

Factors that Influence Malaysian Muslim Travel Preferences

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Abstract: Tourism has become an important industry that contributes to a country's economy. Currently, the Muslim tourist segment is viewed as one of the important segments in the tourism industry. In addition, there has been a growing interest in understanding the preferences and motivations of Muslim travelers. This is due to the increasing number of Muslim travelers worldwide and the recognition that catering to their specific needs is essential for successful tourism development. The number of Muslim tourists from a Muslim-majority country increases significantly. Muslim travelers are looking for destinations in which the majority of the population are Muslims. This study is aimed to determine the factors that influence Muslim traveler preferences and to determine the most dominant factor that influences Muslim traveler preferences. Therefore, a survey of 100 Malaysian Muslim travelers in Shah Alam Selangor was done to determine the factors that influence Muslim traveler preferences. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) is used to analyze the multiple regression to test hypotheses on the factors that influence Muslim traveler preferences. The result of the survey suggests that halal certification is a significant factor in explaining Muslim traveler preferences. The availability of halal food and Sharia-compliant hotels were found not to have a significant relationship with Muslim travel preferences. This study provides evidence of the detailed needs and preferences of Muslim travelers and enhances the knowledge of tourists, government, and service providers about Islamic tourism.

Keywords: *Islamic Tourism, Travel Preferences, Halal Food, Halal Certification, Sharia Compliant Hotel*

1. Introduction and Background

The development of the tourism industry shows tremendous improvements including the Muslim travel market. Islamic tourism has emerged as one of the tourism business concepts recently. Muslim travelers are searching for destinations that comprise of larger part of the Muslim community that can offer them a Halal-friendly tourism environment (Henderson, 2010). For the tourism industry, it is essential to understand the needs and preferences of Muslim travelers. As the Muslim travel market continues to grow, destinations and businesses need to cater to the diverse requirements of Muslim travelers. Muslims have been living in the way of Islamic teachings under the practical frame of Islamic religious principles. Therefore, the daily lives of each Muslim including eating and drinking are all approved by the religious rules or called halal. It is suggested that Muslim hospitality and services aren't just produced for Muslim travelers but in addition searching for non-Muslims which can be seen as a potential market portion (Zulkifli et al., 2011).

This involves not only providing halal food and prayer facilities but also being mindful of cultural sensitivities and offering experiences that align with Islamic principles. Muslim travelers are increasingly seeking spiritual tourism experiences. Muslim individuals' cognition and psychological well-being are influenced by the Islamic religion, which affects the choice of one's product preferences. Research on Muslim tourists showed that the Islamic religion is an attribute to travel satisfaction (Battour, 2012). Muslim travelers are increasingly seeking destinations that offer halal tourism experiences. This trend aligns with the global increase in Muslim tourists and the rising demand for halal tourism (Haq & Wong, 2010). In addition, through Islamic tourism, religious duty was executed as well as knowledge was achieved for a wider dimension (Bhuiyan et al., 2011).

2. Literature Review

Travel preferences: Tourists' destination decision-making relies on four variables; internal (push), external (pull), features of the trip and tourists' experience of their travel and the internal relationship between these variables (Uysal et al., 2009). Moreover, push factors are internal motives, often emotional in nature, that drive individuals to want to travel, to spend time with people they love or to immerse themselves in nature to relax (Battour et al., 2010). Muslim travelers decide their travel preferences complying with their beliefs (Hamza et

al., 2012). In addition, Islamic-friendly accommodation, halal food, and modest dress code as the preferences (Battour et al., 2011). People regularly define their motives for traveling by evaluating their inner needs or exterior factors, which encourage them to travel to an international destination. The variety of factors that influence tourism formed different types of tourism, such as holiday tourism, cultural tourism, social tourism, economic tourism and political tourism. Besides, the Shariah-compliant hotel or Islamic hotel is one of the motivations for Muslim travelers to go abroad (Albattat et al., 2018)

Availability of halal food: Halal is a part of Shariah as an arrangement of ethics to manage Muslims' activities and conduct, however, this ought not to be mistaken for halal as a component of a classified arrangement of Shariah law. Battour et al. (2010) in their studies have discussed the development of Islamic-oriented tourism standards, such as alcohol and gambling-free zones and the availability of halal food. Muslims have to choose to consume halal food since it encounters the requirements that they believe make it suitable for consumption. Azmin et al. (2015) give clear recommendations for providing food that fulfills Sharia laws. Moreover, the importance of Halal food has gained attention from some service providers in the Western tourism industry (Henderson, 2003). Hence, both tourism locations and providers of tourism services are responsible for guaranteeing Muslims are getting halal food as it is a mandatory obligation in Islam. Tourism locations are anticipated to make initiatives to meet Sharia rules concerning halal food obligations.

H1: There is a significant relationship between the availability of halal food and Muslim travel preference.

Halal certification: Firms, businesses or individuals who need to get or apply for halal certification and the halal logo have to submit a request to a halal certification body. Halal certification is a safety guarantee for Muslims to consume halal food products according to the teachings of Muslims (Nurchahyo & Hudrasyah, 2017). Halal certification bodies have the role of certifying products and ensuring that every product that has been submitted fulfills the requirements of Halal. Whenever a product acquires a Halal certification logo it increases customer's confidence to buy those products (Zakaria et al., 2017). In addition, Junaidi (2020) suggested that halal food certification significantly influenced Indonesia's tourism industry. Besides food, halal certification also comprises other items such as cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and toiletries. The demand for halal requirements has an outcome in processing halal certification among business operators (Katuk et al., 2021).

H2: There is a significant relationship between halal certification and Muslim travel preference.

Sharia-compliant hotel: The key factor that determines travel to Islamic destinations is the readiness of Muslim-oriented amenities and services that provide for Muslim travelers and provide them with Islamic hospitality (Nassar et al., 2015). In addition, sharia-compliant hotel is a new innovative and creative service offered by hotels around the world (Azmin et al., 2015). The Islamic norms can influence Muslims' travel decisions such as destination choice, hotel selection, expectation of service, consumption of food, and preferences for activities that need to follow Islamic-friendly criteria. The Shariah-compliant hotel or Islamic hotel characteristic not only covers serving halal food and drink, but it extends to the management and operation of hotels based on Shariah principles (Shaharuddin et al., 2018).

H3: There is a significant relationship between Sharia-compliant hotels and Muslim travel preferences.

3. Methodology

The survey was conducted amongst Malaysian Muslim travelers residing in Shah Alam Selangor Malaysia. By using a quantitative study, a questionnaire was used to determine the factors that influence Muslim travel preferences. Therefore, a quantitative approach was used to conduct the study. Overall, 120 questionnaires were disseminated and 100 questionnaires stood meaningful for analysis purposes. The total of 100 respondents is sufficient to conduct analysis (Faul et al., 2009). The questionnaire was the main instrument for data collection. The questionnaire covered five sections. The first section was intended to gather the demographic profile of the respondents. The second part recognized the availability of halal food items (Golnaz et al., 2010). Next, the third section predicted halal certification items (Junaidi, 2020). The fourth section measured Sharia-compliant hotels (Albattat et al., 2018). Finally, the fifth section recognized Muslim travel preferences items (Battour et al., 2011). A five-point Likert scale, where 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree was used to measure the questionnaire items. Correlation coefficients were used to recognize the relationship between both dependent variables and independent variables. Furthermore, multiple regressions were applied to determine the significant factors that affect Muslim travel preferences.

4. Results

Profile of Respondents: Table 1 shows the demographic profile. In terms of demographic information, 62 percent were male and 38 percent were female. By age, the majority of respondents were 31 to 40 years old with 35 percent while 7 percent of respondents were below 20 years old. By marital status, 82 percent of respondents were married and the remaining 2 percent were single. In terms of monthly income, 38 percent of respondents had an income of more than RM5,000 while 2 percent of the respondents had an income between RM1,001 to RM2,000.

Table 1: Demographic Profile (n=100)

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
GENDER		
Male	62	62%
Female	38	38%
Total	100	100%
AGE		
below 20 years old	7	7%
21-30 years old	14	14%
31-40 years old	35	35%
41- 50 years old	14	14%
50 years old and above	30	30%
Total	100	100%
MARITAL STATUS		
Single	18	18%
Married	82	82%
Total	100	100%
MONTHLY INCOME		
Below RM1000	13	13%
RM1001-RM2000	2	2%
RM2001-RM3000	14	14%
RM3001-RM4000	22	22%
RM4001- RM5000	11	11%
Above RM5000	38	38%
Total	100	100%

Reliability Analysis: Table 2 presents the reliability analysis for both independent variables and dependent variables. The variables are the availability of halal food, halal certification and sharia-compliant hotels, as well as travel preferences.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability Level
Travel Preferences	.617	Moderate
Availability of halal food	.686	Moderate
Halal certification	.928	Good
Sharia-compliant hotel	.952	Good

The interpretation of Cronbach's Alpha is based on Sekaran & Bougie (2013). The Cronbach's Alpha value for travel preference is 0.617, suggesting a moderate reliability result. In addition, Cronbach's Alpha for the availability of halal food is 0.686, signifying a moderately reliability level. The value of Cronbach's Alpha for halal certification is 0.928, representing a good reliability result. Lastly, the value of Cronbach's Alpha for shariah compliant hotel is 0.952, showcasing a good reliability result.

Correlation Analysis: Table 3 shows correlation analysis to prove the strength of a linear association between variables. The coefficient of correlation is applied to measure the strength of the correlation between variables.

Correlation coefficient levels vary from 1 to -1. A perfect positive correlation is represented by a correlation coefficient level of 1 whereas a perfect negative correlation is signified by a correlation coefficient level of -1. The correlation coefficient level which is closer to '0' indicates a weak relationship between variables.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable		
	Availability of Halal Food	Halal Certification	Sharia Compliant Hotel
Travel Preferences	.203*	0.536**	.301**

(*p<0.05, **p<0.01)

The correlation analysis interpretation was based on Guildford's Rule of Thumb (Guildford, 1973). The result found a moderate relationship between travel preferences and halal certification ($r = 0.536, p < 0.01$). There was a weak relationship between travel preferences and availability of halal food ($r = 0.203, p < 0.05$). Finally, there was a weak relationship between travel preferences and Sharia-compliant hotels ($r = 0.301, p < 0.01$).

Regression Analysis: Multiple regression analysis was conducted to further investigate the significant relationship between dependent variables and independent variables. Table 4 shows the results of multiple regression.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable: Travel Preference
Availability of Halal Food	.0039
Halal Certification	.0529**
Sharia Compliant Hotel	-0.009
R ²	0.266
F	12.987**

(*p<0.05; **p<0.01)

From multiple regression analysis, halal certification was identified significant factor determining travel preference ($B = 0.529, p < 0.01$). This result is in line with Junaidi (2020). In contrast, other factors, availability of halal food ($B = 0.039$) and sharia-compliant hotels ($B = -0.009$) were identified as not significant to determining travel preferences. Hence, from multiple regression procedures, the model consisting of availability of halal food, halal certification, and sharia-compliant hotel was found to be significant where the $R^2 = 0.266$ explaining 26.6% of the variance in travel preferences ($F = 12.987, p < 0.01$).

Discussion: The research aims to achieve a better understanding of the relationship between factors that are the availability of halal food, halal certification and sharia-compliant hotels, and Muslim travel preferences. The results of this research were obtained through various statistical methods namely, correlation analysis, reliability test, and regression analysis. These analyses provided a valued understanding of the factors that influence Muslim travel preferences to Muslim travel destinations. Based on correlation analysis, all variables namely the availability of halal food, halal certification and sharia-compliant hotels were found to have positive and significant associations with travel preferences. The multiple regression analysis presented that halal certification has a significant relationship with travel preferences. The result is consistent with empirical studies such as Junaidi (2020). In contrast, the two remaining factors, availability of halal food and sharia-compliant hotels were found not significantly related to travel preferences. This study provides valuable insights for travel operators and policymakers targeting to improve their plans and decision-making in helping them understand Islamic tourism. In addition, enhancing the knowledge of Muslim travel preferences is crucial for tourists, government, and service providers.

Managerial Implications and Recommendations: It is essential for destinations and service providers to understand the core needs and concerns of Muslim travelers to provide for their requirements effectively (Said et al., 2020). Thus, it is evident that providing the detailed needs and preferences of Muslim travelers is crucial for the tourism industry to flourish. As the global Muslim tourist population continues to rise, destinations and

businesses should prioritize providing not only halal certification but also culturally sensitive experiences that align with Islamic principles. In addition, by understanding and addressing the unique requirements of Muslim travelers, the travel industry can tap into this growing market and ensure a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all visitors. Though the research highlights the factors that influence Muslim travel preferences, it also presents opportunities for the travel industry to innovate and create tailored offerings. Finally, destinations and service providers can consider developing dedicated tours and packages that cater specifically to the religious and cultural preferences of Muslim travelers.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study found that halal certification was a significant factor that influenced Malaysian Muslim travel preferences while the availability of halal food and shariah-compliant hotels did not prove a significant effect. This study was restricted to the investigation of three variables that influence Malaysian Muslim travel preferences. However, it is vital to recognize the potential presence of other factors that might affect Malaysian Muslim travel preferences. Hence, it is suggested that future research should choose variables that comprise halal awareness, destination marketing, and Islamic motivation (Septiani & Ridlwan, 2020; Battour et al., 2014; Hassani & Moghavvemi, 2020). These factors could give better outcomes in understanding Malaysian Muslim travel preferences. Finally, the future of the travel industry lies in accepting and accommodating the needs of Muslim travelers, innovating tailored offerings, and promoting an inclusive environment for visitors from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds.

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