

## Modelling Travelers' Behavioural Intentions for Halal Hospitality: A Case of an Emerging Islamic Tourism Hub

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**Abstract:** Islamic tourism is rapidly growing to become the largest tourism sector due to its increasing demand of Islamic tourism products especially in a country like Malaysia. However, little research has been done to explore more about travelers' perceptions on Islamic tourism in Malaysia. This study used Partial Least Square (PLS) analysis as a tool to explore the dimensions of Islamic attributes of destination, i.e., Availability of Halal food and Worship Facilities (WF), Banning of Immoral Activity (IA) and Islamic Dress Code (DC) that maybe important to the segment of Muslim travelers for Halal hospitality in Malaysia. About 396 Muslims travelers participated in this study. The findings revealed that availability of Halal food and Worship Facilities (WF) and Dress Code (DC) have positive relationships on Behavioral Intentions (BI) among Muslims travelers for Halal hospitality in Malaysia. The study indicated that banning of Immoral Activities (IA) significantly affects Muslim travelers' Behavioral Intentions (BI) in Malaysia. The findings also suggested that Tourist Satisfaction (TS) mediated the relationships between Islamic attributes of destination and Behavioral Intention (BI). This study used quantitative method; the data was collected by using a set of self-administered questionnaire. It is hoped that the study will be used as a guideline for destination marketers to develop marketing strategies to attract Muslim travelers come to Malaysia.

**Key words:** Halal hospitality, Islamic tourism, Islamic attributes of destination, PLS, tourism

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### INTRODUCTION

Tourism September 11, 2001 has marked an important phase in the history of Islamic tourism. Since, the tragedy, the number of Muslim travellers, especially from Middle East states, to the United Kingdom and United States has dropped significantly (Mohamad *et al.*, 2011). Although, the finding seemed to give a negative signal to the tourism industry as a whole, it somehow acted as a catalyst to Islamic tourism generally.

It has been reported that this market segment's interests have now shifted to destinations that could accommodate their religious belief and are well-equipped with their special needs like halal food and other Muslim-friendly facilities. Euromonitor also reported that the demand for the concept of Islam in travel and tourism among Muslim markets has been said to be strong with good prospect. The concept of Islamic tourism upholds the idea of purposeful tourism and the objectives that in line with the Islamic principles (Din, 1989). And for that

reason, these groups of affluent tourists and travellers has drawn their attentions to some of the tourism destinations that could fulfill the shariah-compliant elements in its concept of tourism and hospitality, one of which is Malaysia. This is evident in a report by UNWTO 2008 that mentioned Malaysia as one of the most popular OIC member countries, not only from Muslim travellers but also popular among non-Muslims. For that reason, the government of Malaysia through its Ministry of Tourism of Malaysia has announced that Islamic tourism is a major product in Malaysia.

One of the spectrum in Islamic tourism concept gives reference to its product (i.e., accommodation, food and beverage). It is crucial to understand what are the considerations need to be fulfilled in order to regard a service as halal. In the context of commercial activity like hospitality, identification of some Islamic attributes which are in line with 'religiously acceptable' consumption and utilization of material things for Muslims has been reported in past literature. The question is, do these

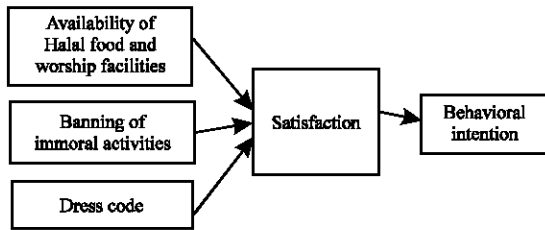


Fig. 1: Proposed conceptual framework

attributes act as the determinants of Muslim travelers' behavioural intentions? Therefore, the objectives of this study, among others are to:

- Identify the Islamic attributes of destination that have significant influence to travelers' behavioral intention
- Investigate the role of satisfaction that acts as a mediator between religious attributes of destination and behavioral intention

**Literature review:** The concept of halal hospitality has existed especially in Middle East states with the introduction of shariah-compliant hotels. The concept was introduced to support halal tourism industry and was initially experimented especially for luxury hotel resorts and boutique hotels to cater the demand from local upscale Muslim travelers. Emirates Business reported that westerners whose motivations to travel relate to intrinsic aspirations associations with well-being, conscious-lifestyle and cultural appreciation may also be attracted to experience this hospitality concept. Considering the potential growth of such hotels, this concept is now slowly emerging in South East Asia especially in Malaysia. This may result, firstly, from the trend, recognition and accelerated growth of shariah-compliant hotels in the UAE and Kuwait (Stephenson *et al.*, 2010). Secondly, it may result from the rise of Muslims travelers in South East Asia region.

Henderson (2010) argued that there are no formal criteria for shariah-compliant hotels. However, collective statements made by industry practitioners and analysts reveals broad agreement about the attributes of shariah-compliance in the hotel industry, albeit lack of consensus about some facets of hotels compliance (Henderson, 2010). Figure 1 illustrates the attributes of shariah-compliance for hotel. Although, there are many interpretations about what constitutes shariah-compliance, most of the stipulations stated below are commonly accepted and have implications for operations as well as development and financing (Henderson, 2010). Battour *et al.* (2011) listed six attributes of destination that are designed specifically to

cater the needs of Muslim travelers, i.e., meeting patrons' religious needs, places of worship, availability of halal food, banning of alcohol consumption and gambling, sexual permissiveness and dress code. These six religious attributes are in line with the attributes of shariah-compliance for hotel as suggested by industry practitioners and analysts which was reported by Henderson (2010).

**Proposed conceptual framework:** In this study, religious attributes of destination is viewed from 3 dimensions which are availability of halal food and worship facilities, banning of immoral activities and dress code (Battour *et al.*, 2012). Meanwhile, in order to understand tourism behavior, tourist satisfaction and tourist behavioral intentions are measured by their level of satisfaction (Oliver, 1999) and intention to revisit and generation of positive word-of-mouth (Muhammad, 2008). Figure 1 is the proposed conceptual framework of the study.

**Research hypotheses:** Based on the literature, research hypotheses of this study are as below:

- Availability of Halal food and Worship Facilities (WF) has a significant effect on Behavioral Intention (BI)
- Banning of Immoral Activities (IA) has a significant effect on Behavioral Intention (BI)
- Dress Code (DC) has a significant effect on Behavioral Intention (BI)
- Satisfaction (STF) mediates the relationships between Availability of Halal food and Worship Facilities (WF) and Behavioral Intention (BI)
- Satisfaction (STF) mediates the relationships between Banning of Immoral Activities (IA) and Behavioral intention (BI)
- Satisfaction (STF) mediates the relationships between Dress Code (DC) and Behavioral Intention (BI)

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Survey instrument and survey setting:** The data were collected at Kuala Lumpur International Airports (KLIA) and Langkawi International Airports. For the current study, the population is Muslim travelers from Malaysia asia, Europe and Middle East countries.

The questionnaire was divided into four parts which are Part 1 until 4. Part 1 covers Islamic attributes of hotel which include 14 items measured by using five-point Likert scale, 1 indicating 'not at all important' and 5 indicating 'very important'. Part 2 covers satisfaction

Table 1: Result summary for Composite Reliability (CR)

Variables	Composite reliability (CR)
WF	0.878
IA	0.931
DC	0.850
STF	0.812
BI	0.916

which includes 3 items measured by using semantic differential scale, the first item of the questionnaire, 1 indicating ‘completely dissatisfied’ and 5 indicating ‘completely satisfied’, the second item, 1 indicating ‘much less than expected’ and 5 indicating ‘much more than expected’ and the third item, 1 indicating ‘very far away’ and 5 indicating ‘very close’. Part 3 covers Behavioral Intention include 6 items measured by using semantic differential scale, 1 indicating ‘least likely’ and 5 indicating ‘most likely’. Part 4 includes eight general information questions such as gender, marital status, etc.

**Sample size:** The sample of the study is based on the population of the travelers that visit Malaysia. According to Tourism Malaysia, < 25 billion tourists visited Malaysia in 2012. According to Krejcie and Morgen (1970) when the population is >2,000,000 the minimum sample size is 384. For the current study, the sample size is 396.

**Data analysis procedure:** The data collection was analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Science program (SPSS Version 20) and Partial Least Square (PLS).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Statistical analysis and hypotheses testing:** The finding of the study revealed that, male and female tourists were equally distributed (51% of the respondents was female) and most of them were married (66.2%). Majority of respondents either holding a bachelor degree (48.2%) or Diploma (23.5%). Most of the tourists were from Middle Eastern countries (47.5%). The highest length of stay was 1-6 days (51.0%). The age ranges are between 20 years old and 30 years old (55.6%) and 31 years old and 40 years old (21.2%). Most of the tourists visited Malaysia for the first time (55.3%) and majority of the tourists visiting Malaysia for vacation (68.9%).

**Internal consistency:** Table 1 shows the result summary for Internal Consistency also referred as Composite Reliability (CR). As shown in the table, CR for all variables is more than 0.80. CR for Availability of Halal food and Worship Facilities (WF) is 0.878, Banning of Immoral Activities (IA) is 0.931, Dress Code (DC) is 0.850, Satisfaction (STF) is 0.812 and Behavioral Intention is 0.916, respectively. According to Hair *et al.* (2014), composite reliability values of 0.70 to 0.90 can be regarded as satisfactory.

Table 2: Path coefficient analysis

Hypothesis	Beta value	t-Statistics	p-values	Empirical evidence
WF -> BI	0.164	2.385	0.018	Significant
WF -> STF	0.075	0.983	0.326	Significant
WF -> STF -> BI	0.012	2.934	0.000	Significant
IA -> BI	-0.128	2.960	0.003	Significant
IA -> STF	-0.160	3.101	0.002	Significant
IA -> STF -> BI	0.021	-3.080	0.000	Significant
DC -> BI	0.124	2.279	0.023	Significant
DC -> STF	0.091	1.468	0.143	Significant
DC -> STF -> BI	0.011	5.726	0.000	Significant

**Path coefficients analysis :** In order to test the research hypotheses, this study used path coefficient analysis to describe the directed dependencies or causal relationships among the variables. According to the analysis, all observed variables have significant relationships with the dependent variable; therefore, H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>3</sub> are supported.

There are meditating effects of Tourist Satisfaction (STF) in the relationship between all the observed variables. Therefore, H<sub>4</sub>, H<sub>5</sub> and H<sub>6</sub> are supported. Summary result for Path Coefficients is shown in Table 2.

## CONCLUSION

All in all, this study provides a preliminary background of a quantitative research in Halal hospitality study from the context of an emerging Islamic tourism hub in Southeast Asian Region. The framework is proven valid to determine a central understanding of travelers’ behavioral intention for Halal hospitality in Malaysia. In general, the researcher hopes that this study has offered a modest contribution to the limited body of scholarly research in this subject area. Specifically, it is hoped that it has contributed to a greater understanding of the effect of the Islamic attributes of destination which is viewed in this study from 3 dimensions which are availability of halal food and places of worship, banning of immoral activities and dress code towards tourists’ level of satisfaction and behavioral intention. Besides providing literature for future scholarly research avenues, it is also hoped that this will be a good starting point for other researchers to further examine other observable factors and in other destination context or other tourism themes.

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