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UNDERSTANDING MUSLIM TOURISTS' SWITCHING BEHAVIOR TO MUSLIM-FRIENDLY HOTELS: AN EXTENDED MODEL OF PUSH-PULL-MOORING FRAMEWORK

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Abstract:

The rapid growth of the Muslim travel market has intensified competition within the hospitality industry, particularly among accommodation providers seeking to attract Muslim tourists. While the development of Muslim-friendly hotels has expanded in response to this demand, limited attention has been given to understanding why Muslim tourists choose to switch from one hotel to another. This conceptual paper addresses this gap by examining Muslim tourists' switching behaviour toward Muslim-friendly hotels through the lens of the Push–Pull–Mooring (PPM) framework. Drawing on prior literature in tourism, service marketing, and Islamic hospitality, the study identifies key push factors (low service quality, low satisfaction, low trust, and negative future expectations), pull factors (alternative attractiveness and Shariah compliance), and mooring factors (such as loyalty, habit, and social influence) that jointly shape switching decisions. By integrating religious compliance with conventional service-related determinants, the proposed framework offers a more comprehensive understanding of switching behaviour in a faith-based tourism context.

Keyword:

Muslim-Friendly Hotels; Push–Pull–Mooring (PPM) Framework; Pull Factors; Push Factors; Satisfaction; Switching Behaviour; Mooring Factors



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Introduction

The hospitality and tourism industry significantly contributes to economic growth, employment, and cross-cultural exchange. Within this sector, accommodation, including hotels, resorts, and lodges, plays a central role by providing safe, comfortable, and culturally appropriate lodging that supports tourism mobility and destination competitiveness (Walker, 2016). In Malaysia, tourism has evolved into a strategic economic sector, accounting for approximately 14% of the national GDP in 2022 and generating tourism receipts of RM251.5 billion, with the accommodation segment contributing RM14.8 billion (Department of Statistics Malaysia [DOSM], 2023). However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this growth, reducing international tourist arrivals from 26.1 million in 2019 to 134,728 in 2021 due to travel restrictions under the Movement Control Order (Tourism Malaysia, 2023).

Post-pandemic, travel behaviour has shifted, with tourists increasingly seeking services that extend beyond functional accommodation to align with personal, cultural, and spiritual values. In this context, the Muslim travel market has emerged as a significant global segment. With an estimated 2.12 billion Muslims worldwide, there is a growing demand for travel services that comply with Islamic requirements, including halal food, prayer facilities, gender-sensitive amenities, and alcohol-free environments (Global Muslim Travel Index [GMTI], 2024). From an Islamic perspective, travel facilitates reflection, learning, and social interaction, making religiously aligned tourism experiences particularly important (Bogan, 2020).

Malaysia is well-positioned to serve this market, consistently ranking among the top destinations in the Global Muslim Travel Index since 2015 (GMTI, 2024). Established halal certification systems, a strong Islamic finance ecosystem, and socio-cultural alignment with Muslim values support this. In 2022, Malaysia hosted approximately 2.12 million Muslim tourists, generating RM5.37 billion in tourism receipts (Rest & Rehlah, 2023).

Despite these advantages, challenges remain. Awareness among Muslim tourists regarding the availability and differentiation of Muslim-friendly hotels is limited. Many travellers assume that hotels in Muslim-majority destinations automatically comply with Islamic requirements, while others cannot distinguish between Muslim-friendly and fully Shariah-compliant hotels. Furthermore, price sensitivity, location, and perceived service quality often outweigh religious considerations. These factors may limit the effectiveness of investments in Muslim-friendly features and hinder customer retention. Therefore, this study aims to develop a conceptual framework based on the Push–Pull–Mooring (PPM) theory to explain Muslim tourists' switching behaviour toward Muslim-friendly hotels.

Literature Review

Muslim Tourism and the Muslim-Friendly Hospitality Industry

Muslim tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry, driven by the continuous growth of the global Muslim population and increasing purchasing power among Muslim travellers (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Muslim tourists generally seek travel experiences that align with Islamic principles, including access to halal food, prayer facilities, privacy, modest dress codes, and the avoidance of non-halal activities (Battour et al., 2011). These religious considerations distinguish Muslim tourists from conventional travellers and significantly influence their travel and accommodation choices.

Recent studies highlight that the demand for Muslim-friendly tourism services has increased significantly as Muslim travellers increasingly prefer destinations and accommodation providers that facilitate religious practices and comply with Islamic values (Abror et al., 2021; Han et al., 2019). Consequently, the Muslim-friendly hospitality industry has gained increasing attention in both academic research and industry practice.

Muslim-friendly hotels (MFHs) refer to accommodation providers that offer selected facilities and services aligned with Islamic values without necessarily operating as fully Shariah-compliant establishments (Razalli et al., 2013). These hotels typically provide halal-certified food, prayer facilities, qibla direction indicators, and environments that support Muslim religious practices. Empirical evidence suggests that Muslim-friendly services enhance tourists' perceived comfort, satisfaction, and trust, which subsequently influence accommodation preferences and revisit intentions (Rahman et al., 2020).

From an entrepreneurial perspective, the development of Muslim-friendly hospitality represents a strategic opportunity for hotel operators to differentiate their service offerings and capture the expanding Muslim travel market. Despite the growing interest in Muslim-friendly hospitality, much of the existing research has focused primarily on satisfaction and loyalty outcomes, while relatively limited attention has been paid to switching behaviour among Muslim tourists.

Concept of Tourist Switching Behaviour

Switching behaviour refers to the decision of customers to terminate their relationship with a current service provider and move to an alternative provider (Bansal et al., 2005). In the hospitality industry, switching behaviour is an important concern for service providers because customer retention is generally more cost-effective than acquiring new customers.

Previous research indicates that switching behaviour may be influenced by multiple factors, including dissatisfaction with current services, perceived attractiveness of alternative providers, and situational conditions that influence switching decisions (Keaveney, 1995). In hotel contexts, negative service experiences, poor service quality, and unmet expectations are commonly identified as key drivers of switching behaviour (Han et al., 2011).

However, switching behaviour is not always solely driven by dissatisfaction. Customers may switch service providers even when they are satisfied due to perceived better value, stronger brand image, or more attractive service offerings. In the context of Muslim tourism, religious

considerations may further influence accommodation choices. Muslim tourists may prefer hotels that provide stronger compliance with Islamic principles, which can motivate switching behaviour even when conventional services are satisfactory. Despite its importance, relatively limited research has examined switching behaviour among Muslim tourists, particularly within the context of Muslim-friendly hospitality services. Therefore, this study aims to develop a conceptual framework based on the Push–Pull–Mooring (PPM) theory to explain Muslim tourists' switching behaviour toward Muslim-friendly hotels.

Push–Pull–Mooring (PPM) Framework

To better understand switching behaviour, this study adopts the Push–Pull–Mooring (PPM) framework proposed by Bansal et al. (2005). The PPM framework explains switching behaviour by categorising influencing factors into three groups: push factors, pull factors, and mooring factors.

Push factors refer to negative aspects associated with the current service provider that motivate customers to switch. In hospitality contexts, low service quality and customer dissatisfaction are frequently identified as push factors that encourage customers to seek alternative providers.

Pull factors represent the attractive characteristics of alternative service providers that draw customers toward them. In Muslim-friendly hospitality, attributes such as halal certification and superior Muslim-friendly facilities may increase the attractiveness of alternative hotels and motivate tourists to switch accommodation providers.

Mooring factors represent personal, social, and situational conditions that may facilitate or constrain switching behaviour. These factors include switching costs, social influence, and psychological attachment to the current provider.

Recent tourism studies increasingly apply the PPM framework to explain consumer switching behaviour in service industries because it provides a comprehensive perspective that simultaneously considers dissatisfaction, alternative attractiveness, and contextual influences (Cheng et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2022). Therefore, the PPM framework is particularly suitable for examining Muslim tourists' switching behaviour toward Muslim-friendly hotels, as it allows the integration of both conventional service factors and religious attributes within a unified behavioural model.

Factors Influencing Muslim Tourists' Switching Behaviour

Low Service Quality and Low Satisfaction (Push Factors)

Service quality is widely recognised as one of the most important determinants of customer evaluation in hospitality services. According to the SERVQUAL model, service quality consists of several dimensions, including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles (Parasuraman et al., 1988). In Muslim-friendly hospitality, additional service elements such as halal assurance, Islamic ambience, and staff sensitivity toward Muslim religious needs are particularly important.

When service performance fails to meet customer expectations, dissatisfaction may occur, which can increase the likelihood of switching behaviour (Chen & Chen, 2010). For Muslim tourists, the absence of halal-certified food, limited prayer facilities, or inadequate understanding of Islamic requirements may lead to negative service experiences. Such deficiencies may act as push factors that motivate tourists to switch from conventional hotels to Muslim-friendly hotels that better accommodate their religious needs.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: *Low service quality positively influences Muslim tourists' switching behaviour toward Muslim-friendly hotels.*

H2: *Low satisfaction positively influences Muslim tourists' switching behaviour toward Muslim-friendly hotels.*

Halal Certification and Alternative Attractiveness (Pull Factors)

Pull factors represent the positive attributes of alternative service providers that attract customers to switch. In Muslim-friendly hospitality, halal certification serves as an important signal of compliance with Islamic principles and enhances Muslim tourists' trust in hotel services.

Halal certification assures Muslim tourists that food preparation, service processes, and hotel operations comply with Islamic dietary and operational requirements. This assurance reduces uncertainty and increases tourists' confidence when selecting accommodation providers.

Another important pull factor is alternative attractiveness, which refers to the extent to which competing service providers are perceived as offering superior benefits compared with current providers (Bansal et al., 2005). Muslim-friendly hotels that provide halal-certified food, prayer facilities, Islamic ambience, and culturally sensitive services may be perceived as more attractive than conventional hotels.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: *Halal certification positively influences Muslim tourists' switching behaviour toward Muslim-friendly hotels.*

H4: *Alternative attractiveness positively influences Muslim tourists' switching behaviour toward Muslim-friendly hotels.*

Switching Cost and Social Influence (Mooring Factors)

Mooring factors represent situational and contextual conditions that may facilitate or constrain switching decisions. One important mooring factor is switching cost, which refers to the financial, psychological, and effort-related costs associated with changing service providers (Jones et al., 2000).

High switching costs may discourage tourists from changing accommodation providers even when alternative hotels offer better services. Conversely, when switching costs are perceived as low, tourists may be more willing to change hotels.

Social influence also plays an important role in shaping tourist behaviour. Recommendations from family members, friends, and online communities often influence accommodation decisions (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of Muslim tourism, travellers frequently rely on social

networks, travel reviews, and online platforms to identify hotels that provide reliable Muslim-friendly services.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: *Switching cost negatively influences Muslim tourists' switching behaviour toward Muslim-friendly hotels.*

H6: *Social influence positively influences Muslim tourists' switching behaviour toward Muslim-friendly hotels.*

Research Gap

Although previous studies have examined Muslim-friendly hospitality, service quality, and tourist satisfaction, relatively limited research has investigated switching behaviour among Muslim tourists. Most existing studies focus primarily on customer satisfaction, loyalty, and revisit intentions rather than examining the behavioural mechanisms that motivate tourists to switch from conventional hotels to Muslim-friendly hotels.

Furthermore, prior studies often examine service-related factors independently without integrating religious attributes and contextual influences within a comprehensive theoretical framework. As a result, limited empirical research has applied the Push–Pull–Mooring (PPM) framework to explain how push factors (low service quality and dissatisfaction), pull factors (halal certification and alternative attractiveness), and mooring factors (switching cost and social influence) jointly influence Muslim tourists' switching behaviour.

Addressing this research gap, the present study develops a PPM-based conceptual framework to examine Muslim tourists' switching behaviour toward Muslim-friendly hotels. By integrating service quality factors, religious assurance attributes, and contextual influences within a unified theoretical model, this study contributes to the growing literature on Muslim-friendly hospitality and provides practical insights for hospitality operators seeking to attract and retain Muslim tourists. Therefore, this study proposes an integrated PPM-based framework that incorporates both service-related determinants and religious attributes in explaining switching behaviour.

Summary of Literature and Research Gap

The existing literature highlights the increasing importance of Muslim-friendly hospitality in the global tourism industry. The rapid growth of the Muslim travel market has encouraged hospitality providers to adapt their services to accommodate the religious needs of Muslim tourists. Muslim-friendly hotels typically provide halal-certified food, prayer facilities, Islamic-compliant environments, and services that align with Islamic values. These features are considered essential in enhancing the travel experience of Muslim tourists and influencing their accommodation choices.

Previous studies in hospitality and tourism have widely emphasised the role of service quality and customer satisfaction in shaping tourists' behavioural responses. Poor service performance, unmet expectations, and dissatisfaction have been identified as key determinants that may motivate customers to change service providers. In hotel contexts, negative service experiences such as inadequate facilities, poor service delivery, or lack of sensitivity toward customer needs often lead to switching behaviour.

In addition to push factors, several studies highlight the importance of attractive features offered by alternative service providers. In the context of Muslim-friendly hospitality, halal certification serves as a significant indicator of compliance with Islamic principles and enhances Muslim tourists' trust in hotel services. Hotels that offer halal-certified food, Islamic-friendly environments, and facilities that support religious practices are often perceived as more attractive alternatives compared to conventional hotels. Consequently, these attributes may act as pull factors that encourage Muslim tourists to switch accommodation providers.

Furthermore, switching behaviour is not only influenced by dissatisfaction and alternative attractiveness but also by contextual factors that may facilitate or constrain switching decisions. These factors, commonly referred to as mooring factors, include switching cost and social influence. Switching cost represents the financial, psychological, and effort-related barriers associated with changing service providers, while social influence reflects the impact of family members, friends, and online communities on tourists' accommodation decisions. These contextual factors play an important role in shaping tourists' final switching behaviour.

Despite the growing body of literature on Muslim-friendly tourism and hospitality services, several research gaps remain. First, many previous studies primarily focus on customer satisfaction, loyalty, and revisit intentions rather than examining the behavioural mechanisms that motivate tourists to switch from conventional hotels to Muslim-friendly hotels. Second, limited empirical research has specifically examined switching behaviour within the context of Muslim-friendly hospitality. Third, existing studies often investigate service-related factors and religious attributes separately without integrating them within a comprehensive theoretical framework.

Therefore, there is a need for a more integrated approach to understanding Muslim tourists' switching behaviour toward Muslim-friendly hotels. To address this gap, the present study adopts the Push–Pull–Mooring (PPM) framework to examine how push factors (low service quality and low satisfaction), pull factors (halal certification and alternative attractiveness), and mooring factors (switching cost and social influence) influence Muslim tourists' switching behaviour. By integrating service-related determinants, religious assurance attributes, and contextual influences within a single theoretical model, this study contributes to the literature on Muslim-friendly hospitality and provides insights for hospitality operators seeking to attract and retain Muslim tourists.

Research Framework

This study proposes a conceptual framework based on the Push–Pull–Mooring (PPM) theory to explain Muslim tourists' switching behaviour from conventional hotels to Muslim-friendly hotels, as shown in Figure 1. The PPM framework explains switching behaviour through three groups of factors: push factors, pull factors, and mooring factors.

Push factors refer to negative aspects associated with the current service provider that motivate customers to leave. In the context of this study, low service quality and low satisfaction represent push factors that may encourage Muslim tourists to switch from conventional hotels when their religious or service expectations are not fulfilled.

Pull factors refer to the attractive characteristics of alternative service providers that encourage customers to move toward them. In Muslim-friendly hospitality, halal certification and alternative attractiveness represent pull factors that increase Muslim tourists' confidence and perceived value when choosing Muslim-friendly hotels. These attributes may signal compliance with Islamic principles and provide greater comfort for Muslim travellers.

Mooring factors represent situational and contextual influences that may either facilitate or inhibit switching behaviour. In this study, switching cost and social influence are identified as mooring factors. Switching cost refers to the financial, psychological, and effort-related barriers associated with changing hotels, while social influence reflects the effect of recommendations from family, friends, and online reviews on tourists' accommodation decisions.

Based on these relationships, the proposed framework suggests that push factors, pull factors, and mooring factors collectively influence Muslim tourists' switching behaviour toward Muslim-friendly hotels.

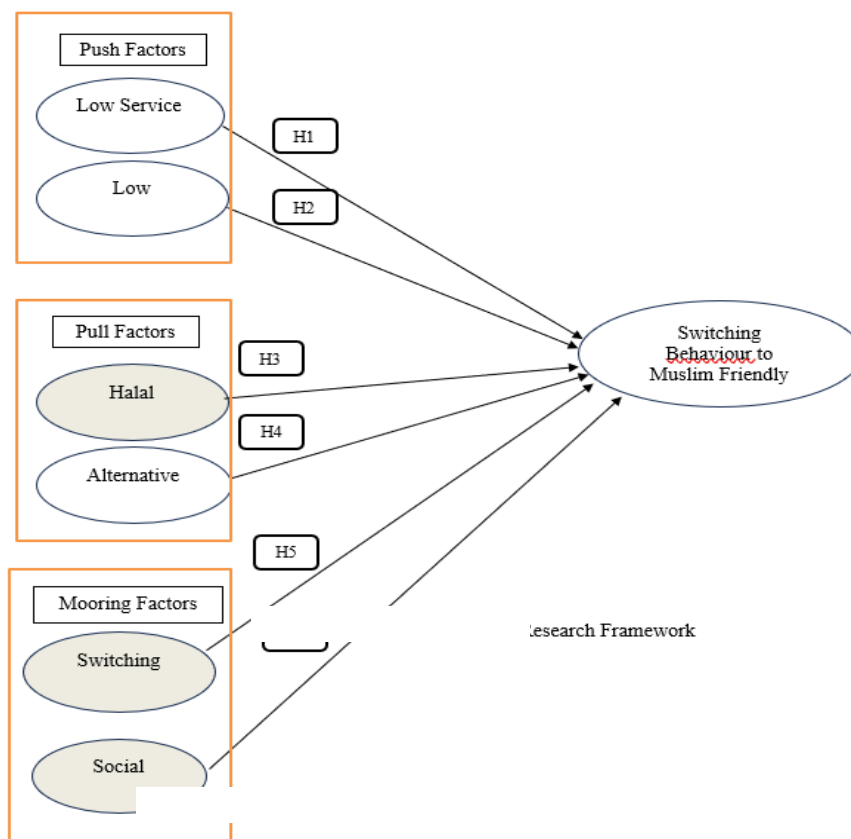


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

The proposed framework illustrates the factors influencing Muslim tourists' switching behaviour toward Muslim-friendly hotels. Based on the Push–Pull–Mooring theory, switching behaviour is influenced by push factors that drive tourists away from their current accommodation, pull factors that attract them to alternative hotels, and mooring factors that either facilitate or inhibit switching decisions. The framework integrates six variables: low service quality and low satisfaction (push factors), halal certification and alternative

attractiveness (pull factors), and switching cost and social influence (mooring factors), which collectively influence Muslim tourists' switching behaviour.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on Muslim-friendly hospitality by examining the determinants of Muslim tourists' switching behaviour toward Muslim-friendly hotels using the Push–Pull–Mooring (PPM) framework. The study integrates push factors (low service quality and low satisfaction), pull factors (halal certification and alternative attractiveness), and mooring factors (switching cost and social influence) to provide a comprehensive understanding of the behavioural mechanisms influencing switching decisions.

The findings highlight that dissatisfaction with current hotel services, particularly in terms of service quality and the lack of Muslim-friendly facilities, can motivate Muslim tourists to consider alternative accommodation options. At the same time, the attractiveness of Muslim-friendly hotels, especially through halal certification and religiously compliant services, plays an important role in attracting Muslim tourists. Mooring factors such as switching cost and social influence further shape tourists' decisions by either facilitating or constraining the switching process.

This study provides several important implications. Theoretically, it extends the application of the PPM framework within the context of Muslim-friendly hospitality by incorporating religious assurance factors such as halal certification. Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for hotel operators and hospitality entrepreneurs in designing strategies that enhance Muslim-friendly services, strengthen halal assurance, and leverage social influence through digital platforms and customer networks.

Overall, understanding the factors that influence Muslim tourists' switching behaviour is essential for hospitality providers seeking to remain competitive in the rapidly growing Muslim tourism market. Future research may empirically test the proposed framework using quantitative or mixed-method approaches to validate the relationships among variables.

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