Study on Muslim-Friendly Hotel in Malaysia: A Conceptual Framework

Conceptual Article

Aishah Hussain[1], Mohammad Aizat Jamaluddin[1]*, Khairusy Syakirin Has-Yun Hashim[2]

[1]International Institute for Halal Research and Training (INHART), International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

[2]Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

*Corresponding author: Mohammad Aizat Jamaluddin, International Institute for Halal Research and Training (INHART), International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.; mohdaizat@iium.edu.my

Abstract: The tourism industry is one of the biggest economic drivers contributing to the world's economic advancement. The growth of Muslim travelers is a new emerging segment within the travel sector that affects the global tourism industry. Given the inherent strengths to cater to the Muslim travellers, Malaysia took this opportunity to gain a greater share of this growing segment and increase the overall tourist arrivals. Since Malaysia is a Muslim majority country and pioneer for the *Halal* industry, the increasing demand for Islamic products and services has led the hoteliers in Malaysia to provide more Islamic friendly hotel services to fulfil the Muslim tourists' needs. However, it seems there are limited studies focusing on Muslim-friendly hotels, whereby in the past, most studies were focused on conventional hotel industry catering for travellers of different faiths. This study is very vital to promote a new field of Muslim-friendly tourism under the sector of faith travel. Therefore, this paper aims to propose a general framework in conceptualising the Muslim-friendly hotel in Malaysia that can be guided by the Islamic principles and teaching. The proposed framework may provide an insight into Muslim-friendly hotels in Malaysia by exploring the concept and the elements that enact the industry. The library research method was conducted to gather relevant information and materials on the subject matters to meet the objective of this study. This paper provides a new dimension to the hotel industry, specifically to the hoteliers, marketeers, businesses and other related agencies, by encouraging them to develop suitable products and services to cater to the needs of Muslim travellers. The outcome of this paper adds to the body of knowledge and may lead to new studies on the

implementation of the Muslim-friendly hotel concept, elements and implementation in Malaysia.

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the world's leading service industries and widely regarded as a critical source of economic growth in the global economy. A well-established and highly developed tourism industry profoundly impacts the country's economy with greater job opportunities and contributes to the social development that benefits the local community and tourists. Since the 1980s, the Malaysian government has paid close attention to the tourism industry due to its excessive reliance on agricultural and manufacturing sectors after its independence in 1957. Thus, to alleviate economic risk, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism was established in 1987 by focusing on the tourism industry's competitive advantage (Puah *et al.*, 2018).

In 2013, the Ministry of Tourism (MoTour), which has been directly responsible for tourism-related matters, was renamed into the Ministry of Tourism and Culture (MOTAC). This is to strengthen the relationship between tourism and culture to place Malaysia as one of the top travel destinations in keeping with the country's famous tagline "Malaysia, Truly Asia". This tagline signifies the country's unique diversity in terms of cultures, festivals, traditions and customs. In 2018, as announced by the Prime Minister of Malaysia during the cabinet formation following the 14th General Election, this Ministry was renamed into the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia.

From 2010 until 2019, Malaysia received yearly an average of at least 24 million tourists from all over the world. The growing number of tourists has increased tourism revenue and promoted the growth of the Malaysian tourism industry. For example, the hotel sector tried its very best to improve its facilities, products and services to cater to the need and demand of local and international travellers. As Malaysia received millions of visitors from other Muslim countries, there is a need for accommodation that provides facilities, products and services that may ease Muslim guests to perform their religious duties. Hence, Islamic tourism or Muslim-friendly tourism has gained attention from many countries, including non-Muslim countries like Japan and Korea. In Malaysia, the hotelier and business owner took this opportunity to introduce Muslim-friendly hotels that provide *Halal* food and safe accommodation for their guests.

Over the last few years, the concept of Islamic hospitality or *Shariah* hotels have extended beyond the Gulf region into many other parts of the Muslim countries in Asia, particularly Indonesia and Malaysia, where Muslims constitute a majority. In addition, this phenomenon has expanded to countries with Muslim minorities such as Thailand, Philippines, China (Lee, 2010; Temporal, 2011), Japan, Korea and Taiwan (Md Salleh & Md Nor, 2015). In Muslim majority countries, basic Muslim-friendly services such as *Halal* food is easily available in hotels, airports and shopping malls (Samori *et al.*, 2015). Tourism operators in non-Muslim

tourist destinations have struggled tremendously to provide satisfactory Muslim-friendly facilities due to lack of knowledge on Islamic rules and the limited capabilities of food vendors (Md Salleh & Md Nor, 2015).

Recent technology advancement has made it easier for Muslims to travel around the world, either for work, business or leisure. As a result, the demand for Muslim-friendly products and services has surge in demand to supply to the relatively under-served market. Travelling to a non-Muslim country can be inconvenient for Muslims due to the absence of prayer facilities and *Halal* food. Battour *et al.* (2011) found that prayer facilities, *Halal* food and a Muslim-friendly ambience are the most important factors influencing Muslim choices to travel to a certain destination. Although many researchers have discussed about the topic of hotel industry, particularly conventional hotels, limited studies were done on Islamic services provided by Malaysian hotels (Md Salleh *et al.*, 2019). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the important elements involved in conceptualising the framework of Muslim-friendly hotel in Malaysia that differentiate it from a conventional hotel.

2. Tourism in Malaysia

Tourism, along with other industries, contributes significantly to the development of the Malaysian economy. For the past few years, the number of tourists who travelled to Malaysia has increased. The top 10 tourists in Malaysia are originated from neighboring countries such as Singapore, Indonesia, China, Thailand, India, Brunei, South Korea, Japan, Australia and Philippines. Travellers are prone to visit this country as a result from Malaysia's initiative to offer all of the essential components for an ideal tourism destination that perfectly caters for the needs of Muslim and non-Muslim travellers. Muslim travellers, for example, can enjoy their stay in this country due to easy access to abundance of *Halal* food, prayer facilities and numerous Islamic attractions in every state in Malaysia regardless of their basic faith-based needs. While non-Muslims are able to enjoy the shopping experience, beach experience and local cultural experience throughout their stay in this country, as Malaysian community respects all types of faiths and cultural backgrounds, due to the multi-racial, multi-faith and multi-ethnic groups residing in Malaysia.

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), tourism can be defined as "a social, cultural and economic phenomenon that entails people's movement to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. The people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists, residents or non-residents), and tourism has to do with their activities, some of which involve tourism expenditure". Din (1989) described tourism as "vacation or non-work involvement which is a form of leisurely diversion from the work situation". In summary, people travel outside of their norm place (or other countries) for several reasons such as a vacation, visiting family and friends, shopping, medical matters, business, education and honeymoon.

Tourist arrivals and receipts into Malaysia are important components of enhancing the tourism industry's sustainable growth. This is because the international tourism receipts

reflect the actual expenditures incurred during their visits to this country, and these receipts contribute significantly to the national income (Puah *et al.*, 2018). The Malaysian government can use this national income to reinvest in the tourism industry or other sectors to boost the economy. As a result, various tourism packages can be launched and promoted to attract tourists from all over the world to choose Malaysia as their number one destination. This industry is dependent on multiple related industries in the value chain, including transportation, accommodation, food and beverage, telecommunication and recreation. Thus, this will give a great advantage to the economic growth such as job opportunities to the Malaysian locals.

Table 1 shows the tourist arrivals and receipts to Malaysia from the year 2010 until 2020. It is presented that the tourism industry's contribution has consistently inclined over time from 2010 until 2019. However, it is noticeable that there were significant decline in tourist arrival in 2020 (4.33 million tourists with RM12.7 million), marking a decrease of 83.4% compared to the previous year, 2019 (26.10 million tourists with RM86.1 million). These diminutions were due to the spread of COVID-19, which negatively affected the tourism sector in this country. Additionally, following the World Health Organization's (WHO) declaration of Covid-19 as a pandemic on March 11, the Malaysian government has imposed a Movement Control Order (MCO) restricting international tourists from entering the country beginning 18 March 2020. The effects of the pandemic on the tourism sector can be seen beyond the borders of Malaysia. According to the data from the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), Malaysia's growth downturn in tourist arrivals is not exceptional because neighboring ASEAN countries, including Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam and Indonesia, have experienced similar declines due to the respective countries' ban on international travel in response to the pandemic.

Table 1. Tourist Arrivals and Receipts to Malaysia by Year

YEAR	ARRIVALS (MILLION)	RECEIPTS (RM)
2020	4.33	12.7
2019	26.10	86.1
2018	25.83	84.1
2017	25.95	82.1
2016	26.76	82.1
2015	25.72	69.1
2014	27.44	72.0
2013	25.72	65.4
2012	25.03	60.6
2011	24.71	58.3
2010	24.58	56.5

Source: https://www.tourism.gov.my/statistics

3. Tourism in Islam

Islam divides religious and spiritual journeys into three categories: *hajj*/*umrah*, *rihla* or *ziyara* (Haq & Wong, 2010). Traditionally, tourism in Islam is linked to religion (Din, 1989), where Muslim from all over the world travel to Mecca and Medina to perform *hajj* during the month of *Zulhijjah*. Every Muslim is obligated to perform *hajj* at least once in their lifetime, if they are physically and financially capable (i.e. affordability) of making the journey and supporting their family, while they are away from home. In contrast, *umrah* is a non-mandatory pilgrimage that can be performed throughout the year by Muslim to Saudi Arabia. Moreover, travel is also related to *rihla*, where a Muslim takes a journey to other places to seek knowledge, commerce, health, or research (Haq & Wong, 2010). Finally, *ziyara* is defined as a Muslim's pilgrimage to shrines, mosques or monasteries for spiritual growth and devotion to prominent spiritual figures (Kessler, 1992).

Muslims are encouraged to travel to improve their knowledge, benefiting from social and cultural interactions, in addition to expanding their business to other places in the world (Jafari & Scott, 2014). Through travelling, individuals will develop social relationships with other people, learn and grow as a person. Furthermore, they will expose to new cultures, religions, languages and environments that expand their mind to new ideas, creativity and flexibility. Allah SWT said:

> *"Travel through the earth and see how Allah SWT did originate creation; so, will Allah SWT produce a later creation: for Allah SWT has power over all things".*

(al-Quran 29:20)

In addition, Muslims are encouraged to travel outside of their usual place to see the beauty of Allah SWT's creation in nature and then reflect on the magnitude of Allah SWT's bountiful blessings on humanity. Every place or country has their uniqueness in terms of people, nature, food, culture, race and customs. When Muslim travel, this will bring them closer to their creator. Allah SWT said:

> *"Have these people (of Mecca) not travelled through the land with hearts to understand and ears to hear? It is not people's eyes that are blind, but their hearts within their breast."*

(al-Quran 22:46)

Din (1989) was among the pioneering academic studies about Islamic tourism in Malaysia. In his study, he highlights the main objectives of modern mass tourism are distinct from the Islamic concept of travel, which aims only on submission to God. In contrast, Battour *et al.* (2011) described Islamic tourism as "a type of religious tourism in conformity with Islamic teaching concerning behaviorism, dress, conduct and diet". In addition, Battour, (2018) also emphasised that Islamic tourism should be accompanied by good *Niyyah* or intention as part

of the travelling activities. If the intention of the traveller is contrary with the Islamic teaching, then the travel will not be considered as an Islamic tourism.

An Islamic tourism encompasses all modes of product development and marketing efforts intended for Muslims (Henderson, 2010) that provides *Halal* food and hospitality services in line with the Islamic law (*Shariah*). The example of hospitality services includes *Halal* resorts and hotels, Islamic heritage tours, restaurants with *Halal* foods, Muslim-friendly cruise and among others (Battour & Ismail, 2015). All of these service providers should not serve alcoholic beverages, oblige to offer *Halal* certificates for food and restaurants, in addition to separate facilities for different genders (i.e. male and female). Furthermore, they also should provide Muslim-friendly on-premise environment. These attributes are important because Muslims frequently make destination selections based on the availability of *Halal* food and worship facilities that may ease them to practice Islam, while they are scheduled for a short or long vacation (Battour *et al.*, 2011).

Malaysia has gained popularity related to *Halal* products and services in terms of Islamic banking and finance, cosmetic and personal care, *Halal* logistic, retailing, pharmaceutical and tourism industry (Jaswir & Ramli, 2016). Currently, Malaysia is making greater headway into becoming the pioneer in Muslim-friendly hotels. According to the MasterCard-CrescentRating (2016), Malaysia was one of the first few countries that recognise the potential of Muslim tourism. Tourist destination operators, accommodation providers, travel agents, restaurants and other travel related organisation should take this opportunity through improving tourism facilities and services (Abdul-Latif & Adnan, 2020) to cater the needs and demands of Muslim tourists worldwide. Most of the accommodations in this country, including the hotel, provide *qibla* direction (i.e. on the floor or on the ceiling of the hotel's room) and prayer mats in the hotel's room. Islamic attributes such as prayer facilities, *Halal* food and Muslim-friendly environment are among the significant factors that contribute to the tourist arrival to this country (Battour *et al.*, 2013; Battour *et al.*, 2011).

4. Muslim-Friendly Hotel

Hotels are the fastest-growing segment of the hospitality industry, which are bound to various tourism-related activities, including food and beverages, accommodation, gifts or souvenirs, sports, entertainment, beauty, healthcare, and conferences (Jeaheng *et al.*, 2019). Innumerable hotel management teams have targeted a broader range of customer interests with their products and services. Hotels constantly strive for the most efficient methods and tools to expand their customer base and enter new markets. Over the last few years, the pattern toward providing Muslim-friendly tourism services has shifted away from providing basic services toward providing more comprehensive services and expanding the target market from Muslims to non-Muslims by focusing on family and health-related matters (Henderson, 2010). The interest in promoting the *Halal* market has grown exponentially in recent years.

The words *Halal*, Muslim-friendly, Islamic or *Sharia* Compliant Hotels (SCHs) are commonly used interchangeably. According to Battour *et al.* (2010), Muslim-friendly hotels provide products or services according to the Islamic teaching. The term Muslim- friendly also signifies "an attempt to make the tourism experience enjoyable to observant or practicing Muslims" (Battour, 2018). In comparison, *Sharia* compliance hotel refers to a hotel that offers product and service adhere to the *Sharia* or Islamic principles that regulate the entire hotel operation (Saad *et al.*, 2014; Samori *et al.*, 2013). In addition, an Islamic hotel means a hotel that provides *Halal* services to Muslim travellers by serving *Halal* food and adhering to Islamic principles in its operation and management (Idris & Razali, 2016). Moreover, the dry hotel is a non-alcoholic hotel that emphasises the restriction of alcohol in their premises, but their operations and services remain the same as conventional hotels (Che Ahmat *et al.*, 2012; Rosenberg & Choufany, 2009). Previously, all studies on Islamic principles applied in the business model include *Halal* food and beverage, operation and management in the hotel service (Suci *et al.*, 2020). Thus, *Halal* hotels symbolise the application of Islamic teachings and beliefs. Therefore, using these terms in studies does not contradict one another, since their definitions of the terms and nature have similar meaning and substance.

CrescentRating, which publishes the annual Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), confirmed that Muslims are diverse in their religious practices. As a result, it is critical for businesses to categorise their customer's need and demand into three categories of faith-based service need: "need to have", "good to have" and "nice to have". In 2009, CrescentRating identified six critical religious needs influencing the consumption behavior of Muslim travellers in regards to *Halal* food, prayer facilities, Ramadan service, water-friendly washroom, prohibition to non-halal activities and recreational facilities, and finally, services with privacy (i.e. for Muslim women or girls wearing headscarves or known as *Hijabis* or *Nikabis*, who require a closed space or environment not permissible for entry or visible to the *non-Mahrams*) to protect the *aurah* of men and women that must not be seen by *non-Mahrams*. For example, men are required to cover their *aurah* between the navel to the knee, whereas, for women, only face, hands and sometimes in different *mazhab* feet are allowed to be exposed. In Islam, different genders such as male and female should be separated when it comes to prayers, in some cultures wedding receptions, whereby women guests are separated from the men guests. One hadith in Sahih Muslim (Book 4, Hadith 881) mentions gender segregation in mosques and prayer rooms, stating that the best rows for males are the first rows, while the best rows for women are the last rows. Women and men are not permissible to mix in the same place to avoid free mixing between them and to protect dignity as well as *aurah* of the Muslim women.

However, in 2019, due to rapid changes in the *Halal* tourism ecosystem, there were changes in the travel patterns and various *Halal*-related events demanding a revision of the original faith-based service by adding three more new needs on top of the six uncovered previously,

such as no Islamophobia, social causes and local Muslim experiences. Table 2 is the summary of the faith-based service need in 2009 and 2019, respectively.

Table 2. Faith-Based Service Need

Category	Service Needs (2009)	Service Needs (2019)
Need to have	• Halal food service • Prayer facilities	• Halal food service • Prayer facilities • Water-friendly washroom • No islamophobia
Good to have	• Water-friendly washroom • Ramadan services and facilities	• Social causes • Ramadan service • Local Muslim experiences
Nice to have	• No non-halal activities • Recreational facilities and services	• Recreational spaces with privacy • No non-halal services

Source: (MasterCard-CrescentRating, 2019)

4.1. The Development of Muslim-Friendly Hotel in Malaysia

After the World Trade Centre attacks on September 11, 2001, the number of Middle Eastern tourists visiting Islamic countries has significantly increased. The Middle Eastern tourists' attempts and initiatives to avoid travelling to the Europe and United States as their favorite travel destination after the 9/11 attack, due to the Islamophobia (i.e. irrational fear, hostility or fear of Islam) sentiment, which has been inculcated into Americans towards Muslims, which may endanger Muslim travellers' safety and security during their travel. As a result, they begin to shift their travel preferences toward Muslim majority countries, particularly in Asia (Hanim *et al.*, 2010). Malaysia was one of the first countries to recognize this market's potential and takes this opportunity to develop more strategies and plans to provide sufficient products, services and facilities to cater to Muslim tourist's need and demand.

Tourists from the Middle East are a significant niche market for Malaysia because they spend more money, stay longer in this country and easily adapt to tropical temperatures (Ahmad Azmi & Mohd Safar, 2009). Furthermore, they also have strong disposable personal income and normally travel with large family members (UNWTO, 2015). The average tourist from the Middle East spends an estimated RM 7000 during their vacation compared to an average of RM 2300 for other international tourists (COMCEC, 2016). Among the initiatives taken by the government, businesses and other related agencies (Ahmad Azmi & Mohd Safar, 2009; Shafaei & Mohamed, 2015) to welcome Middle East tourist to this country were:

• Establishing *'Ain Arabia'* or Arab Street in Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur, that promotes Middle Eastern cultures and cuisines.

- Placing Arabic language signage and employ Arabic speaking staff at KLIA Airport, hotels, restaurants and shopping malls.

- Promoting the employment of Arabic-speaking personnel in travel agencies.

- Encouraging restaurants to initiate Arabic printed menus apart from English or Malay menu.

- Selected hotels organising special events like 'Arabian Nights' and serving Arab cuisine to attract more Muslim guests to stay at their hotel.

- Some hotels subscribing to Arab Radio and Television (ART) to be broadcasted into their hotel's TV channel.

- Ensuring that all hotel's brochures, leaflets and the guest registration forms to be in Arabic or to minimise to cost of printing for the materials to be in trilingual (i.e. Arabic, English and Malay).

- Ensuring KLIA Airports to offer additional transport service like limousines, vans or MPVs for Arabs travelling with families up to eight members to be at their respective destination(s).

- Publishing the first local Arab newspaper, known as '*Ahlan Wasahlan*', means 'Welcome' to give information on Malaysian tourism activities and programmes.

Malaysia's tourism industry is greatly benefiting from the Muslim tourist market. Islamic tourism-related amenities should be improved from time to time to attract more Muslim tourists to visit and return to Malaysia in the future. Tourism suppliers such as hotels, restaurants, and popular tourist destinations should provide better Islamic services to guarantee satisfaction on Muslim travellers' spiritual and material needs during their stay in Malaysia. In 2015, the Department of Standard Malaysia (DSM), the national standard and accreditation body of Malaysia, has introduced Muslim-friendly hospitality services requirements (MS 2610: 2015). This standard has been created to ensure that the products and services offered to Muslim travellers are adhering to the *Shariah* principles. This standard has the following objectives:

- To ensure the products and services adhere to *Shariah* principles.

- To safeguard and preserve the integrity of Muslim-friendly tourism products and services by ensuring that the standard is applied effectively.

- To improve customer satisfaction by adhering to the customer requirements.

Muslims favor Islam as a 'way of life,' in which its principles and values incorporate all aspect of their lives. Every Muslim must observe some regulations pertaining to dress code, food and drink, entertainment, personal and social interaction as well as prayer five times daily (Henderson, 2016). However, certain adjustment may be made in the case of travellers, depending on their circumstances. Thus, the tourism-related organisations or businesses should provide products, services and facilities that may ease Muslim to fulfill their religious obligations. A study by Battour *et al.* (2014) confirmed that the presence of some religious

attributes that fulfil the needs of Muslim tourists may play a significant role in Islamic tourism. As a result, Muslim travellers will feel comfortable, satisfied and continue to visit this country in the future. Furthermore, they will spread positive words of mouth to their family members and friends about their holiday experience in this country.

5. Main Elements of Muslim-Friendly Hotel

In this study, the researcher divided the elements of Muslim-friendly hotel into two categories. The first category discusses traditional attributes of Muslim-friendly hotels in Malaysia includes service quality, brand image and price. In contrast, the second category focuses on Islamic attributes in Muslim-friendly hotels consisting of physical and non-physical Islamic attributes. The sections below discuss in depth on the elements in Muslim-friendly hotel in Malaysia.

5.1. Service Quality

Many factors have contributed to the success of business in the hotel industry. One of the business's elements is service quality, since superior service quality has become a priority to attract new customers and maintain long-term relationships with the existing ones. Countless studies on service quality have been conducted demonstrating the diversity of factors that influence customer satisfaction across various business sectors. Furthermore, previous researchers have discussed and made recommendations to improve service quality (Otaibi & Yasmeen, 2014; Wantara, 2015) in various industries, including the hotel and banking sectors.

Grönroos (1984) defined service quality as "a perceived judgement, resulting from an evaluation process where customers compare their expectation with the service they have received". In comparison, Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) described service quality as a comprehensive assessment of the service provider's to their customer. Normally, customers will judge their perceptions and expectations of the service quality based on their experience after they have used the service.

SERVQUAL model is a common approach used to determine the perceived service quality in the service sector. This model evaluated the overall service quality received by a customer by comparing customer perceptions and customer expectations of service quality. Additionally, the SERVQUAL instruments were widely used in the tourism and hospitality industries, airlines, ski resorts and restaurants (Tsang & Qu, 2000). Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) develop SERVQUAL into five dimensions, namely:

   a. *Tangibility*
    -The hotel's physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel.
   b. *Reliability*
    -The ability of the employee to perform the expected service dependably and accurately.
   c. *Responsiveness*

-The willingness of the employee to help and provide prompt service to the customer.

d. *Assurance*

-The employee's politeness and knowledge and their ability to inspire the customer's trust and confidence.

e. *Empathy*

-Employee's caring, consideration, understanding of the customer and individualized attention towards the customers' needs.

Given the current economic environment, it is critical for all Muslim-friendly hotels in Malaysia to provide a high level of hospitality quality to meet the needs of Muslim guests. Inadequate hospitality quality will result in customer dissatisfaction and cause them to seek services from other hotels that offer better quality. Thus, Muslim-friendly hotels should strive for an excellent service quality because true measure of a company's success lies in its ability to satisfy customer's needs continually and consistently (Amin *et al.*, 2013), which later will attract more guests, resulting in increased profitability. Islam *et al.* (2019) discovered a positive relationship between service quality and customer engagement in a survey of luxury hotel guests. This has a positive effect on brand experience and intention to revisit the same hotel in the future.

5.2. Brand Image

Brand image is regarded as one of the most important principles in marketing. The brand symbolizes a product, quality and factor that affects customers' subjective preferences and subsequent actions (Ryu *et al.*, 2008). Additionally, the brand image acts as an extrinsic cue, when consumers evaluate a product or service before making a purchase decision (Zeithaml, 1988). Normann (1991) explained that by combining advertising, public relations, physical image, word of mouth and experience with the product and service, it is demonstrated that brand image affects the customer's mind.

In marketing literature, brand image relates to an intangible concept that can be categorised as the brand's intrinsic value that appeals to customers. Keller (1998) defined brand image as consumers' perceptions of the brand as reflected by the brand associations in customers minds. A strong brand image impacts customers' perceptions of an organization's communication, operations and the quality of its services and products (Kang & James, 2004). Additionally, the brand image communicates the product's position in the consumer's mind, thereby establishing the brand's equity and enhancing the business's value.

In the hotel sector, the brand image should convey a sense of comfort, cleanliness and differentiation from their competitors (Lahap *et al.*, 2016). In addition, Kandampully & Suhartanto (2000) recommend comfort, interior design, price, physical facility, interior design and trustworthiness should all be part of the hotel brand image. As a result, this component of brand image has a significant impact on customers' perceptions of value,

satisfaction and likelihood to return to the same hotel in the future (Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Lai *et al.*, 2009; Ryu *et al.*, 2008).

5.3. Price

Nowadays, customers can access information on products and services through the internet. Customer can use a mobile app or social media to find information on the various products and services to find better deals. For instance, they can compare hotel room rates via an online hotel booking website and choose the best hotel deal that meets their needs and budget. Prices may vary according to the customised services offered, resulting in various product or service experiences (Chung & Petrick, 2015). As a result, the customer's decision to purchase or not to purchase a product or service is likely to be rapid.

Xia *et al.* (2004) defined price as "a consumer's assessment and associated emotions of whether the difference (or lack of difference) between a seller's price and the price of a comparative other party is reasonable, acceptable or justifiable". In contrast, Chen *et al.* (1994) described the price as "the customer's judgment about a service's average price in comparison to its competitors", which may include both monetary and non-monetary costs such as time and effort (Zeithaml, 1988). Monroe (2003) highlighted that price fairness is a subjective interpretation and assessment of whether a price is considered reasonable from the customer's perspective. Additionally, he argued that individuals appear to interpret the same amount of monetary sacrifice differently because of the subjectivity of wealth.

The marketing literature emphasises the critical role of price as a predictor of customer satisfaction as customers evaluate a purchased product or service based on the value it provides. Charging a reasonable price increases customer satisfaction, as the price is a factor in determining customer satisfaction (Xia *et al.* 2004) in dealing with products and services. Moreover, price is considered a predictor of customer satisfaction because price plays a factor in directing their level of satisfaction in the customer's eyes.

5.4. Islamic Attributes

Religion appears to be a significant influence in determining consumer experiences among Muslim travelers, including hospitality and tourism. Islam teaches Muslim to adherent codes of conduct that may encourage or discourage them from consuming certain tourism products (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015). Muslims are allowed to consume *Halal* products and services that Allah SWT permits. The word *Halal* is an Arabic word that means permitted, allowed, authorised, approved, sanctioned, lawful, legal, legitimate or licit (Mustafa *et al.*, 1989; Wahab, 2004). In addition, Qaradawi (1993) defined *Halal* as lawful, permissible and accepted by an Islamic law.

Every Muslim must adhere to the *Shariah* principles in their life reflected in the values and attitudes of individuals and societies at large (Fam *et al.*, 2004). A Muslim is expected to pray five times daily in a clean environment and to fast during Ramadan. Furthermore, they are also prohibited to be involved in adultery, gambling activities, pork consumption and

other foods classified as haram (forbidden), the sale or consumption of liquor and inappropriate dress (Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010).

For example, in the Muslim-friendly hotels, the hoteliers should provide products, services and facilities that follow Islamic law. These elements of Muslim-friendly hotel will enhance the purchasing experiences of Muslim consumers by incorporating Islamic benefits that add to the overall value of the products, services and facilities. Battour (2018) outlined the requirements for Muslim-friendly hotel rooms that must include a copy of the Qur'an, Qibla direction, prayer mat, prayer timetable and so forth. In addition, he also added that Muslim-friendly hotel services are required to have certified *Halal* food/kitchens, well-trained staff to satisfy Muslims, female staff for women, women only floor/family only floor, session for ladies in swimming pool or gym, prayer room and Ramadan services and facilities. Certain hotels in Turkey for example offer separate swimming pools and recreational facilities for man and woman because Muslims typically adhere to a dress code and refrain from mixing freely with different gender (Ozdemir & Met, 2012).

Muslims consider *Halal* (allowed) and *Haram* (prohibited) not only concerning food and beverages (Mohsin *et al.*, 2016), but also for tourism-related industries such as the hotel. *Halal* service especially in Muslim-friendly hotel should be based on Islamic value that follows the rules of *Shariah*. Eid & El-Gohary (2015) recommended that Islamic attributes are divided into Islamic physical attributes and Islamic non-physical attributes that may affect customer satisfaction, particularly among Muslims. The minimum needs for Muslim-friendly hotels should include *Halal* food, prayer facilities, ablution area and sufficient quantities of pure water (Henderson, 2010; Karim *et al.*, 2017; Razalli *et al.*, 2015).

5.4.1. Physical

Islamic physical attributes include all visible and touchable aspects of Islam, such as the availability of places of worship, the Quran in a hotel room, Shariah compatible toilet (Putra *et al.*, 2016), as well as the accessibility of *Halal* food (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015).

5.4.2. Non-Physical

Islamic non-physical attributes represent all attributes that are visible, but not necessarily touchable such as segregated facilities for man and woman, appropriate television channel and entertainment in addition to the artwork does not depict animal and human forms (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015). **Table 3** presents the Islamic attributes of the Muslim-friendly hotel by Eid & El-Gohary (2015).

**Table 3.** Islamic Attributes of Muslim-Friendly Hotel

Islamic Attributes	
Physical	**Non-physical**
-Prayer facilities for Muslim	-Segregated facilities for man and woman
-*Halal* food	-Appropriate television channel and entertainment

-A copy of the Quran in the hotel room	-The artwork does not depict animal and human forms
-*Shariah* compliant toilets	

6. Proposed Framework for a Muslim-Friendly Hotel

The availability and adoption of *Halal* elements in Islamic countries such as Malaysia will be more demanding, since Malaysia is the world's *Halal* industry leader. Muslim-friendly hotel services, for example, should ideally cater to the needs of Muslim guest to ease and promote convenience to them to perform their religious duty, while travelling in this country.

In this study, the components of a Muslim-friendly hotel were divided into two categories: traditional attributes (i.e. service quality, brand image and price) and Islamic attributes (i.e. physical and non-physical). All of these components must be incorporated and integrated with *Shariah* principles and values. These components will serve as the foundation and guidelines for the entire range of services offered. The integration between these two categories will enhance customer satisfaction and customer loyalty towards a Muslim-friendly hotel in this country. **Figure 1** shows the proposed framework for this study.
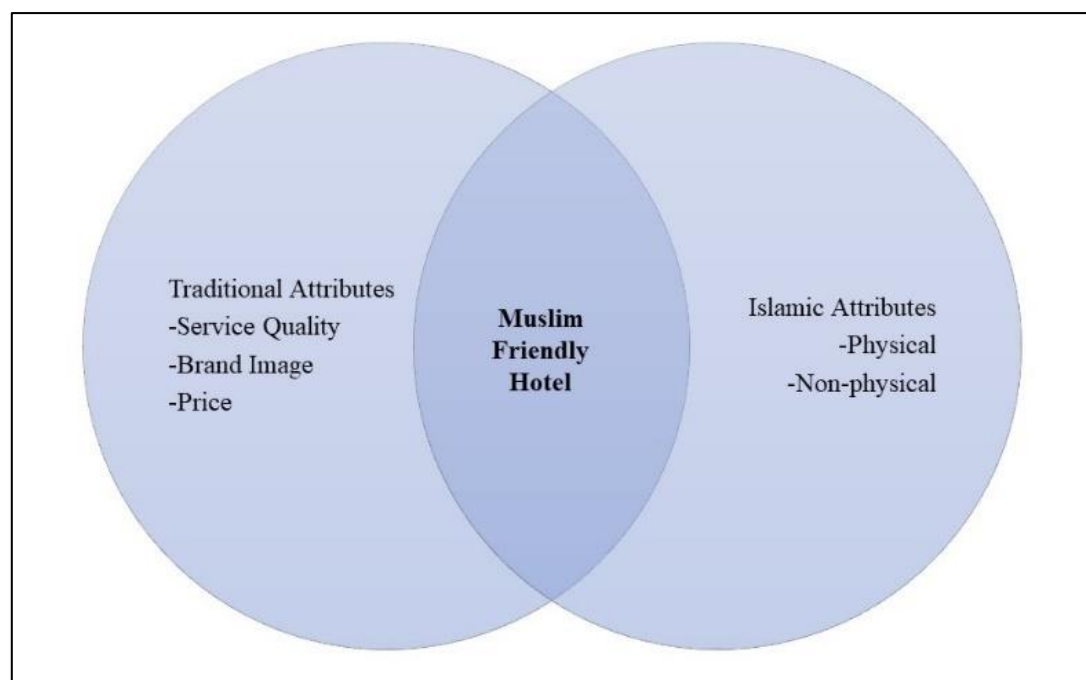
Figure 1. Proposed Framework for Muslim-Friendly Hotel in Malaysia.

7. Conclusion

The initiative to develop a framework for Muslim-friendly hotels in Malaysia is significant, since the *Halal* market that offers Muslim friendly products and services presents a lucrative opportunity for hoteliers and businesses. Therefore, hotel managers and marketeers must develop creative and effective marketing strategies to attract this potential rewarding

segment. Furthermore, the hotel that operates traditionally and wishes to expand its product and service to Muslim customers must have fundamental knowledge on Muslim friendly hotels. This is to alleviate industry players' confusion and misunderstanding of the concept, resulting in non-standardisation and an unstable Muslim-friendly hotel pattern in Malaysia. Continuous guidance and support from the government, industrial player and private sector in Malaysia will contribute to the advancement, growth and sustainability of the Islamic tourism industry. More strategic collaboration with neighboring countries can further stimulate cross-border tourism that will create employment opportunities, income and local ties for their respective economic activities.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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