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DEVELOPING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF HALAL CERTIFICATION, EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE, SERVICE INNOVATION, AND DESTINATION LOYALTY IN MALAYSIAN ISLAMIC TOURISM

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Abstract:

The primary objective of this study is to propose a conceptual model consisting of the relationship between halal certificates for food and beverages, emotional experience, service innovation, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty in the context of Malaysian Islamic tourism. As a preliminary study, this study used a self-administered questionnaire to gather the data for the pilot survey, which focused on Muslim tourists from international Islamic nations visiting Malaysia's Islamic tourism sites. Purposive sampling was used to choose the respondents with certain criteria. SPSS version 26 was used to examine the demographic profile of the respondents and reliability analysis of halal certification for food and beverages, emotional experience, service innovation, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty. The findings indicate a high consistency of measuring items for each construct, which provides a strong foundation for the actual study. Consequently, the administration of Islamic tourism and tour companies will gain profit from the devoted foreign Muslim travellers who come to Malaysia.

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Destination Loyalty, Emotional Experience, Food and Beverage,
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Introduction

Islamic tourism refers to an individual or group travelling in accordance with Sharia, which assures ease in carrying out the orders of the all-powerful Allah SWT and avoiding all of his prohibitions (Putra & Tucunan, 2021). Islam has a profound influence on the attitudes and actions of Muslims in everyday life. Even when traveling for leisure, one must conform to the legal standards of Islamic law (Boğan & Sarıışık, 2019). Malaysia is considered one of the most popular tourist destinations in Asia and even in the world, including Islamic tourism. The State of the Global Islamic Economy (SGIE) Report 2022 ranked Malaysia as the region's leading country in the Muslim-friendly travel and hospitality sector. Evidently, a total of 110 million Muslim international tourists arrived in 2022 to Malaysia, making up 12% of all international tourists (CrescentRating & Mastercard, 2023).

Moreover, Malaysia is a well-known Islamic tourism destination due to its offering of Halal services and products that encompass various aspects of the halal travel continuum, such as halal food, halal accommodations, halal logistics, halal healthcare, and other related products that increase Islamic tourism revenue in Malaysia (The Malaysia Reverse, 2024). However, recently, the number of international tourists visiting Malaysia from the year 2019 to 2024 has been decreasing (Tourism Malaysia, 2024). Thus, it is important to enhance the loyalty of international Muslim tourists through several factors affecting destination loyalty. For example, in the context of a Muslim tourism destination, the halal certificate on food and beverages has a strong association with destination loyalty because Muslim tourists prefer the type of certification body that is impacted by its accreditation of the halal requirement (Ulfy et al., 2021). Moreover, the significance of emotions among individuals across the field of tourism is also required to be acknowledged (Ulfy et al., 2021), and it has been determined that the emotional experience or incident of an individual tourist has affected the tourists' intention of travelling back to the destination which is considered as a crucial aspect of loyalty (Sharma &

Nayak, 2019). Furthermore, service innovation tourism efforts are vital for increasing tourist satisfaction and rebuilding the reputations of destinations (Cheng et al., 2022; Liat et al., 2020). Therefore, this research aims to investigate the relationship between halal certificates for food and beverage, emotional experience, service innovation, and tourist satisfaction with destination loyalty.

Literature Review

Destination Loyalty

Destination loyalty refers to an individual tourist's positive emotions about the destination, which initiate their intention to repeat the visit or willingness to suggest the destination to other people (Mohamad et al., 2019). Similarly, destination loyalty or loyalty can be related to the behaviour of tourists or consumers, such as enjoying certain items or services and having the intention to buy or revisit them repeatedly (Azis et al., 2020). Most importantly, since the nature of the concept of loyalty is to recommend and repeat visits to the destination, it becomes an important driver of economic success. It is due to the increasing number of tourist arrivals from their repeat visits, recommending more potential tourists to visit the destination, and their spending on accommodation, transportation, food, beverages, and entertainment. This is the reason why destination loyalty is treated as the outcome in most of the past studies (Burhanudin et al., 2025; Chua et al., 2025; Dahanayake et al., 2025; Han et al., 2025).

Halal Certificate for Food and Beverage

In Islam, halal is described as allowed, permissive, or lawful, whereas haram or non-halal means prohibited or unlawful activity (Wannasupchue et al., 2023). The concept of halal covers the products, services, and actions that comply with Islamic principles, especially in travelling, food and beverages, lifestyle, and more. This is the reason why Muslims are very particular about the food and beverages to ensure that the ingredients and the preparation of the food and beverages comply with Islamic principles. In other words, they are concerned about how the food and beverages are manufactured. Basically, manufacturing halal food means the food adheres to Islam's dietary requirements and uses carefully picked ingredients (Wannasupchue et al., 2023). To ensure the food and beverages are guaranteed Halal, the government bodies in most countries have established an authority body to oversee the status of Halal on the food and beverages produced by the food handlers. As in the case of Malaysia, Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) was established to conduct this practice. Those considered as halal foods and beverages will receive certification by JAKIM. Salindal (2018) defines that Halal certification follows Islamic law and addresses concerns of Muslim consumers on the status of a product. Therefore, having the certification will convince the Muslims, especially when they want to choose and consume the food and beverages. Most importantly, the halal certificate and food and beverage play an important role in satisfying the tourists (Ulfiy et al., 2021; Tabelessy et al., 2023) and shaping their destination loyalty (Tabelessy et al., 2023). Thus, the proposed hypotheses are as follows;

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between halal certificates of food and beverage and tourist satisfaction.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between halal certificates of food and beverage and destination loyalty.

Emotional Experience

Emotional experience examines both dimensions of emotions, either positive emotions or negative emotions (Al-Msallam, 2020). Emotional experience can be defined as tourists' emotional response that occurs immediately after their visit and before tourist satisfaction. Hence, there is a general pattern throughout all tourism research studies on emotional experience, given that unfavourable feelings are an important obstacle to tourists that could harm tourist satisfaction and positive word of mouth (WOM) (Al- Msallam, 2020). Most importantly, emotional experience acts as the predictor of tourist satisfaction (Biswas et al., 2020) and destination loyalty (Al-Msallam, 2020; Hamid & Mohamad, 2020). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed;

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between emotional experience and tourist satisfaction.

H4: There is a significant positive relationship between emotional experience and destination loyalty.

Service Innovation

Innovation is one of the main elements behind product creation or renewal initiatives, including changes in product, process, organizational, and marketing (Liat et al., 2020). Not just that, innovation is typically associated with retail organizations. Current developments have shown that the service industry must adopt innovative techniques, and innovation may be applied to both 'renovation' and 'improvement'. Meanwhile, service innovation is a structure that integrates the capabilities and functions of numerous individuals to generate core beliefs that aid in healthy changes, taking advantage of innovative market opportunities, and developing significant competitive benefits (Cheng et al., 2022). Moreover, service innovation is important in shaping tourist satisfaction (Cheng et a., 2022; Liat et al., 2020) and destination loyalty (Liat et al., 2020). Thus, two more hypotheses are proposed as follows;

H5: There is a significant positive relationship between service innovation and tourist satisfaction.

H6: There is a significant positive relationship between service innovation and destination loyalty.

Tourist Satisfaction

Satisfaction refers to the expected response of consumers to goods and services. It is the result of the process of satisfying consumers or tourists with the products or services offered by providers (Ratnasari et al., 2020). It allows consumers or tourists to respond positively, and this becomes a factor that consumers or tourists consider when purchasing products or returning to the destination (Ulfy et al., 2021). Tourist satisfaction has an important influence on tourists' behavioural loyalty (Cheng et a., 2022; Liat et al., 2020), which encourages their involvement in future visits and recommending it to other potential tourists. Even though the direct effects of halal certification of food and beverages, emotional experience, and service innovation on tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty, as well as the direct effect of tourist satisfaction on destination loyalty, were examined thoroughly in the past research works, a limited number of the studies have examined the mediating effects of tourist satisfaction on the relationship between halal certification of food and beverages, emotional experience, service innovation

and destination loyalty. Thus, to fill the research gaps in the existing literature, four more hypotheses are developed.

H7: There is a significant positive relationship between tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty.

H8: There is a mediating effect of tourist satisfaction on the relationship between halal certification of food and beverages and destination loyalty.

H9: There is a mediating effect of tourist satisfaction on the relationship between emotional experience and destination loyalty.

H10: There is a mediating effect of tourist satisfaction on the relationship between service innovation and destination loyalty.

SOR as an Underpinning Theory

The development of a conceptual framework for this study is supported by the Stimulus Organism Response theory (SOR). Basically, this theory was built to evaluate the influence of the environment on individual behavioural outcomes (Russell & Mehrabian, 1974; Jacoby, 2002). The SOR theory comprises three important components. First, the 'stimulus' refers to the external environment around individuals, which is related to the decisions that affect their internal state (Kim & Park, 2019). In this study, three variables are identified as stimuli, which include halal certification of food and beverage, emotional incidents, and service innovation that affect individual tourists' internal feelings, which is tourist satisfaction. Second, 'organism' refers to an individual's internal state, which comprises emotions, thoughts, and feelings. The variable of this study that suits the organism is tourist satisfaction. From the development of internal feeling, it drives an individual response, which is the destination loyalty (tourists' intention to repeat visit and recommend to other potential tourists) of this study. Thus, the framework of theory depends on sequential relationships to examine the effects of halal certification on food and beverage, the emotional experience of tourists, and the service innovation, through individual satisfaction on destination loyalty.

Methodology

This research uses a quantitative study to examine the effects of halal certificates for food and beverages, emotional experience, service innovation, and tourist satisfaction on destination loyalty among Muslim tourists visiting Muslim destinations in Malaysia. However, the present study is only a preliminary study, whereby the actual data collection has been conducted. The only outcomes for this study are the demographic profile of the respondents and the reliability analysis of measuring items of each construct using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 software. Thus, the study plans to examine the interrelationship of the variables after the actual collection has been conducted using the Partial Least Squares Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) software. The researcher used PLS-SEM because in some cases, it is a better option for second language quantitative research as compared to Covariance-based structural equation modelling software (CB- SEM) (Hair & Alamer, 2022). Moreover, this study employed a cross-sectional design whereby the data collection was conducted at a single point in time.

The population is the complete aggregate comprising all the elements, individuals, or units possessing certain characteristics that the researcher aims to study or generalize about. The characteristics are: (1) Muslim tourists from International Islamic countries, (2) aged 18 years

and above, (3) must experience staying in Malaysia for more than 24 hours but less than 365 days, and (4) know how to communicate in English.

The present study used a non-probability sampling. To be specific, purposive sampling is the type of non-probability sampling that is appropriate for this study. Data collection enables a person or researcher to answer the related questions, evaluate the results, and analyze accurate insights for research regarding upcoming probabilities and trends. The current study used the self-administered questionnaire as a tool to collect the data for the pilot survey and actual data collection using a 7-point Likert scale. The study chose a 7-point Likert scale because of its greater sensitivity and variability, allowing the respondents to express more precise levels of agreement. The study followed the rule of thumb by Roscoe (1975) whereby the range of samples is between 30 to 500 samples.

Findings

As mentioned earlier, this study is just a preliminary study, which means it is just a pilot survey that was conducted among 100 respondents. The outcomes from the analysis of this survey are: (1) the demographic profile and travel profile, and (2) the reliability analysis for all items measuring each construct of the study.

Table 1: Demographic Profile and Travel Profile

| Demographic Profile | Categories | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------|------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender | Female | 53 | 53.0 |
| | Male | 47 | 47.0 |
| Age | 18 – 28 years old | 30 | 30.0 |
| | 29 – 39 years old | 56 | 56.0 |
| | 40 – 50 years old | 12 | 12.0 |
| | 51 years old and above | 2 | 2.0 |
| Length of Stay | 1-7 days | 30 | 30.0 |
| | 8-14 days | 26 | 26.0 |
| | 15-20 days | 20 | 20.0 |
| | 21-27 days | 15 | 15.0 |
| | More than 28 days | 9 | 9.0 |
| Repeat Visit | No | 22 | 22.0 |
| | Once | 23 | 23.0 |
| | Twice | 20 | 20.0 |
| | Three times | 25 | 25.0 |
| | More than four times | 10 | 10.0 |

Based on Table 1 above, the participants of the survey are almost balanced between male (53%) and female (49%). However, most of them are between 29 and 39 years old (56%), which resembles young and strong travellers who travel abroad. The majority of participants indicated a preference for a short stay of 1-7 days, followed by a medium-term stay ranging from 8-14 days or 15 to 20 days. These findings are imperative for the actual study as they indicate a real-life target segment for travel agencies, validating the study findings to a greater extent.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

| Variable | Number of Items | Cronbach's Alpha |
|--|-----------------|------------------|
| Halal Certificate for Food and Beverages | 8 | 0.971 |
| Emotional Experience | 17 | 0.957 |
| Service Innovation | 9 | 0.975 |
| Tourist Satisfaction | 4 | 0.964 |
| Destination Loyalty | 4 | 0.974 |

Based on Table 2 above, it indicates the reliability analysis for all items measuring each construct. All items indicate a high consistency in measuring each construct since the Cronbach's Alpha values exceed more than 0.70. Hence, all items are suitable to be used for the actual data collection in the future study. However, the future study has to confirm the interrelationships between the proposed variables based on the actual data collection. The proposed hypotheses are analysed using the Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) from the actual data collection. PLS-SEM is a non-parametric statistical analysis tool used in hypothesis-testing research, which has been selected by most researchers due to its strong predictive capabilities (Hair et al., 2021). Basically, the two main analyses in PLS-SEM are: (1) assessment of the measurement model, and (2) hypothesis testing using structural equation modelling, including testing direct and indirect effects of the exogenous on the endogenous variable(s).

The assessment of the measurement model is executed to empirically evaluate the relationships between the constructs and their respective indicators (Hair et al., 2017). The research model of the proposed current study is a reflective measurement model. To ensure the quality of this reflective measurement model, four key assessments were performed: (1) Factor loadings; (2) Internal consistency was measured using Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha (CA); (3) Convergent validity was assessed through outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE); and (4) Discriminant validity was determined using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) and the Fornell-Lacker criterion. Once the results meet all the requirements, the hypothesis testing is conducted for the direct and indirect effects of the relationships among the variables.

Discussion

As the preliminary study, only the pilot survey was conducted. The findings from the pilot survey provided initial support for the robustness of the proposed research framework. This can be proven from the high internal consistency values for all the proposed constructs, highlighting that the measuring items for halal certificates of food and beverages, emotional experience, service innovation, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty are reliable and fit for further empirical testing. This provides a strong justification that the conceptualization of destination loyalty as discussed by past research works (Azis et al., 2020; Ab Ghani et al., 2021; Muhamad Nasir et al., 2022; Nasir & Wongchestha, 2022; Nasir et al., 2022) can be effectively expanded in the context of Islamic tourism in Malaysia. As loyalty reflects tourists' intention to recommend and revisit the destination, establishing a reliable measure at the current stage strengthens the foundation for examining the structural relationships among constructs in the actual study.

Furthermore, most of the active respondents in the survey are young adults at the age of 29-39 years old, with a preference for short to medium term stays. This segment indicates an active and economically productive group of Muslims travelers who are most likely to be highly concerned about the status of halal compliance and service quality. The results from the respondent profile indicate that the relatively high proportion of repeat visitors also provides support to evaluate the factors that enhance satisfaction and destination loyalty among Muslim travelers. Moreover, within the Malaysian context, where the country is ranked as one of the top Muslim-friendly hubs, as highlighted in the State of the Global Islamic Economy (SGIE) Report 2022, the role of halal assurance is also emphasized as an important element. Halal food and beverage products not only represent an Islamic obligation but also represent an element of trust and authenticity that could potentially lead to feelings of positive emotional experience and result in loyalty.

In addition, the role of incorporating emotional experience and service innovation as antecedents of tourist satisfaction is an important addition to the Islamic tourism literature, where emotional experience in the tourism experience may potentially impact the level of satisfaction, while innovative services may add value in terms of gaining a competitive advantage in the tourism industry. Furthermore, the study aims to highlight the role of tourist satisfaction as a mediator in the relationship. Although the study findings are based on pilot reliability analysis, there is an essential need to conduct full-scale data collection in the future in order to analyse the findings by using PLS-SEM to validate the hypothesized relationships. Finally, the summary from the above analysis underlines the significance of integrating religious compliance, personal experiences, and innovative strategies to sustain the competitive advantage of Malaysia in the Muslim-friendly tourism industry.

Conclusion

The current study proposed a new research framework that comprises halal certificates for food and beverages, emotional experience, and service innovation as independent variables, whereas destination loyalty acts as the dependent variable. Meanwhile, tourist satisfaction mediates the relationship between these variables. However, the present study is a preliminary study, whereby no actual data collection was conducted. The survey conducted in the present study is a pilot survey to measure the consistency of the items measuring the constructs. All items indicate high consistency in measuring the intended constructs. It is hoped that future research will continue the current research works by collecting the actual data in order to confirm the interrelationships between halal certificates for food and beverages, emotional experience, service innovation, and tourist satisfaction with destination loyalty by using the PLS-SEM software. Consequently, it provides evidence-based recommendations to the destination managers and tourism stakeholders as to enhance tourist satisfaction and encourage repeat visitation.

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