Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH) (e-ISSN : 2504-8562)
2022, Volume 7, Issue 9, e001765
DOI: https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v7i9.1765

Malaysian Acceptance of Muslim-Friendly Hotels: What Else Can It Provide?

Siti Anis Adilah Tarmazi[1], Siti Fatimah Hamid[2], Zubaidah Mohd Ali Tan[3], Ahmad Redhuan Abu Bakar[4*], Zarifah Mohd Zain[5]

[1]Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Pulau Pinang, 13500 Permatang Pauh, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.
Email: anisadilah@uitm.edu.my
[2]Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Pulau Pinang, 13500 Permatang Pauh, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.
Email: sitifatimahamid98@gmail.com
[3]Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Selangor, 42300 Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.
Email: zubaidah.tan@uitm.edu.my
[4]Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Pulau Pinang, 13500 Permatang Pauh, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.
Email: redhuanab@uitm.edu.my
[5]Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Pulau Pinang, 13500 Permatang Pauh, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.
Email: zarifahmz@uitm.edu.my

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR (*):
Ahmad Redhuan Abu Bakar (redhuanab@uitm.edu.my)

KEYWORDS:
Muslim Friendly hotel
Guest acceptance
Awareness
Push and pull motivators theory

CITATION:
Siti Anis Adilah Tarmazi et al. (2022). Malaysian Acceptance of Muslim-Friendly Hotels: What Else Can It Provide?. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH), 7*(9), e001765. https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v7i9.1765

ABSTRACT

Recently, Malaysia promotes Muslim-friendly travel and hospitality. A Muslim-friendly hotel's terms of service and policies must be understood because the hotel industry is the one with the highest growth. This could resolve any problem, enhance awareness, and enhance hotel guest acceptance. The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that influence hotel guests' acceptance of Muslim-friendly accommodations in Malaysia. Data for this study were acquired from 146 respondents using a self-administered questionnaire. Data analysis were aided by SPSS application to measure the relationship between administrative practices, common area practices, bedroom practices, services practices, food and beverage practices as well as awareness and the Muslim Friendly Hotel guest acceptance. Only four of the six factors—guest awareness, administrative procedures, bedroom procedures, and food and beverage procedures—are directly related to guest acceptance. In conclusion, this study contributes to the body of knowledge about the qualities that Muslim-friendly hotels value.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature about the qualities that Muslim-friendly hotels look for in their target market and focuses more on the attributes perceived by hotel guests.

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1. Introduction

The hotel industry in Malaysia is growing due to the growing contribution of tourism (Karim et. al, 2020). According to the COMCEC Coordination Office (2016), Malaysia has once again topped the list of the best Muslim-friendly holiday destinations for Muslim travelers. There is a concern on the part of the Malaysian government about Islamic values not only in daily life but also from the perspective of a traveler. Supplying the tourism goods and services required by the demand of Muslim tourists is called Muslim-friendly tourism. Therefore, Muslim-friendly tourism services are interpreted in accordance with Islamic principles. It is based on the advancement of Islamic practice for Muslim travelers from any part of the world who encounter situations that are incompatible with their faith and practices. Muslim-Friendly Hospitality services are products or services in the travel and tourism industry that are guided by Shariah requirements and cater to provide facilities suitable for Muslim travelers, such as airlines, hotels, entertainment, health and wellness, transportation, and food services (Zawawi & Ramli, 2018). Muslim-Friendly Tourism is defined as "The activities of Muslim travelers who do not wish to compromise their religious beliefs when they travel for a purpose" (COMCEC, 2016). In order to attract Muslim tourists from all over the world, Malaysia developed Muslim-friendly tourism. Since the government places an emphasis on assisting Muslim travelers, Malaysia is an attractive destination for tourists.

Malaysia is known as the world's number one Muslim-friendly destination due to incomparable hospitality and its top-notch facilities. Tourists can relax knowing that their fundamental necessities as Muslims are met by walking to the majority of hotels. In Malaysia, the majority of hotels and lodgings are well renowned for having halal-certified kitchens and Muslim-friendly amenities (Islamic Tourism Centre of Malaysia, 2021). The "Muslim-Friendly Hotel (MFH) Recognition" programme, a type of accreditation that certifies lodging that complies with Shariah for travellers, was also introduced. A total of 40 hotels in Malaysia were recognized as Muslim-friendly and categorized based on the degree of conformance to the established requirements. The three degrees of accreditation are platinum, gold, and silver. In-room prayer amenities including praying mats and kiblah direction signs, halal-certified eateries, segregated gyms and swimming pools for women are only a few of the requirements for meeting the standards (Malaysia Budget Hotel Association, 2016).

Muslim-Friendly hotel is not a new idea in Malaysia, however according to Hashim and Mohd (2022), the uncertainty of government regulation, the lengthy procedure of obtaining the Halal certificate, and the lack of a solid support system to support the implementation of Muslim-Friendly Hotels are the issues in implementing Muslim-Friendly Hotels in Malaysia. The number of hotels that provide comprehensive Shariah Compliant Hotel services is still limited. According to Samori et al. (2015), there are a few hotels that provide basic amenities to meet the demands of Muslim visitors and are referred to as Muslim-friendly hotels. However, there is still a dearth of awareness among Malaysians about the existence of MFH procedures. The majority of five-star hotels are multinational brands that have encouraged other hotel operators to use Shariah-compliant concepts in their operations. Despite the fact that many researchers have examined the hotel sector, particularly conventional hotels, few studies have been conducted on Islamic services provided by Malaysian hotels (Md Salleh et al., 2019). Since there are varied practices and awareness, the aim of this study is to study the effect of the administrative practices, common area practices, bedroom practices,

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service practices, food and beverage practices and awareness on guest acceptance towards Muslim-friendly hotels.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview of Muslim Friendly Hotel in Malaysia

A requirement for Muslim-friendly hospitality services was created by the Malaysian Department of Standards in 2015 (MS 2610:2015). According to Shariah regulations, this criterion attempts to maximise customer satisfaction by satisfying consumer requests while ensuring that goods and services offered to Muslim travellers are in compliance with Shariah principles (Department of Standards Malaysia, 2015). However, the use of this standard is entirely discretionary (Samori & Sabtu, 2014). The company should make sure the lodging facilities adhere to Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services criteria (MFHS). Therefore, the degree to which the service provider takes the effort to integrate existing hospitality concepts with Shariah norms and regulations as permitted by Islam will determine how well Muslim guests accept the concept of an Islamic hotel. It might be even harder for western hotel groups to adopt this idea (Albattat et al., 2018). In the Southeast Asia region, Malaysia is the most active country in developing and discovering prospects for Islamic tourism (Henderson, 2010a). In order to accommodate Muslim tourists, the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) created the Muslim-friendly Accommodation Recognition (MFAR), under which more than 40 hotels have been accredited. The 40 hotels are broken down into seven Muslim-friendly Platinum hotels, seven Muslim-friendly Gold Hotels, and twenty-six Muslim-friendly Silver Hotels (Islamic Tourism Centre of Malaysia, 2021).

2.2. Administrative practices

In the administrative portion of previous studies, management, financial, and human resource procedures were considered (Bangsawan et al., 2019). To fully respect the Shariah principle, hotel development and operation should be financed through financial arrangements. Razalli et al. (2015) recommended that a Shariah Consultative Committee be established as a hotel policy with the aim of auditing, training, and monitoring hotel operations based on the shariah concept. In the meantime, a Zakah (if a Muslim owns it) or a social responsibility programme (for a non-Muslim) should be paid by a Shariah-compliant hotel each year, as far as the financial procedures are concerned. This suggests that the hotel should pay zakah if its criteria for carriage (period of one year) and nisab are met. The hotel should pay zakah for business (achieve the required amount of zakah). Zakah's fundamental aim is to cleanse one's riches and guarantee that everybody receives equal wealth. Besides zakah, Islamic financing is also suggested in terms of wages, revenue savings, and investment for the hotel. In theory, Muamalat Islam allows for all transactions (Qawaid Fiqh), unless such transactions include forbidden components, such as usury (riba) (Vejzagic & Smolo, 2011).

2.3. Common Area practices

Public areas of the hotel are addressed by common area practises. This category includes Islamic entertainment and aurah, or male-female social contact in Islam (Henderson, 2016; Razalli et al., 2015). The majority of hotels today allow for gender mixing in the swimming pools, anticipating that Muslim female guests would be reluctant to use the swimming pool because the norm calls for them to wear attire that

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does not comply with Islamic teachings. Therefore, in order to give swimming possibilities for all genders, hoteliers should offer choices that are in line with both genders' religious beliefs. The practices include separate facilities or at the very least distinct schedules for men and women. Hotel operations procedures should be used for all legal components. In addition, drug dealing should not be permitted at the hotel. Furthermore, for the interior and design of the hotel, the building should not exhibit any art that is similar to that of humans or display any jewels that do not reflect any signs of living beings, and furniture layout must meet shariah principles (Sahida, Rahman, Awang & Man, 2011; Samori et al., 2013). Another important aspect of a hotel room is the permeability between the public area, hallway, and room, or, in other words, privacy. In order to ensure healthy social interaction between hotel guests and hotel staff, the privacy of guests needs to be respected. The hotel should provide smoking and non-smoking rooms as Malaysia prohibit smoking in certain public spaces. Therefore, customers will feel more comfortable if they are in an environment that is designed with a Muslim theme (Sahida et al., 2011; Stephenson, 2014).

2.4. Bedroom practices

As was previously said, the ideal Islamic approach to bedrooms in Muslim houses must enable family members to safeguard their privacy inside the confines of the home. In Malaysia, a room must be at least 6.5 m^2 in size to accommodate a bed, storage, room for movement, and space for praying. The Qiblah, the Quran, prayer tables, bidets, halal toiletries, halal in-room meals, Islamic entertainment, and non-alcoholic drinks are all included in the amenities of the rooms (Stephenson, 2014). Additionally, the hotel must offer both smoking and non-smoking rooms because smoking is detrimental in Malaysia. To put it another way, it simply entails designing the ideal themes, surroundings, architecture, and any other necessary support to ensure that Muslim visitors are at ease while they are at the establishment (Sahida et al., 2011). Muslim travellers may demand extra services during Ramadan. During Ramadan, Muslim travellers need dates and water to break their fast. Preference will be given to Ramadan buffet hotels. Certain hotels additionally include halal room service menus, a list of all halal eateries in the vicinity, and transportation to neighbouring mosques, among other amenities.

2.5. Service practices

A hotel is a service organization, and the front office department, where clients engage with hotel services, is the core of a hotel business. Staff at the front desk will collaborate closely with other departments to ensure that all of the guests' needs are met and, ideally, fulfilled. Reception is the most coveted job in the hotel sector. Reception is frequently referred to as the hotel's nerve centre. Within 24 hours, a hotel's reception desk must be staffed. Making bookings, checking in, checking out, and receiving guests are all examples of reception activities. In addition to being well-dressed, receptionists must be intelligent and capable of solving problems effectively. The Islamic dress code encourages modesty while attempting to reduce sin and immorality in society. Both men and women in Islam are required to dress simply, modestly, and with dignity. Henderson (2010b) mentioned that shariah regulations stipulate a strict prayer schedule and other adherences which are the basis for rules regarding diet, dress code, personal and social interactions. As a result, Muslims are particularly careful while choosing vacation spots, and they will examine local clothing regulations when travelling abroad. Furthermore, this aspect is critical for them to assess the level of comfort when staying in those visited locations. In essence, Muslims are instructed to

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cover their bodies and hair correctly in order to prevent being seen by other males other than her family, also known as "Muhrim" in Islam. Muslim women are not permitted to show their hair or bodies, according to Shariah. Timothy and Iverson (2006) state that men should cover their thighs. Besides, Islamic greeting, notice of the prohibition of alcoholic beverages, Islamic products/services (wake up call for Subuh prayer, Ramadan buffet, no gambling activities, and so on) and information about halal restaurants and mosques should be incorporated into service practices.

2.6. Food and Beverage practices

Halal is an Arabic word that means permissible or lawful. The opposite of halal is haram. In Malaysia, the demand of Halal food and Islamic-oriented hotel has instigated the government to believe that the country can become a chosen tourist attraction both for Muslim and non-Muslim travelers (Razalli & Yusoff, 2013). Both authors also proclaimed that the increasing numbers of Islamic-oriented hotel provides positive and great influence on the country. The hotel obtains halal certification not only for the kitchen but also for its restaurant, which serves all meals, including room service. The certification of halal programs, such as those in Malaysia, would be subject to stringent guidelines and inspections in a variety of areas, including food preparation, storage, and handling. This certification would ensure that the food available in the hotels is halal for Muslim consumption. According to Yang and Huang (2017), the global market for halal products is rapidly expanding, and halal is no longer associated with religious obligation or observance, but it can be considered the standard of choice for Muslims and non-Muslims worldwide. This is an extremely important aspect of Muslim culture, and it entails preparing food in accordance with Islamic laws. Furthermore, the consumption of any food or drink containing alcohol is prohibited. Muslims' awareness of the halal concept is also growing, which has increased the demand for halal foods that meet their religious requirements. A study done by Battour et al. (2018), reveals that the relevance of halal food offers may also appeal to non-Muslim guests. This study further revealed that some non-Muslim tourists were willing to consume halal food as long as the taste is fine. These tourists also did not mind to substitute pork with halal meat, fish or vegetarian food.

2.7. Awareness

In general, awareness refers to a person's knowledge and understanding of a particular issue. Constantly, the awareness of halal practices greatly contributes to consumers purchase intentions (Awan et al., 2015). According to Azam (2016), in the case of halal, the aspect of awareness depicts an individuals' special interest, experience, or knowledge pertaining to the purchase of product or service. Hence, awareness in the context of halal can be conceptualized as the apprising process to growing the levels of consciousness toward what is permitted and prohibited for Muslims to eat, drink and use (Ambali & Bakar, 2012). Due to the increased awareness and knowledge about halal and haram among Muslim consumers, marketers can no longer avoid the "halalness" issue by simply adding a halal logo to the package (Said et al., 2014). Halal awareness has emerged as a critical issue in Muslim consumers' decision-making processes, particularly in Muslim-majority countries such as Malaysia (Phuah & Wan Jusoh, 2013). Muhamad Yunus et al. (2014) have also demonstrated that halal awareness is critical for Muslim consumers when purchasing halal packaged foods produced by non-Muslim companies. Ghadikolaei (2016) also discovered that halal awareness and halal label have significant relationship with Muslim consumers' purchase intentions.

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2.8. Guest Acceptance

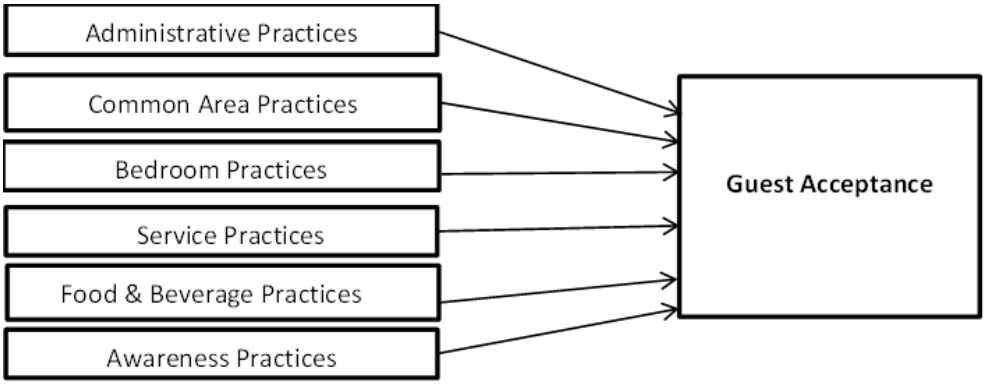
The consumers' acceptance takes place if the items or services supplied are willing to continue to be used. Acceptance is characterized as positive consumer feedback. Customers are considered as accepting and approving certain goods and services when they are ready to partake in anything related to the products offered (Mansor, Hamid & Muda, 2011). The more people consume it, the more precious it will be. In addition, great customer happiness leads to loyalty of customers, which will also help generate future revenues for the companies providing goods and services (Williams & Naumann, 2011; Lahap et al., 2016; Rahimi & Kozak, 2017). Indeed, the significance of the knowledge of consumer acceptance is crucial, given that it serves as a motivating basis for recurrent selection and is supported by customer pleasure (Martin et al., 2008). Understanding consumers' motives, expectations and demands provides the basis for providing the finest services by the supplier. It demonstrates that acceptance is occurring when customers offer favorable comments about something. Consumers' attitudes towards Shariah-compliant hotels are assessed by their acceptance and desire to remain, since their attitudes fluctuate among customers themselves (Che Ahmat et al., 2012).

2.9. Push and Pull Motivators Theory

According to Uysal et al. (2008), tourist destination decisions are influenced by four factors: push factors (internal needs), pull factors (external needs), trip features, and tourists' travel experience. It is proposed that tourists are first pushed by internal factors and then pulled by external factors in selecting specific destination for travelling (Battour, Battor & Ismail, 2012). Pull factors, on the other hand, are extrinsic motives associated with destination attributes that draw people to a specific location. In addition, pull factors come from within destinations, but these factors can help trigger push factors. Destinations thus should be able to meet customers' expectations in terms of prices, facilities and, most importantly, the level of quality provided. This means that, from time to time, destination managers need to augment their offers in ways that satisfy customers' needs and desires (Yousaf, Amin & Santos, 2018). However, Islamic pull factors include Muslim-friendly destination characteristics such as the availability of prayer rooms/prayer mats, non-alcohol and halal food, and separate beaches and bathrooms for men and women (Han et al., 2019). Battour et al. (2017) shed light on the critical role of Islamic norms and practices in strengthening the relationship between the destination's pull factors and the satisfaction of Muslim tourists. Thus, this study suggests the decomposition of push and pull motivators theory towards the guest acceptance towards Muslim-friendly hotel in Malaysia. The framework shown in Figure 1 is adapted from Othman, Mohd Isa & Thurasamy (2019) and Che Ahmat, Ahmad Ridzuan and Mohd Zahari (2012) to study the factors effecting guest acceptance towards Muslim-friendly hotel in Malaysia.

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Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Adapted from Othman, Mohd Isa & Thurasamy (2019) and Che Ahmat, Ahmad Ridzuan & Mohd Zahari (2012)

3. Methodology

This study is carried out using quantitative research in an attempt to explain what is observed. Purposive sampling is used for this study to identify the qualify respondents for this study. The questionnaires were distributed all over Malaysia via online mediums such as email, telegram, Facebook and WhatsApp. Screening question on whether the potential respondents have experience stayed in hotel were carried out to eliminate samples who does not fit the sampling frame. Since the actual numbers of the population have experience stayed in hotel cannot be determined at this time, power analysis was used by the researcher to decide on the number of samples to approach. Based on the power analysis calculation a minimum number of 146 sample size are required for this study.

4. Result

4.1. Reliability Analysis

Table 1 illustrates Cronbach's Alpha coefficient scores for all variables. Each variable is able to yield a highly reliable score. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient scores for both awareness (α =.935) which consists of 10 items and food and beverages practices (α =.941) with 5 items have shown an excellent score for internal consistency (α ≥ 0.9).

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha

Item	Item (N)	Cronbach's Alpha
Awareness	10	.935
Administrative practices	3	.855
Common area practices	5	.882
Bedroom practices	7	.893
Service practices	5	.860
Food and beverage practices	5	.941
Guest acceptance	7	.883

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Others remaining variables such as administrative practices (α =.855) with 3 items, common area practices (α =.882) with 5 items, bedroom practices (α =.893) with 7 items, service practices (α =.860) with 5 items and guest acceptance (α =.883) with 7 items respectively portray good reliability score (0.9 > α ≥ 0.8). High Cronbach's Alpha coefficient scores indicate that all items within the instrument for each variable are highly correlated. The internal consistency indicator for Cronbach's Alpha coefficient scores was based on the Cronbach Alpha Rule of Thumb by Sekaran and Bougie (2013).

4.2. Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 2 shows the result for Multiple Regression Analysis for this study. It portrays that respective independent variables are able to explained 65.4% (R^2 = .654) of the variance in the regression model.

The regression model is significant (F (6,139) =43.781; p<0.01). Four factors tested in the study have shown a significant influence on guest acceptance. Guest awareness (β= .370; p<0.001), administrative practices (β= -.125; p<0.01), bedroom practices (β= .499; p<0.001) and food and beverage practices (β= .295; p<0.001). Based of Beta Coefficients value, bedroom practices possess the highest contributor to guest acceptance towards Muslim Friendly hotel. On the other hand, administrative practices (β= -.125; p<0.01) shows invers result.

Table 2: Multiple Regression

Variables (Independent variables)	Std Beta coefficients
Total_A (Awareness)	.370***
Total_B (Administrative Practices)	-.125*
Total_C (Common Area Practices)	-.151
Total_D (Bedroom Practices)	.499***
Total_E (Service Practices)	.070
Total_F (Food and Beverage Practices)	.295***
R	.809
R^2	.654
Adjusted R^2	.639
F change	43.781
Sig. F change	.000

Note: * p-value < 0.1, ** significance at 0.05, *** significance at 0.001

5. Discussion

The study identifies factors of bedroom practices, awareness, food and beverage practices as well as administrative practices that do have a significant effect on hotel guest acceptance. Bedroom practices yielded with highly significant value towards MFH acceptance. Current hotel guests highlight a frequent topic pertaining to "room" in their online evaluation and feedback. The awareness factor as the second highest contributor could be viewed in terms of Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture initiatives and vigorous promotion in promoting awareness of the MFH concept. A significant relationship between visitor knowledge of Muslim Friendly hotels and how it influences guest acceptance of its implementation shows that the more guests are aware of Muslim Friendly hotels' policies, the more likely MFH will be accepted by the guest. Additionally, it indicates a conjecture that MFH needs effective promotion and strategic support from the government. "Food", consisting of elements of breakfast and taste, is the most frequent topic mentioned by hotel MFH guests. A study highlighted that food is a major

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predictor of Muslim-friendly hotel visitors' opinions in determining service quality. In addition, halal food quality is an important criterion for Muslim-friendly hotels (Oktadiana et al., 2016). Serving halal food is common among MFH. Thus, MFH should aim to increase halal food variety and start catching up with new food trends in the commercial market. Services in the hotel or tourist sector can affect the success or failure of a business's locations (Kamarudin & Ismail, 2017). On the other hand, the study found that service is not significant as guests only prefer to have a regular vacation and are not interested in MFH policies that may apply for specific events and ceremonies. MFH commonly has strict policies related to halal and haram according to shariah requirements. For example, alcoholic beverage policy and the type of event that could be organised. A similar approach was applied when suppliers delivered food materials that did not have clear halal documentation; they were rejected accordingly (Samori & Sabtu, 2014). The common area was insignificant as separate pools for female guests are not a major deal when the hotel has the room to develop a new pool or just adhere to the separate time for male and female guests. However, it does have a drawback issue as some guests may expect leisure time with all family members by the pool and they are restricted by the policy. An isolated or private area could be the best option for future MFH as serving the needs of the customer could still be fulfilled and shariah compliance is strengthened through policy and dedicated facilities. Finally, administrative operations were not significant as MFH guests were not aware of Islamic principles that must be applied to achieve shariah compliance in administrative practices. For instance, the payable percentage of earnings to zakah is a requirement. However, in terms of zakah, it is commonly referred to as confidential status among MFH players to not disclose their zakah contribution to the public. MFH guests would usually have good faith that when a hotel claimed to be MFH or shariah compliant, all shariah principles would be established and followed.

6. Conclusion

This research will contribute to the body of knowledge on customer preference towards the level of acceptance of Muslim-friendly hotels. The finding will expand our knowledge from the psychological perspective. In practical aspect, this study contributes on how to improve guest acceptance towards Muslim-friendly hotels in Malaysia. A customer's desire for a Muslim-friendly hotel can be determined after a thorough analysis of the respective factors. Both MFH industrial players who provide such services and the general consumer will gain benefits from the findings. This study may influence the analysis of customers' points of view and future expectations of Muslim-friendly hotels. New insights into consumer expectations, such as disadvantages and preferences, may be useful in future business strategy. However, there are certain limitations related to the study. The scope of Muslim-Friendly hotel practices explored in this study is narrow enough for a selective focus. Future researchers could broaden the scope by incorporating more extensive elements in Muslim-friendly activities as well as different sampling techniques such as stratified sampling.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the Branch Ethics Research Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA (BERC). All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance to ICH Good Clinical

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Practice Guidelines, Malaysian Good Clinical Practice Guidelines and the Declaration of Helsinki.

Acknowledgement

Part of this article was extracted from an undergraduate dissertation submitted to University Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang.

Funding

This study received no funding.

Conflict of Interests

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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