MUSLIM TRAVELERS' FOOD SENSITIVITY, TRAVEL, AND ACCOMMODATION CHOICES

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This study discusses the significance of religion in influencing Singaporean Muslim travelers' (SMT) food selection, motivation to travel, and their accommodation choices. It also expounds on the tolerance level of SMT on conventional accommodation, which are non-Shariah compliant by nature. The study used qualitative data collection methods, and the results suggested that SMTs were mainly concerned about the availability of halal-related food in their destinations, they were flexible in adapting to the environment, and understood the concept of mix-gender facilities and the necessity for hotels to sell alcoholic beverage. It was surprising to note that even if SMTs were affected by Islamophobia, they considered halal hotels unnecessary, and associated accommodation quality to food quality.

Key words: Travel motivation; Halal tourism; Singapore; Accommodation; Food; Islamic tourism; Muslim-friendly tourism

Introduction

The term "halal" is defined as *"That which is permitted, with respect to which no restriction exists, and the doing of which the law-Giver, Allah is allowed"*, in an authoritative Islamic book called *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*, written by world renowned Islamic scholar Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi (1999). It is understood that halal means what is lawful or permitted in Islam and is generally safe and good for well-being. "Haram" is the total opposite of "halal," which means unlawful or not permitted in Islam. However, there are circumstances where things are not clearly halal or haram, and hence these circumstances are categorized as "syubhah," which means doubtful or questionable.

Halal and haram are commonly used for food identification purposes in the tourism and hospitality industry. In general, all foods are considered halal except for flesh of swine and any by-product of the pig, alcoholic drinks and intoxicants, meat of dead animals, beasts and carnivores such as lions and birds of prey, and any foods contaminated with the aforementioned products (Mujlis Ugama Islam Singapura [MUIS], 2018). Meat and poultry

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must be prepared and slaughtered in accordance to Islamic law for the product to be considered halal. Examples of foods that are syubhah or questionable are foods that are not certified halal but may not contain any haram elements. Often, vendors who are not halal certified but claim to be halal will market their products as "No pork, No lard" (WhatsHalal, 2018). However, this slogan does not provide full assurance for Muslim consumers that the products are safe and permitted in Islam. Other syubhah products include vegan and vegetarian foods. According to the Vegetarian Society, vegetarian products are mostly meat free but may contain alcohol, which may not be declared in the ingredient list (Halal Certification Europe, 2018). While alcohol consumption is allowed for vegetarians, it is not permissible for Muslims. Similarly, vegan foods may also contain alcohol (McKee, 2015).

In Singapore, the religious council for Islam is known as the Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS); it is the authoritative agency for halal certification and certifies products, F&B outlets, hotels, and other entities as halal after rigorous inspection (MUIS, 2018). MUIS is also responsible for providing adequate amenities and facilities for the Muslim community in Singapore, who made up approximately 14% of the population in 2015. The provision of halal certification and Muslim-friendly amenities has become a fundamental infrastructure in supporting the rise in halal tourism in Singapore.

Another angle where halal and haram are observed is in the interactions between male and female Muslims who are not "mahram." Mahram means a male consort for a Muslim female who is her husband, biological father, or the heir of the biological father according to Islamic lineage (MUIS, 2018). In simpler terms, male and female Muslims who are not immediate family related are forbidden to mix. This also applies to interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims. Female Muslims must "reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment" (Saheeh International, 2004, p. 339). Hence, female Muslims are required to cover themselves in the presence of a man who is not their mahram. However, in the hospitality context, it is commonplace to have casual interactions between male and female guests and employees who may be Muslims and yet are not mahram. The boundaries between halal and haram interactions are not clear, which can be a cause of conflicting interests for Muslims.

These principles and practices of Islam do not deter Muslims from traveling. In fact, Muslim travelers are becoming one of the fastest developing segments in the tourism industry (Oktadiana, Pearace, & Chon, 2016). This growth of vacation trend among Muslims has created new travel opportunities and the emergence of a different kind of tourism—halal tourism. Therefore, halal tourism is a type of tourism that conforms to the practices and values of Islam.

With the growing Muslim travel market in the world, there is a need for research to understand the complex interactions and relationships between the Muslim market and the global tourism and hospitality industry. Although the literature in halal tourism has been explored by different authors (Boğan & Sarıışık, 2019; Han, Al-Ansi, Olya, & Kim, 2019; Vargas-Sánchez & Moral-Moral, 2018), there is no literature found regarding to halal tourism and travel of Singaporean Muslim community.

The Muslim community is the second largest community in Singapore at 15% of the total population (i.e., approximately 800 thousand people are Muslim). There is a paucity in the investigation on the accommodation choices and food preferences of Singaporean Muslim travelers (SMTs). This study investigates the significance of religion in influencing SMTs' choices on food, accommodation, and travel motivation. The study discusses the considerations made by SMTs when booking accommodation overseas and assesses a generally underinvestigated issue, namely, their tolerance level for non-Shariah-compliant food and accommodation.

Literature Review

Muslims are one of the biggest consumer groups in the travel and tourism industry (Henderson, 2010). Their global expenditure on outbound travel amounts to $151 billion in 2015, which is 11.2% of the global outbound travel expenditure, surpassing

the US and UK travel market. This number is projected to increase to $243 billion by 2021 and this expenditure alone excludes the travel receipts for Hajj and Umrah (pilgrimage to Mecca). In 2015, the top Muslim consumer market source hailed from Saudi Arabia with a total travel expenditure of $19.2 billion. Subsequent ranks include United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Kuwait, making the Middle East a highly lucrative halal market.

As halal travel trend continues to grow, the proliferation of new and existing Muslim-friendly offerings is swelling. While the term halal is mostly associated with food and eateries, there is a growing trend for hotels to fully comply with the Shariah law and to be Muslim friendly. Most Shariah-compliant hotels are commonly found in the Middle East where destinations are Muslim majority. However, these "halal hotels" are increasingly finding their places in Western territories and destinations where Muslims are a minority. Studies have shown that more hotels in London were predicted to offer basic Muslim-friendly services such as provision of prayer mats and halal food by 2018 (Buller, 2018). Furthermore, Muslim holidaymakers showed an affinity for beach resorts. In 2014 alone, the Muslim travel market expenditure on beach resorts was estimated to be $28 billion. The most popular destinations for beach resorts are in Thailand and Turkey where the resorts offer halal food and prayer spaces, are alcohol free, and provide women-only swimming pools, beaches, spas, and fitness centers (Nursanty, 2013).

Alternative accommodation is also gaining significance in the hospitality industry and it is changing the way Muslim travelers select their accommodation today (Chow, Garretson, & Kurtz, 1995; Cusack, 2018). Similar to Airbnb, Book Halal Homes is a platform for peer-to-peer property lease targeted at Muslim travelers. It focuses on faith-based sharing and requires specific attributes such as halal food and prayer facilities on site for the property to be listed and certified by the platform (Book Halal Homes, 2018).

Due to the increasing demand and supply of Muslim-friendly accommodation, more online booking platforms are catering to the Muslim market. HalalBooking.com is one of the leading independent sites that focuses on halal travel (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Launched in 2009, Halal Booking.com provides unique Muslim-friendly searches such as women-only spas, halal restaurants, or private bathing. Another similar venture, Tripfez (https://www.tripfez.com/), is an online travel agency that helps Muslim travelers discover and compare hotels that suit their specific religious needs.

In recent years, cruise lines have also jumped into the bandwagon offering Muslim-friendly cruises. Costa Cruises, an Italian-owned cruise line, was the first European cruise line with a halal certificate where the casino on board is closed during these trips. Cruise activities included Qiyamulail prayers, religious talks, Quran reading sessions, and performances by nasyid groups (Cruise and Travel Asia, 2016).

Airlines are also increasingly tailoring their products and services for the Muslim market. London-based Firnas Airways have their crews dressed modestly and serve halal food. The airline operates alcohol free and has designated prayer spaces on board the aircraft. Private airlines like LGO International only target women from wealthy Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) families and is run by an all-female crew (Harum, Halim, Jamaludin, & Mufih, 2019).

From the retail space perspective, the Kingdom Centre in Riyadh has a dedicated women-only floor called the Ladies Kingdom where ladies are free to remove their veils and pursue activities outside of their homes and work (Le Renard, 2011). The space is strictly off limits to men and special elevators are required to reach the sanctuary. The building also houses the world's tallest mosque, which sits on the 77th floor of the 99-floor skyscraper.

According to the 2017 Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), the Middle East is the most popular region for Muslim travelers, with United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia remaining as the market's popular destinations. Malaysia was ranked the top OIC destinations among others, offering a plethora of dining options suitable for the Muslim travel market. Malaysia illustrates the importance of gastronomy in a Muslim travel context. Positioned as a prominent and attractive destination in Asia, Malaysia offers rich Islamic traditions and values in its tourism products and services injected with vibrant Malay heritage and diverse gastronomy scenes (Butler, Khoo-Lattimore, & Mura, 2014). The search for halal food—one of the most

fundamental elements to a stress-free vacation for Muslims—was made simpler and hassle free for Muslim travelers in Malaysia (Battour, Ismail, Battor, & Awais, 2017). This was possible due to the higher set of halal certification standards for hotel restaurants launched in 2010 to encourage hotels to obtain halal certificate and elevate the satisfaction levels of Muslim tourists (Henderson, 2010). Nonetheless, providing mass halal certification is no tall order for Malaysia, which is already home to approximately 19 million Muslims, more than half of its total population (Population of the World, 2018).

In a destination where Muslims are a minority, Singapore was ranked the top non-OIC destination for Muslim travelers. Singapore is known for its safe travel environment, diverse dining options, and provision of ease of communication (Crescent-Rating, 2018). Singapore's multiethnic mix provides the nation with a competitive advantage and the innate capability to meet the needs, demands, and lifestyle of the Muslim community (COMCEC, 2016). More than 4,000 premises have been certified halal in 2016 by MUIS, providing food assurance and a multitude of dining options for both local and foreign Muslims. During the holy month of Ramadhan, hotels with certified halal kitchens or food providers occasionally host specialized iftar buffets (the meal eaten by Muslims after sunset during Ramadhan) and modify breakfast timings for their Muslim guests who require their predawn meals.

The Muslim Traveler

One Muslim traveler's needs may differ greatly from another's. According to a research conducted by Amadeus (2016) on Muslim travelers, 72% of Muslims seek comfort when traveling and visit known destinations with no compromise on "family-friendly" activities. This is supported by Battour et al. (2017), Yeo, Mohamed, and Muda (2016), and Han et al. (2019) studying different Islamic traveling groups. These comfort travelers place deep emphasis on halal food. At the other end of the spectrum are Muslim travelers who prefer to explore new destinations and have cultural exposure. They are highly adaptable and are flexible in terms of their food options and, as such, are willing

to consume non-halal products. From a financial perspective, some of the Muslim travelers are bargain-seekers who appreciate value-for-money deals although they may not necessarily be cost constrained. Others who are "simplicity-seekers" prefer a hassle-free vacation and thus are prepared to spend bigger dollars when traveling in unknown or non-Muslim destinations.

Essoo and Dibb (2004) specified significant evidence for presenting religion as a crucial element in influencing consumer behavior. They found that religion could affect the way people consume. This is a possible indication that religion may also affect how people choose their travel destinations and travel products (Weidenfeld & Ron, 2008). Battour et al. (2017) went a step further and investigated the relationship of various push and pull travel motivations with tourist satisfaction. They conducted the research on Malaysian Muslims and found that their three main push travel motivations were: 1) visiting destinations not visited by friends, 2) sharing travel experience, and 3) escaping demands at home. On the other hand, the most effective pull factors were: 1) natural scenery of destination, 2) wide spaces, and 3) personal safety. However, Battour et al. (2017) also studied if religion was a crucial consideration when Malaysian Muslims travel overseas. Their research outcomes revealed that general Islamic morality and the lack of public gambling and alcohol consumption were fundamental attributes that the Muslim travelers seek in any foreign destination. Another study by Weidenfeld and Ron (2008) revealed that the availability of halal food would significantly influence travel decisions of Muslim travelers. This is because food is a necessity and consumption of halal food is required by Shariah laws. Several authors pointed out it is highly likely that Muslims would visit destinations where halal food is abundant, and where Muslim-friendly services and facilities are available (Carboni, Perelli, & Sistu, 2017; Han et al., 2019; Stephenson, 2014).

While traveling, food and accommodation are the two important issues for Muslim travelers (Vargas-Sánchez & Moral-Moral, 2018). Salam Standard is the world's first hotel standard targeted towards Muslim consumers, which enables them to select Muslim-friendly lodging that observes the principles of Islam (Ananth, DeMicco, Moreo, & Howey,

1992). This new hospitality rating assesses various Muslim-friendly amenities and services and awards them with a bronze, silver, gold, or platinum rating (Abdelkader, 2015).

According to the study conducted by Amadeus (2016), Muslim travelers who travel as a family expressed their preference for apartments or chain hotels that allowed them more freedom. Mainstream hotels currently fail to meet the basic prayer and dining needs of Muslim holidaymakers, forcing them out of their cultural comfort zone. It is also challenging for female Muslims to identify a hotel that caters to their specific needs.

The availability to access halal food in the destination is always a concern, and the Muslim market is also worried about the rise in fraudulent halal certification of products and eateries. As the demand for halal-certified food rises, the risk of fake halal certification is also higher. In Toronto, an errant distributor labeled non-halal meat as halal using his own "halal" labels. Investigations have led to the establishment of a new halal monitoring authority, which has promised to conduct rigorous scrutiny on dishonest halal practices (Soon, Chandia, & Regenstein, 2017).

Although many studies have investigated the case of Muslim travelers (Boğan & Sarıışık, 2018; Carboni & Janati, 2016; Vargas-Sánchez & Moral-Moral, 2018), there is still a research gap about food preferences of Muslims travelers. This study investigates the influence of religion in the travel behavior, food consumption, and accommodation choices of SMTs. It seeks to get into depth with the question about how pragmatic and tolerant the Muslims are of such tourism destinations and tourist facilities that are not dedicated to a Muslim market. This is a critical issue for restaurants and destinations that recognize the value of this market.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative research method. Qualitative research aims to discover new ideas, as for example, ways of thinking, feelings, relationship between events, and predictions of hidden psychological or social processes and to understand the participants' values in-use (Veal, 2011). The sample consisted of eight participants who met the prerequisites of being Singaporeans and Muslims. These prerequisites had to be established due to the nature of research, which requires insights into SMTs' vacation travel motivations and how they select their choice of accommodation and food for leisure travel. The respondents varied in terms of age to allow a more diverse perspective on the research topic.

The respondents were selected based of the above criteria who the authors identified from the list of colleagues, family, and friends, and eight SMTs were chosen using purposeful sampling method.

A list of questions was developed according to the objectives of the study (Table 1). Other academic

Table 1
List of Questions Asked

Questions	Source
Travel related	Amadeus (2016), Battour (2017);
Where have you traveled for the last 10 years?	
How important is religion in influencing your travel decisions and why?	
Who do you usually travel with?	
What would your typical travel itinerary look like?	
What do you look forward to most when on holiday?	
Accommodation related	Battour & Ismail (2016), Henderson
How do you usually plan for your leisure travel, especially accommodation?	(2010), Stephenson (2014)
What do you prioritize most when selecting an accommodation for leisure travel?	
How does religion affect your accommodation choice?	
How do you feel about using hotel facilities that are shared by all genders?	
Food related	Carboni et al. (2017), Weidenfeld &
How do you decide where and what to eat?	Ron (2018)
What do you usually do when there is limited or no halal dining options available?	
How do you feel about hotels that sells alcoholic beverage?	

faculties in the institution and students from the Muslim community proofread the questionnaire. Semistructured interviews were conducted. The study obtained ethical clearance from Singapore Institute Technology Institutional Research Board, and the interviews were conducted from April to June 2018. Each candidate was asked if they accepted being recorded during the interview. The interview was conducted between 20 to 30 min each. Tools used for the interview included an audio recorder and a notepad for note-taking during the interview. All interviews were transcribed into 13,881 words and thematic analysis was used for data analysis.

Results

Demographic Profiles of Participants

The pool of interviewees had an equal mix of Singaporean male and female participants. It also had a range of ages, ranged from 20s to over 60s, to allow for multiple perspectives (Table 2). Different hotel attributes were categorized using symbols, and participants were asked to choose those attributes that are important to them when traveling overseas for leisure.

Three main themes were developed after analyzing the collected data. They are (1) travel motivations and travel considerations; (2) important considerations for accommodation and food; (3) tolerance on non-Shariah-compliant food and accommodation.

Influence of Religion in Travel Motivation

According to Battour et al. (2017), Muslim travelers seek foreign destinations that have fundamental Islamic morality, halal food, and a lack of public gambling and consumption of alcohol. On a similar note, SMTs considered halal food an important religious value and preferred to consume as much halal food as possible when abroad. While halal food held significant meaning for SMTs, they were generally flexible with their halal food options and were highly adaptable. This is in contrary to Weidenfeld and Ron (2008), who claimed that the absence of halal food would significantly influence Muslim travelers' travel destination. SMTs are highly driven by their personal desires to visit a destination and engage in tourist activities. SMTs' travel to explore new and different cultures and destinations, see and do things such as visit fauna and farms that are difficult to find in Singapore. As such, religion does not interfere with SMTs' vacation plans.

It was surprising to note that SMTs' travel motivations are more influenced by safety and security concerns than the discomfort on limited food

Table 2

Profile of Participants

No.	Gender	Age	Occupation	Travel Activity	Important Attributes for Accommodation
S1	Male	Mid 50s	Retired	Visit historical sites, Shopping, Sightseeing	Price, Convenience, Quality
S2	Male	40s	Civil servant	Sightseeing	Convenience, Cleanliness, Muslim-friendly attributes (halal food, prayer room, etc.), Positive online reviews (ratings and reviews)
S3	Female	Late 50s	Housewife	Shopping, Visit historical sites	Convenience, Location, Brand/reputation, Muslim-friendly attributes (halal food, prayer room, etc.), Hotel facilities & amenities
S4	Female	Early 50s	Housewife	NA	Price, Convenience, Location, Cleanliness, Safety & security
S5	Female	Mid 20s	Student	Tourist attractions	Convenience, Location, Cleanliness
S6	Female	Early 30s	Unknown	Visit zoos, Visit museums, Theme parks, Sightseeing	Price, Location, Positive online reviews (ratings and reviews)
S7	Male	60s	Retired	Sightseeing	Convenience, Muslim-friendly attributes (halal food, prayer room, etc.)
S8	Male	Late 20s	Unknown	Sightseeing, Tourist attractions	Price, Quality, Location, Cleanliness

choices, in particular over anti-Muslim sentiments. It may be explained by the fact that Islamophobia is an uncommon phenomenon in Southeast Asia, where the population majority are Muslims. Being in multiethnic societies have helped communities stay more resilient to harmful prejudices. This is in contrast to the Western territories, where Islamophobia is expected to be more aggressive by the respondents and creates a deep-seated conflict among the communities. One participant voiced that she would not visit destinations that are against Muslims due to safety and security reasons.

> You have to make sure that you check if that country accepts Muslims or not. If they don't accept Muslims, then why must you go to that country? It's simple as that. If they do not welcome Muslims, then we might as well don't go. (S4)

Consideration for Accommodation and Food Selection

When traveling overseas for leisure, participants were more focused on traveling and exploring the destination rather than being fixated on the accommodation. For many SMTs, the accommodation was simply a temporary safe space to rest and recoup for the night and hence they were not bothered by the activities and facilities in the accommodation.

> To me, swimming, spas, gym . . . all these are not really important because we are supposed to go there for holiday, to see the country and going out. (S4)

> Hotel is just a safe place for me to spend the night and recoup. (S8)

Participants strictly did not consume non-halal or haram foods and beverage such as pork and alcohol. However, they tend to tread on the gray areas (questionable food) when facing challenging halal dining situations. While the participants could adapt and survive on those substitutes, it does not suggest that they enjoyed the experience of eating substitutes instead of enjoying the local cuisine or having a wholesome meal.

> Food is actually a factor for me. Even though I say bread and spread is enough, sometimes I do want to enjoy their local cuisines. (S6)

> Eat bread. Hard bread, and water. Like French loaves. The only thing that is appetizing. (S1)

Another interesting finding was that participants make direct relationship between accommodation qualities with food quality in the destination. This implies that food quality plays a discreet yet significant role in SMTs' choice of accommodation. As such, accommodation with an excellent Muslim-friendly gastronomy scene will benefit greatly from food-loving SMTs.

> If 3-star hotel not so nice. The food also not nice. Unless it's a 5-star but 5-star, the food is okay lah. (S1)

> 5-star is good—the service, the food. If the lousy ones, need to go downstairs to find food. (S3)

Level of Tolerance on Non-Shariah-Compliant Food and Accommodation

Accommodation ideals for a Muslim traveler have been shaped into a new set of standards by Salam Standard, which includes availability of halal food, qibla (the direction that Muslim prayers face) direction, and other Muslim-friendly amenities. Surprisingly, these ideals were loosely regarded as "nonsensical expectations" by some SMTs who travel frequently. SMTs generally understood how hotels and alike accommodations operate, where facilities such as swimming pools and gyms are intended to generate higher guest satisfaction albeit being shared, and sales of alcohol are chiefly designed for revenue generation. With this understanding, SMTs have developed lower expectations for Shariah compliance and practiced higher tolerance for conventional hotel operations. Living in a multiethnic society like Singapore may have also influenced SMTs' high level of tolerance towards non-Shariah compliance in public spaces. Most SMTs chose to practice self-regulation and discretion and not commit an act that is against Islamic beliefs (e.g., consuming alcoholic beverage or observing partially clothed guests in swimming pools). For SMTs, being in a social space requires them to be adaptable with their surroundings and practice flexible judgement without posing any discomfort to themselves or any other.

I have to tell my children "Girls, sorry you cannot bathe because they don't have the kind of facilities whereby you can wear swimming costumes which are covered." (S4)

For ladies who wear the hijab, it's not fun because it's mix-gender. If they have a special space for ladies only and not mixed, then it's good. (S3)

SMTs presented high tolerance in accommodations that offer alcoholic beverage. A majority of the participants are generally unaffected by the non-Shariah-compliant activities that occur in their accommodation. Most participants were able to tolerate or be unaffected by conventional hotel operations because they understood that the hotel is simply offering relevant products and services to their guests to generate revenue and guest satisfaction.

Hotels selling alcoholic beverages—I see it as just one of the ways that they are generating revenue for their own establishments. (S5)

Hotel is hotel. Hotel have the preparation for swimming pool. Hotel swimming pool is for both genders. (S7)

Some people drink, they are okay. Some others who drink, they make trouble. That's the bad side. (S1)

Someone might feel drunk and disturb us. (S3)

Discussion and Conclusion

SMTs were found to associate accommodation quality with food quality. This may indicate that the participants intentionally select high-quality accommodation like five-star hotels for their excellent services and facilities, but, most importantly, the quality of their food. The decision might imply that food quality plays a discreet yet significant role in the participant's choice of accommodation. As such, accommodation with an excellent gastronomy scene will benefit greatly from food-loving SMTs.

The findings have shown that SMTs highly values price, location, and cleanliness of an accommodation but their most basic need is the availability of halal food, a religious-related consideration. If halal food is scarce in the destination, SMTs seem to be pragmatic and consume other food

alternatives instead, such as dried foods, instant noodles, and instant packaged food brought from home or store bought. Although some SMTs would consume questionable foods such as foods with no pork or lard, most SMTs would proactively avoid obvious haram products such as pork and alcoholic beverage. Be that as it may, surviving on these food substitutes were merely to "fill an empty stomach" and did not suggest elevated satisfaction and enjoyment in the travel experience. On the other hand, even if halal-certified food was made available in hotels or in a nearby precinct, price-sensitive SMTs would skip the eatery if the halal menu was charged at steep prices. The lack of local cuisine and delicacies that are halal certified is another dismal factor for SMTs who embark on gastronomic journeys while on vacation. Being able to enjoy the local cuisine provides a richer experience for travelers in general. Hence, not being able to do so may diminish SMTs' level of satisfaction when traveling overseas.

SMTs in general were unaffected by alcohol sales. SMTs were immune to the presence of alcohol in hotels because it does not concern them. However, some SMTs raised concerns about excessive rowdy behavior due to intoxication. Rowdy behavior of drunk guests made participants feel uncomfortable and affected their perception of safety in the accommodation. This negative perception might indirectly affect the accommodation's image in the eyes of the guest. For accommodation that would like to welcome Muslim travelers, it is important to train staff to effectively implement the standard operating procedures in handling drunk guests. This could be done through constant observation and modification of alcohol concentration in alcoholic beverage served to tipsy guests.

In terms of facilities, a majority of the SMTs are accepting of the mix-gender attribute attached to these facilities. This could be attributed to the fact that most SMTs understood that hotel facilities are purely for recreational purposes and are meant for public use; in addition, SMTs strongly believe in self-regulation because it is easier to regulate oneself than to regulate others. SMTs did not frequently utilize these facilities because most of the time they were out to explore the destination. While the presence of mix-gender facilities generally did not affect SMTs, their female counterparts highlighted that

mix-gender facilities have restricted their desired activities. Due to the gender mix, these facilities did not adhere to Shariah laws and, as such, female Muslims were restricted from enjoying the use of swimming pools and other mix-gender facilities. This was made worse when female Muslims were also not allowed to swim with a burqini.

While halal hotels are slowly being introduced into the hospitality scene, it was surprising to note that many SMTs deem halal hotels unnecessary despite showing support for the initiative. SMTs felt that it was pointless for hotel operators to remove revenue-generating streams like sales of alcohol or having to create more facilities for gender separation just to cater to the Muslim demand. They were also skeptical of the success of Shariah-compliant hotels due to a perceived Muslim minority travel market and loss in a major revenue stream from alcoholic beverage, which SMTs considered the hotels needed to sustain their business.

For the availability of halal food, several international chains such as Subway are attaining halal certification to reach to a larger market and, in turn, increase sales and revenue (MUIS, 2018). As such, for hotel operators and managers, they may consider including an affordable halal restaurant in the venue or collaborating with nearby halal food outlets to provide halal food options for Muslim guests. Apart from their dietary needs, hotels who are already providing mobile phones for their guests may consider including a Muslim-focused concierge App to accommodate to their Muslim guests' needs (Thomson Reuters, 2016). With the rise in Muslim-friendly online booking site, hotels may discover new revenue and cost streams from these platforms. Mainstream online travel agencies, on the other hand, may have to anticipate a dip in traffic and revenues as Muslim consumers begin to patronize more Muslim-friendly sites. Hotel and restaurant managers could also consider adjusting their F&B menu or outlets to include halal options as halal food is a pivotal element for most Muslim travelers. For destinations interested in the Muslim travel market, they might imitate Japan's strategy in commencing pilot tests in dedicated regions to test the waters (Henderson, 2016). These regions will observe intensive halal tourism education and experience a surge in halal tourism products to attract Muslim travelers. Most importantly, destinations could focus on offering halal dining options that reflect the local and traditional cuisine to provide a richer travel experience. Destination managers will also have to anticipate the growing halal trend in their destination and market their products accordingly to Muslim travelers without alienating non-Muslim travelers.

This research has some limitations. In terms of the method used, the nature of the research topic may be sensitive for participants as it is heavily associated with religious values and practices. There is a possibility that interviewees may tend to provide politically or religiously correct responses to portray themselves in a positive light. It is also acknowledged that the research outcomes from the small sample might not be unanimously applicable to other SMTs, whom the research did not reach. For future studies, quantitative methods of data collection could be used to complement this research on SMTs for comparison with other countries' Muslim travelers for a more comprehensive study.

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