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Muslim Consumers' Perceptions of Marketing Korea a Muslim-Friendly and Halal Tourism Destination: Future Implications

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Cover Page Footnote

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Muslim Consumers' Perceptions of Marketing Korea as a Muslim-Friendly and Halal Tourism Destination: Future Implications

Persepsi Konsumen Muslim tentang Pemasaran Korea sebagai Destinasi Pariwisata Ramah Muslim dan Halal: Implikasi Masa Depan

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ABSTRACT

Halal tourism is becoming an emerging niche market to attract Muslim tourists to non-Muslim majority countries. This study aims to assess current conditions associated with the availability of halal-friendly tourism elements and services and future implications for halal tourism in Korea through the lenses of diaspora from Muslim-dominated countries, including Indonesia, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan. A qualitative approach with the descriptive exploratory design was employed and data were collected through in-depth interviews (N = 27) and direct observation. Results in the marketing context indicated that Koreans have basic knowledge of the concept of halal, halal food, halal services, and halal tourism. Muslim residents have a remarkable positive attitude when recommending others to visit Korea as a tourist destination, but the availability of halal tourism is insufficient. Thus, this study contributes to the literature on halal tourism and can serve as an information source for stakeholders and policymakers involved in the halal food market. A few marketing implications are also noted. Muslim consumers are unsatisfied with the facilities of halal tourism. They suggest that tourism organizations, hotel managers, and policymakers improve such facilities according to the sharia-based needs of Muslim tourists.

ABSTRAK

Pariwisata halal menjadi salah satu pasar khusus yang muncul untuk menarik wisatawan Muslim ke negara-negara mayoritas non-Muslim. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menilai kondisi saat ini terkait dengan ketersediaan elemen dan layanan pariwisata halal serta implikasi masa depan untuk pariwisata halal di Korea melalui pandangan diaspora dari negara-negara mayoritas Muslim, termasuk Indonesia, Uzbekistan, dan Pakistan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain deskriptif eksploratif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam (N = 27) dan observasi langsung. Pada konteks pemasaran, hasil studi menunjukkan bahwa orang Korea memiliki pengetahuan dasar tentang konsep, makanan, layanan, dan pariwisata halal. Warga Muslim memiliki sikap positif yang luar biasa ketika merekomendasikan orang lain untuk mengunjungi Korea sebagai tujuan wisata, tetapi ketersediaan pariwisata halal tidak mencukupi. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada literatur tentang wisata halal dan dapat berfungsi sebagai sumber informasi bagi para pemangku kepentingan dan pembuat kebijakan yang terlibat dalam pasar makanan halal. Beberapa implikasi pemasaran juga dituliskan pada naskah ini. Konsumen muslim merasa tidak puas dengan fasilitas pariwisata halal. Mereka menyarankan agar organisasi pariwisata, pengelola hotel, dan pembuat kebijakan meningkatkan fasilitas tersebut sesuai dengan kebutuhan wisatawan Muslim berbasis syariah.

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1. Introduction

Tourism is defined as a temporary movement of people to destinations beyond their normal places where they

take on several activities and use facilities to cater to their needs. Halal tourism is a type of religious tourism that complies with Islamic rules regarding the behavior, diet, and lifestyle of people. Halal tourism also focuses on economic, sociocultural, and religious aims to uplift

various purposes: the revival of Islamic cultures and spread of Islamic values, economic advantages for Muslim countries, and the buildup of Islamic self-confidence, recognition, and beliefs despite negative stereotyping relative to other cultures and way of life (Re & Rosyidie, 2016). As a new phenomenon, halal tourism is increasingly becoming popular in Korea, with the release of halal tourism policies in the last six years. The tourism sector is a substantial contributor to economic growth in Korea. The country set down a sharp rise in the number of international tourists before the COVID-19 outbreak. Until 2019, the contribution of travel and tourism to the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country was estimated at \$US47.7 billion. This contribution increased from \$US22.9 billion in the year 2000 to \$US47.4 billion in 2019, rising at an average annual rate of 4.16% (World Data Atlas). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), such an increase exhausted \$US33.3 billion from the country's economy in 2020. This economic downturn is due to stringent restrictions since the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, WTTC indicated that if international travel would improve by the mid-2021, then tourism could contribute to the GDP by a drastic increase of around 48.5% annually (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020). Thus, the number of foreign tourists (approximately 17.5 million) reached a record high in 2019 (KBS World, 2020). Particularly, the number of Muslim tourists hit an all-time high of over one million on the backing of growing interest in Korean culture and tourist sites in Korea (Yonhap News Agency, 2019). In 2020, the Korean government set its target to attract 20 million international visitors, while the domestic spending of foreigners in the tourism and leisure sectors decreased by 80% due to the spread of coronavirus (Kyung-don, 2021). Hence, the Korea Culture & Tourism Institute reported that the possible resumption of cross-border traveling and foreign tourists will continue to increase in the post-COVID period (Eun-byel, 2021). The drive must be accomplished with several measures and policies to promote the tourism industry.

States diversify their diplomatic policies to foster mutual relations and boost their economies. Many non-Islamic states, such as New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Spain, and South Korea, have started adopting halal tourism policies to attract global flows of Muslim travelers. Therefore, Korea strives to emerge as a welcoming Muslim-friendly destination and entices the influx of Muslim tourists who choose Korea as a destination that aims to attract them with halal tourism. The tourism industry plays a crucial role in promoting destination image and improves soft power through public diplomacy worldwide. Similarly, the spread of the Korean Wave (Hallyu) has become a notable tool to increase Muslim tourists visiting Korea. The growing number of Muslim tourists demands halal food, worship services, and accommodation facilities based on Islamic teachings.

A new phenomenon, namely halal tourism, has been increasingly becoming popular over the last six years in Korea due to the aforementioned development. In March 2015, the visit of President Park Geun-hye to the United Arab Emirates brought significant economic achievements since the signing of the Memorandum of Understandings with her counterpart. The Korean government and stakeholders focused on competitive policies and industrial aspects by considering the rapid growth of the halal food market. In June 2015, the Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs announced the Development and Export Vitalization Plan for the halal food industry, focusing on "halal industry development policy, export increase, and vast distribution network" (Yunjae, 2016). This initiative has worked to develop ties with the United Arab Emirates a strategic partner and boost relations in the halal food market with other Muslim populated countries to grow Korean products, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and many others. Korea is also in cooperation with a third-party "state exporting certification agency" to expand the halal food sector and certification. Moreover, the Korean Muslim Federation and Korean Halal Association are authorized to label "halal" for products (Deniar & Effendi, 2019). Such efforts were made to enter the halal market and address the sharia-based needs of Muslim consumers.

According to the Straits Times, the Korean Muslim Federation estimates approximately 200,000 Muslims are staying in Korea (Deniar & Effendi, 2019). Some 100,000 Muslim tourists visited Korea before the spread of COVID-19 due to the growing popularity of K-dramas and K-pop among Muslim viewers. Owing to this growth, the Korean government has adopted a tourism model for Muslim tourists, such as labeling many products "halal" and promoting Korea as a Muslim-friendly destination. The Global Muslim Travel Index (2019) ranked Korea among the top ten Muslim-friendly destinations considering non-Organization of Islamic Cooperation countries.

From a halal tourism perspective, many empirical pieces of evidence have posited to reveal halal attributes, accommodations, and service quality considering the halal tourism industry in Korea. Several past surveys and studies have examined the perceptions of tourists, and a few focus on the attitudes of residents and the viewpoints of Muslim residents. However, this study fills the research gap by gathering information from three groups of foreign nationals from Muslim countries that are home to a Muslim-dominated population, including Indonesia (87%), Uzbekistan (88%), and Pakistan (96%) (World Population Review, 2021). The author attempts to identify halal attributes and services, which have been offered to Muslim consumers and tourists in Korea. The selection of participants from the three countries was justified for the following reasons. First, all three

countries have a Muslim majority population and people care about halal food and religious services. Second, people from these countries comprise a large number of Muslims living in Korea, which include workers, students, stakeholders, and families.

Considering Korea as a tourist destination and an emerging Muslim-friendly state, many studies have been conducted by taking insights of tourists to promote halal tourism (Abukhalifeh et al., 2020; Han, et al., 2018; Eum, 2018; Park & Jamaludin, 2018). While studies analyzing halal tourism from the standpoints of the Muslim community in Korea remain scarce, the current study obtains insights into the perceptions of Muslim residents on halal tourism in the country. Therefore, this study used qualitative analysis (document analysis method) and a qualitative approach (interviews). The author aims to capture the experiences of Muslim residents toward halal characteristics, satisfaction toward service quality of halal tourism, destination attraction as a Muslim-friendly state, and implications that are also embedded within the study to improve halal tourism in Korea.

A brief theoretical foundation of the literature review on the subject is presented as follows.

Halal tourism is becoming an emerging niche market to attract Muslim tourists. Non-Islamic destinations offer tour packages for Muslim tourists to promote the halal market. Thus, the design policies of the government are based on the teachings of sharia laws and provide halal facilities, such as halal food, halal products, halal hotels, halal transport, and halal finance. Considering these factors, Muslim tourists tend to visit a destination where they can achieve religious, social, and cultural goals.

Halal and halal tourism

Halal can be defined by its root words, including halla, Yahillu, hillan, and wahalan, which means that anything permissible and lawful which is not prohibited in Islam. This lawful aspect of halal is associated with every sphere of human life with complete guidelines on human consumption, worship, social, economic, political, and environmental conduct. However, halal tourism is a new concept and growing market sector in the tourism industry that provides opportunities for boosting economic growth in countries with Muslim minorities. From an Islamic perspective, halal tourism can be understood by integrating and adopting the concept of halal. Halal tourism is tapped into the fulfillment of the needs of Muslim tourists in compliance with Islamic laws and sharia by considering its requirements (Azam et al., 2019). Notably, halal tourism is not always defined as Islamic tourism because it is unnecessary to travel for a religious purpose. "The word 'halal' is more precisely used to label anything that is permissible under shariah law. The word is also more inclusive when compared to the terms 'shariah' and 'Islamic', which Muslims perceive to be too exclusive" (Aji, 2019, p.6). Based on

these explanations, Muslims are free to visit any tourist destination around the world, but they should consume halal food and services according to Islamic laws while visiting a non-Muslim country.

Halal attributes, accommodations, and service quality

Halal tourism is recognized as an object, activity, product, and service that is permissible or lawful in Islamic sharia and meets the requirements and needs of Muslim consumers. Considering halal attributes, various characteristics are identified for accommodation businesses: mentioning halal, being multilingual and family-friendly, offering worship services and prayer spaces, providing prayer time and prayer mats, putting a Qibla indicator and copy of the Holy Quran, banning alcoholic drinks and pork, providing services during Ramadan, and distinguishing facilities for men and women. Additionally, accommodation attributes for halal tourism include the following; offering halal food, catering to specific religious and dietary needs, putting halal logo on products, and supporting Islamic financial principles (Razak et al., 2020). Soydas (2020) noted different concepts of halal hotels for Muslim tourists: hotels without alcohol as dry hotels and partial halal hotels that provide separate services for men and women, offer masjid availability, provide the Holy Quran and prayer mats in rooms, and forbid alcoholic beverages. These hotels are designed for marketing purposes, and the sustainability of the business is maintained by offering facilities and services based on sharia.

Muslim tourists highly prioritize access to halal products and services that are available at a non-Muslim destination. Thus, the service quality of a destination plays a significant role in halal tourism market to accommodate Muslim tourists. The success of a tourist destination is determined on the basis of customer satisfaction level with attributes and facilities offered to them. A Muslim-friendly state provides halal services and accommodates the Islamic lifestyle according to the expectations of the customers.

Non-Islamic countries, including Korea, have developed halal tourism policies to become a Muslim-friendly state and promote halal tourism to attract Muslim travelers. Tourism supports the local economy and increases the income of local people. The World Population Review (2021) reported approximately 1.9 billion Muslims globally, and Islam is the second-largest religion followed by Christianity. Thus, the future of halal tourism in non-Muslim states is expected to grow continuously. Battour and Ismail (2016) demonstrated the future of Islamic tourism in a few countries and revealed that the halal tourism industry is a good business opportunity and could be competitive in the coming new years in non-Muslim majority states, including Taiwan, Vietnam, China, and South Korea.

Similar to the view of the increasing number of Muslim tourists (over one million before the COVID-19 pandemic) in Korea, the government aims to develop halal tourism through the implementation of various policies. Simultaneously, significant factors are regarded since the adoption of halal tourism strategies. First, Korea strives to reduce its dependence on assistance from other states. Second, halal tourism policies are used as a tool to achieve the belief of the community in the government considering the presence of the Muslim diaspora. Therefore, halal tourism policies entice Muslim tourists to visit Korea. Third, these policies also serve to enhance cooperation with the Muslim world; thus, developing ties with Islamic states becomes imperative (Marlinda, et al., 2021). Korea has adopted four halal statute categories comprising “halal-certified, self-certified, Muslim-friendly, and pork-free” to promote halal tourism to satisfy the Muslim community and offer them services in compliance with sharia. Furthermore, the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) has introduced three e-books, including “Muslim-friendly restaurants, tourist maps, and routes,” to raise awareness regarding Korea and build the image of a Muslim-friendly Korea (Korea Tourism Organization).

Within this framework, existing literature on halal tourism in Korea has been presented and examined by scholars to assess Muslim tourists' perceptions of halal tourism in Korea. From this perspective, Nisa and Sunjono (2017) analyzed how Korea seeks to engage an Islamic branding campaign to advance halal tourism through KTO, provide information regarding tourism on the official website, and develop mobile phone applications to find halal restaurants, allow barcode scanning of food products, and provide directions to

religious places in the country as a Muslim-friendly state. Park and Jamaludin (2018) discussed the dimensional difficulties of the Korean government in growing the halal market and its efforts to set halal market into a dominantly constructed paradigm and adopted measures to probe the Islamic market starting from halal products. Han et al. (2018) explored the perceptions of Muslim travelers concerning halal-friendly destination characteristics in Korea and found that attributes, such as halal-friendly social environment and facilities, halal food and services, and halal-friendly locals and staff, can be useful to build a favorable destination image and revisit intentions. Han et al., (2018) evaluated travel motivators and customer retention and revealed that halal-friendly travel ambitions were significantly influenced by the revisit behavior and satisfaction of Muslim tourists. Marlinda et al., (2021) explored factors to promote halal tourism and found that the support of the Korean government is due to economic and market factors, demographic change with the growing number of Muslims in the country, and implementation of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense policy.

Information regarding attitudes and preferences of Muslim residents is crucial to promoting halal tourism in a Muslim minority country. Thus, this study aims to present the perspectives of three groups of consumers from different Muslim countries and examine their perceptions regarding the availability of halal attributes, service quality, and ways to improve halal tourism in Korea to satisfy Muslim tourists. To achieve the goal, this study comprises the following main research question: Which halal attributes, halal facilities, and destination attractions entice Muslim diaspora to visit Korea?

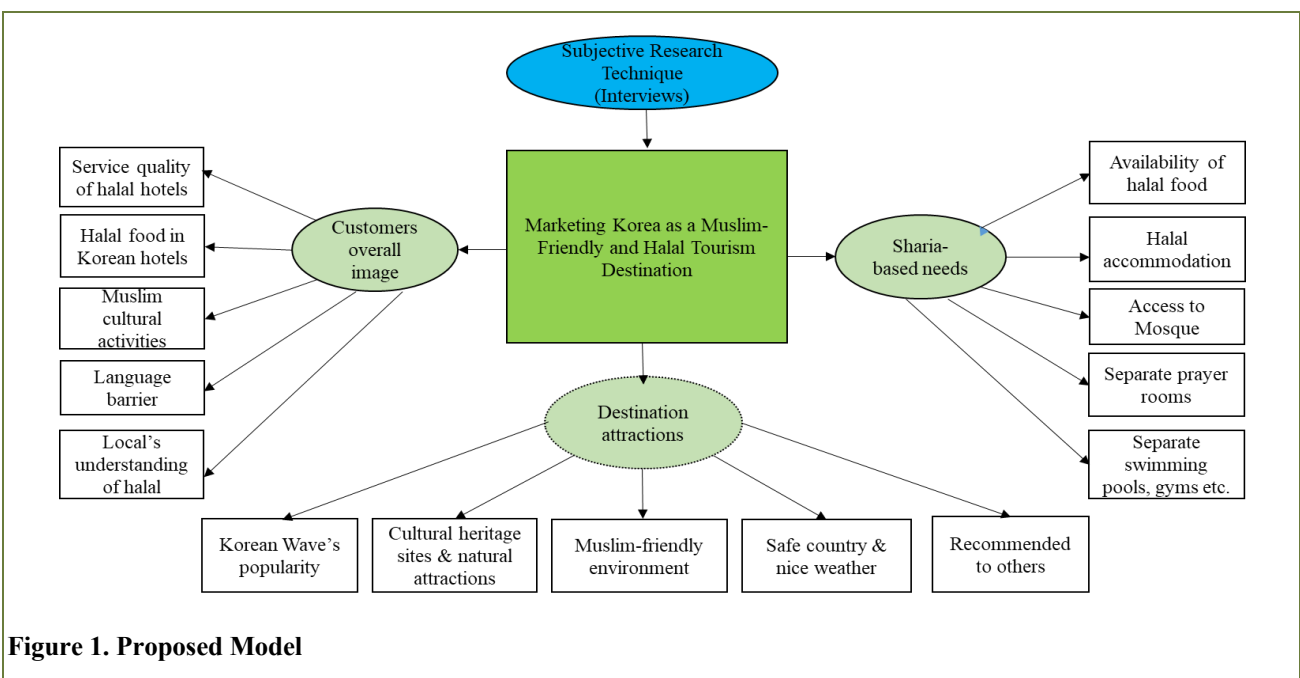


Figure 1. Proposed Model

To answer the main research question, the author proposed the following sub-research questions: (1) What kind of halal attributes are available in Korea?; (2) What is the overall image of Muslim residents of halal services and accommodations to entice Muslim tourists in Korea?; (3) How does destination image involving destination attractions encourage Muslim tourists to visit Korea?

The author proposed a model that shows research method techniques and key points of variables, such as sharia-based needs of Muslims, the overall image of halal facilities, and destination attractions, to promote halal tourism in Korea (see Figure 1).

2. Methods

Instrument design

The research methods for this study comprised multiple pursuits, including data collection, knowledge acquisition, investigation, design, and implications. First, existing literature was reviewed on halal attributes, accommodations, service quality, and halal tourism. The scope of this study lies in halal tourism in Korea, which has been ranked among the fastest-growing Muslim-friendly destinations across Muslim minority states. The purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents from diverse Muslim-dominated countries, including Indonesia, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan. Inclusion criteria for the target population were established by selecting participants from different walks of life, including workers, students, entrepreneurs, and families who are living in Seoul and Daegu. The knowledge acquisition was conducted by interviewing the participants. The interviews aimed to identify their perceptions regarding the availability of halal attributes, the overall image of customers, and tourism attractions to promote halal tourism through the lenses of Muslim consumers in Korea. Interviews also helped gain information from experiences and observations of residents and contributed to testing the marketing of Korea as a halal tourism destination by gathering the opinions of Muslim residents. The investigation was conducted in two ways to analyze the documents and interviews with respondents. Finally, future implications for halal tourism are explored, which contributes to the literature.

The interview questionnaire for this study was adopted from the existing literature. The author modified and rephrased items to increase their applicability in a Korean context. An instrument was developed to meet the purpose of the study. The interview questionnaire was based on three sections. The first section dealt with the sociodemographic characteristics of respondents, the second addressed the halal attributes and overall image of halal facilities, and the final section comprised the

items related to future implications to improve halal tourism in Korea.

Data collection method

The data were collected by interviewing Muslim residents in Seoul and Daegu (2021, June 3 to August 15) via an interviewer-administered questionnaire. The author attempted to interview nine respondents from each target Muslim country to test the credibility of the collected data.

Thus, two methods were adopted to conduct interviews. One-to-one semi-structured interviews were performed to collect primary data. The author used strategies, such as audio recording, field notes, and observations. In-depth recorded interviews also helped capture complete information regarding the experiences and thoughts of interviewees (Fossey et al., 2002). The author utilized the field notes strategy; nonverbal clues, mood, gestures, and facial expressions of respondents before, during, and after conducting the interview were observed. The author captured the observation and assumption of what was heard and observed during the encounter with respondents. These field notes worked as a valid justification for data interpretation and underlining important notions during the data analysis process (Creswell, 2008). Meanwhile, an interview questionnaire was sent to three respondents. They recorded their responses and sent them back to the author via WhatsApp messenger.

A total of 23 individuals and six families were invited to participate in the study to share their experiences considering marketing Korea as a halal-friendly destination.

Table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of respondents from three Muslim populated states, namely Indonesia, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan. Approximately two-thirds majority of the participants were male and had their master's level of education. More than half of the respondents were married, while the dominant group among participants comprised students. All stakeholders are living with their families. The majority of respondents reported a length of stay from 16 to 20 years. Interestingly, all the participants showed their interest in tourism.

3. Results

The study used qualitative analysis based on 27 interviews with Muslim nationals from Indonesia, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan who have visited halal restaurants several times and have experience with halal tourism in Korea. Items included in the study were related to sharia-based needs, the overall image of services of respondents, and tourist destination attractions.

Table 1. Demographic profile $N = 27$

Variables	Category	Frequency
Gender	Male	19
	Female	8
Age (in years)	21–30	9
	31–40	15
	41–50	3
Highest Level of Education	Undergraduate	7
	Master	13
	Graduate	5
	Postgraduate	2
Marital Status	Married	16
	Unmarried	11
Occupation	Employed Full-Time	6
	Stakeholder	6
	Student	9
	Housewife	6
Length of Stay (in years)	4–10	6
	10–15	3
	16–20	14
	More than 20	4
Interested in Tourism	Yes	27
	No	-
Origin of Country	Indonesia	9
	Uzbekistan	9
	Pakistan	9

During the initial stage, included items focused on the availability of halal food, halal accommodations, access to mosques, and separate prayer rooms/swimming pools/gyms for men and women at tourist places. A brief description of the responses of interviewees is provided as follows.

The perceptions of Muslim consumers ($n = 19$) reveal that Korea is not a Muslim-friendly country. Finding halal food at tourist places and also in Korean restaurants, except those that are halal-certified or owned by Muslims, is difficult. Several Korean restaurants provide seafood that does not contain any forbidden ingredient (permissible for Muslims) but must be checked. Muslims do not purchase halal food at many local markets, except in large cities, such as Seoul, Daegu, and Busan. Muslims are conscious of timely worship services. However, many tourist places do not have prayer rooms, except for Everland and Lotte World. An Indonesian expressed concerns regarding the availability of halal food and worship services: “I do not find any halal food at several tourist places, mostly I eat vegetables but I have to ask about ingredients. On the other side, I prepare my lunch at home and take it with me when I plan to visit any tourist place. Moreover, I take my meal with me at my workplace. Sometimes if I want to take lunch by a Korean restaurant, and if there are impermissible ingredients included in vegetables, I have to skip meals.”

Similarly, Muslims could not find separate prayer spaces and water usage-friendly toilets. According to a Pakistani national: For worship services, prayer rooms are not available at many hotels, shopping centers, malls, and tourist places. Korea also lacks separate gyms and spa facilities for men and women. However, the government is attempting to enhance halal services; for example, Incheon airport has prayer spaces and halal restaurants, and even halal makeup is available in stores around Itaewon Mosque. Many Muslim residents visit halal-certified hotels owned by Muslims and express that all decorations, pictures, and paintings at halal restaurants are comprised by Islamic laws except Indian halal hotels that display pictures of idols and paintings.

The perception of respondents considering the overall image of the service quality of halal hotels, halal foods in Korean restaurants, Muslim cultural activities, language barrier, and locals' understanding of halal is as follows.

A vast majority of respondents ($n = 24$) are satisfied with the service quality of halal hotels and the environment at halal-certified restaurants; thus, they recommend these places to others. Additionally, a few respondents ($n = 3$) are unsatisfied with halal-certified hotels: they do not meet the criteria of the three common types of taste that help grow a restaurant (food presentation, good food, and reasonable bill); these so-called halal-certified restaurants are lacking the aforementioned qualities.

Thus, consumers find it difficult to recommend any halal hotel to others. However, the following statement of an Indonesian indicates the services of Korean hotels for Muslims: "I visited various Korean hotels, some offer seafood and Korean food without pork. But many Korean are not aware of the concept of halal food. They consider halal food is only for Muslims, without alcohol and pork. Likewise, halal is limited to our eating habits and it's not about lifestyle and other living ways."

Muslim residents love to organize cultural events and like participating in Korean cultural events. They occasionally collaborate with Koreans and hold cultural activities to promote their culture. However, those who do not have Korean language proficiency find it difficult to survive in Korea, understand the Korean culture, and enjoy the Korean cultural festivals enthusiastically. According to an Uzbek respondent: "The language barrier is a major issue for foreigners, Koreans are getting better at English communication. However, if foreigners find someone who can communicate in English, they ask for help to communicate with Korean. Similarly, staff at Korean restaurants are not good at English."

A participant indicates the misperception of locals and stated the following: "Many non-Muslim consumers have a cliché perception that halal products mean Islamic and only signified for Muslims. Like other non-Muslim states, non-Muslims in Korea are also not aware of the concept of halal. There is a need to remove misconceptions among the Koreans to create a positive perception in terms of halal products and services. Further, opportunities for halal tourism can be brought by organizing conferences, seminars, meetings, and exhibitions regarding Muslim culture."

Perceptions of participants of destination attractions are examined as follows.

Many participants (n = 17) view that Korean Wave (Hallyu) is progressively attracting Muslim tourists worldwide. The growing popularity appeals to the Muslim diaspora to visit Korea, which opens a window of opportunity for tourism. Such an opportunity can be maximized by considering the increased availability of halal attributes at tourist sites to raise halal tourism. Meanwhile, all respondents reported that they are influenced by Hallyu and consume Korean cultural products.

Considering destination attractions, the statement of a Pakistani participant indicates his perception of the potential of Korea in the tourism market: "Korea is a safe

country and it has cultural heritage sites and natural beauty attractions that can appeal to Muslim tourists from East Asia, the Middle East, and the Arab world. Koreans are trustworthy and provide quality services to their customers. In Korean restaurants, they should introduce Korean food to Muslim tourists with halal ingredients. I believe that halal products and market can be promoted as an ecofriendly market or as a healthier lifestyle in Korean society with the purpose of developing the Korean economy."

Numerous Koreans remain slightly unfriendly or uncomfortable with Muslim residents. Thus, educating Koreans regarding Islam and the Muslim culture and their living standards is necessary to attract Muslim travelers. An Uzbek participant reveals her perception of locals toward Muslims: "Those who have knowledge about Islam and also about Muslim culture, have different perceptions about us. Overall, Muslims are not respectful among Koreans."

Notably, rather than a Muslim-friendly tourist destination with diverse cultural sites and wonderful natural attractions, all participants recommend others to visit Korea as an attractive tourist destination.

Considering the analysis of Muslim residents' perceptions of halal tourism in Korea, the author compared the perceptions of three groups and found that all groups almost have similar perceptions and attitudes. The findings indicated that they have information regarding the availability of halal attributes and facilities that have been developed in Korea and have relatively similar opinions based on their observations and experiences. Hence, Korea is not the priority of Muslim travelers due to undeveloped halal services in the tourism industry. Muslim tourists who want to learn a new culture and enjoy the country's traditional food find only a few options for halal food and services in Korea. Therefore, the perceptions of Muslim consumers reveal the potential opportunities of halal tourism in the country to take advantage of the Muslim consumer market in Korea.

4. Discussion

From a halal tourism perspective, Korea has reacted positively regarding continuing on this line and focusing on the needs of Muslim tourists to provide halal services. Particularly, the Korean government pushes to attract Muslim tourists. However, challenges remain prevalent. Korea must improve halal services to entice and welcome Muslim tourists across the Islamic world.

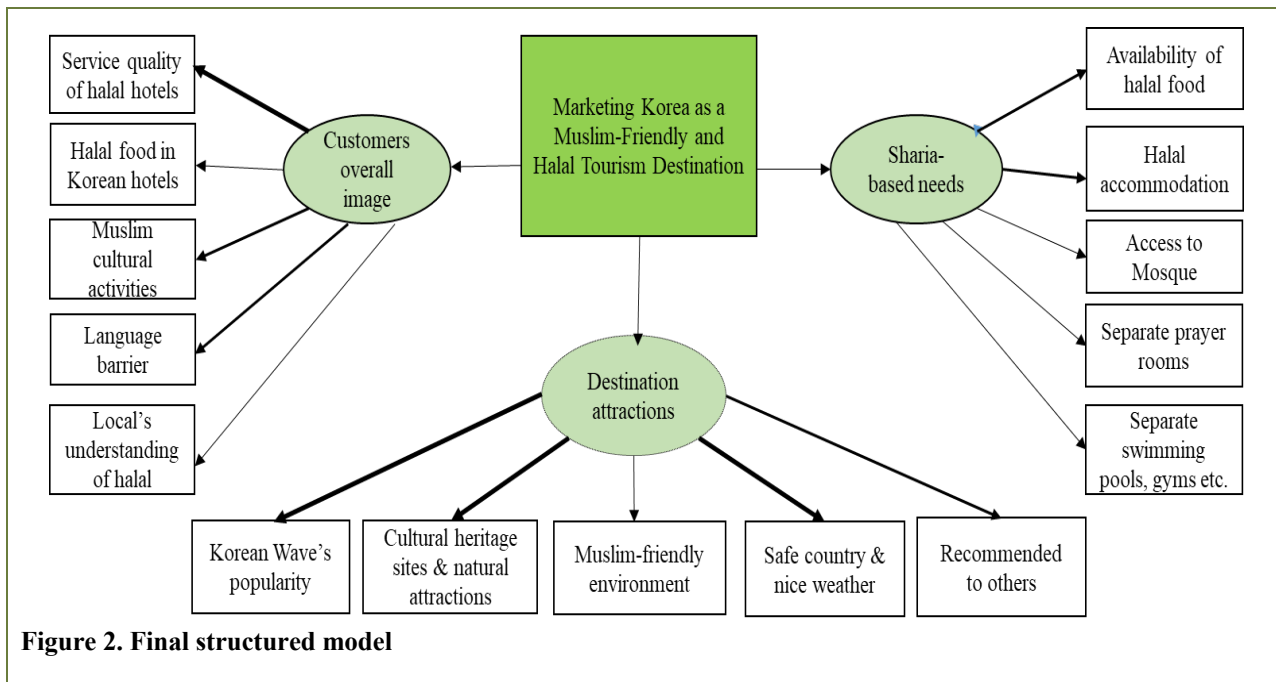


Figure 2. Final structured model

Changes and improvements in halal tourism can be made through the following: provision of halal food in local markets; allocation of prayer rooms at airports, shopping complexes, and tourist sites; and halal-certified restaurants providing a halal-friendly social environment in the country. Additionally, K-food has various nutritional characteristics and low prices. Thus, halal Korean dining should also be prepared in restaurants for Muslim tourists. Meanwhile, Korean Muslims can work to provide halal tourism consulting and help the government captivate and deal with Muslim tourists as per Islamic teachings. Instead of theological needs, cultural training, halal diet provision, and professional training on Muslim culture are essential parts of cultural needs. Training and educating Korean hotel managers and destination marketers to open a halal menu with Korean food is necessary. Thus, halal tourism in Korea could lift its ranking among Muslim-friendly states and could be a remarkable opportunity to attract the flow of Muslim tourists.

From another angle, similar to Japan, the Korean government should implement additional policies to attract Muslim tourists. For example, the Japanese municipality, namely Takayama City, has adopted a strategy for its restaurants and accommodations to attract Muslim tourists without obtaining halal certification. According to this strategy, all ingredients are shown on menus, and only Japanese food that does not include pork or alcohol is served (Takeshita, 2020). Considering the potential of Korea to promote halal tourism, adopting such policies in Korea can be beneficial. The country has continued to respond positively since 2015, focusing on

halal services to attract Muslim tourists and develop the tourism sector. Many published articles have reported that the inflow volume of Muslim tourists is due to the popularity of the Korean Wave, particularly K-pop, K-dramas, K-sports, K-food, and Hallyu tourism. Significant differences are observed in the approaches of Muslim residents toward halal tourism in Korea from 2015 to date that prove the promotion of halal tourism.

The halal industry can be developed by accomplishing several tasks, such as halal awareness among locals, improving halal services, placing halal logos on products, and promoting Korea by understanding the needs and attitudes of Muslim tourists. Some issues emerge in the halal tourism industry, but solutions are elusive due to the added complexity of non-Muslims, who are unaware of the halal concept. In the move toward achieving the goal of a Muslim-friendly country, considering the perceptions of Muslim residents and adopting the ways of integrating the residents by removing the misconceptions regarding Muslims to turn halal tourism in Korea is necessary. Overcoming the challenges in halal tourism is also necessary, and considering the unique needs of Muslim tourists to increase halal services in Korea is imperative for destination marketers.

A few marketing implications considering Korea being a Muslim-friendly and halal tourism destination is observed; thus, Korean halal products must be prepared to develop the local industry in Korea. This strategy can work in two directions: establishing the domestic halal products industry to meet the sharia-based needs of

Muslim residents and improving the marketing image of Korea as a Muslim-friendly state. Policymakers must also consider the increased availability of halal attributes at tourist sites to improve halal tourism and as a part of future strategies for public and private tourism authorities. Furthermore, marketers should formulate policies considering the ecofriendly market by releasing halal products as a healthy lifestyle. Muslim consumers are unsatisfied with the facilities of halal tourism. They suggest that tourism organizations, hotel managers, and policymakers improve such facilities according to the sharia-based needs of Muslim tourists.

Originality and limitation

This study is the first of its kind that assessed perceptions of Muslim consumers on halal tourism to obtain insights of foreign nationals from three Muslim countries (Indonesia, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan) regarding their perception of Korea as a Muslim-friendly and halal tourism destination according to their religious beliefs. This study contributes to halal tourism in Korea and suggests Korea as a Muslim-friendly country, which has the potential to appeal to Muslim tourists and market it as a halal tourism destination through the efforts of destination marketers and hotel managers by offering halal services.

Past studies on halal tourism through the perceptions of Muslim consumers in Korea provide limited literature. Thus, the interviewees were chosen from three Muslim-dominated countries, including Indonesia, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan, and those who are currently living in Seoul and Daegu. The findings of this study could be considered preliminary generalizations because they are based on small sample size and present insights into Indonesian, Uzbek, and Pakistani populations. Future research must be conducted in other areas of Korea with a large sample size of respondents.

5. Conclusion

According to different religious practices and beliefs among Muslims, all halal characteristics, facilities, and services are unavailable when visiting a non-Muslim state. Offering goods and services to meet the expectations of their customers is necessary for marketers. Considering the ecological aspect of halal food to promoting halal tourism in Korea is effective. Qualitative analysis shows the presence of significant characteristics that are similar across three groups; none of these groups has perceived halal attributes properly at tourist sites in Korea. All groups expressed major concerns regarding finding halal food and services at several sites. The growth of Muslim mass tourism requires halal facilities in certain places and needs some form of management to satisfy consumers for a big halal tourism boost. The finding in the marketing context

indicated that Koreans have basic knowledge of the concept of halal, halal food, halal services, and halal tourism. Thus far, rather than a Muslim-friendly destination due to the insufficient availability of halal tourism, Muslim residents have a positive attitude to recommend others to visit Korea as a tourist destination. This attitude can be analyzed by issues faced by Muslim consumers in finding halal food, worship services, lack of English language information, halal-certified products, and facilities offered in Korea. Destination marketers could formulate policies considering the ecofriendly market by releasing halal products as a healthy lifestyle.

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