

Linking ‘Halal’ Friendly Hotel Attributes and Customer Satisfaction: The Islamic Tourism Sector

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Abstract

An increasing demand for Islamic tourism has driven the concept of a ‘Halal’ (or permissible) friendly hotel into another level of business insight within the consumers’ travel market. The concept via its unique value proposition has rapidly become very attractive not only to Muslim tourists, but also to non-Muslim tourists globally. This study aims to examine the relationship linking ‘Halal’ friendly hotel attributes and customer satisfaction. Using purposive sampling, a total of 410 survey questionnaires were distributed to targeted respondents with only 323 usable feedbacks and used for data analysis. Regression results revealed that four main “Halal-friendly hotel” attributes have significant relationships with customer satisfaction. These include prayer facilities, Halal food, Islamic dress code and general Islamic morality. Of these four attributes, prayer facilities proved to have the most significant impact on customer satisfaction. Findings and managerial implications were further discussed in this article.

Keywords: Islamic tourism; travel; hotel; ‘halal’ hotel attributes; tourists; customer satisfaction

1. Introduction

An increasing concern on the need to adhere with Islamic teachings has created an emerging potential niche market within the tourism industry, or specifically referred to as Islamic tourism. Islamic tourism reflects a sphere of interest, industry or activity relating to travel, exploring Islamic history, arts, culture and heritage, as well as to experience an Islamic way of life (www.itc.gov.my, 2016). This global scale of increasing religious consciousness further created a new market opportunity, particularly within the hotel sector. In this sector, an Islamic ‘Halal’ (or permissible) friendly hotel concept, through its unique value-proposition, has rapidly become very much attractive to both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists all over the world. This possibility has taken the Halal friendly hotel concept to another level of business insight within the marketplace. As stated by Zamani and Henderson (2010), Muslims travellers are inclined to

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adhere by Islamic teachings which may directly and indirectly impact their decisions concerning leisure and travel plans.

In view of the above, this study was carried out to determine the extent to which 'Halal' friendly hotel attributes may affect customer satisfaction. In addition, it further seeks to identify the most significant attribute impacting satisfaction. The scope of research involves Malaysia as tourism is one of the largest earning sectors contributing towards its nation's economy in terms of increasing foreign exchange earnings, employment and business opportunities (Suki et. al., 2015; Putit et. al. 2014). It is also currently amongst the Top 10 on the United Nation's World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) list for tourist arrivals in 2009 and it has moved up two marks from eleventh place to ninth place (Bernama, 2010).

2. Literature Review

This section explains past literature relating to Halal friendly hotel attributes and its impact on customer satisfaction. Further sub-sections discuss on the relevant constructs identified within this study.

2.1 Prayer facilities

According to Islam-world.net (2011), a formal prayer reveals one of the most important acts of worship. It reflects mankind's connection to Allah, through which one gathers strength, guidance and peace of mind. According to the second pillar of Islamic beliefs, a Muslim must perform five times' act of prayer or 'Solat' which include before dawn (Subuh), noon (Zuhur), afternoon (Asar), after sunset (Maghrib), and evening (Isyak) respectively. In essence, it is deemed crucial for Muslims to necessitate places or facilities to perform these prayers. Examples of such facilities involve a prayer room or mosque (a house to perform Islamic worship). This is supported by Al-Hamarneh and Steiner (2004) who stated that a mosque, referring to Muslims' house of worship or prayer room, is considered to be one of the most vital facilities for Muslims.

Mohsin and Mohammed (2011) found that Omani students were highly attracted by the availability of mosques (or Islamic places of worship), Arabic foods and/or Halal foods, and was rated as the most attractive pull travel motivations for destination's attributes. Weidenfeld (2006) suggests that proximity to a mosque may influence Muslim tourists' preferences when making hotel reservations. Mohsin (2005) conducted a study on Peninsular Malaysians' attitude towards choosing the Northern Territory of Australia as a holidaying tourism destination and found that Muslim respondents were concerned about the availability of mosques. Syed (2001) also suggested that the availability of mosques at tourist destinations may increase satisfaction levels. The mosque itself may be considered a tourist attraction if it is unique and outstanding (Henderson, 2003). Mohsin and Ryan (1997) further recommend that ease of access to Islamic services are important upon exploring Malaysian and Indonesian business people's attitude towards the possibility of holidaying in Australia. It is also suggested that Middle Eastern countries take concrete steps to develop Islamic tourism internally by having prayer rooms at tourism sites (WTM, 2007).

2.2 Halal food

Availability of Halal food is also a crucial factor in influencing tourists on their hotel selections. It has been a motivating factor in an individual's behaviour. This was supported by Mohsin and Mohammed (2011) who found that the Omani students were highly attracted by availability of Arabic foods or Halal

foods which were rated as the most attractive pull travel motivations for destination's attributes. Hashim et al. (2007) also suggested that a list of nearby Halal restaurants should be available in influencing Muslim tourists towards a particular destination of interest. Battour, Battor and Mohd Nazari (2012) opined that since Muslims have to follow a strict diet everywhere they go, availability of and easy access to Halal food contribute to a stress-free holiday abroad. When promoting a destination for Muslim tourists, marketers should run promotional campaigns that focus on the availability of Halal food and drink (Battour, Battor & Bhatti, 2014).

2.3 Islamic entertainment

Provision of Islamic entertainment is important for hoteliers as an attempt to attract Muslim hotel guests. Many Muslim scholars said that it is 'Haram' or not permissible to visit places where sexual permissiveness is rampant, and that free mingling of both sexes are rampant (Henderson, 2003; Al-Hamarnah & Steiner (2004); Timothy & Iverson (2006). This is supported by Deng et al., (1994) who stated that religion influences gender roles in a particular culture. In an Islamic country, both genders must cover their torso and upper legs at all times and in the case of women, only their face may be exposed (Henderson, 2003). In most hotels nowadays, gender mixing is allowable in swimming pools, hence resulting in the Muslim women guests' inability to enjoy such activity because the standard rules require them to wear swimming attires that are not conforming to Islamic teachings. As such, hoteliers should provide options in an attempt to provide swimming opportunities for both genders that are in accordance to their religious beliefs.

Timothy and Iverson (2006) also suggested that hoteliers should educate their staff on cross cultural communication to enable them to treat Muslim tourists with respect. This can be made possible by recruiting religious staff. Such an effort will subsequently satisfy their Muslim guests as the staffs know how to treat their customers well. Some hotels may provide karaoke room for leisure of their guests but it is a pleasure if they exclude or do not permit the guests to drink alcohol and gambling there at all. It has been clearly stated in many Quranic verses that alcohol is the mother of all evils and it is the most shameful of evils, thus it should not be consumed by Muslims (Al-Qaradawi, 1999). It is also not permissible for Muslims to visit places where alcohol is consumed and gambling is practised (Al-Hamarnah & Steiner, 2004; Hashim et al., 2007; Zamani & Henderson, 2010).

2.4 Islamic dress code

The Islamic dress code promotes modesty and seeks to minimize vice and immorality in society. In Islam, both men and women are expected to dress simply, modestly, and with dignity (Zamani & Henderson, 2010). The authors further claim that Shariah laws prohibit improper dressing. In view of this, Muslims are very concerned in deciding tour destinations, to which they will consider local dress codes upon travelling overseas. Furthermore, this consideration is crucial for them to determine the level of comfort when staying at those travelled places. The Holy Quran states: 'O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women to draw their outer garments around them (when they go out or are among men). That is better in order that they may be known (to be Muslims) and not annoyed . . .' (Holy Qur'an, 33: 59). In essence, Muslims are taught to cover their body and hair properly in avoiding to be seen from other men except her relatives or also known as "Muhrim" in Islam. According to Shariah, Muslim women must not expose their hair and body. Men are supposed to cover their thighs (Timothy & Iverson, 2006).

In an attempt to attract Muslim tourism market, the hotelier's staffs must wear appropriate uniforms. Mohsin (2005) stated that the use of sexually provocative images of bikini-clad girls to promote a destination will not attract Muslim tourists. This is similar to hotel industries where Muslim tourists are offended by the presence of staff with improper dress code. Such considerations are very essential in attempting to attract Muslim tourists to choose appropriate hotel destinations. Hashim et al. (2007) demonstrate the Malaysian Tourist Board's awareness of Islamic dress sensitivities by restricting their marketing campaigns to present only traditional Malay Muslim dress codes. On advertising billboards and home pages, women with headscarves and men with 'songkok' (or a black rimless hat worn by Malay men usually for praying) were depicted.

2.5 General Islamic morality

The Muslim guests may appreciate hoteliers who are in control over unpleasant or immoral behaviour amongst hotel guests. The Shariah expressly forbids Muslims from engaging in fornication or adultery. Activities that are deemed conducive to sexual permissiveness are not allowed to take place in public. This is based on many verses in the Holy Quran including like: 'Nor come nigh to adultery: for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils)' (Holy Qur'an, 17: 32). Many Muslim scholars take the view that it is Haram or not permissible to visit, for the sake of tourism, places where sexual permissiveness is rampant. Therefore, the hotelier should strictly monitor the behaviour of other tourists who may affect the hotel's reputation. Furthermore, using sexually provocative images in marketing tourist destinations to potential Muslim customers is also frowned upon. According to Shariah, promotion techniques must not use sexual appeal in international marketing (Saed et al., 2001). Female images are therefore not featured in tourism promotion in several Malaysian states like Terengganu (Henderson, 2003). Mohsin (2005) is of the opinion that the use of sexually provocative images of bikini-clad girls to promote a destination will not attract Muslim tourists.

2.6 Customer satisfaction

Satisfying customers is the ultimate goal of all businesses because of its potential impact on repeat purchase behaviour and profits (Kim, Li & Brymer, 2016). According to Hunt (1975), satisfaction is an evaluation on which the customers have experienced with the services that is at least as good as it is supposed to be. Oliver (1981) further defined customer satisfaction as an emotional response to the use of a product or service. Dubrovski (2001), on the other hand, defined customer satisfaction as a consumer's response towards an evaluation of perceived discrepancy between expectations and perceived performance of the product or service in terms of antecedents and as the generator of repeated purchase in terms of consequence. As customer satisfaction is influenced by the availability of customer services, the provision of quality services has become a major concern of all businesses (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). There is always a need to find out how hotels can improve their halal-friendly services (Rosenberg & Choufany, 2009). Halal friendly hotel service providers could improve their chances of increasing market share if they are able to satisfy the customers in terms of services that they are offering.

Following the above discussion, several hypotheses were proposed in this study and identified as follows:

- H1.** There is a significant relationship between prayer facilities and customer satisfaction.
- H2.** There is a significant relationship between Halal food and customer satisfaction.
- H3.** There is a significant relationship between Islamic entertainment and customer satisfaction.

- H4.** There is significant relationship between Islamic dress code with customer satisfaction.
H5. There is a significant relationship between general Islamic morality and customer satisfaction.

3. Methodology

A purposive sampling technique was used in collecting the data. From the 410 survey questionnaires distributed to sample respondents who had experienced staying at halal friendly hotels, only 323 feedbacks were usable and carried out for further data analysis. In terms of item measurements, all items were adopted from past research and adapted for this study. The scope of study focused on Halal friendly customers from both Muslim and non-Muslim background, and who have had experienced Halal friendly hotel services in Malaysia or other parts of the world prior to the research conducted.

In ensuring reliability, coefficient alpha were computed to measure the five constructs of Halal friendly hotel attributes and customer satisfaction respectively. The items had been tested accordingly and all items were found to be reliable with values ranging from 0.810 to 0.922. The Cronbach's alpha results for tested items were as follows: prayer facilities 0.910 (3), Halal food 0.874 (4), Islamic entertainment 0.810 (4), Islamic dress code 0.845 (3), general Islamic morality 0.814 (3), customer satisfaction 0.900 (4) and behavioural intentions 0.922 (4). The overall Cronbach's alpha values for all variables are more than 0.7 which is considered reliable (Nunnally, 1978).

In validating the instrument, construct validation using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used. The reliability analysis alone was not sufficient because it pertains to the content of the test whereas descriptions and decisions were made based on respondents' response to the test items (Norzaidi et al., 2008). The data was examined using principal components analysis as the extraction technique and Varimax as the method of rotation. This technique was used as it could reduce the poor items (Pallant, 2010). An exploratory analysis conducted in this study shown that each construct for this study had scales loading with Eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and more than 50 percent of cumulative total variance explained. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (>0.60) indicated a practical common variance as represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Factor analysis results for construct validity

Construct	KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy	Initial Eigenvalue	Cumulative Percent of Explained Variance
Prayer facilities	.692	2.550	84.984
Halal food	.766	2.991	72.776
Islamic entertainment	.788	2.572	64.295
Islamic dress code	.731	2.306	76.863
General Islamic morality	.671	2.197	73.223
Customer satisfaction	.815	3.088	77.191
Behavioural intention	.829	3.248	81.211

Hair et al., (2006) stated that factor loading represents a measure of importance for a variable as well as a means for interpreting and labelling a factor. Any factor loadings greater than 0.50 were considered acceptable in this study. From the Table 2, it can be seen that all components have higher factor loading (>0.50). Therefore, all of these items were used in their construct to test the hypotheses for this study.

Table 2. Factor loading for Halal friendly hotel attributes, customer satisfaction and behavioural intention

No	Prayer facilities	Halal food	Islamic entertainment	Islamic dress code	General Islamic morality	Customer satisfaction	Behavioural intention
PF 6	.958						
PF 7	.864						
PF 8	.941						
HF 9		.829					
HF 10		.813					
HF 11		.899					
HF 12		.869					
IE 13			.860				
IE 14			.802				
IE 15			.791				
IE 16			.751				
IDC 17				.868			
IDC 18				.882			
IDC 19				.880			
IGM 20					.776		
IGM 21					.900		
IGM 22					.885		
CS 23						.896	
CS 24						.935	
CS 25						.894	
CS 26						.782	
BI 27							.860
BI 28							.934
BI 29							.931
BI 30							.877
Eigenvalue	2.550	2.991	2.572	2.306	2.197	3.088	3.428
Cumulative percent of explained variance	84.984	72.776	64.295	76.863	73.223	77.191	81.211

4. Results

Using correlation analysis (refer Table 1 in Appendix 1), the results revealed that customer satisfaction was positively correlated with all independent variables at 0.000 levels. The correlation coefficient was significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). It further reported that all independent variables were positively related to customer satisfaction. The correlation for prayer facilities is ($r=.706$) with significant 0.000, Halal food is ($r=.643$) with significant 0.00, Islamic entertainment is ($r=.645$) with 0.000, Islamic dress code is ($r=.624$) and general Islamic morality is ($r=.673$) with significant 0.000. In essence, moderate positive relationships were observed between Halal food, Islamic entertainment, Islamic dress code, and general Islamic morality toward customer satisfaction. On the other hand, a strong positive correlation was observed between prayer facilities and customer satisfaction.

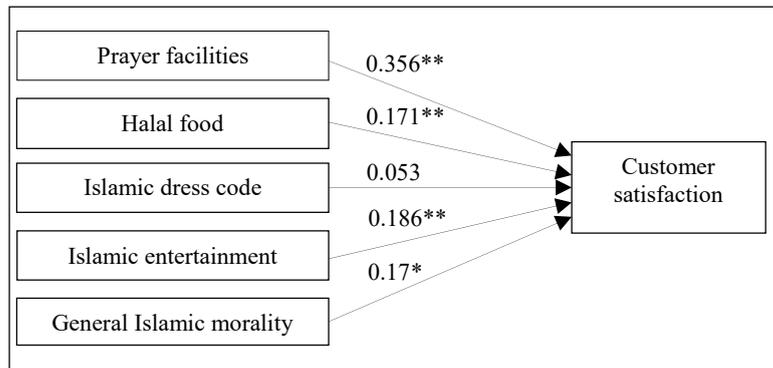
Table 3. Model summary of MRA

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimates
1	.790	.624	.618	.515

The results from multiple regression analyses are illustrated in Table 3. The findings indicated that 62% of the variance in customer satisfaction was significantly explained by the five said attributes ($R^2 = .624$, $F(5, 322) = 105.3$, $p < .001$). According to Hair et al., (2007), the larger the F-ratio, the more variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variable. In this model, the F-ratio (105.253) indicates the model is highly significant at the 0.001 level.

Table 4. Coefficients for Halal friendly hotel attributes and customer satisfaction

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Beta Coefficients	t-value	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	.016	.219		.072	.942
Prayer Facilities	.321	.054	.356	5.982	.000
Halal Food	.183	.052	.171	3.550	.000
Islamic Entertainment	.063	.071	.053	.887	.376
Islamic Dress Code	.209	.059	.186	3.568	.000
General Islamic Morality	.181	.062	.170	2.909	.004



Note: * indicates standardized beta-coefficient value significant at $*p < 0.01$ level and $**p < 0.001$ level respectively.

Fig. 1. Summarized multiple regression analysis output

Table 4 and Figure 1 illustrate the respective standardized coefficient value of hotel attributes as well as the most significant factor that influences customer satisfaction on hotel visitation. It further summarized the relationship for each attribute of Halal friendly hotel towards influencing customer satisfaction.

As shown in Figure 1, four independent variables are statistically significant at less than 0.01 level. The relationship between prayer facilities and customer satisfaction was significant at 0.001 level. Results reveal that prayer facilities have the most significant relationship with customer satisfaction. Prayer facilities were the strongest determinant factor in influencing customer satisfaction with the highest number in the standardized coefficient beta value at 0.356. Hence, **H1** is accepted. The result further indicates that the relationship between Halal food and customer satisfaction was significant at less than 0.001. Halal food was the third strongest determinant factor in influencing customer satisfaction with the highest number in the standardized coefficient beta value at 0.171. Therefore, **H2** is accepted.

Based on the findings, statistical results for Islamic entertainment were found to be above 0.10. The relationship between Islamic entertainments was insignificant at 0.376, and standardized coefficient beta value was 0.053. Thus, **H3** is rejected. The relationship between Islamic dress code and customer satisfaction is significant at 0.001. Islamic dress code has significant relationship with customer satisfaction. Standardized coefficient beta is 0.186 and was the second determinant factor in influencing customer satisfaction. Therefore, **H4** is accepted. Table 4 also illustrates that the relationship between general Islamic morality and customer satisfaction is significant ($\beta = .17, p < 0.01$). Thus, general Islamic morality has significant relationship with customer satisfaction. Therefore, **H5** is accepted.

5. Discussions and managerial implications

In essence, this study reveals a positive and significant relationship between four Halal friendly hotel attributes with customer satisfaction. Out of the four constructs, the prayer facilities were the main indicator affecting satisfaction. Following this, Halal friendly hotel service providers need to monitor their attributes and service performances in order to improve their services. Highly perceived Halal friendly attributes services will lead to satisfied customers and form favourable behavioural intentions (Olorunniwo et al., 2006; Leong et al., 2010).

In addition, the Halal friendly hotel service providers need to spend more resources in ensuring and enhancing service attributes that are important to the customers, and fewer resources on less important attributes (Olorunniwo et al., 2006). The hotel managers should invest considerable time and effort towards gathering information about their customer's needs and expectations. The underlying reason is because expectations keep on increasing over time. Customers will subsequently form favourable intentions if they are satisfied with the services they have received. Muslim hotel guests, in particular, will continue to revisit and return to Halal friendly hotels for the next few years and will positively recommend to others because they are satisfied in using the Halal friendly hotels services.

There is also a need for hotel operators to enhance Halal friendly hotel services. The role of the tourism and Islamic boards in supervising the new Halal service hotel industry should be further expanded to include mechanisms in dealing matters involving both Muslims and non-Muslims. These stakeholders could also revise existing marketing strategies and to also focus on the dominant Halal friendly hotel attributes in order to enhance customer satisfaction, which will, in turn, lead towards influencing positive or favourable behavioural intentions of the customers.

6. Conclusions

In essence, this study aimed to investigate the relationship between five attributes of Halal friendly hotels and customer satisfaction. Several limitations were observed in this study. Future research should instead focus on qualitative research by identifying the level of understanding and challenges of non-Muslim customers towards Halal-friendly hotels, as well as the experiences of Halal-friendly developers and service providers towards developing Halal-friendly hotels and facilities. There is always a need to find out how hotels can improve their halal-friendly services as mentioned in past research. Halal friendly hotel service providers could improve their chances of increasing market share if they are able to satisfy the customers in terms of services that they are offering.

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