Spirituality in Hospitality Services: An Assessment of Halal Tourism Practices

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Abstract

As a significant determinant of human lifestyle, religion becomes one of the influencing criteria that shape the tourism and hospitality business all over the world. A range of practices to accommodate and appreciate the religious values of guests has turned into a part of hospitality services. Growing demand, particularly among Muslim guests and tourists, encourages hospitality service providers to initiate new services based on religion. In response to this demand, Halal tourism is gaining popularity in many destinations. This research aims to evaluate Halal hospitality services in relation to market characteristics critically. In order to address the research aim, this theoretical study reveals several insights into Halal hospitality service practices, such as why spirituality matters to the Muslim market segments, emerging scopes, and potential challenges of Halal tourism in terms of conventional market demands. Moreover, the study addresses the evolution of Halal tourism and the transformation of tourism supply-side in response to the demand for Halal tourism. Finally, it evaluates the extent of Islamic rules and regulations to support or contradict with some so-called Halal tourism practices. Academic literature on Halal tourism and industry practices, which are available in open public sources, including websites and brochures, have been reviewed in this research.

Keywords: Halal tourism, Muslim travel market, Spirituality, Halal food, Halal accommodation.

Introduction

Religion has long been a profound determinant of human behavior, influencing various social, economic, and cultural practices (Ahmed & Akbaba, 2018; Akyol & Kilinç, 2014). Among these, the tourism and hospitality sector has been particularly shaped by religious beliefs, as the growing global demand for religiously compliant services has led to the rise of Halal tourism. Halal tourism, a subcategory of religious tourism, is designed to accommodate the spiritual and religious needs of Muslim travelers by providing services aligned with Islamic principles, such as Halal food, prayer facilities, and gender-segregated spaces (Battour & Ismail, 2016; El-Gohary, 2016). This emerging trend also highlights the broader understanding of spirituality in travel, which resonates with the values and beliefs of Muslim tourists (Cheer, Belhassen, & Kujawa, 2017).

The global Muslim population, especially in regions such as Southeast Asia and the Middle East, represents a significant and rapidly expanding segment within the tourism industry (Mastercard & Crescentrating, 2017). This growth is driven by the rise in disposable income and an increased awareness of religious obligations among Muslim travelers (Mastercard & Crescentrating, 2018). In response, the hospitality industry is evolving to meet the specific needs of this market, with many hotels, airlines, and travel agencies offering Halal-compliant services (Gabdrakhmanov, Biktimirov, Rozhko, & Mardanshina, 2016). These services extend beyond the provision of Halal-certified food to include prayer

spaces and gender-segregated facilities, aligning with the core values of Islamic teachings (Henderson, 2003). The increasing prominence of Halal tourism necessitates an exploration of the factors driving its growth. Spirituality plays a central role in motivating Muslim tourists, as travel is often perceived as a means of self-discovery, spiritual growth, and religious fulfillment (Battour & Ismail, 2016). This intersection between spirituality and tourism has created a unique niche for Halal hospitality services, where the primary focus is on fulfilling religious obligations while offering leisure and recreational experiences (Haq, 2013). Moreover, the rising demand for Halal services in non-Muslim-majority countries, particularly in Europe and the Americas, presents new opportunities and challenges for the global tourism industry (Mastercard & Crescentrating, 2017, 2018).

Despite the growing attention toward Halal tourism, the field remains under-researched, with limited academic studies exploring its market characteristics, evolution, and impact on the tourism supply chain (Battour, Ismail, & Battor, 2010; Bone, 2015; Jaelani, 2017). Most existing research has focused on the economic potential of the Halal tourism market (Blomfield, 2009; Bone, 2015; Jaelani, 2017; Rustom, 2008), but there is a gap in understanding the broader implications of spirituality in shaping tourist behavior and preferences (Pearce & Lee, 2005; Pew Research Center, 2017). Furthermore, the dynamic nature of global tourism markets calls for a closer examination of how Halal tourism aligns with conventional tourism practices and whether it can meet the demands of both Muslim and non-Muslim travelers (California Islamic University, 2020).

This study aims to critically evaluate the development of Halal hospitality services in response to market demands, examining the scope, challenges, and transformation of tourism services in the context of Islamic guidelines (Chanin, Sriprasert, Rahman, & Don, 2015; Bone, 2015). By assessing the evolution of Halal tourism, the study seeks to provide insights into how this concept has influenced the supply side of the tourism industry and what future opportunities it presents (Blomfield, 2009; Danilo, 2009). Additionally, the research will analyze the extent to which Halal tourism practices comply with Islamic rules and regulations, while exploring any potential contradictions that may arise (Danilo, 2009; Chianeh, Kian, & Azgoomi, 2019). The findings of this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between spirituality and tourism, offering valuable perspectives for both academics and industry stakeholders involved in the development of Halal tourism (Cheer et al., 2017; Mastercard & Crescentrating, 2018).

Materials and Methods

To explore the role of spirituality in motivating Muslim travelers, this research relied on both primary and secondary data sources. An extensive review of academic literature was conducted to gather insights from studies focusing on spiritual tourism, religious obligations in Islam, and the significance of spirituality in Muslim travel behavior. Primary sources included religious texts, such as the Quran and Hadith, to understand the theological basis of travel in Islam, with specific emphasis on verses promoting travel as a means of spiritual enlightenment and devotion to Allah (e.g., Surah Al-Ankabut 29:20; Ali, 2015).

In addition, data was collected from surveys and reports published by organizations involved in religious and Halal tourism. These sources provided information on the demographic and psychographic characteristics of Muslim tourists, focusing on how their religious beliefs shape their travel decisions. Key factors such as Halal food availability, prayer facilities, and spiritual fulfillment were analyzed (Ahmed & Akbaba, 2018; Dinar Standard, 2020).

Secondary data was obtained through the examination of case studies from both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority countries. These case studies highlighted the growing importance of spirituality and religious compliance in the hospitality sector, especially for Muslim tourists (Haq, 2013; Chanin et al., 2015). Literature from tourism journals, government reports, and market research documents was used to identify how destinations are adapting to meet the spiritual and religious needs of the Muslim market (Jaelani, 2017; Henderson, 2003).

To assess the scope and challenges of Halal tourism, the study employed a mixed-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative analysis. The quantitative analysis involved a comprehensive review of statistical data on global Muslim travel trends, which was sourced from travel market reports, such as those published by Crescent Rating and Mastercard (Mastercard & Crescent rating, 2017, 2018). These reports provided quantitative insights into the growth potential of Halal tourism, such as the increasing number of Muslim travelers and the importance of Halal-compliant services like food, accommodation, and prayer spaces.

Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders in the tourism industry, including hotel managers, tour operators, and representatives from Halal certification bodies. These interviews aimed to explore the operational challenges of implementing Halal tourism services and Muslim travelers' perceptions regarding the adequacy of these services (Battour & Ismail, 2016).

Further qualitative analysis was conducted by reviewing online travel platforms and customer reviews of Halal-compliant hotels and destinations. This allowed for the identification of common issues faced by both providers and consumers in the Halal tourism market, such as the difficulty in balancing the needs of Muslim and non-Muslim tourists. For instance, some hotels that market themselves as Sharia-compliant have been perceived as less

attractive to non-Muslim travelers due to the strict adherence to Islamic rules (Salam Standard, 2015; Blomfield, 2009).

The study also analyzed the regulatory frameworks governing Halal tourism in different countries, both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority. This analysis was based on government policies, Halal certification requirements, and industry standards to evaluate how effectively destinations are responding to the growing demand for Halal tourism (Saad et al., 2014; Jafari & Scott, 2014). Key challenges identified included the variability in Halal standards across countries, the dominance of Western narratives in tourism marketing, and the reluctance of some non-Muslim travelers to visit Sharia-compliant destinations (El-Gohary, 2016; Mohsin et al., 2016).

Data for this study was collected through multiple methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of Halal tourism practices. Primary data collection included surveys distributed to Muslim travelers in both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority countries. These surveys gathered information on traveler preferences, challenges faced during travel, and the importance of religious compliance in their choice of destination. The sample population included tourists from different regional, ethnic, and occupational backgrounds, ensuring diverse perspectives on Halal tourism (Ahmed & Akbaba, 2018; Akyol & Kilinç, 2014).

Secondary data analysis was performed on existing literature, including studies on the economic, cultural, and social aspects of Halal tourism. Reports from global tourism organizations, such as the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), provided valuable insights into market trends and forecasts for the growth of Halal tourism (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Jaelani, 2017).

The collected data was then analyzed using thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for quantitative data. Key themes such as the significance of spirituality, the evolving demand for Halal services, and the operational challenges faced by service providers were identified and analyzed. Statistical data on Muslim travel trends, such as the projected growth in the number of Muslim tourists and the financial contribution of Halal tourism to the global economy, was also incorporated to highlight the economic potential of this market (Halbase, 2015).

Realization of New Concepts in the Tourism Industry

The substantial size of the Muslim market, rising demand for Halal products, and potential for niche marketing have driven the development of unique tourism products and services for this demographic. Although the need for Muslim-friendly travel was recognized by service providers in the 1980s (Duman, 2011), its full implications for the tourism industry took time to materialize. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was a pioneer in recognizing the potential impact of the Muslim market on tourism and economic development. At an OIC meeting in 2000, the

organization acknowledged the potential of the Muslim market segment to influence tourism and the economic development of Islamic countries (El-Gohary, 2016). Consequently, they introduced the concept of Islamic tourism (Samori, Salleh, & Khalid, 2016). According to Duman (2011), Islamic tourism is driven by Islamic purposes, with tourism activities performed in accordance with Islamic law. In Islamic tourism, the purpose of travel holds significant importance, as Islam emphasizes that the intention behind any activity should be aligned with its religious principles (El-Gohary, 2016).

Reconciliation and Evolution of Halal Tourism Concepts

Halal tourism, a contemporary term within the travel and tourism industry, emerged as a refined expression of earlier concepts such as Muslim-friendly travel and Islamic tourism. Its formal inception can be traced back to 2009, when a dedicated team of leading travel industry managers and top global organization associates began integrating Islamic principles into tourism (Battour & Ismail, 2016). This pioneering initiative led to the establishment of the 'Halal Booking' brand, which aimed to align travel services with Islamic principles (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Malaysia is credited with introducing Halal tourism to the global stage (Samori, Salleh, & Khalid, 2016). Initially, the concept gained traction primarily in Muslim-majority countries such as Malaysia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, and Oman. However, the growing market trends and business opportunities have since attracted non-Muslim countries, including Singapore, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Hong Kong, and Japan (Mastercard & Crescentrating, 2017). By 2017, out of 130 Halal tourism destinations worldwide, 46 were located in Muslim-majority countries, while 82 were in non-Muslim countries (Jafari & Scott, 2014).

Transformation in Tourism Supply-Side

The distinct values, views, lifestyle, and needs of Muslim travelers necessitate significant adjustments on the supply side of tourism (El-Gohary, 2016). To cater to these unique needs, tourism service providers must adhere to Islamic rules and regulations, resulting in substantial changes in service offerings (Duman, 2011). For instance, Halal hotels typically provide amenities such as Qibla direction indicators, prayer mats, Halal food, separate prayer rooms for males and females, and designated recreational facilities (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Additionally, hotels must avoid certain practices as outlined in Table 1. While there are no universal standards for Halal tourism, researchers and practitioners, including Akyol and Kilinç (2014), Stephenson (2014), Battour and Ismail (2016), El-Gohary (2016), and Suid et al. (2018), have offered guidance on implementing Halal principles (Samori, Salleh, & Khalid, 2016). Based on their insights, this study identifies six key elements of Halal tourism: Halal accommodation, Halal food and beverage, Halal transportation, Halal finance, Halal attractions, and Halal tour packages.

Divergence of Religious Verdict

Islam encompasses a comprehensive framework of spiritual values, offering guidance on every aspect of human life (El-Gohary, 2016). Adhering to these principles, Muslims believe in the holistic impact of their actions on their soul, mind, and body. Allah, the Almighty, has designated certain actions as Haram (forbidden) and others as Halal (Duman, 2011). For example, while Allah encourages travel to appreciate His creation, He prohibits gambling and alcohol (Gabdrakhmanov, Biktimirov, Rozhko, & Mardanshina, 2016). Scientific research supports the health benefits of travel and the adverse effects of alcohol.

Islamic teachings, known as Sharia, outline the path Muslims should follow in their lives (El-Gohary, 2016). Sharia is derived from two primary sources: the Quran, which is the sacred word of Allah and a spiritual guide for humanity (El-Gohary, 2016), and the Hadith, which encompasses the sayings, advice, and actions of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (Duman, 2011). Therefore, discussions on travel and tourism in Islam must be considered from the perspectives of both the Quran and Hadith. Islamic scriptures encourage travel for spiritual enrichment, with the intention of seeking Allah's pleasure during the journey. Hadiths highlight that a traveler who aims to gain Allah's gratification will be rewarded, and they are allowed to shorten their prayers (Gabdrakhmanov et al., 2016).

Both the Quran and Hadith provide comprehensive guidance, but some matters require interpretation by Islamic scholars. For instance, different scholars have varying opinions on whether Muslim women can travel without a Mahram (a male relative). Scholars such as Imam Abu Hanifah and Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal argue that women should not travel without a Mahram based on Hadith from Al-Bukhari and Muslim, which states, "a woman should not travel without the company of a Mahram" (Hanim, 2019). Conversely, scholars like Imam Shafi'i and Imam Malik permit women to travel alone if security is assured, supported by Hadith narrated by Adily Ibn Hatem, which describes a future where women can travel safely from Hira to Ka'bah without fear except of Allah (Hanim, 2019).

Another issue discussed by El-Gohary (2016) is the presence of both Halal and Haram activities in the same location. For example, a hotel offering Halal services but also operating a nightclub and serving alcohol may present a contradiction (El-Gohary, 2016). Misconceptions about Halal practices often arise from inadequate knowledge of Sharia. For instance, some tourism providers offering Halal food may not adhere to proper slaughtering techniques as required by Islamic law, and some Muslim tourists may incorrectly assume that beef is Halal without proper slaughter (Samori, Salleh, & Khalid, 2016). Table 2 provides an overview of Halal tourism from the perspectives of the Quran and Hadith, detailing specifications, examples, and common misconceptions.

Results

In the study, the emergence of Halal tourism is largely attributed to the significant growth in the Muslim market and the expanding Halal industry, particularly in the Islamic economy. This growth, initially spearheaded by Malaysia, has since expanded globally, with 46 of 130 Halal tourism destinations located in Muslim-majority countries by 2017, while 84 were in non-Muslim countries (Mastercard & Crescentrating, 2017). Additionally, the demand for Halal travel services has been driven by the increasing purchasing power of the Muslim population, who spent $2.2 trillion on food, pharmaceuticals, and lifestyle products in 2018, a figure projected to reach $3.2 trillion by 2030 (Dinar Standard, 2020) as shown in figure 1.

On the supply side, tourism service providers have adapted by offering Sharia-compliant services such as Halal food, prayer facilities, and gender-segregated recreational spaces (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Chanin, Sriprasert, Rahman, & Don, 2015). However, there is still a lack of standardized principles for Halal tourism, though key elements such as Halal accommodation, food, transportation, finance, attractions, and tour packages have been outlined (Akyol & Kilinç, 2014; El-Gohary, 2016; Stephenson, 2014) as shown in figure 2.

Furthermore, the study discusses the divergence in Islamic interpretations regarding permissible travel practices, highlighting ongoing debates on whether women can travel alone or if establishments with mixed Halal and Haram practices are acceptable (Hanim, 2019; Ali, 2015; El-Gohary, 2016). This is compounded by the misconceptions surrounding Halal standards, such as proper slaughter techniques, which remain areas of contention (El-Gohary, 2016).

The research also differentiates between Halal tourism, Islamic tourism, and Muslim-friendly travel. While Islamic tourism adheres strictly to Sharia principles, Halal tourism specifically caters to the needs of Muslim travelers, while still accommodating non-Muslims (Ahmed & Akbaba, 2018; Yan, Zahari, Ismail, & Zain, 2017). This distinction is critical in understanding Halal tourism's evolution as a specialized and contemporary concept compared to its predecessors (Mastercard & Crescentrating, 2018; Duman, 2011) as shown in figure 3.

Discussion

In recent years, Halal tourism has gained prominence within the global tourism market due to the expanding Muslim market segment, the growth of the Halal industry within the Islamic economy, and the rising potential of niche marketing. These factors have prompted tourism service providers to develop customized products and services tailored to the needs of Muslim travelers (Ahmed & Akbaba, 2018).

Table 1: Elements and practices of Halal tourism

Elements of Halal tourism	Halal Practices
Halal Accommodation	- Prayer mats, a copy of Quran and Qibla direction in every room. - Beds and toilets not to be positioned so as to Qibla direction. - Prayer rooms, predominantly Muslim staff. - Modest staff dress and guest dress code. - Separate staffs for male (male staff) and female (female staff) floors. - No prohibited recreational facilities such as nightclubs, bars, discotheques. - Art or paintings depicting human or animal form not to be presented in premises or rooms.
Halal Transportation	- Maintenance of cleanliness. - Non-alcoholic drinks to be served. - Providing magazine, publications, and music which are coherent with Islam. - Airports, bus stands, and railway stations must have prayer room and space for ablution segregated by gender.
Halal Food and Beverage	- Alcoholic drinks or foods prepared using alcohol is forbidden to serve. - No pork or pork by products foods should be served. - Animals that has died prior to slaughtering in Islamic manner, is prohibited to serve. - Animals that has slaughtered without pronouncing the name of Allah the Almighty or not slaughtered properly by following Islamic teaching is prohibited to serve. - No blood and blood by products be served. - Carnivorous animals and birds of prey (a bird that feeds animal flesh) not to be served.
Halal Finance	- Financial resources of tourism service providers must be conformed with Islamic teaching. - Sharing the profit and loss of business with all parties involved in providing financial support for the organization. - Avoiding interest in financial operations.
Halal Attraction	- Tourism destinations offering Muslim friendly services and facilities. - Family friendly holiday destination. - Safe travel environment (Unsafe entertainment is not allowed in Islam). - Dining options with Halal foods and beverages. - Prayer places in or near the tourism sites.

Table 2: Halal tourism from different perspectives

| Basis of Halal tourism	Specifications	Examples
Perspective of the Quran	Tourism activities that are acceptable or prohibited through the verses of the Quran.	-Gambling and consumption of alcohol and pork are prohibited in the Quran. - Travelling is highly encouraged in the Quran to appreciate Allah the Almighty's greatness.
Perspective of Hadith	The act of travel is necessary or permitted according to the prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him)).	- The primary purpose of traveling should be attaining pleasure from Allah the Almighty. - Saying prayers and maintaining other obligatory religious activities during a trip.
Distinct viewpoints among Muslim scholars regarding Halal	Acts or activities are regarded as Halal according to Hadith, but different Islamic scholars have interpreted them in different ways.	- To be in a place where both Halal and Haram activities occur at the same time is forbidden by Islamic rules. - Female travelers should be accompanied by a Mahram. - Excessive expenses on something, including travel.
Misconceptions of Halal	Acts or activities that are not Halal but, due to inadequate knowledge or inappropriate perception, are assumed to be Halal.	- Entering into a contractual marriage for a few hours. - Beef is Halal, proper slaughter method in the name of Allah the Almighty is not necessary. - Offering or attending a Halal disco.
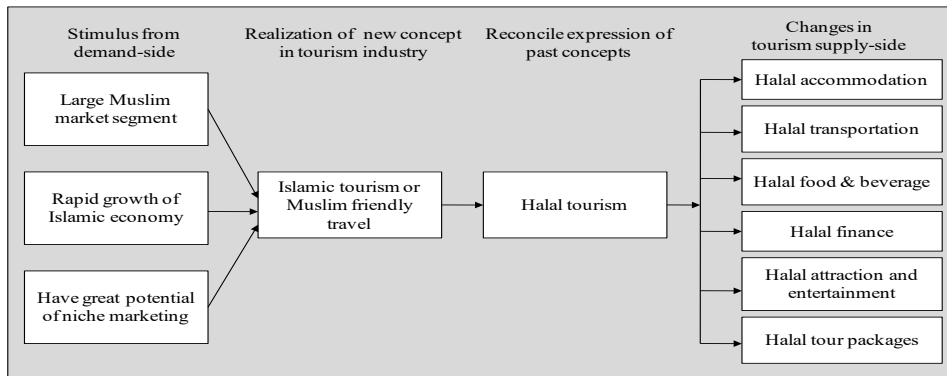
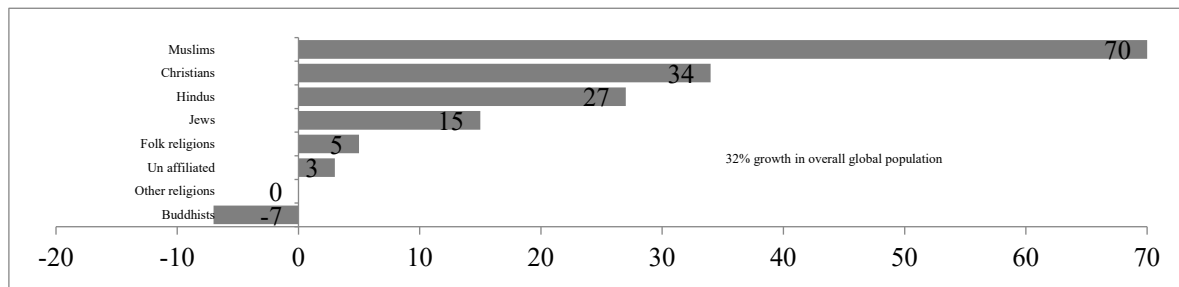**Figure 1.** Evolution of Halal tourism and transformation in supply-side

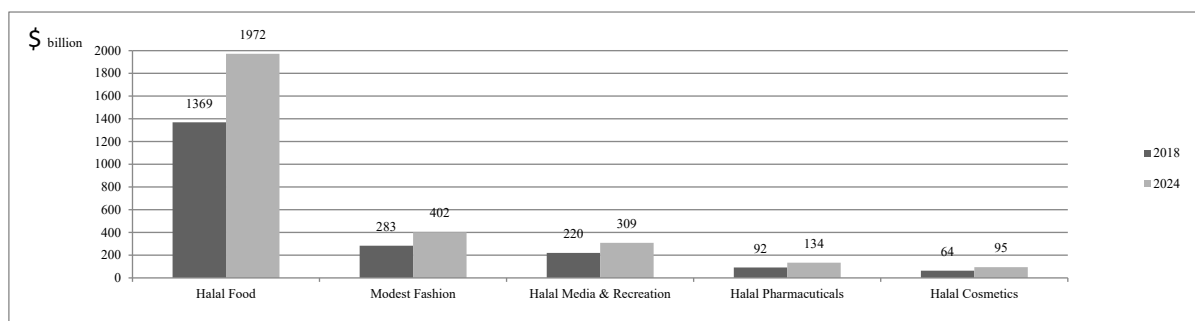**Figure 2.** Population growth projections of world religions, 2015-2060

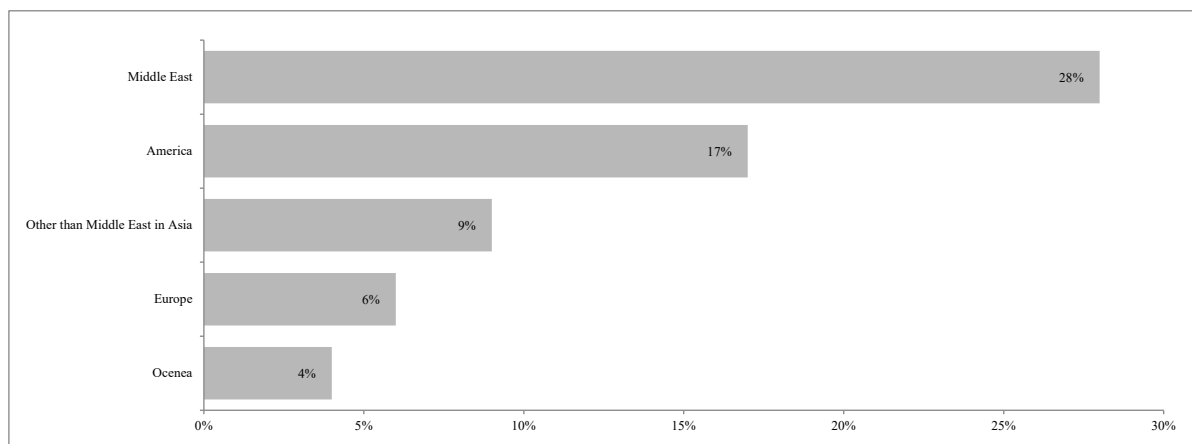**Figure 3.** Global Islamic economy outlook

Figure 4. The direct GDP impact of Muslim tourism as a percentage of inbound tourism, 2015

Duman (2011) introduced a model highlighting that the value perception of Muslim tourists is significantly influenced by Sharia compliance, which affects all aspects of their travel experience, from destination selection to activity participation (Jafari & Scott, 2014). This model underscores the importance of aligning tourism services with Islamic principles to offer high-value experiences for Muslim tourists (Battour & Ismail, 2016). For many Muslims, traveling is not only a means of exploring new places but also an opportunity to witness the grandeur of Allah's creation and feel a profound sense of humility before Him (Musa, Ali, & Moghavvemi, 2016). Additionally, Islam teaches that Muslims have a responsibility to maintain harmony between living beings and their environment (Saad, Ali, & Abdel-Ati, 2014) as shown in figure 4.

Islamic principles are built upon values of peace, wellness, and social justice, emphasizing brotherhood and socioeconomic equity (Jafari & Scott, 2014). The religion also encourages learning and personal growth through travel (Pearce & Lee, 2005). Islamic law mandates that Muslims take precautions to protect themselves from harm (Ali, 2015). For instance, a Hadith emphasizes the importance of avoiding dangerous activities, such as sleeping on an unsafe rooftop, which could lead to injury or death (Ali, 2015). Consequently, activities like bungee jumping, skydiving, cliff jumping, and shark diving, which involve significant risks, are generally discouraged in Islam.

Moreover, Islam places a high priority on health and safety during travel. While Islamic teachings regard diseases as tests from Allah, they also advise Muslims to take measures to enhance their safety and well-being (California Islamic University, 2020). Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) provided guidance on staying healthy and avoiding exposure to epidemics. For example, he refrained from shaking hands with a delegate with a contagious disease during a meeting in Medina (Sofuglu, 2020). This guidance is particularly relevant in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, providing a framework for responding to global health crises.

Despite the growing interest in Halal tourism, there is some ambiguity in the usage and definition of related terms such as Muslim-friendly travel, Islamic tourism, and Halal tourism. Previous studies have shown varying interpretations. Musa et al. (2016) used the terms interchangeably, while Ahmed and Akbaba (2018) differentiated between Islamic and Halal tourism based on the tourist's religion. Jafari and Scott (2014) highlighted that Islamic tourism emphasizes adherence to Sharia in travel activities, a view contested by Battour and Ismail (2016), who argued that this approach overlooks the religious background of tourists and is more appropriate for defining Halal tourism.

The role of religion in defining Halal tourism has been a focal point for many researchers. Battour and Ismail (2016) emphasized the Muslim market as the primary target for Halal tourism (Ahmed &

Akbaba, 2018), whereas Yan et al. (2017) argued that Halal tourism services are not exclusively for Muslims but are available to all. This study delineates that Islamic tourism involves service providers adhering to Sharia principles regardless of the tourist's religion, whereas Halal tourism focuses on catering specifically to the needs of Muslim travelers while also accommodating non-Muslims. Thus, Halal tourism can be seen as a more organized and contemporary evolution of earlier concepts such as Islamic tourism and Muslim-friendly travel.

Conclusion

Halal tourism has emerged as a significant segment within the global tourism market, driven by the expanding Muslim market, the growth of the Halal industry, and the potential for niche marketing. This study underscores the importance of aligning tourism services with Sharia principles to enhance the travel experience for Muslim tourists while accommodating diverse needs. The evolving concept of Halal tourism, distinct from earlier notions like Islamic tourism and Muslim-friendly travel, highlights the need for specialized products and services tailored to Muslim travelers. By addressing the unique requirements of this growing market, tourism providers can capitalize on new opportunities and contribute to the development of inclusive and respectful travel experiences. Understanding and leveraging these insights can aid policymakers and service providers in meeting the demands of Muslim tourists effectively.

Author contributions

K.H. conceptualized and developed the methodology. J.F. prepared the original draft and collected the data. T.M. reviewed and edited the writing.

Competing financial interests

The authors have no conflict of interest.

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