The Impacts of Motives, Barriers, and Behaviour on the Travel Package Attractiveness from Muslim Travelers Perspectives

Arman Hj. Ahmad, Izian Idris, Cordelia Mason, Muhammad Asyraf Hasim, Sulaiman Sajilan

Abstract: Travel agencies have modernized the way they communicate their package tours to travelers through digital technology. It is however imperative to also understand travelers’ needs in order to remain competitive in the market. In particular, it is crucial to clearly recognize the diversity in travel needs particularly the travel desires of Muslims travelers since they hold a different set of values and beliefs that guide their travel needs. Hence, this research attempts to understand Islamic travel needs among Muslim travelers and how such needs can impact the attractiveness of package tours in Malaysia. The travel needs of Muslim travelers i.e. travel motives, travel behavior and perceived travel barriers will be determined against the attractiveness of packaged tours. This paper proposes a conceptual model so that further analyses can be conducted and marketing strategies can be recommended to enhance the attractiveness of package tours developed by Travel agencies for Muslim travelers. By gaining a better understanding of Muslim traveler needs, tour operators in Klang Valley, Malaysia will be able to enhance their marketing strategies, increase the attractiveness and demand for their package tours and attract more Muslim travelers to travel with them.

Index Terms: Islamic tourism marketing; Malaysia; Muslim traveler’s needs, package tour.

I. INTRODUCTION

Travelling is one of those pastimes that most people have tried out or intend to do. In response to the market demand, industries and business owners have supplied travelers with customized travel plans i.e. package tours that enable traveling without the hassle of detail planning. Savvy travel agencies, in particular, took advantage of today’s digital technology to communicate their package tours via social media. This decision not only could stimulate digital engagement, but it also serves an advertising strategy (Voorveld, Noort, Muntinga & Bronner, 2018 and Voorveld, 2019) as communications through interactive platforms tend to attract wider audiences than orthodox adverts. Travelling in modern times is possible for almost anyone though each traveler holds a different set of values and beliefs that guide their travel needs. It is more so for Muslims as they are becoming more affluent and observant of the requirements of their religion (Alserhan, 2011). Muslim travelers tend to take extra caution during their trips in order to adhere to Islamic requirements. Such adherence towards religious consumption will be more apparent moving forward since the market specifically catering to the needs of Muslim is expanding due to the population growth. Thomson-Reuters (2018) reported that Islam is the fastest-growing religion across the world and the Muslim market is composed of approximately 23.4 percent or 1.6 billion of the global population. The travel needs of a Muslim thus may differ from the norm. Hence, it is imperative to grasp what exactly are the Islamic travel needs of a typical Muslim traveler in order to enhance the attractiveness of package tours among Muslims.

Furthermore, it is estimated that the Global Muslim Tourism Market (GMTM) outbound expenditure in 2011 was approximately USD126.1 billion which constituted 12.3% of total global outbound tourism expenditure. However, this amount does not include those of the Hajj and Umrah market (Malaysian Islamic Tourism Centre, 2019). In the same research, the Malaysian Islamic Tourism Centre (2019) reported that Muslim tourist expenditure from 2012 – 2020 is expected to grow to be approximately 4.79% per annum on average and by the year 2020, the growth in Muslim travel is expected to reach 4.8%. Interestingly, this figure is significantly higher than the global figure of only 3.8% (Malaysian Islamic Tourism Centre, 2019). As an Islamic country, Malaysia is one of the truly ideal Muslim-friendly destinations which in the right direction and position to drive the Islamic tourism sector (Malaysian Islamic Tourism Centre, 2019). Moreover, with this status and other advantages such as an extensive and well-develop Halal network, good infrastructures which met the Syariah compliances, consistent economic growth rate, government-backed business incentives as well as political and social stability, more and more numbers of Muslim travelers (locally and internationally) are expected to choose Malaysia as their preferred travel destination. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct this study to understand the true elements that could attract those Muslim travelers in choosing any package tours simultaneously increase the attractiveness of those package tours to meet the needs of Muslim travelers around the world.
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II. RESEARCH PROBLEM, QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

Research Gap

Muslim traveler is more likely dispersed in Asian countries since more than 60 percent of the global Muslim population is in Asia (Cornell University Library, 2017). Furthermore, about 25 percent of the global Muslim population resides in Southeast Asia which is dubbed as the ‘Muslim archipelago’ (Cornell University Library, 2017). Among Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia similarly to Brunei and Indonesia is a country known for its dense Muslim population. Pew Research Center (2011) estimated that 61.4 percent of Malaysians were Muslim in 2010 and projected the number to increase to 64.5 percent by 2030 while Kettani (2010) estimated that roughly 60 percent of the Malaysian population would be Muslim by 2020. The growth of the Muslim population is parallel to the Muslim market which in turn presents a prosperous opportunity for potential new business ventures.

According to the Malaysian Islamic Tourism Center (2019), Islamic tourism’s growth potential is increasingly recognized worldwide. This sector represents the largest and most lucrative untapped niche market in global tourism which is the Muslim travelers market. In the past, Islamic tourism means religious travel such as Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage to the Holy City of Mecca but over the years, this term has expanded to include Muslims who travel for the purpose of business, leisure and many more purposes. This new development in the world of Islamic tourism has given rise to the need for industry players which include restaurants, airlines, hotels and tour operators to understand the needs of these travelers and adjust their products and services so as to cater to the needs of this growing market segment. With a market potential of more than 50 Muslim countries and approximately 1.6 billion Muslims, remarkable opportunities await those who are willing to meet the demands for Muslim-friendly tourism products and services particularly the travel operators.

Knowledge regarding the travel needs of Muslim travelers would give travel agencies a head start of succeeding in these new ventures. Furthermore, studies that probe on the travel needs (e.g. Chhabra, 2012 and Chen & Shoemaker, 2014) have been conducted through the study on travelers but study within the boundary of religious context appears to be lacking. This paper henceforth offers to supplement such lack in order to provide the competitive edge needed by industry players.

Research Questions

There are several research questions that have been listed out in order to ensure the feasibility of this research. The items in the research questions are based on the variables that would be tested in this research. The research questions are as followed:

RQ 1: What is the relationship between Travel Motives and the Travel Package attractiveness among Muslim travelers in Malaysia?

RQ 2: What is the relationship between Travel Barriers and the Travel Package attractiveness among Muslim travelers in Malaysia?

RQ 3: What is the relationship between Travel Behaviors and the Travel Package attractiveness among Muslim travelers in Malaysia?

Research Objectives

In order to answer all the components in the research questions, the research objectives that have been developed for this research are as following:

RO 1: To study the relationship between Travel Motives and the Travel Package attractiveness among Muslim travelers in Malaysia.

RO 2: To study the relationship between Travel Barriers and the Travel Package attractiveness among Muslim travelers in Malaysia.

RO 3: To study the relationship between Travel Behaviors and the Travel Package attractiveness among Muslim travelers in Malaysia.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Travel Advertisement

The practice of advertising is aimed at persuading consumers to do something although, in some instances, the aim is simply informative: to inform the general public of the advertised product or company. In the beginning, the practice was a way to identify the advertised producer (William, Sandra, John & May, 2007). Technological advancement made it possible to reach a wider audience and thus advertising became more focused on providing commercial information.

Apart from visual, advertisement is infused with message appeals that play an important role in ‘bright up’ the advertisements. The manner in which these messages are communicated is crucial towards the advertising success since one of the most important creative strategy decisions involves the choice of an appropriate appeal. Some promotional messages use rational appeals and are designed to communicate information regarding a product or service and appeal to the logical aspects of the consumer decision-making process. With the rapid development of the Internet and other social media platforms, advertising has evolved into a vital communication system both consumers and businesses. In essence, it is strategic communication driven by objectives and these objectives can be measured to determine whether the advertising was effective or not. The message within an advertisement is conveyed through many different kinds of mass media. Intertwining advertising with media, however, comes at a cost as changes in how media are used are challenging as well as beneficial towards adverts (Duff & Segijn, 2019 and West, Koslow & Kilgour, 2019).

The Attractive Package Tour

A package tour is a planned trip whereby transport, accommodation and meal arrangements are advertised and sold together by tour operators otherwise known as travel agencies. Package tour was originally used to travel to other geographical regions in the 1840s and future changes in global legislation and relaxation of border controls led to its surge in demand (Baxter, 2013).
Such tours were deemed the most cost-effective way of traveling of the time and signified the popularization of package tours as a mean of transport abroad. Years later, travelers still opt for package tours although its role expanded by the late 1980s. Goodall (1990) reasoned the expansion was caused by the traveler’s preference of having a glimpse of knowledge regarding the destination beforehand. In some parts of the world, the group dynamics offered by package tours became the selling point for travelers, especially among Europeans (Quiroga, 1990).

In Europe where the environment can sometimes be perceived as hostile, the inter-tourist social interactions in a package tour-setting are comforting to the point that it encourages them to explore new experiences. However, the same reason might cause some to be less attracted to package tours due to cultural and societal influences. This concurs with Gholipour and Tajaddini (2014) who clarified that travelers from countries that rather avoid uncertainties if possible would take on a more collectivist approach and travel in groups instead.

Technology development enables traveling options such as holiday deals, flight and accommodation prices that were once inaccessible to be easily compared, thus affecting the sales of package tours (Chiappa, 2013). Travelers nonetheless are still attracted to package tours as the convenience, value and timesaving benefits that the tour offers are undeniable. Alliances forged between various tour vendors and local operational expertise have facilitated tour-exclusive activities that manage to attract the attention of travelers. In Malaysia, statistics estimated that 66% of local travelers prefer package tours instead of purchasing flights and accommodations by themselves (GFK Research, 2015). Even though today’s travelers are tech-savvy, they still take into consideration the information provided in the package tours for their traveling plans. Frias, Rodriguez, and Castaneda (2008) justified that travelers regard available information as credible as any stated destination and its activities have been reviewed by field experts hired by travel agencies. Hence, travelers; at least Malaysians, are still attracted to package tours. In order to measure the attractiveness of package tour in this study, nine items developed by Frias, Rodriguez & Castaneda, (2008), Nishimura, King & Waryszak (2007) and Wang, Ma, Jao & Lin (2013) will be utilized for data collection and further analyses.

IV. THE MUSLIM TRAVELERS

The notion of “self-concept” is instrumental in molding consumer behavior (Govers & Schoormans, 2005; Lindridge, 2005; Lindridge & Dibb, 2003; Bonne, Vermeir & Verbeke, 2007). The notion supports Salamn & Siddiqui (2011)’s claim that Muslim consumers’ have the tendency to behave in a certain manner that is acceptable in Muslim society. This is because members of a collectivist society are prone to be influenced by one another as they are more perceptive of their own regulation that believers observe and follow in their daily activities.

Similarly, Islamic regulation encompasses the consumption habits of Muslims. “Halal” for instance, is a common term among Muslims. Usage of the term has been used in the industry to attract Muslim’s attention such as Halal tour in the tourism industry and Halal Food in the food industry. In a multicultural nation such as Malaysia, the indication of ‘Halal’ is sought after by Muslims in their purchasing deliberation. Studies conducted by Ambali & Bakar (2014) and Baharuddin, Ahmad Kassim, Nordin & Buyong (2015) implied that Halal consumption is associated with hygiene, safety, and quality of higher standard. For Muslim travelers, the travel needs of a Muslim should uphold Islamic beliefs and anything that goes against it is avoided.

As mentioned above, traditionally the Muslim traveler is known as those engaged with traveling to perform Hajj or Umrah to the Holy City of Mecca but nowadays, the Muslim travelers are not only those who go to Mecca but also include those Muslims who travel for the purpose of business, leisure or many more purposes (Malaysian Islamic Tourism Center, 2019).

The Muslim Travelers’ Needs

Given that 84% of the global population is affiliated with some form of religion (Pew Research Center, 2012), it is not surprising to see that religion has been central in some consumer studies (e.g. O’Guinn & Belk 1989; Izberk-Bilgin 2012; McAlexander, DuFault, Martin & Schouten, 2014). In light of the Muslim population growth, this paper focuses on Islamic travel needs and how such needs impact the attractiveness of package tours among Muslims who travel. This is because advertising to Muslim consumers can be challenging as marketers must ensure that they uphold Islamic values in their marketing communication. Yet, little is known about the impact of package tour towards attracting the attention of Muslim travelers. The following shall discuss the attractiveness of package tours in relation to Muslim travel motives, travel behavior, and travel barriers. The discussion highlights issues and challenges that if address properly will benefit not only marketers and the tourism industry but the travelers themselves as well.

The Travel Motives

Muslims, like other travelers, are motivated by social influences in their traveling decisions (Carstensen, Isaacowitz & Charles, 1999). As reported by Malaysian Islamic Tourism Centre (2019) Muslim tourists and travelers chose Malaysia as their preferred travel destination because of several motives such as the availability of Halal foods and Halal activities, good infrastructures which met the Syariah compliances, consistent economic stability of the country, the availability of Halal businesses which received supports from Malaysian government as well as political and social stability. Thus, instead of attractive travel fares and availability of the travel schedule throughout the year, Muslim travelers are also more attracted to package tours that highlight these motives in their travel packages.

Apart from financial and time constraints, travel motives
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are influential during the decision-making process. Cleaver, Muller, Ruys & Wei (1999) define travel motives as the purpose of the trip.

Such motives can be caused by the urge to gain new experiences (Chen & Shoemaker, 2014) or feel the real environment of Muslim surroundings especially for those Muslim travelers who are living in a non-Muslim country. In addition to that, travelers also look for relaxation (Guillet, Lee, Law & Leung, 2011), thrill (Lim, Ramli, Yusof & Cheah, 2015) or simply to escape from daily routine (Jiang, Scott & Ding, 2014). Studies indicate that all travelers (regardless of their religions) have shown preference to package tours particularly in those involving social activities. Obrador (2012) claims that families that travel on package tours have a stronger familial bond while Kasim, Dzakiria, Park, Nor, Mokhtar & Radha (2013) added that Malaysians travelers, in particular, are able to conveniently meet new people despite being with relatives. Schanzel & Smith (2014) support the claim as the surroundings facilitated by package tours help strangers to become acquainted with one another.

Meanwhile, Mehmetoglu (2007) and Youssef & Marzuki (2012) mentioned that package tours revolving around shopping, sightseeing, and dining are sometimes favored. These sorts of activities exclude many physical activities though the motives remain to be socially influenced. Adverts of package tours provide travelers with information regarding various destinations and activities that may pique their interest. The level of attractiveness of package tours is nonetheless dependent on whether the advertising appeal has worked on travelers or not. As for this variable, fifteen items will be adapted from Chen & Shoemaker (2014), Youssef, & Marzuki (2012) and Battour (2017). Hence, it is predicted that,

H1: Travel motives have a significant influence on the attractiveness of package tours

The Travel Behaviors

Travel behavior is the manner in which travelers present themselves throughout the traveling period. Hence, the behavior of a traveler affects the attractiveness of package tours. Lepp and Gibson (2008) clarified that travelers’ willingness to take risks can influence the degree of package tour appeal as some travelers are more of a risk-taker compared to others. Averse-risk travelers tend to have more control over their traveling as they prefer to be independent. Regardless, Ortega, Rodriguez, and Philip (2014) emphasis that travelers often choose package tours with a comprehensive description by their standard that would be complementary towards self-enhancement. Studies (Pearce, 2013 and Morrison, Hsieh & O’Leary, 1994) indicate package tours offering similar comfort levels that allow travelers to behave normally are more appealing. This is because those that frequent resorts identify comfort through the availability of amenities and facilities and those that enjoy outdoor activities are likely to be attracted to package tours that require them to “rough it out”. The comfort offered by package tours nevertheless is proportional to travelers’ understanding of the advertised details.

Muslims as travelers are unique travelers as they not only look at the comfortability of the whole tour programs but also seek behavioral elements beyond what is norm such as praying five times a day, reciting Quran, reciting Do’a while traveling and many more. Thus they look for facilities offered by the travel packages such as apps that they can download in their smartphones before traveling such as qiblah direction, interactive Do’as and prayers mobile apps and many more. This kind of behavioral aspect if available and offered by travel operators will be considered as attractive by Muslim travelers (Engku Alwi, & Saany, 2019). Therefore, based on the above explanation, it is hypothesized that there is a significant relationship between travel behavior and the attractiveness of package tours from the Muslim travelers’ perspectives. In order to test this relationship, the ten items developed by Chen & Shoemaker (2014), Gokovali, Bahar & Kozak (2007) and Battour (2017) will be adapted.

H2: Travel behaviors have a significant influence on the attractiveness of package tours

The Travel Barriers

Law, Leung, Lo, Leung, and Fong (2015) highlights the success of package tours in Asia was due to overcoming travel barriers. Travel barriers hinder travelers to make a conclusive say for their travels and consequently lessen the appeal of advertised package tours. Such barriers are often caused by time and financial constraints (Shoemaker, 2000; Lee & Tideswell, 2005 and Tretheway & Mak, 2006) though younger travelers might be vulnerable to them more.

These barriers also applied to and faced by Muslim travelers (Battour, 2017). As an example, a travel or tour package to perform Umrah by tour operators is considered attractive by Muslim travelers (pilgrims) if the price of the package is reasonable and affordable (Khabibulina, 2016). Hence, the package tours should appeal to the cost-benefits of package tours in order to downplay the travel barriers. Furthermore, the distance of the destination will also important to be considered in developing an attractive tour package for Muslim travelers as it is related to the difficulties of travel among some aging travelers. The travel operators need to think of a suitable way to shorten the time of travel due to the distance of the destination. The mode of transportation will solve this problem as well as the direction of the travel and the time that the travelers will spend throughout the journey. Travel by air with direct flight to the destination will be more attractive than those which involve transit stops (Hambali, 2016). Therefore, the package tours should appeal to distance and travel duration-benefits of package tours in order to reduce the travel barriers. Physical barriers that pose a limitation in travelers’ activities also affect package tour appeal.

Studies such as Dolnicar (2005), Anderson and Harrison (2010) and Chen and Shoemaker (2014) agreed that the barrier though seems less appealing to younger travelers increases the attractiveness of package tours for aging travelers due to health and dietary requirements or safety and security purposes. Gonzalez, Rodriguez, Miranda, and Cervantes (2009) however noted that there are some who disregard this in order to feel young again. Consequently, attractive package tours should be able to overcome these barriers to attract more Muslim travelers to join the package.

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Another barrier is related to the fear of hassling which according to Chen and Shoemaker (2014) has led to the increased attractiveness of package tours. Travelers on tours are able to avoid the fear with more convenience as they can enjoy without hassles such as lack of companionship (Shoemaker, 2000 and Lee & Tideswell, 2005) and language restriction (Lepp & Gibson, 2008 and Mancini-Cross, Backman & Dennis, 2009). An attractive package tour should eliminate this barrier by offering a hassle-free tour package to Muslim travelers. The lesser the barrier of the travel, the more attractive the package tour will be. As for this variable, ten items developed by Chen & Shoemaker (2014), Battour (2017), Hambali (2016) and Khabibulina (2016) will be adapted to test the proposed hypothesis which predicts that there is a significant influence between the travel barriers and the attractiveness of package tours from the Muslim traveler’s perspectives.

H3: Travel barriers have a significant influence on the attractiveness of package tours

V. METHODOLOGY

Conceptual Framework

In order to understand the Islamic travel needs of Muslim travelers and how such needs can impact the attractiveness of package tours in Malaysia, this study adapts Chen and Shoemaker’s (2014) travel needs model. Chen and Shoemaker (2014) introduce the three dimensions of travel needs, which include travel motives, travel behavior, and travel barriers. This study will try to see the subsequent impact of those elements on package tours attractiveness. The conceptual framework in Figure 1 outlined travel motives, travel behavior and perceived travel barriers as the Islamic travel needs that affect the attractiveness of package tours offered Muslim travelers in this study.

Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework

This study shall be quantitative in nature. Bryman & Bell (2011) supported this approach as it is more suitable for data tabulation and statistical analysis. Primary data will be collected from Muslim travelers through the use of a questionnaire survey. Bernard (2011) justified that questionnaires are suitable to collect data from a large pool of respondents to prove that the research is theoretically important. Potential respondents are aged between 15 to 80 years old who are residing within the Klang Valley in Malaysia and the sample population will be based on several pre-determined selection criteria. This study targeted the Klang Valley residents because they are shaped by similar social environments and would have equal opportunity to be exposed to similar package tour offerings. Once the response rate for the survey is deemed sufficient, data collected will be analyzed using SPSS software for descriptive statistics and variables testing. For statistical consistency, age groups of travelers will be defined according to the standard prescribed by the United Nation.

VI. EXPECTED OUTCOMES (RESULT)

As for the survey that would be carried out to aid the development of this research, it is expected that all the predicted independent variables will significantly influenced and have a significant relationship with the dependent variable. The reason is that all the variables have been tested earlier in past literature. In addition to that, all the variables are acknowledged and received a lot of validation regarding their significance level among each other from the past academicians and scholars in the related fields. Hence, it is wise to assume the outcome of this experiment would be positive. Therefore, based on the above explanation and all hypotheses, it is predicted that all the Islamic travel needs elements (travel motives, travel behavior, and travel barriers) are significant in predicting and influencing the attractiveness of package tours in Malaysia.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness of Package Tours</td>
<td>Travel Motives, Travel Behaviors, Travel Barriers</td>
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H3: Travel barriers have a significant influence on the attractiveness of package tours

Conclusions

Fundamentally, this paper proposes a conceptual framework to study the needs of traveling from a Muslim’s standpoint and how their needs impact the attractiveness of package tours.

The Muslim population growth resulted in the market...
expansion for Muslim travelers. These travelers may have different traveling needs since Islamic requirements encompassed its believers wholly including daily consumption.

Thus, Muslim travelers’ attraction towards package tours may vary as they hold a different set of values and beliefs. In order to provide a better understanding, the literature highlights the role of advertising in attracting Muslim travelers towards package tours while the Islamic travel needs were discussed in terms of travel motive, travel behavior, and travel barriers. The outcome from this paper can bring huge benefits to government agencies, tourism operators, stakeholders in the industry as well as the public at large.

The implication to Islamic Marketing Theory and Practices

This paper enhances the existing works of literature by offering a different outlook on the study of travelers particularly by exploring the effectiveness of religious-oriented advertisement for package tours. The outlook provides a better understanding of what Muslim travelers want when traveling. Outcomes from this study foreshadow future directions to flourish the market for Halal tours and Halal tourism parallel to the growth of the Muslim population inside and outside of Malaysia. This study shall reveal the perceived as well as the expectation of Muslim travelers towards package tours in terms of marketing communication and advertising messages. Advertisers and marketers thus can apply knowledge gained from this study to create more attractive and Islamic oriented marketing campaigns that are more appealing to Muslims. Brands and companies, especially Halal-certified brands will gain many benefits from the findings of this study as they will understand the needs of Muslim travelers better and will be able to effectively tailor their adverts. Furthermore, government agencies that are responsible for the Halal industry in Malaysia [e.g. Halal Industry Development Corporation (HDC)] could treat this paper as supplementary guidance on what they are supposed to do in relation to Halal consumption.

The implication to Islamic Tourism Industries

This paper contributes insights regarding Muslim travelers’ needs and highlights possible gaps in tour operators’ current offerings particularly the contents of the package tour advertisement. Hence, tour operators will be able to be more creative in their advertising and eventually demonstrate that they can put together better packages than travelers can independently speak on the Muslim travelers’ needs. Subsequently, this study could potentially aid travel agencies and tour operators to gain benefits from a rise in demand for their service, increases customer satisfaction and a more positive outlook on the industry. In the long run, government bodies and policymakers could also utilize the results of this study to upgrade tourism policies and practices in Malaysia. This will not only increase travel and tourism in Malaysia but could also encourage more international travelers, which indirectly helps build better international relationships. Nevertheless, the understanding gained from this paper is beneficial to travelers themselves as they can better grasp their own traveling needs and maximize the convenience and value for their money when traveling.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study nonetheless is investigative in nature and thus bare apparent limitations. The specific group within a limited area will be targeted as rich qualitative data is desired instead. Therefore, further study should include non-Muslim travelers and its coverage broadens to investigate differing perceptions among cities or states. The researchers would also like to recommend future researches to conduct empirical research using the proposed framework and attest to the predicted assumptions on the hypotheses to see the real answers and verify the predictions.

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