THE ACCEPTANCE OF ISLAMIC HOTEL CONCEPT IN MALAYSIA:
A CONCEPTUAL PAPER

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Abstract

It is essential to develop and promote Malaysia’s global image as the producer of high quality Halal products and services. This paper tries to explore the true potential of Islamic tourism through the understanding of consumer acceptance and demand of Halal hotels as one of the components of tourism industry. This study will be conducted through quantitative and qualitative methodology. In particular, this study aims to explore hotel providers’ perspectives in terms of the criteria of a Halal Hotel and the Substantiality, Profitability and Identifiability of Halal Hotel market. These objectives will be achieved through in-depth interviews with hotel managers. For a better understanding, this study will also gather feedback from the consumers through quantitative study. A questionnaire survey will be developed to understand consumer awareness in Islamic Tourism in Malaysia and the perceived value of Halal Hotel, to determine factors that influence the acceptance and demand of Halal Hotel in Malaysia and, to obtain explanatory power on the demand of Halal Hotel through the Theory of Acceptance Model. In addition, this study hopes to identify the profile of Halal Hotel Customers and, ultimately, recognize whether Islamic Tourism is more of a hype rather than a sustainable demand. It is expected that the findings of this study would provide some guidelines and valuable information to stakeholders of Islamic tourism in their implementation of Islamic Tourism Hub for Malaysia. The paper also aims to propose a framework to better understand the term Halal Hotel.

Background and Issues

The phenomenon of tourism is very complex and to have a concise definition of it is a challenge (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2006). The widely used and accepted definition is according to the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) that defined tourism as “activities of persons travelling to and
staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited”. Tourism consists of short-term movement of people to destinations outside their usual environment (Medlik, 2003) for various reasons such as business and leisure (Page and Connell, 2009): and the tourist activities (Page and Connell, 2009; Medlik, 2003). The tourism industry inherently is a system that consists of a tourist generating region, a transit route region and a tourist destination region. In those entire regions one would find travel agents, tour operators, transportations, accommodation, and all visitor attractions, leisure and entertainment amenities, linking each other making it into a synergistic system (Leiper, 2004).

Although the studies of tourism has started many years ago and there are a number of authors and researchers that have written on the studies of tourism and its relationship with the religion of Islam, but the amount of knowledge on it is still at an infancy stage. It is hoped that this study would be able to contribute to the evolving concept of Islamic tourism and shall help push Islamic tourism to a higher stage.

Tourism Malaysia’s mission is to market Malaysia as a destination of excellence and make tourism as the central socio-economic contribution to the country. Malaysian tourism industry is one of the key potential growths in Malaysian services economy. The industry has contributed a significant growth and economic value to the GDP of Malaysia. Performance of the hotel industry is a very significant contribution towards economic growth of the tourism sector.

Malaysian government aspires for the country to be an Islamic tourism hub among the Islamic tourist in the world. The set-up of Islamic Tourism Council (ITC) strengthened this aspiration. Being an Islamic country, Malaysia has the capability and ability to cater to the needs of
Islamic tourist. Many Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar has huge potential to be the market for Malaysia and they are couple with high spending power. In order to achieve this Islamic hub status, introduction of Islamic hotel or Halal hotel as a form of tourism services seems to be an important factor. The question remains unanswered as to whether that is what the Islamic tourists want. Even if the demand is available, it is very important to any business that there should be substantial demands for this type of hotel. This is to ensure a good return of investment.

In order for a hotel to be Islamic, it must be halal. Therefore, Islamic hotel is a Halal Hotel. In fulfilling Muslim’s consumers demand towards Halal products, the understanding of Halal concept among the hotel proprietors is vital. This study attempts to contribute a piece of thought in the Halal hotel domain. There are some studies that were conducted surrounding halal issues in general. Osman and Sahidan (2002) had voiced out the concerns of Muslim consumers about the trustworthiness of the Halal certifying bodies. Entrepreneurs in Malaysia have knowledge on food hygiene and halal food and therefore able to comply with the Halal certification (Othman et al., 2004). This is a good sign for Malaysia that is moving towards becoming a halal hub. Food selection and consumption are closely linked to religion, and shall act as a powerful motive for the intentions to purchase. For a Halal hotel, food and its services is only one part of the hotel product and operations. There is a need to gain more knowledge on the other part of Halal hotel products and operations. Merely changing the hotel concepts to Islamic concept but not apply Islamic rules to the fullest in their services, should not be considered as Halal hotel.

All goods and services of hotel industry designed according to Islamic principles and offered to Muslim markets in Malaysia are considered part of Halal Hotels in Malaysia. The
standardization and certification of hotel service in Malaysia are ruled by Ministry of Tourism. The certification of Halal Hotel is given by Malaysia Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM). The hotels that use halal tourism concept are known to obey all the legal requirements of the JAKIM directives. It is said that only JAKIM Halal logo will be accepted, use and recognize in Malaysia as of 1st January 2012 (halalfocus.com, 2012).

**Research Questions**

To achieve the above issues, the following research questions will be explored in this study:

1. What are the criteria of a Halal Hotel?
2. What is the awareness level of Islamic Tourism in Malaysia?
3. What is the Perceived Value of Halal Hotel by the consumer?
4. Who are the patrons (customers) of Halal Hotel?
5. What are the factors that influence the acceptance and demand of Halal Hotel in Malaysia?
6. Is the Halal Hotel market segment Substantial, Profitable and Identifiable?
7. Is Islamic Tourism a hype rather than a sustainable demand?
8. Does the Theory of Acceptance Model have the explanatory power on the demand of Halal Hotel?

**Proposed Conceptual Framework**

This study is designed to uncover the consumer behaviour with regards to patronizing halal hotel. The proposed theory to be adopted and modified is the technology acceptance model (TAM). TAM evolved from the theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) to explain belief-attitude-intention behaviour in information technology (Davis et al., 1989). This theory (TAM) explains that an individual’s intention behaviour is determined by two variables that are: perceived
usefulness and perceived ease of use. Perceived ease of use influences perceived usefulness, meaning the easier an information technology is to be used; the more useful it will be (Davis et al., 1989). This scenario shall then lead into the adoption of Information technology. An extensive research done on information technology adoption behaviour using TAM has been developed, tested and supported (Taylor and Todd, 1995; Venkatesh and Davis, 2000). TAM provides excellent theoretical foundations for exploring information technology adoption behaviour and, therefore, is used extensively in many researches till today.

In this paper, we shall adopt and modify the acceptance model and apply it to the adoption of halal hotel concept. This theory is chosen as the basis for developing a conceptual model to explain consumer patron due to its consistent capability to explain a substantial proportion of variances between behavioral intentions and actual behaviors. Although this model was used on research into the purchase of technology related products (see Davis et al., 1989; Mathieson, 1991; Adams et al., 1992), it can also be modified to suit other products such as the halal hotel. As halal hotel concept is relatively new, it is pertinent for the research to find out the behavioral intention and actual behaviour of consumers towards halal hotel. It is hoped that the theory is a good predictive model of consumers’ intention to patronize halal hotel.

On the other hand, personal and psychological factors that influence an individual's decision to make a purchase are also included in the framework to further understand the individual's motivations, and attitudes to choose the service. These variables are Perceive Value of the halal hotel and Individual Religiosity of the individual mediated by the Individual’s motivation and attitude towards the halal hotel. This research, will investigate whether the impact of aspects of religiosity on the intention to patronize as suggested by Farah (2000). People who take
consequences from their religiosity in their everyday life and people who strongly believe in dogmas are more willing to draw our attention to other aspects of religiosity (Stark and Glock, 1968). Religiosity is important as it is capable of influencing an individual cognitively and behaviorally. Recent research studies suggest that perceived value may be a better predictor of patronage intentions than either satisfaction or quality (Cronin et al., 2000; Oh, 2000). Perceived value is defined as “the consumer’s overall assessment of the utility of a product (or service) based on perceptions of what is received and what is given” (Zeithaml, 1988). As motivational process represents one prerequisite step to engage in a specific behavior (Hsu et al., 2010), customers’ underlying motivation is expected to mediate halal hotel consumption behavior. Besides, consumer’s attitude toward a specific object can be determined by one’s expectation of the object (Hsu et al., 2010). Attitude is defined as “a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object” (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, p. 10).

![Conceptual Framework](image)

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**
Methodology
This study will employ a mixed method which includes both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative research involves in-depth interview to explore insights into the main issues pertaining to the understanding of the Halal hotel concept. In-depth interview participants will be chosen among expert from Islamic Tourism Council, Halal Development Corporation, Ministry of Tourism, Tourism Malaysia, Hotel Association, tour and travel agents, attractions (e.g. shopping complexes, restaurants, museums etc.). The results of the in-depth interview will be the basis for the development of questionnaire which will be used in the subsequent part of the research which is the quantitative research. Quantitative survey will be carried on 1000 samples among Domestic and International tourists all over Malaysia. The advantage of quantitative survey is its coverage of a large population sample, and the ability to generalize the findings as a representative of true population. The results will provide tangible statistical evidence that could be used to support important decisions of actions and policies by the hotel industry and related agencies.

Conclusion
The purpose of this paper is to propose a conceptual framework for Halal Hotel in Malaysia. This study will contribute to Islamic Marketing literature by exploring a new product line in the hospitality industry i.e. the Islamic hotel and the factors that possibly lead to consumer acceptance of the product. Further it will provide a better understanding to the concept of Islamic hotel. The study will examine of the true potential of Halal Hotel, particularly, will help practitioners to gain a clear understanding of whether worth exploring and investing the Halal hotel market segment. With this understanding, hotel companies would be able to formulate more unique and effective strategies in pursuing the new Halal Hotel Concept.
References


