

A Gap Identification in Muslim-Friendly Hotel Research in Malaysia: A Systematic Literature Review Approach

Noraini Rahim^{1*}, Wan Rusni Wan Ismail², Nuradibah Abdul Rahman³
Ahmad Redhuan Abu Bakar⁴

^{1,2,4}*Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Pulau Pinang, 13500 Permatang Pauh, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia*

³*Tasek Gelugor Community College, 13300 Tasek Gelugor, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia*

noraini970@uitm.edu.my

rusni.wi@uitm.edu.my

adibah@staf.kktg.edu.my

redhuanab@uitm.edu.my

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ABSTRACT

The Muslim-Friendly Hotel (MFH) is a concept introduced by the hotel industry to cater for a market segment that seeks accommodations that meet specific characteristics. Despite the increase of MFH establishments worldwide, research in this area is still in its infancy, and this study aims to investigate the immature areas related to MFH research. This study is conducted using the systematic review, following the Reporting Standards for Systematic Evidence Syntheses (ROSES) guidelines. Overall, the themes indicate gaps in current literature as these themes evolved around issues related to hotel facilities, regulations, standardisation, sustainable practice involving environmental issues and guest acceptance.

INTRODUCTION

The growth in the global travel industry has created a market for the diverse needs of travelers from various cultural and religious backgrounds. Muslim-Friendly Hotels (MFH) provide specific offerings such as halal food, prayer facilities, no alcohol or pork products, family-friendly environments, and privacy considerations, which are highly sought after by Muslim travelers (Hussin & Fauzi, 2022). Even though the concept was created to target Muslim consumers, the MFH does not only appeal to the Muslim niche market, but non-Muslim travelers also welcome the concept as conventional services are still available, provided that the services provided are not against the MFH concept (Abd Razak et al., 2019). Despite there being a clear indication of travelers' acceptance and growth in MFH worldwide, adoption of MFH is still low due to various factors, including problems with standardisation, government regulation, lengthy procedures in obtaining Halal certificates, operating guidelines, and facility operation, which are common problems discussed in previous literature (Mazlan & Ahmadun, 2023).

^{1*}*Corresponding author: noraini970@uitm.edu.my*

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Even though there is an increasing trend of research focusing on MFH, this topic is not as popular compared to other Islamic research, especially food and Halal Certification, as many Islamic research topics evolved around this area of study (Henderson, 2016). Limited research development related to the MFH topic is due to the niche areas that MFH represents in the hospitality field, as the earliest publication was less than ten years old. As the MFH concept itself is still relatively new in the hospitality industry, many previous studies are looking at the immediate issues that might potentially cause problems for MFH, such as guest acceptance, facilities and standardisation (Adbrakhmanova & Moghavvemi, 2022).

Therefore, this study aims to identify the gap in the literature about MFH research in Malaysia. Gap identification is crucial to determining missing information or areas not highlighted in previous research. This unexplored area will help to fill the body of knowledge that is still lacking, hence leaving a vacuum that creates many uncertainties and limitations for future research to conclude this topic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Malaysia as A Muslim-Friendly Travel Destination

Muslim tourists currently constitute about 20% of the total tourist arrivals to Malaysia, contributing about RM14.7 billion to the local economy in 2023 (Branded, 2024). Malaysia, renowned for its strong reputation as a premier Muslim-friendly holiday destination, has captivated travelers globally due to its rich Islamic culture and warm, safe environment for singles, families, and women. As illustrated in Figure 1, which showcases the top twenty destinations according to the Global Muslim Travel Index 2023, Malaysia consistently ranks among the leading choices for Muslim travelers. A nation is an excellent place for Muslim travelers because it has much to offer regarding natural beauty, cultural legacy, and easy access to halal food. Malaysia was honoured with the titles of Best Muslim-Friendly Destination and Best Muslim-Women-Friendly Destination at the Halal in Travel Awards in Singapore, as the New Straits Times (2023) reported. These accolades, awarded by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Crescent Rating in partnership with Mastercard, highlight Malaysia's commitment to providing inclusive and culturally sensitive travel experiences. This recognition highlights Malaysia's effective strategies in attracting Muslim travelers and positions it as a premier choice for the Muslim travel market, signaling the significant potential for further tourism growth.

Table 1. Top twenty destinations based on Global Muslim Travel Index 2023)

GMTI 2023 Rank	Change VS 2022	Destination	GMTI 2023 Scores
1	1	Indonesia	73
1	0	Malaysia	73
3	-1	Saudi Arabia	72
4	1	United Arab Emirates (UAE)	71
5	-3	Türkiye	70
6	0	Qatar	69
7	0	Iran	66
7	0	Jordan	66
9	0	Bahrain	65
9	3	Egypt	65
11	1	Kuwait	64
11	-2	Singapore	64
13	-1	Oman	63
13	-4	Uzbekistan	63
15	-3	Brunei	62
15	2	Tunisia	62
17	-5	Morocco	60
17	0	Pakistan	60
19	0	Lebanon	59
20	2	Kazakhstan	58
20	2	Kyrgyzstan	58
20	8	United Kingdom (UK)	58

Source: (https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Top-Twenty-Destinations-based-on-Global-Muslim-Travel-Index-2023-Mastercard_fig2_372799658)

Muslim-Friendly Hotel in Malaysia

The MFH industry in Malaysia is experiencing rapid growth, with Asia leading in visitor arrivals, as nearly 31% of all travelers identify as Muslims, according to the Crescent Rating Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) 2019 by Mastercard. Figure 2 illustrates this trend, highlighting Malaysia and Indonesia as top destinations in the expanding Muslim travel market (Crescent Rating, 2019). Malaysia and Indonesia have become the top two global travel destinations for Muslims (Malaysia, Indonesia Top Destination for Muslim Traveler, 2023). This growth is attributed to factors such as the increasing affluence of Muslim travelers, the expansion of direct flights between Malaysia and other Muslim-majority countries, and the rising popularity of Malaysia as a Muslim-friendly destination (Hasanah & Harun, 2020). The Malaysian government has taken several significant steps to promote Muslim-Friendly Tourism, as reported by The Edge Malaysia on May 27, 2024. The Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC), under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC), has intensified its efforts to position Malaysia as a leading Muslim-Friendly Destination. Among these initiatives is introducing the Muslim-Friendly Tourism and Hospitality Assurance and Recognition (MFAR) and Muslim-Friendly Tourist Guide (MFTG) programs, which aim to ensure the quality of products and services, enhance tourist confidence, and expand market opportunities.



Fig. 1. Crescent rating GMTI 2019

Source: <https://www.crescentrating.com/magazine/press-releases/3998/mastercard-crescentrating-global-muslim-travel-index-gmti-2019-indonesia-and-malaysia-take-the-top-positions-in-the-fast-growing-muslim-travel-market.html>

Issues in Muslim-Friendly Hotels (MFHs)

The concept of MFH is often plagued by unclear regulations and standardisation. Inconsistency and poor execution result from the absence of a single, all-encompassing regulatory framework for hotels that welcome Muslims. While halal food and services are certified by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), no single, all-encompassing set of rules applies to MFH. This gap results in inconsistent interpretations of the regulations by hotel operators, which in turn affects the delivery of services (Shaharuddin et al., (2022)). Some hotels ensure the provision of halal food and basic prayer facilities. In contrast, others need to offer more comprehensive amenities, such as alcohol-free environments and gender-segregated recreational areas, which are crucial for fully adhering to the principles of Islamic hospitality. This inconsistency can ultimately lead to reduced guest satisfaction, especially for Muslim travelers seeking a comprehensive Muslim-Friendly experience.

Moreover, another challenge for MFH is the fear of alienating non-Muslim guests due to social pressures that discourage openly advertising Muslim-friendly services such as halal food and prayer

facilities (Abdrakhmanova & Moghavvemi, 2022). This concern is rooted in several factors. For example, the hotels are wary that prominently promoting these services might make non-Muslim guests feel uncomfortable or excluded. Additionally, in predominantly non-Muslim regions, there can be backlash or negative perceptions from the local community if businesses highlight services tailored explicitly to Muslim guests. Hotels also strive to maintain a broad, inclusive brand image and worry that emphasizing Islamic attributes could lead to perceptions of exclusivity. Consequently, many hotels choose to downplay or omit information about their Muslim-friendly services in their marketing efforts, potentially missing out on attracting Muslim tourists who are seeking accommodations that meet their religious and cultural needs.

Issues with facilities are also widely documented in the literature. For instance, hotels that adopt the MFH concept need to remodel existing facilities to meet Islamic standards, leading to increased operational costs and interruptions (Che Omar et al., 2019). According to Malaysian Standard (MS) 2610:2015, there is a crucial guideline for hospitality providers, ensuring that their services cater to the needs of Muslim travellers by incorporating requirements related to halal food, prayer facilities, and other amenities that align with Islamic principles (Amer Nordin & Abd Rahman., 2018).

METHODOLOGY

The systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted according to the ROSES protocol. ROSES (Reporting Standards for Systematic Evidence Syntheses) offer a detailed structure and transparent reporting for a systematic review. The study performs a comprehensive literature search to identify related articles on MFH. Search parameters dedicatedly identify articles published between 2014 and 2024 utilizing databases such as Web of Science and Scopus. The keywords for the search string were selected according to the specific keywords related to the topic. Synonyms and other alternative words were considered, yet the uniqueness of MFH and terminology related to Islam were carefully selected to fit the search objective. Research about MFH in the context of Malaysia was acknowledged to be significantly immature in the number of searches (Robinson & Lowe, 2015), and 10 to 15 articles were deemed sufficient for systematic analysis. Additionally, all data relevant to the review protocol were reported in the ROSES flow chart, and the final 10 articles were included in the synthesis.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

1. Review Protocol -ROSES

The analysis protocol guiding this study is ROSES (Reporting Standards for Systematic Evidence Syntheses), specifically designed for scientific assessment and management. ROSES focuses on the early and middle stages of the review process, including searching, sampling, data retrieval, and critical appraisal. One of ROSES's key strengths is its flexibility in data evaluation (Haddaway et al., 2018). ROSES aims to assist researchers in providing the appropriate information with the necessary level of detail, thanks to its inherent flexibility. Haddaway et al. (2018) assert that each systematic review employs a highly dynamic and context-specific synthesis method, challenging a universally accepted reporting standard. ROSES simplifies the process, allowing researchers to ensure that the necessary details are provided appropriately (Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2021).

An SLR begins with formulating relevant research questions and developing a search strategy through three main sub-processes: detection, screening, and eligibility (inclusion and exclusion criteria). Once the articles are selected, they undergo an assessment to ensure their quality and meet the selection criteria (Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2021). Finally, the content of the chosen articles is thoroughly reviewed.

2. Research Question Formulation

The research process began with the formulation of the research question. To achieve this, the PICo framework, as outlined in Table 2, was employed, focusing on three key concepts: population or issue,

interest (topic of concern), and context (scope) (Lockwood et al., 2015). This technique is recommended for researchers to develop an appropriate research topic (Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2021). These components guided the authors in formulating the central research question: What are the gaps in MFH research in Malaysia?

Following the formulation of the research question, inclusion and exclusion criteria based on the Population, Interest, and Context (PICO) framework were established to guide article selection. This study explicitly targets research on MFH in Malaysia, and any articles that do not meet these criteria were excluded. The detailed guidelines for this process are presented in Table 3.

Table 2. PICO (Population, Phenomenon of Interest, Context)

P – Population of Issue	Muslim-friendly Hotel
I – Interest	Research gap
Co – context	Malaysia

Research Question: What are the research gaps in Muslim-friendly hotel research in Malaysia?

Table 3. Population, Interest and Context (PICO) based inclusion and exclusion criteria.

	Included	Excluded
Problem	Muslim-friendly hotels	Shariah-compliant Hotel
Population	Hotel service providers, Consumers, Enforcement Bodies, Legal Acts in Malaysia	Population outside Malaysia
Phenomenon of interest	Knowledge/awareness Attitudes Behaviour Religious/cultural belief Hotel management Hotel operation Hotel Facility Hotel attributes Muslim-friendly service Halal Kitchen in the hotel	Experimental Lab Research Islamic / Halal tourism Halal destination Halal recreation Halal Food Trail Exploration Halal transportation Halal hub Star-rating Hotel
Context	Malaysian population	Non-Malaysian population

3. Strategies for Systematic Searching

3.1 Searching

The initial and most critical step in conducting a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) involves identifying relevant studies by selecting specific keywords and utilising a search string to query various databases. For this study, Web of Science and Scopus were selected due to their extensive coverage of social science literature (Norris & Oppenheim, 2007). Web of Science includes over 100 million articles from 33,000 journals and 5,200 social science publications (Analytics C, 2017), while Scopus encompasses contributions from 21 educational institutions, including over 300 librarians and academics (Burnham, 2006). Table 3 outlines the comprehensive search string used in this study. The search process across these two databases yielded a total of 698 documents. The keywords were carefully selected based on the research question.

Table 4. The Search String

Database	Search string
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Halal-friendly" OR "Muslim-Friendly" OR "Islamic Hospitality" OR "Dry Hotel" OR "Modern Islamic" AND "Hotel")
Web of Science	TS (topic search) = ("Halal-friendly" OR "Muslim-Friendly" OR "Islamic Hospitality" OR "Dry Hotel" OR "Modern Islamic" AND "Hotel" OR "Accommodation")

3.2 Screening (Including Eligibility)

This study automatically screened all 83 initially selected papers by applying the database's sorting function. Kraus et al. (2020) highlights the importance of research field maturity, which guided the decision to restrict the review to articles published between 2014 and 2024. A 10-year time frame was chosen to capture long-term trends and developments, ensuring a comprehensive and mature understanding of the field. Searches on Scopus and Web of Science yielded 40 and 43 papers based on the specified search strings. The analysis was limited to journal articles written in English across all fields of study relevant to the context of Malaysia. Following removing 48 irrelevant articles, 34 papers were retained for further analysis. One paper, identified as a duplicate, appeared in both databases. Figure 3 shows the process flow of the ROSES review protocol.

3.3 Synthesis (Including quality appraisal and data abstraction and analysis)

The subsequent step in the synthesis process involved data abstraction and analysis. The preferred method for synthesising or assessing data through a qualitative or mixed-method approach involves extracting and synthesising relevant information from the selected papers (Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2020). This study adopted a qualitative approach, focusing on quality appraisals that were deemed crucial to evaluate the selected articles effectively, following the approach used in other systematic literature reviews (SLRs). This study focuses on ten selected papers that have been thoroughly examined, particularly in their abstracts, findings, and discussion sections. These papers represent approximately 12.08% of the publications initially identified in the databases for further investigation.

Quality appraisal was deemed crucial to evaluate the selected articles effectively, following the approach used in other systematic literature reviews (SLRs). Robinson and Lowe (2015) suggest that a systematic review in a specific field can be effectively carried out with a modest number of articles, usually around 10 to 15. Therefore, the number of articles included in this study is deemed sufficient.

To achieve this study's reliability, a data triangulation method employing thematic analysis was used. This method involves using multiple data collection techniques, investigators, data sources, and theories, which are analysed and cross-referenced to validate the findings. As highlighted by Lauri (2011), this approach effectively enhances the accuracy and dependability of qualitative research. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and categorise research areas, while NVivo word frequency analysis was used to organise and visualise the frequency of researched areas systematically.

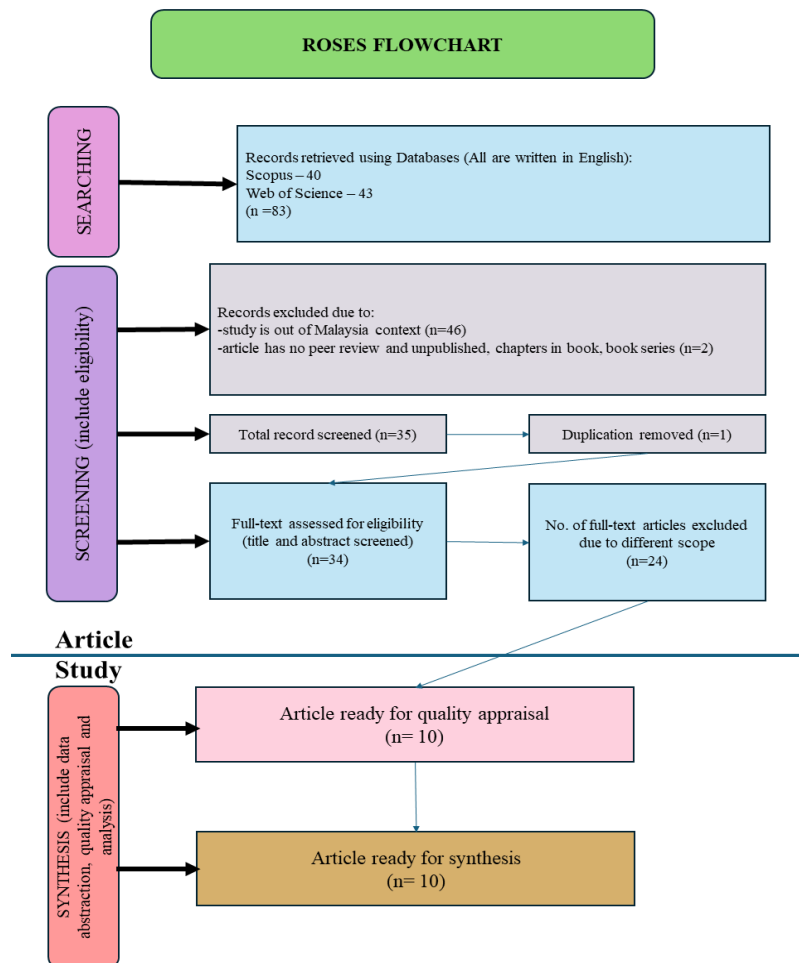


Fig. 2: ROSES flow diagram adopted and modified from Sordello et., 2020.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Background of Studies

MFH areas of study are very niche as they represent a small area of hospitality operations; hence, the number of publications is minimal, but also indicates a steady publication growth from 2016 to 2024. These publications are obtained through the Web of Science (WOS) and SCOPUS databases. The articles are summarised according to methods, year of publication and research design, as depicted in Table 5. Furthermore, the trendline of publication in Figure 4 indicates a significant growth in the studies related to MFH, suggesting the importance of the MFH concept for the hospitality industry in Malaysia.

Table 5: Summary of Background of Studies

No	Author(s)	Year	Research Method	Research Design / Theory	Title	Journal	Database
1	Ramli & Zawawi	2016	Qualitative	Conceptual Analysis	Shariah Compliant Hospitality Services" Or "Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services": Searching for A Balance	Malaysian Journal of Consumer and Family Economics	SCOPUS
2	Yahya et al	2020	Qualitative	Comparative	An Analysis of Muslim-Friendly Hotel Standards in Malaysia According to The Maqasid Syariah Perspective	International Journal of Islamic Thought	SCOPUS & WOS
3	Yusof et al.	2022	Quantitative	Social Exchange Theory	The Effect of Service Climate, Service Behaviour and Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction in Muslim-Friendly Hotels	Journal of Safety and Health at Work	WOS
4	Azali et al	2023	Quantitative	Social Exchange Theory	Why Not Travel to Malaysia? Variations In Inbound Tourists' Perceptions Toward Halal-Friendly Destination Attributes	Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research	WOS
5	Fajriyati et al.	2022	Quantitative	Three Factor Theory- Customer Satisfaction	Attributes Influencing Overall Tourist Satisfaction and Its Consequences for Muslim-Majority Destination	Sage Open Journal	WOS
6	Osman et al.	2024	Quantitative	Theory of Consumption Value	Consumption Values, Image and Loyalty of Malaysian Travellers Towards Muslim-Friendly Accommodation Recognition (MFAR)	Journal of Islamic Marketing	SCOPUS
7	Ma'asor et al	2023	Quantitative	Content Analysis - Descriptive Statistics Analysis	Level Of Islamic Attributes Practices By Muslim Friendly Hotel In Malaysia	Journal of the Malaysian Institute of Planners	SCOPUS
8	Kılıç	2024	Quantitative	Business Model Canvas	A Conceptual Model for Muslim-Friendly Hotel Entrepreneurship	Journal of Multidisciplinary Academic Tourism	SCOPUS
9	Sulong et al.	2024	Quantitative	Coalignment theory	Constructing Sustainable Halal Tourism Composite Performance Index for The Global Halal Tourism Industry	Asia Pacific Journal & Tourism Research	WOS
10	Haron et al.	2024	Quantitative	Theory of Planned Behaviour	Analysing Revisitation Dynamics: A Scholarly Analysis of Bootstrapping, Mediating Muslim-Friendly Context	Journal of Islamic Marketing	SCOPUS

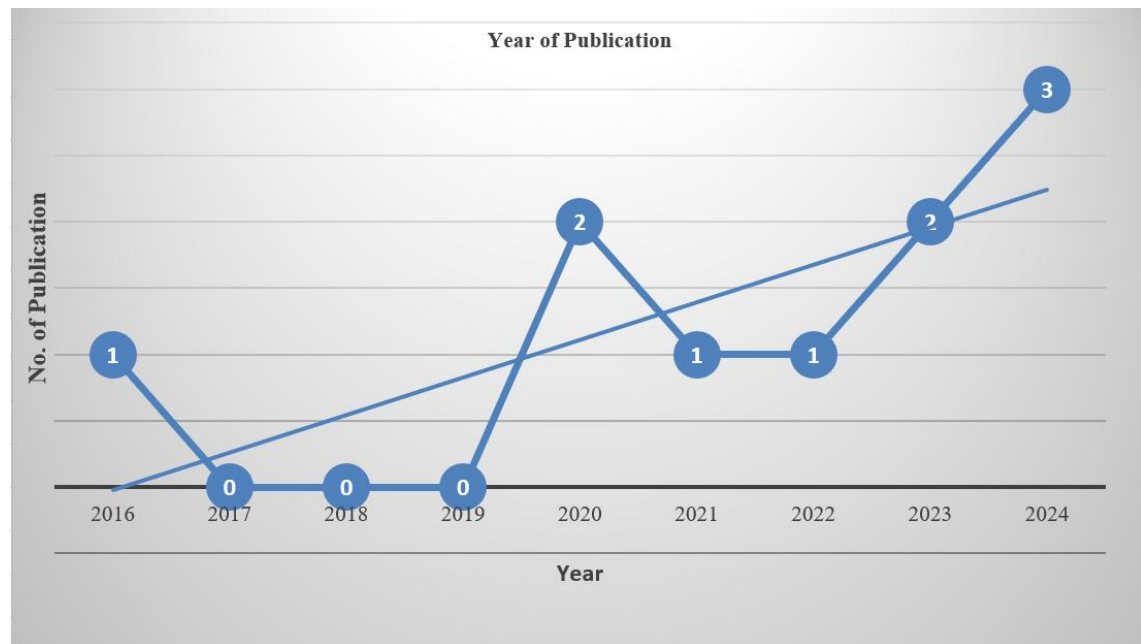


Fig. 3. Publication According to Year

2. The Themes

Table 6 shows five main themes identified through extracted words from N-Vivo word frequency analysis. The themes in Table 5 are generated using triangulation and deductive qualitative techniques where predetermined codes are drawn from literature and theory related to this study area.

Table 6: Extracted Keywords and Themes Identification

Extracted Words From N-VIVO Word Frequency Analysis	Themes
Loyalty, Satisfaction, Value, Revisiting, Complaint, Effect, Service Climate	Consumption Value
Attributes, Service, Hedonic, Accommodation, Standards	Islamic Attributes
Muslim, Islamic, Halal, Maqasid, Principle, Religiosity, Shariah, Terminologies	Islamic Law
Attitude, Intention, Influence, Behavioural, Attitudinal	Consumer Behaviour
Employee, BMC, Cost, Economic, Motivational, Operators, Performance, Resources, Revenues,	Resources & Capabilities
Sustainability, Social, Communities, Government, Public	Sustainable Practice

2.1 Consumption Value

Consumption values are related to how consumers portray the services and facilities provided by the MFH and whether these attributes meet their expectations. The importance of satisfaction is highly documented in previous studies, as satisfaction is directly linked with customer loyalty to hotels. Thus, by aligning

services with consumer value, hotels can create a meaningful customer experience that will infuse customer satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, consumption value is evaluated by consumers based on experience, online reviews, and bad word of mouth, which are often found to influence consumption value related to MFH (Nugraha et al., 2022).

2.2 Islamic Attributes

Destination attributes, which consist of various elements that attract visitors, play a central role in overall tourist satisfaction. While all tourists value generic features such as amenities, attractions, and services, Muslim travelers also seek additional aspects that align with their religious and cultural practices. These specific features, known as Islamic attributes, are essential in fulfilling the expectations of Muslim tourists at a destination. Dabphet (2021) highlights five critical Islamic attributes in hotel services that should be visibly implemented: a Halal-friendly environment, Halal food, proper Halal food preparation, and Halal-compliant washroom facilities. These Islamic attributes significantly shape the perceptions and satisfaction of Muslim tourists by addressing their unique needs and concerns while travelling.

2.3 Islamic Law

There are vital aspects to consider within this theme, each contributing to a broader understanding of Islamic law's influence in the MFH sector, such as Islamic Principles, Maqasid Syariah, Islamic Service Standards -MS2610:2015, Crescent Rating, and Salam Standard (Yahaya et al., 2020). The Muslim-friendly hospitality standard (MS2610:2015) aims to balance providing quality service and complying with Islamic law (Ramli & Zawawi, 2017). Islamic law thus provides a framework for shaping MFH standards, ensuring that they meet the expectations of Muslim guests while navigating challenges related to compliance, transparency, and uniformity across different regions.

2.4 Consumer's Behaviour

An MFH study on purchasing intention (Shariff et al., 2021) shows that consumer attitudes significantly impact purchase intention. The intention relates to consumers who understand the Halal principle, which will influence their intention to purchase Halal services from MFH. Hence, it explains that knowledge of Halal influences consumers' intention to choose MFH services. Consumers often evaluate the types of services offered, such as Halal intangible and tangible services (Jeaheng et al., 2019). Additionally, consumer behaviour on MFH reflects a dynamic trend that offers vast potential for future study.

2.5 Resources and Capabilities

Resources and capabilities depict an organization or hotel establishment's ability to fulfil Muslim-friendly hospitality standards and Shariah principles—resources and capabilities for MFH cover broad aspects of human resources, economics, and business models. A business model for MFH is often structured and customised to Halal services. Halal services attracting Muslim consumers are Muslim prayer facilities, Halal food, and gender-segregated areas (KILIÇ, 2024). However, the downside is that MFH costs are high due to the gender-segregation policy for room and hotel facilities (KILIÇ, 2024). Despite the high operating costs, the MFH sector offers revenue potential based on Muslim Friendly Hospitality's estimated value to attract 36 million and generate RM168 million in revenue (Mazlan et al., 2023). On the other hand, MFHs are exposed to challenges due to unstandardised services and marketing to attract Muslim consumers (Mazlan et al., 2023).

2.6 Sustainable Practice

Sustainable practice opens an opportunity to explore Muslim-friendly hotel concepts, which may contribute to the sustainable approach in minimizing the industry's ecological footprint and fostering Muslim ethics in sustainability. The Malaysian government plays a vital part in continuing to improve Halal standards for MFH to ensure compliance with Shariah governance (Samori et al., 2017). In addition to Halal compliance governance, an initiative that focuses on developing and sustaining the attractiveness and competitiveness of tourism destinations will eventually benefit local communities. Similarly, Rozi and Camelia (2022)

3. Research Gap Through N-Vivo Cloud Analysis

standards
sustainable motivational
principle accommodation maqasid
climate satisfaction bmc complaint
hedonic effect concept
consumers halal tourist attitude revenue
loyalty service muslim islamic public
hospitality values friendly intention economic
operators employee attitudinal
resources cost attributes influence religiosity
terminologies revisit behavioral social shariah
performance communities government
educational

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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partially explain the complete picture of this topic where changes in trends in MFH concepts may be visible. Future research may address this gap in primary data collection, which will further confirm the thematic findings. There are still apparent gaps in literature, such as the feasibility of MFH concepts, which have yet to be explored.

From a theoretical perspective, this research recognizes the significance of understanding the dimension of MFH and the hidden gaps identified through systematic analysis. Today, the hospitality industry is open to rapid changes, and a similar dynamic should be explored within MFH. Practical implications offer valuable information and forecasts for Muslim-friendly standards or policies that benefit the industry and end consumers.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Noraini Rahim conducted the literature review and served as the corresponding author, managing the manuscript submission and all correspondence with the journal. Wan Rusni Wan Ismail contributed to the discussion and conclusion, and acted as the anchor author, overseeing the overall structure, review, and final approval of the manuscript. Nuradibah Abdul Rahman developed the research methodology, conducted the data search, screening and selection process, and carried out the data analysis. Ahmad Redhuan Abu Bakar participated in the data search and screening and contributed to the formulation and writing of the discussion.

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