

# Conflicting halal attributes at halal restaurants and consumers' responses: The moderating role of religiosity

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## ABSTRACT

Halal tourism has gained significant attention in the tourism and hospitality literature, yet the questions on *Halalness* remained *unanswered*. This study proposes a conceptual framework that investigates how the conflicting halal attributes—conflicting halalness, conflicting social servicescape, conflicting atmospherics—lead to Muslim tourists' attitude ambivalence, which further generates psychological discomfort followed by adverse downstream bipolar behavioral responses—choice deferral and revisit intention. Moreover, the present research examines the moderating role of tourists' religiosity on attitude ambivalence through conflicting halal attributes. Data were gathered from 546 inbound Muslim tourists at various halal restaurants in China. Results reveal that conflicting halal attributes positively affect tourists' attitude ambivalence that stimulates their psychological discomfort, which, in turn, triggers positive choice deferral and negative revisit intentions. Religiosity partially moderates the associations between conflicting halal attributes and tourists' attitude ambivalence. The study's findings extend the literature on Islamic marketing, service management, consumer psychology, halal tourism, and halal restaurants.

## 1. Introduction

The word Halal (حلال), also spelled hallal or halaal, is an Arabic word which means acceptable, allowable, and permissible (Akhtar, Sun, Ahmad, & Akhtar, 2019a). The concept of 'Halal' is derived from the Quran and the prophet's Hadith, which define it as permissible, lawful, and having no restriction according to Islamic Sharia Law (Al-Qaradawi, 1999; p. XXV). Moreover, from a tourism perspective, Halal tourism refers to the objects or actions in the tourism industry, which the Islamic Sharia Law allows Muslim tourists to practice or observe (Akhtar et al., 2019a; Battour & Ismail, 2016). Ryan (2015, pp. 12–14) and El-Gohary (2016) suggest that halal tourism spans hospitality, leisure, social and recreational services, halal food, and the Sharia dress codes in hotels, airlines, and restaurants. According to The New York Times, since 2016, the halal tourism industry has grown 30%, and over the next decade will reach \$300 billion from the current \$180 billion. The State of Global Islamic Economy Report 2018/2019 identified that the global Muslim tourists spent \$1.3 trillion on beverages and food in 2017. Its growth

rate is 6.1% and is expected to reach \$1.9 trillion by 2023 (Reuters, 2018). This coverage in the business press clearly shows the growth of the industry. However, the observant Muslim—who performs daily prayers, fasting and is highly religious—tourists face difficulty to find the halal-certified food in non-Muslim countries. For example, McDonald's has falsely advertised non-halal chicken as halal and had to pay \$700,000 for settlement in a lawsuit (Huffpost, 2013). Likewise, a restaurant in Japan with halal certification was caught for storing non-halal meat (NST, 2018). In Xian, China, Muslim restaurants were found selling non-halal products and alcohol (UCAnews, 2015). Similarly, the Pan Asian Restaurant used halal-certified meat for Muslim tourists and pork for non-Muslim consumers with separate cooking under one roof (TripAdvisor, 2018). In terms of advertising, numerous restaurants used halal standards—such as “pork-free,” “Muslim-owner,” “halal certifications,” and “halal logos”—from Halal World Institute (HWI) to attract Muslim tourists (HWI, 2020). Moreover, Euromonitor International showed that Western chains such as Chillis and TGIFriday had no halal certification. Yet, they pretended to be Muslim friendly,

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which violated the protocols of halal restaurants (Fazira, 2018). Such reported incidents and personal experience of tourists develop inconsistencies in their attitudes.

In non-Muslim countries, the observant Muslim tourists act in more religious manners due to their strong cognitive beliefs and behavioral dimensions, including interpersonal religiosity and religious activists (Safiek, 2009). Although Halal restaurants use halal food standard MS1500:2004 to attract Muslim tourists (Carboni & Idrissi, 2016), Muslim tourists worry about the above-mentioned undesirable practices when they find unlawful and restricted products and services at halal restaurants (Meenchee, Sizhong, Rabiul, & Zhangyue, 2018). Therefore, the involvement of halal restaurants in non-Muslim countries in unlawful, mixed, and contradictory exercises affect religious beliefs and can generate conflicting thoughts among Muslim tourists, such as attitude ambivalence. Attitude ambivalence refers to simultaneous evaluations of both positive and negative conflicting thoughts and mixed feelings toward objects, resulting in inconclusion and indecision of consumers (Akhtar, Siddiqi, Akhtar, Usman, & Ahmad, 2020; Siddiqi & Akhtar, 2020; Wang, Batra, & Chen, 2015). Thus, the halal restaurants' double-edged sword attributes are more likely to cause cognitive conflicts (e.g., interpersonal religious beliefs), incompatible cognitions, and attitude ambivalence among Muslim tourists.

A body of literature has investigated the causes and outcomes of consumers' attitude ambivalence and behavioral intentions in online contexts (Conner et al., 2002; Pang, Keh, Li, & Maheswaran, 2016; Siddiqi, Sun, & Akhtar, 2019; Wang et al., 2015). While the present literature has examined the causes and consequences of consumers' attitude ambivalence, few studies have explored consumers' ambivalence and behavioral outcomes in halal tourism context. For instance, Wang et al. (2015) examined the consumers' experience of contradictory and mixed feelings toward an object, which causes attitude ambivalence that leads to psychological discomfort. Priester et al. (2007) have argued that any or few conflicting attributes or opposite valence evoke ambivalence, which in turn is associated with adverse behavioral intentions. The simultaneous occurrence of positive (pleasant) and negative (unpleasant) situations shape conflicting reactions, and consumers consequently engage in ambivalent behaviors (Penz & Hogg, 2011). Scholars have identified that social influences significantly affect consumer behavior. Specifically, contradictions in service encounters develop emotional ambivalence and choice deferral intentions (Huang and Chang, 2018). Thus, mixed attributes, contradictory experience, and conflicting service environments are more likely to create a degree of tension and conflict causing attitude ambivalence and consequent adverse behavioral reactions.

The previous literature's primary aim was to examine conflicting attributes in the development of attitude ambivalence and its associated behavioral intentions. Given their importance, the tourism trends in halal tourism in general and halal restaurants in particular certainly urge the researchers to investigate consumers' attitude ambivalence for conflicting halal attributes. In this context, we argue that the three attributes, i.e., halalness of food, physical environment, and social servicescape influence observant Muslim tourists' cognitive and religious beliefs and thoughts (Battour, Ismail, Battor, & Awais, 2017; Ha & Jang, 2012; Khan & Khan, 2019). Therefore, to have deeper understandings of tourists' attitude ambivalence and behavioral intentions, the utilization of conflicting attributes into research frameworks would be a better research initiative. Thus, to answer multiple research calls (Battour et al., 2017; Ha & Jang, 2012; Khan & Khan, 2019), we introduce the three conflicting attributes into present study namely halalness, social servicescape, and atmospherics at the halal restaurants to understand Muslim tourists' attitude ambivalence and behavioral intentions. Moreover, their religious beliefs and thoughts generally guide the visit of Muslim tourists at halal restaurants in non-Muslim countries. As a result, they act as followers of Islamic Sharia laws to reduce the risk of using unlawful and restricted products and services. Scholars discuss that halal products and services at halal restaurants are still a matter of

some debate, and Muslim tourists observe the halalness, physical environment, and social servicescape (Battour et al., 2017; Khan & Khan, 2019; Weaver & Agle, 2002). Thus, it will be worthwhile to investigate the interactive effects of religiosity and conflicting restaurant attributes on the attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of observant Muslim tourists.

Drawing on these arguments, we posit that there is a need to develop a conceptual model based on the conflicting attributes prevalent at the halal restaurant settings especially when these attributes have not been empirically examined concerning tourists' attitudinal ambivalence. The present study aims to fill this void by developing a conceptual model to investigate Muslim tourists' attitude ambivalence and associated behavioral intentions in response to conflicting attributes at the halal restaurants. The present research model examines the effect of conflicting attributes (i.e., halalness, social servicescape, and atmospherics) at halal restaurants to create attitude ambivalence. In so doing, we investigate the influence of attitude ambivalence on the formation of tourists' psychological discomfort and behavioral responses. Furthermore, we examine the moderating effect of religiosity on the relationship between conflicting attributes and attitude ambivalence. This way, it adds to the literature in various ways. First, this study develops and validates a model of conflicting attributes at halal restaurants and explains its outcomes. Second, it contributes to the body of literature on Islamic marketing and service management by examining three conflicting attributes at halal restaurants and their outcomes. Third, it also investigates the moderating role of religiosity on the effects of conflicting attributes. Practically, the study findings assist the management of halal restaurants in developing valuable strategies to eliminate causes of attitude ambivalence and encourage Muslim tourists to revisit halal restaurants.

## 2. Review of literature and hypotheses formulation

### 2.1. *Conflicting halalness and tourists' attitude ambivalence*

'Halalness' refers to the degree of permissible, lawful, or halal as assumed by Muslim consumers (Khan & Khan, 2019). Wardi, Abror, and Trinanda (2018) argued that halalness denotes halal attributes such as halal foods, kitchen, dress code, cutlery, halal logo and certification, and being free of gambling. However, suspicious, restricted, non-permissible, non-familiar, and unaware attributes in terms of halalness are translated as "Shubhah" (i.e., conflicting, contradictory, doubtful, or questionable) (Hakeem & Lee, 2018). Scholars discussed conflicting or contradictory features as simultaneous thoughts (i.e., positive and negative), inconsistent feelings aroused by the mixed or bivalent attributes of a product or service, which cause individuals' attitude ambivalence (Huang et al., 2018). It can be inferred from this discussion that conflicting and contradictory attributes of halalness at halal restaurants are more likely to develop inconclusive or ambivalent attitudes.

According to Akhtar et al. (2019b), mixed, conflicting, and contradictory hotel firms' attributes result in poor information processing and high cognitive effort, which develops attitude ambivalence. And, the incongruent or conflicting cognitive state activated by food products causes uncertainty and inconclusive attitude (Jakubanecs, Fedorikhin, & Iversen, 2018). Research on attitude ambivalence has mentioned that consumers' evaluations of food products induced by mixed (e.g., positive and negative) and conflicting attributes develop inconclusive thoughts (Olsen, Prebensen, & Larsen, 2009). In consumer psychology research, consumers' evaluations of two independent components of opposite valence cause mixed cognitive reactions that lead to an ambivalent attitude toward products or services (Akhtar et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2018; Siddiqi & Akhtar, 2020; Yang & Unnava, 2016). Similarly, Boukamcha (2017) showed that cognitive and affective contradictions in an object activate uncertainty and attitudinal ambivalence. The variations in situational factors, environment, and the objects

affect consumers' cognitive ability and thoughts, which produce instability leading to the inconclusive evaluation of these stimuli (Luttrell, Petty, & Briñol, 2016; Wang et al., 2015). Thus, these studies affirm that tourists' evaluations of contradictory, mixed, and conflicting motivational and external factors (e.g., halal attributes) at halal restaurants develop opposing cognitions and intra-attitude discrepancy, which trigger inconclusive and ambivalent attitude toward halalness.

Based on these arguments, we posit that consumers' experience of conflicting, contradictory, and mixed halalness at halal restaurants affects cognitive beliefs resulting in inconsistent feelings, thus causing uncertainty and inconclusive decision-making. In case of conflicting halalness at the halal restaurants, we propound that the more often halalness is imbued with inconsistent, mixed, and conflicting attributes, the more likely it is to cause consumers' attitude ambivalence regarding conflicting halalness at halal restaurants. In response, we propose the following hypothesis.

**H1.** Conflicting halalness at the halal restaurants is positively associated with tourists' attitude ambivalence.

## 2.2. *Conflicting social servicescape and tourists' attitude ambivalence*

The idea of social servicescape has its origins in a widely accepted model of servicescape. This model by Bitner (1992) discusses the influence of physical factors (non-human) of the service environment on consumer behavior. Consumers may also use the human factors of the service environment to evaluate the service provider (Line, Hanks, & Zhang, 2018). Thus, the concept of social servicescape suggests that human elements such as the presence, look, and behavior of service providers and other consumers affect consumers' cognitive and psychological behaviors in the consumption space (Hanks, Line, & Yang, 2017). Likewise, contradictory, contrasting, and incongruent social servicescape (e.g., physical and facial appearance) induce instability in consumers' attitudes and behavior (Mariani, Borghi, & Kazakov, 2019). This instability can be reflected in terms of attitude ambivalence. Building on these arguments, we deduce that conflicting and contradictory social servicescape at halal restaurants is likely to develop Muslim tourists' attitude ambivalence.

Islamic marketing literature has identified that observant Muslim tourists focus on human factors exhibited in social servicescapes, such as service staff and customers. Moreover, the contradictory social servicescape affects their dining experience and attitude (Khan & Khan, 2019). According to Line and Hanks (2019), the contradictory appearance of front line employees such as their hairstyles, tattoos, attire, makeup, and piercings influence consumers' perception that develops attitude ambivalence. Similarly, Line and Hanks (2019) mentioned that employees' appearance of conflicting affects consumers' evaluation of social servicescape, which causes uncertain attitude. The research on the halalness of restaurants has identified that the absence of cleanliness, accents, and manners of service providers affects consumers' attitudes and decisions to revisit (Khan & Khan, 2019). Likewise, scholars showed that insufficient knowledge, lack of competency, and contrasting physical appearance of service staff during service encounters affect consumer cognitive beliefs, which cause inconclusive decisions (Ha & Jang, 2012; Harris & Ezech, 2008). These studies demonstrate that the contradictory appearance of social servicescape can cause consumers' ambivalent attitude. Drawing from the above discussion, we infer that tourists' experience of inconsistent, contradictory, and conflicting social servicescape at halal restaurants contradict with their religious thoughts and beliefs. As a result, they can develop unresolved and uncertain feelings and consequent indecisions. To sum, we argue that conflicting social servicescape at halal restaurants is more likely to create consumer attitude ambivalence toward the restaurants. Thus, in the present case, we frame that the more often social servicescape at halal restaurant appears with contradictory, conflicting, and inconsistent features to the consumers, the more likely they are to develop attitude ambivalence.

Therefore, the authors formulate the following hypothesis.

**H2.** Conflicting social servicescape at the halal restaurants is positively associated with tourists' attitude ambivalence.

## 2.3. *Conflicting atmospherics and tourists' attitude ambivalence*

Kotler (1973) explained atmospherics as the conscious design of a buying place to create particular emotional influences in consumers to increase their purchasing probability. In restaurant studies, the non-human factors such as music, design, background, odor, and ambient conditions influence tourists' evaluation of the situation and increase emotional and attitudinal responses (Ha & Jang, 2010, 2012; Jang, Liu, & Namkung, 2011). However, the notion of atmospherics embedded in services marketing literature can contradict the Islamic marketing perspective. For example, interior and exterior design such as background music, ambient condition, lighting, and physical environment contradictory to Islamic laws can affect consumers' evaluation and development of behavioral intentions (Akhtar et al., 2019c; Khan & Khan, 2019; Wardi et al., 2018). Thus, from this perspective too, contrary and opposing atmospherics at the halal restaurants can be more likely to cause Muslim tourists' attitude ambivalence.

Some studies have demonstrated that the conflicting and contradictory atmospherics adversely affects consumers' attitude and behaviors. For example, Kim, Kang, and Park (2014) argued that loudness of background music elicits a higher level of intolerance, irritation, and unpleasant arousal, which cause avoidance behavior. The scholars mentioned that physical attributes unaligned to Sharia principles, such as mixed swimming pools, without separation spa and hair salon for males and females, and no separate prayer space cause consumers' ambivalent attitude that leads to inconclusive decision-making (Isa, Chin, & Mohammad, 2018). Similarly, in their seminal study, Wardi et al. (2018) found that Muslim tourists heavily rely on Islamic physical and nonphysical attributes for their decision making. The present study further proposes that tourists' encounters with opposing and conflicting atmospherics can significantly cause attitude ambivalence. The empirical studies further found that disparate elements of atmospherics provoke a wrong impression on the consumer and develop sadness and unfavorable mood ending in reluctant behavioral responses (Ha et al., 2010; Khan & Khan, 2019). Hence, the influence of atmospherics at halal restaurants on consumers' attitudes and behavioral responses depends on atmospherics, which are conflicting, inconsistent, and contradictory to Islamic regulations. The ensued consumers attitudes affect behavioral intentions regarding revisit to the halal restaurants. Thus, consumers' experience of inconsistent, contradictory, and conflicting atmospherics at a halal restaurant influence their religious beliefs that develop adverse feelings, which provoke uncertain and ambivalent attitude. Therefore, in the current case of conflicting atmospherics at halal restaurants, we frame that the more often atmospherics at halal restaurants appear with contradictory, conflicting, and inconsistent elements to the consumers, the more likely they are to form attitude ambivalence. Thus, we hypothesize the following.

**H3.** Conflicting atmospherics at the halal restaurant are positively associated with tourists' attitude ambivalence.

## 2.4. *Tourists' attitude ambivalence and psychological discomfort*

Attitude ambivalence refers to the simultaneous assessment of the bipolar degree of attitude (i.e., positive and negative) or the coexistence of assessments of the opposites (Kaplan, 1972; Wang et al., 2015). Priester et al. (2007) mentioned that consumers' ambivalence toward an object equates to a sense of discomfort, tension, and sadness. In their study, Wang et al. (2015) explained that inconsistent and uncertain consumer attitude is connected with confusion and psychic tension. Recently, Akhtar et al. (2019c) have found that consumers' attitude ambivalence is associated with conflicting information in an object and

significantly influences their psychological discomfort. Likewise, consumers' felt ambivalence or conflicting feelings induce tension and anxiety, which are positively associated with psychological discomfort (Festinger, 1957; Pang et al., 2016). Therefore, we can infer that attitude ambivalence not only engenders consumers' sadness, anxiety, and tension but also creates psychological discomfort.

Several scholars have argued that ambivalent consumers tend not to provoke behavioral responses for an object at the attitude-formation stage. For example, Akhtar et al. (2019b) conceptualized that attitude ambivalence depends on the object's conflicting attributes, which create psychological discomfort and associated behavioral intentions. Ambivalent consumers have low predictive behavior because they feel more adverse and inconclusive toward an object, which causes a state of psychological discomfort (Yang & Unnava, 2016). Similarly, Ahmad and Sun (2018) mentioned that ambivalence and uncertainty caused by distrusting beliefs represent a state of psychological discomfort in consumers' minds determining behavioral responses. Moreover, the intra-attitudinal discrepancy generates confusion and disruption, which engender individual internal psychological conflict and tension (Boukamcha, 2017). Moreover, a prior study (Penz & Hogg, 2011) identified that contradictory, conflicting, and opposing reactions toward an object develop consumers' attitudinal ambivalence and, in response, consumers experience psychological discomfort and avoidance behavior.

Based on the studies mentioned above, we contend that the activated attitude ambivalence determines a state of sadness, anxiety, and uneasiness among consumers, leading them to passiveness, stress, and psychological discomfort. Therefore, the authors assume that attitude ambivalence is more likely to cause psychological discomfort toward the conflicting attributes at halal restaurants. Thus, in the present context, we frame that the more consumers develop attitude ambivalence for the halal restaurants, the more they feel anxiety and state of psychological discomfort for the restaurants. Accordingly, we formulate the following hypothesis.

**H4.** Tourists' attitude ambivalence is positively associated with their psychological discomfort.

## 2.5. Psychological discomfort and consumers' behavioral responses

Classical research explained that individuals' state of psychological discomfort has unpleasant and adverse outcomes such as negative feelings, anxiety, and sadness, which further engender adverse behavioral responses (Festinger, 1957). Moreover, psychological discomfort is associated with confusion, conflict, and contradiction affecting the behavioral intentions. In this study, we evaluate the influence of the ensued consumers' psychological discomfort in the development of their bipolar behavioral intentions—choice deferral and revisit intentions—for the halal restaurants. Marketing scholars have theorized that psychological discomfort adversely influences consumers' behavioral intentions. For example, Ahmad and Sun (2018) found that psychological discomfort positively engages consumers in negative electronic word-of-mouth and less repeat purchase intentions. Similarly, Boukamcha (2017) argued that negative emotional appeal in the ambivalence object causes psychological inconsistency, which triggers resistance to persuasion. Evidence for this bipolar distinction can be found in a recent study by Akhtar et al. (2019b), in which they established that tourists' psychological discomfort and frustration directly negatively affect consumers' feelings of happiness, which causes negative intentions to use and less purchase behavior. This discussion shows that consumers' state of discomfort negatively influences their decision-making processes.

In their work, Pang et al. (2016) and Dhar (1997) mentioned that the state of discomfort often generate choice deferral in consumers and they postpone their decision making in search of additional information and other alternatives. Further, mixed emotions and conflict tendencies cause a cognitive state of dissonance that shapes adverse consumer

reactions in the form of avoidance behavior and unwillingness to buy (Penz & Hogg, 2011; Siddiqi et al., 2019). Consumers experiencing psychological discomfort sit on the fence and feel more uncertainty and inconclusiveness when evaluating the conflicting and contradictory objects, which often results in bipolar adverse behavioral outcomes (Akhtar et al., 2019c; Ahmad and Sun, 2018).

In another study, Olsen et al. (2009) mentioned that consumer anxiety is a psychological state in which consumers exhibit sadness, anger, and discomfort triggering bipolar evaluative responses. Similarly, Jakubanecs et al. (2018) theorized that the state of conflicts and contradictions is usually associated with dissonance and discomfort, which serve as an indicator of negative behavioral consequences. Based on the above arguments, we posit that consumers are more likely to experience bipolar behavioral intentions after experiencing psychological discomfort from the conflicting attributes at the halal restaurants. Therefore, in our context, we frame that the more often consumers feel psychological discomfort for conflicting attributes at the halal restaurants, the more they engage in choice deferral and revisit intentions. Thus, we formulate the following hypotheses.

**H5.** Tourists' psychological discomfort is positively associated with their choice deferral for halal restaurants.

**H6.** Tourists' psychological discomfort is negatively associated with their revisit intentions for halal restaurants.

## 2.6. The moderating role of religiosity

Religiosity refers to "the degree of an individual's beliefs and commitments about the absolute definitiveness and inherent truth qualities of a religion's teaching and scriptures" (Ahmed, Najmi, Faizan, & Ahmed, 2019). Ariffin, Ismail, and Shah (2016) argued that religiosity or religious affiliation of individuals to a specific religion actively guide their attitude and behavioral outcomes. Social scientists indicate that religious affiliation and religious beliefs of people influence their intra-psychic factors such as attitude and behavior (Mansori, Sambasivan, & Samsinar, 2015). As such, consumers' religiosity is associated with internalization of values, beliefs, and attitudes, which dominantly affect behavioral intentions. In the present context, due to this internalization, contradictory and conflicting religious practices at halal restaurants are more likely to cause consumers' attitude ambivalence as hypothesized previously (i.e., in H1, H2, and H3). Thus, the relationship between conflicting restaurants' attributes and ambivalence can be contingent on the religiosity of Muslim tourists. To better understand the relationships between conflicting attributes (i.e., halalness, social servicescape, and atmospherics) and attitude ambivalence, we propose religiosity as a moderating variable.

Islamic marketing researchers have mentioned that the difference between consumers' religiosity or religious beliefs and attributes at halal restaurants can cause ambivalent attitudes and adverse behavioral intentions. For example, Ahmed et al. (2019) argued that religiosity determines consumers' attitude and behavior, and the unfamiliar, conflicting, and suspicious ingredients of halalness might be problematic when not accurately comprehended. Bhuian and Sharma (2017) have found that dissimilar religious practices positively develop uncertainty that significantly intercepts between attitude and behavioral intentions. In another study, scholars found that observant Muslim consumers respond ambivalently when they experience attributes conflicting to religion (Ariffin et al., 2016). Similarly, consumers dining at halal restaurants in non-Muslim countries often experience conflicting atmospherics and displays, which contradict with their religious beliefs and lead to attitude ambivalence (Khan & Khan, 2019). In consensus, Ahmed et al. (2013) found that inconsistency between religious beliefs and consumption attributes strongly cause indecisive and inconclusive purchase intentions. Thus, we deduce that the contradiction between religious beliefs and the halal restaurants attributes engender inconsistent, inconclusive, and ambivalent attitudes.

Given the importance of religiosity, scholars have advanced the literature of Islamic marketing and consumers' psychology by understanding its influence. For example, Battour et al. (2017) argued that Muslim tourists at halal restaurants particularly note the contradictions of halalness of food ingredients, halal logo, brand name, premises, and cleanliness. Likewise, Khan and Khan (2019) mentioned that observant Muslim tourists focus on conflicting human factors (i.e., social servicescape) such as service staff and other customers who may affect their dining experience. Ha and Jang (2012) explained that the non-human factors at restaurants such as music, design, background, odor, and ambient conditions influence tourists' evaluations of the situation and the development of emotional and attitudinal responses. In particular, Muslim tourists have religious thoughts and beliefs that obligate them to visit halal restaurants. According to Weaver and Agle (2002), religious beliefs affect human emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. We have already established that conflicting halalness (i.e., contradictory atmospherics and mixed social servicescape) generate conflicting cognitive thoughts, beliefs, and incongruent interactions, which cause attitude ambivalence. Scholars have argued that contradictory and conflicting opinions of sellers as perceived by consumers actively develop consumers' ambivalence which causes product or service replacement decisions (Huang et al., 2018). We infer from the above arguments that the tension and dissimilarities between Muslim tourists' religious beliefs and attributes at the halal restaurants cause attitude ambivalence. Moreover, tourists' religiosity influences the relationships between conflicting attributes and attitude ambivalence. Thus, we postulate the following hypothesis.

H7. Religiosity positively moderates the effects of (a) conflicting halalness, (b) conflicting social servicescape, and (c) conflicting atmospherics on tourists' attitude ambivalence.

### 3. Research methods

#### 3.1. Research instrument and measures

We used a self-administrated questionnaire based on multi-item scales to collect data. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. At the start of the questionnaire, we explained the purpose of the research and conflicting attributes at the halal restaurants. The first section consisted of multiple-item scales of the constructs of the study. We adapted the scales from the studies previously conducted in a similar context and modified some items slightly to make them congruent with the present context. To measure the conflicting halalness, we employed a five items scale from Battour et al. (2017) and adapted it slightly to reflect the availability of halal food and beverage, segregated halal kitchen, separate area for women, and ban of non-halal food. A seven-item scale from Khan and Khan (2019) was adopted to measure conflicting social servicescape, including the type of customer dining, wearing head scarfs, halal logo, serving personnel, and comfortable dining. Conflicting atmospherics were measured with three items from Ha and Jang (2012).

We asked respondents to evaluate their experience regarding layout, music, and interior design at the halal restaurant. For attitude ambivalence, we employed five-items scale from Moody, Galletta, and Lowry (2014), and adapted for the context of Chinese halal restaurants. We measured psychological discomfort with four items reflecting disappointment, annoyance, guilt, and self-criticalness, borrowed from Ahmad and Sun (2018). Further, we assessed consumers' behavioral intentions using choice deferral and revisit intentions. To measure choice deferral, four items from Pang et al. (2016) were modified slightly to anchor halal restaurant choice and to later decisions. Similarly, the authors measured consumers' revisit intentions with four items borrowed from Akhtar et al. (2019a) with minor changes to retain core themes regarding respondents' anticipated continuing visits, continuity to go, the expectation of continuing the visits, and the future intentions.

Finally, a scale of four items from Ahmed et al. (2013) was employed to measure the religiosity. It was modified slightly for the present setting retaining its core elements, including regular worship, spiritual values, religious practices, and being very religious (Please see Table 2). The second section of the questionnaire included eleven questions regarding participants' basic demographics characteristics (Please see Table 1). In addition, we used respondents' demographics (e.g., income, education, occupation, and age) as control variables. The control variables are in line with the prior literature (Ahmad & Sun, 2018; Akhtar et al., 2019). We tested the internal consistency of measurement items and conducted a pilot study. The participants of the pilot study consisted of 58 inbound tourists at the halal restaurants in Beijing. The results of the pilot study demonstrated that all variables' Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) scores exceeded the threshold value of 0.70; the Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) scores: conflicting halalness = 0.817, conflicting social servicescape = 0.793, conflicting atmospherics = 0.851, attitude ambivalence = 0.764, psychology discomfort = 0.839, choice deferral = 0.803, revisit intentions = 0.729, and religiosity = 0.737.

#### 3.2. Sample and survey procedure

We chose inbound Muslim tourists as the study's population and approached them at halal restaurants in Chinese cities of Beijing, Shenzhen, Shanghai, Xi'an, Hangzhou, Guangzhou, and Kaifeng. We selected these cities due to the rapid growth of Chinese halal tourism industry, specifically halal restaurants, in them (Roohi, 2019). China has

**Table 1**  
Socio-demographic information.

Respondents profile	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	284	52.0
Female	262	48.0
<b>Age (Years)</b>		
20-25	89	16.3
26-30	137	25.1
31-35	153	28.0
36-40	105	19.2
41-45	22	4.02
46-50	18	3.30
51-55	13	2.38
56 and above	09	1.65
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Unmarried	249	45.6
Married	297	54.4
<b>Occupation</b>		
Students	152	27.8
Government officials	107	19.6
Businesspersons	196	35.9
Scholars	91	16.7
<b>Qualification</b>		
High School	94	17.2
Senior High School	105	19.2
Undergraduate degree	117	21.4
Graduate degree	172	31.5
PhD	58	10.6
<b>Income</b>		
≤US\$ 1000	78	14.3
US\$ 1001–2000	59	10.8
US\$ 2001–3001	90	16.5
≥US\$ 3001	134	24.5
<b>Duration of stay</b>		
2 weeks	79	14.5
1 month	158	28.9
3 months	165	30.2
6 months	144	26.4
<b>Nationality</b>		
Asia	147	26.9
Europe	93	17.0
America	103	18.9
Africa	137	25.1
Other Countries	66	12.1

**Table 2**  
Results of measurement model validation.

Constructs	Statements and scale	FL	CR	AVE
<b>Conflicting halalness <math>\alpha = 0.85</math></b>	(5- point, strongly disagree - strongly agree)			
CH1	There is an availability of halal food at halal restaurants at tourism sites, airports, shopping malls, hotels, parks, etc.	0.750	0.865	0.563
CH2	There is an availability of segregated halal kitchens in halal restaurants.	0.714		
CH3	There is an availability of segregated areas for women at halal restaurants.	0.721		
CH4	There is an availability of halal restaurants with segregated halal food and beverages for Muslims.	0.753		
CH5	There is a ban on non-halal food and beverages in halal restaurants.	0.808		
<b>Conflicting social servicescape <math>\alpha = 0.84</math></b>	(4- point, strongly disagree - strongly agree)			
CSS1	If there is a halal logo, I often look at the type of people dining there.	0.754	0.901	0.566
CSS2	If the customers in the restaurant look Muslim, I have confidence in dining there (e.g., wearing a headscarf).	0.780		
CSS3	The types of customers dining are a good indicator of halal food being served in a restaurant.	0.756		
CSS4	If there is a halal logo, I often look at the serving personnel.	0.700		
CSS5	If the serving personnel look Muslim, I feel confident dining there (e.g., wearing headscarves).	0.713		
CSS6	If the serving personnel look Muslim, I feel comfortable dining there.	0.786		
CSS7	The serving personnel of a restaurant is a good indicator of Halal food being served there.	0.772		
<b>Conflicting atmospherics <math>\alpha = 0.82</math></b>	(7- point, strongly disagree - strongly agree)			
CA1	The interior design of the halal restaurants reflects Muslim culture.	0.786	0.868	0.688
CA2	The music played in the halal restaurants entertained me.	0.906		
CA3	The layout and facility aesthetics of the halal restaurants were somewhat different from those of the non-halal restaurant, so they were fun to me.	0.791		
<b>Religiosity <math>\alpha = 0.94</math></b>	(7- point, strongly disagree - strongly agree)			
RL1	I go to the mosque and place of worship regularly.	0.900	0.945	0.811
RL2	Spiritual values are more important than material things.	0.912		
RL3	If halal restaurants follow more religious practices, this would be a better country.	0.909		
RL4		0.880		

**Table 2 (continued)**

Constructs	Statements and scale	FL	CR	AVE
<b>Conflicting halalness <math>\alpha = 0.85</math></b>	(5- point, strongly disagree - strongly agree)			
	I consider myself to be very religious.			
<b>Attitude ambivalence <math>\alpha = 0.79</math></b>	(5- point, strongly disagree - strongly agree)			
AA1	Possessed reactions towards the halal restaurants that are mixed versus one-sided.	0.756	0.870	0.573
AA2	Felt conflicted in my reactions to the halal restaurants.	0.728		
AA3	Felt indecisive to buy from the halal restaurants.	0.776		
AA4	Felt the tension in my thoughts and feelings towards the halal restaurants.	0.767		
AA5	Felt ambivalent towards the halal restaurants.	0.757		
<b>Psychological discomfort <math>\alpha = 0.85</math></b>	(5- point, strongly disagree - strongly agree)			
PD1	After feeling ambivalent about the halal restaurants, it makes me feel disappointed.	0.816	0.856	0.597
PD2	After feeling ambivalent about the halal restaurants, it makes me feel annoyed.	0.765		
PD3	After feeling ambivalent about the halal restaurants, it makes me feel guilty.	0.762		
PD4	After feeling ambivalent about the halal restaurants, it makes me feel self-critical.	0.747		
<b>Choice deferral <math>\alpha = 0.84</math></b>	(5- point, does not apply at all – applies very much to me)			
CD1	After being psychologically discomfort, I would be likely to take the halal restaurant choice.	0.881	0.887	0.663
CD2	After being psychologically discomfort, I would not take the halal restaurant choice.	0.877		
CD3	I would be likely to search for more information about similar halal restaurants and decide later.	0.746		
CD4	I would be likely to search for more information about other halal restaurants and decide later.	0.743		
<b>Revisit intentions <math>\alpha = 0.85</math></b>	(5- point, strongly disagree - strongly agree)			
RI1	I anticipate continuing to visit the halal restaurants in the near future.	0.923	0.905	0.707
RI2	It is likely that I will continue to go to the halal restaurants.	0.746		
RI3	I expect to continue to visit the halal restaurants in the near future.	0.762		
RI4	I am satisfied with my decision to go to the halal restaurants and will go again in the future.	0.915		

Note: FL = factor loading; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted;  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha.

over 20 million Muslims and a Muslim tourism market of USD 600 billion (World Tourism Alliance, 2017). In this regard, China took the initiative to promote the country's Muslim history and offered business opportunities to the Emirates airline to start flights to connect Yinchuan, the capital city of Ningxia province, to Dubai, Amman, and Kuala Lumpur. Chinese government also planned to develop a World Muslim City worth USD 3.6 billion as a part of Hui cultural theme park to link China and the Middle East (Joles, 2019). The tour operators in China have signed agreements worth USD 490 million, with more than twenty countries' tour operators to promote halal tourism (Xinhua, 2013). Similarly, Chinese Muslims offer halal foods per Islamic law to mitigate the concerns of Muslim tourists (Muslim, 2018). Furthermore, in China, Muslims have developed various halal restaurants such as Khan Baba, Yijunyuan restaurant, and Istanbul Turkish restaurant to attract Muslim tourists, thus serving halal and non-alcoholic foods (Muslim2China, 2018). Accordingly, the present study used a cross-sectional survey relying on convenience sampling to collect data. Convenience sampling is considered appropriate, as reported by the extant research (Nikbin, Hyun, Baharun, & Tabavar, 2015). Despite the caveat of less generalizable findings, convenience sampling is used due to the easy access to the respondents' and the relevance of the items to them (Nikbin et al., 2015). Thus, convenience sampling does not pose a significant concern for our study. To collect data, we trained seven doctoral candidates. At the start of the survey, we asked a confidential question to participants regarding their religion to ensure that only Muslim consumers participated in the study. A typical questionnaire took approximately twenty minutes to complete. The doctoral candidates thanked the respondents for the completion of the survey and gave them an appreciation card and a small gift. In total, data collection exercise took nine weeks between July 3, 2019 and September 2, 2019. Total 741 questionnaires were distributed of which 583 were returned (response rate of 78%). We rejected responses with extreme, incomplete, and missing values. As a result, a total of 546 responses met the criteria for further analysis. In addition, the authors used Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measures of sample adequacy ( $KMO = 0.872$ ), Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Approx. Chi-Square = 10884.157,  $df = 630$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Further, we followed Tabachnick et al. (2001) and performed the Skewness and Kurtosis analysis to test the normality of data. The results were within the cutoff scores ( $\pm 1$ ,  $\pm 3$ ).

## 4. Data analysis

### 4.1. Sample profile

We used IBM SPSS 25.0 to perform descriptive analysis to provide socio-demographic information of participants (see Table 1). The participants consisted of both male 284 (52%) and female 262 (48%). The majority of respondents (28%) were between the ages of 31–35 years, followed by 26–30 years (25.1%), 36–40 years (19.2%), 20–25 years (16.3%), 41–45 years (4.02%), 46–50 years (3.30%), 51–55 years (2.38%), and 56 and above years (1.65%). Among the participants, 54.4% and 45.6% were married and unmarried, respectively. We categorized the participants amongst four occupations; most of the participants were businesspersons (35.9%), followed by students (27.8%), the government officials (19.6%), and the smallest group of the scholars (16.7%). Most respondents had Bachelor and Master degrees, 289 (52.9%), followed by 17.2% high school, 19.2% senior high school, and 10.6% doctorate. Frequency regarding monthly income showed 134 (24.5%) respondents' earning  $\geq$  \$3001 and the rest of 227 (75.5%) participant  $\leq$  \$3001. Most of the respondents had a stay of one month or above 467 (85.5%), followed by two weeks duration of stay (14.5%). The authors categorized the nationality amongst five categories; the majority of the participants were Asians (26.9%), followed by Africans (25.1%), Americans (18.9%), Europeans (17%), and respondents from other countries (12.1%). In addition, we tested the effects of control variables on attitude ambivalence and results revealed insignificant

effects; income ( $\beta = -0.055$ ,  $p = .465$ ), education ( $\beta = 0.042$ ,  $p = .953$ ), occupation ( $\beta = 0.052$ ,  $p = .910$ ), and age ( $\beta = -0.019$ ,  $p = .080$ ).

### 4.2. Assessment of measurement model

We followed the two-step approach of Anderson and Gerbing (1988) to perform confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in IBM Amos 23.0 to assess the measurement scales. Construct validity of measurement model was evaluated by employing  $\chi^2$  test and using various goodness-of-fit indices: the  $\chi^2$  test to examine the degrees of freedom ration (CMIN/df), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), incremental fit index (IFI), and normed fit index (NFI). A CFA was performed using 32 items, and results demonstrated that all of the items had factor loadings above the threshold score of 0.70 (see Table 2) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Overall, the goodness of fit statistics of measurement model exhibited satisfactory fit indices:  $\chi^2/df = 2.556$ ,  $p < .000$ , RMSEA = 0.053, CFI = 0.916, IFI = 0.917, NFI = 0.987 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Further, we examined the measurement model employing evaluations of composite reliability (CR), Cronbach's alpha, convergent validity (average variance extracted (AVE)), and discriminant validity. As Table 2 indicated, the composite reliability (CR) scores were between 0.856 and 0.945, which exceeded the cutoff score of 0.70 (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). The values of Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.796 to 0.945, showing an excellent level of scales reliability (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011). Moreover, we calculated the AVE, and the results indicated scores for all variables within the range (i.e., 0.562 to 0.811) which is greater than the cutoff level of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2011). Finally, we calculated the discriminant validity as demonstrated in Table 3, and results revealed that the square root of AVE was found to be greater than the correlations of all constructs, and correlations among all variables were below the cutoff score of 0.85 (Kline, 2015). Consequently, the findings of CFA validated the reliability and validity of the eight constructs.

### 4.3. Common method variance

The current study used cross-sectional data; therefore, we applied two tests to check the issue of common method variance (CMV) of data. First, we performed Harman's single factor test to assess the threat of CMV. Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2003) suggested two critical levels for CMV measurement: (a) exploratory factor analysis (EFA) shows that a single factor emerges from all measures; (b) a single factor will account for the majority of the covariance among the measures. Thus, we performed EFA. The results demonstrated that the first factor accounted for 33.05% variance, which was below the cutoff value of 50%, indicating no considerable issue of CMV. Second, to check the robustness of the CMV, we performed a common latent factor analysis in Amos, following the suggestions by Podsakoff et al. (2003). We included a common factor and linked with it all independent and dependent observed variables. The findings, with and without, common factor revealed insignificant differences between estimated parameters and fit indices of the model. In sum, the tests mentioned above demonstrated that CMV is not a concern in our study.

### 4.4. Assessment of structural model and hypotheses

After validation of the measurement model, we evaluated the structural model. Before the evaluation, we used a collinearity test to check the issue of multicollinearity of variables. Table 3 demonstrated the scores of VIF for all the variables between 1.193 and 1.292, which were below the cutoff value of 3 suggested by O'Brien (2007). This shows that multicollinearity in all constructs was not an issue. Further, we assessed the validity of the structural model, the results of fit indices indicated an acceptable model fit:  $\chi^2/df = 2.942$ ,  $p < .000$ , RMSEA = 0.060, CFI = 0.993, IFI = 0.994, NFI = 0.948 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The model fit indices performed satisfactorily, and we assessed the path

**Table 3**  
Results of descriptive analysis, multicollinearity, correlations, and discriminant validity.

	CH	CSS	CA	RL	AA	PD	CD	RI
CH	<b>0.750</b>	0.782	0.205	0.116	0.275	0.088	0.101	0.194
CSS		<b>0.752</b>	0.130	0.083	0.405	0.115	0.102	0.213
CA			<b>0.830</b>	0.369	0.369	0.014	0.143	0.289
RL				<b>0.900</b>	0.346	0.121	0.080	0.249
AA					<b>0.757</b>	0.124	0.013	0.355
PD						<b>0.773</b>	0.530	-0.177
CD							<b>0.815</b>	0.099
RI								<b>0.841</b>
VIF	1.841	1.233	1.934	1.193	1.292	1.346	1.357	1.264
Mean	2.479	3.358	3.201	2.715	3.079	3.455	3.064	3.424
SD	0.937	0.933	0.699	0.187	0.724	0.982	0.946	0.928

relationships.

The results of the path relationships of constructs are reported in Table 4 and Fig. 1. In line with our theorizing, results indicated that conflicting halalness (H1) ( $\beta = 0.197, t = 2.113, p < .05$ ), conflicting social servicescape (H2) ( $\beta = 0.517, t = 5.080, p < .001$ ), and conflicting atmospherics (H3) ( $\beta = 0.341, t = 6.450, p < .001$ ) had positive significant effects on tourists' attitude ambivalence. Therefore, H1 to H3 were supported. The findings further demonstrated that tourists' attitude ambivalence positively affected psychological discomfort (H4) ( $\beta = 0.130, t = 2.563, p < .01$ ); psychological discomfort significantly influenced choice deferral (H5) ( $\beta = 0.529, t = 11.050, p < .001$ ) and revisit intentions (H6) ( $\beta = 0.183, t = 3.835, p < .001$ ), which supported hypotheses H4 to H5 and did not support H6.

The authors further identified the predictive power ( $R^2$ ) and effect sizes ( $f^2$ ) of endogenous variables. We followed the recommendations of Falk and Miller (1992), indicating that the total change in each dependent variable should be greater than 10% caused by the independent variables. Consequently, results revealed the following variance in each endogenous construct: tourists' attitude ambivalence = 28.2%, psychological discomfort = 17.1%, choice deferral = 28%, and revisit intentions = 33.7%, which are all satisfactory. In order to explain the magnitude of the effect size of the study's model, we used the values of  $f^2$  as a small, medium, and large (i.e., 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, respectively) suggested by Cohen (1988). The findings indicated that tourists' attitude ambivalence ( $f^2 = 0.3928$ ), choice deferral ( $f^2 = 0.3889$ ), and revisit intentions ( $f^2 = 0.5083$ ) had large effect sizes in comparison to psychological discomfort which had a medium effect size ( $f^2 = 0.2063$ ).

#### 4.5. Moderation results

The author has employed PROCESS macro 3.4 in SPSS 25.0 to assess the moderation effects of religiosity. Using model 1, we performed moderation analysis to examine the separate moderating effect on a dependent variable with the interaction effect of independent variables. Table 5 and Fig. 1 showed that religiosity positively moderated the effect of conflicting halalness on tourists' attitude ambivalence (H6a) ( $\beta = 0.066, t = 2.655, [CI: 0.0173, 0.1156], p < .001$ ), supporting H6a. Further, the results of bootstrapped confidence interval for (H6b) indicated that religiosity positively moderated the association between conflicting social servicescape and tourists' attitude ambivalence ( $\beta =$

**Table 4**  
Effects of hypothetical relationships.

Paths	Path coefficients	t-statistics	Relationships
Hypothesis 1 (CH→AA)	$\beta = 0.197^{**}$	2.113	Supported
Hypothesis 2 (CSS→AA)	$\beta = 0.517^{***}$	5.080	Supported
Hypothesis 3 (CA→AA)	$\beta = 0.341^{***}$	6.450	Supported
Hypothesis 4 (AA→PD)	$\beta = 0.130^*$	2.563	Supported
Hypothesis 5 (PD→CD)	$\beta = 0.529^{***}$	11.050	Supported
Hypothesis 6 (PD→RI)	$\beta = 0.183^{***}$	3.835	Unsupported

Significance levels: \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ .

0.101,  $t = 3.071, [CI: 0.0365, 0.1659], p < .001$ ), so H6b is also supported. However, the religiosity had an insignificant influence on the association between conflicting atmospherics and tourists' attitude ambivalence ( $\beta = 0.036, t = 1.310, [CI: -0.0181, 0.0908], p > .10$ ); thus, (H6c) was unsupported.

### 5. Discussion and theoretical implications

The current empirical research aimed to develop and validate a research framework attempting to enhance the understandings regarding inbound Muslim tourists' attitudes and behaviors toward conflicting attributes at halal restaurants in China. For this, we developed a conceptual model and identified the role of conflicting halalness, conflicting social servicescape, and conflicting atmospherics in the formation of inbound tourists' attitude ambivalence and related psychological discomfort, which consequently determines their behavioral intentions towards halal restaurants in China. The authors empirically tested the research model on inbound Muslim tourists who visited halal restaurants in China. Overall, the results confirm that conflicting attributes at halal restaurants cause consumers' attitude ambivalence that positively develops psychological discomfort, which in turns, determine related adverse behavioral intentions (see Fig. 1). In answering research questions, this study's findings contribute to the body of consumer psychology, service management, consumer behavior, Islamic marketing, and the halal tourism industry.

As we proposed, conflicting or contradictory attributes at halal restaurants cause tourists' attitude ambivalence. Specifically, we found that conflicting halalness at halal restaurants had a significant positive influence on consumers' attitude ambivalence. In other words, inbound Muslim tourists have religious beliefs, and they are more likely to accept products or services, which align with Islamic Sharia Law. However, conflicting and contradictory elements to Islamic Sharia Law in food and beverages or the absence of halalness activate their attitude ambivalence (Khan & Khan, 2019; Olsen et al., 2009). This outcome is in accordance with the seminal study of Jakubanees et al. (2018), which argued that contradictory and conflicting objects in food products trigger inconclusive and ambivalent attitudes that cause negative behavioral responses. The prior literature has mainly examined consumer attitude ambivalence from the aspect of online hotel reviews (Akhtar, Sun, Akhtar, & Chen, 2019c; Akhtar, Sun, Chen, & Akhtar, 2019b), trust and distrust (Moody et al., 2014), product information (Wang et al., 2015), and product purchases (Pang et al., 2016). However, the extant literature has not provided evidence regarding conflicting halalness's effects on Muslim tourists' attitude ambivalence at halal restaurants that lead to adverse behavioral intentions. Therefore, we filled this gap by investigating consumers' attitude ambivalence because of conflicting halalness at halal restaurants in China and contributed to the body of knowledge of Islamic marketing and consumer psychology.

Moreover, we validated that the conflicting social servicescape positively influence consumers' attitude ambivalence. Our results



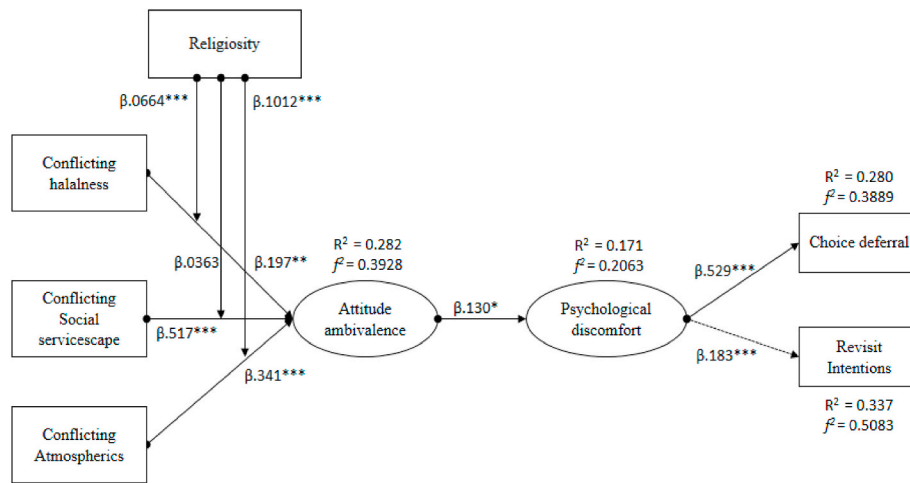


Fig. 1. Results of hypotheses.

Table 5  
Effects of moderation.

Paths	Path coefficients	t-statistics	Bias-corrected CI. 95%	Relationships
Hypothesis (6a) (RL → CH → AA)	$\beta = 0.066^{***}$	2.655	[0.0173, 0.1156]	Supported
Hypothesis (6b) (RL → CSS → AA)	$\beta = 0.101^{***}$	3.071	[0.0365, 0.1659]	Supported
Hypothesis (6c) (RL → CA → AA)	$\beta = 0.036$	1.310	[-0.0181, 0.0908]	Unsupported

Significance levels:  $***p < .001$ .

demonstrate that conflicting social servicescape positively affects attitude ambivalence. This finding has a complete agreement with arguments of Line and Hanks (2019), Hanks et al. (2017), and Harris and Ezeh (2008), who mentioned that contradictory styles of employees such as hairstyle, tattoos, attire, makeup, and piercings affect consumers’ perception that causes attitude ambivalence. In the present study, we found that conflicting appearances of employees such as nude service staff, surrounded by nude images, dress, hairstyle, makeup, grooming, and facial hair in stark contrast to Islamic Sharia Law, rear the inbound tourists’ attitudes ambivalence at halal restaurants, which is consistent with the findings of Khan and Khan (2019). Our results are in line with previous studies investigating the effect of social servicescape on consumer attitude and behavioral responses (Ha & Jang, 2012; Harris & Ezeh, 2008; Khan & Khan, 2019). To the best of our knowledge, contemporary work is silent regarding the influence of conflicting and contradictory attributes of social servicescape on consumer attitude ambivalence. This way, the current study adds to the literature of service management and halal tourism to answer the research questions and unveil reasons for attitude ambivalence. Accordingly, we found a significant positive effect of conflicting social servicescape at halal restaurants on tourists’ attitudes ambivalence.

Scholars have recommended that inconsistent and mixed atmospherics at a place influence consumers’ cognitive beliefs and attitudes, and elicit adverse behavioral intentions (Ha & Jang, 2012; Jang et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2014). In the current study, findings revealed that conflicting atmospherics at halal restaurants positively develop consumer attitude ambivalence. The present finding confirms that observant Muslim consumers have strong religious beliefs and thoughts (Ahmed et al., 2019; Mansori et al., 2015), and contradictory atmospherics attributes at halal restaurants result in inconclusive and ambivalent attitude. This finding advances the literature on servicescape and the dining environment. It validates that contradictory atmospherics’ attributes cause consumer attitude ambivalence in the context

of halal restaurants. Thus, halal restaurants with mixed servicescape or atmospherics positively affect consumers’ attitudes that determine their adverse behavior.

Past studies have recommended that consumers’ attitude ambivalence is associated with their psychological discomfort and related purchase intentions (Akhtar et al., 2019b; Siddiqi et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2015). Our finding validated these studies and found that consumers’ inconclusive and ambivalent attitude significantly caused their psychological discomfort. This result implies that conflicting objects at halal restaurants develop attitude instability, uncertainty, and ambiguity, which subsequently develop a state of sadness, anxiety, and adverse psychological behavior. Moreover, the authors’ review of the literature revealed that previous studies examined consumers’ attitude ambivalence and its behavioral intentions in the online context (Akhtar et al., 2020; Akhtar et al., 2019; Pang et al., 2016; Penz & Hogg, 2011; Wang et al., 2015). Thus, the extant literature does not investigate the effect of attitude ambivalence on psychological discomfort in the context of halal restaurants. The current finding contributes to a growing body of knowledge on consumer psychology, service experience, and hospitality by examining the Muslim tourists’ attitude ambivalence effects on their psychological discomfort.

Moreover, we have proposed that psychological discomfort ends in two bipolar behavioral responses in the form of choice deferral and revisit intentions. In response to this investigation, our findings add to the literature on social cognition and behavioral intentions. We found that psychological discomfort had a strong positive association with choice deferral. This aligns with prior findings mentioning the positive influence of psychological discomfort on choice deferral (Pang et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2015). However, we found a significant positive influence of psychological discomfort on revisit intentions, which is congruent with a recent study of (Akhtar et al., 2020) who found that frustration and psychological discomfort develop adverse intentions to use and low purchase intentions. This way, these findings theoretically contribute to the body of consumer behavior and validate that the bipolar behavioral outcomes provide more independence in consumers’ decision-making processes.

To the best of our knowledge, we took an unprecedented step and employed religiosity as a moderator variable to examine the influence of religious beliefs and thoughts on consumer attitude ambivalence in the wake of conflicting attributes at halal restaurants. The current results partially supported our conceptualization that religiosity moderates the effects of conflicting halalness and conflicting social servicescape on attitude ambivalence. These findings align with prior studies (Ahmed et al., 2013; Ariffin et al., 2016; Mansori et al., 2015), arguing that conflicting and contradictory religious beliefs and consumption

attributes develop inconclusive and ambivalence attitude. Thereby, the Muslim tourists have religious beliefs, which affect cognitive ability when they interact with contradictory and inconsistent attributes at halal restaurant. The present findings significantly enrich the literature on Islamic marketing, consumer attitude, and service management. Thus, the particular religious affiliation of a consumer affects his attitude and behavioral responses.

### 5.1. Practical implications

The extant literature has outlined the importance of halal tourism, in particular, the halal restaurants (Battour and Ismail, 2016; El-Gohary, 2016; Khan & Khan, 2019). Moreover, the inbound Muslim tourists market is steadily growing (Akhtar et al., 2020; Reuters, 2018). Thus, the present study's findings identified the effects of conflicting attributes at halal restaurants in China on consumers' attitudes and behaviors. This way, we offer practical implications for business managers, decision-makers, and other stakeholders associated with the halal tourism industry and halal restaurants. According to our findings, the investigated conflicting attributes at halal restaurants are the positive and significant predictors of the development of consumers' attitude ambivalence. Thus, halalness, social servicescape, and atmospherics at the halal restaurants are essential factors for Muslim tourists in China. Although inbound Muslim tourists expect to embrace halal attributes at halal restaurants, the conflicting, contradictory, and mixed attributes at halal restaurants cause consumer attitude ambivalence. We suggest to the managers of halal restaurants to display the certification and logos of halal, ban pork, and alcohol, hire Muslim staff for service encounters, and set separate prayer rooms for males and females. Tourism managers, restaurant managers, and policymakers in China need to understand the requirements of inbound Muslim tourists and minimize the conflicting attributes that cause attitude ambivalence. For example, service providers at halal restaurants should be well trained to know how to welcome Muslim tourists and how to deliver the halal services as per Islamic Sharia Laws. The staff should be restricted to attire tight, mini-skirts, and nude clothes at restaurants, which might affect Muslim tourists' religious beliefs and thoughts and develop their ambivalent attitude.

Moreover, the halal restaurant managers should focus on atmospherics at the restaurant, such as decoration of halal restaurants according to halal-friendly fashion. For instance, design, painting, decoration, and service encounters should be free from nudity and not include any element that contradicts Sharia laws and jurisprudence. Further, our findings demonstrated that consumers' state of psychological discomfort provokes choice deferral for halal restaurants. In other words, conflicting attributes at halal restaurants cause attitude ambivalence and related behavioral outcomes in observant Muslim tourists. Therefore, we recommend that stakeholders and managers of halal restaurants should develop consumers' feedback mechanisms to understand their uncertain and indecisive attitude. In response, managers should develop strategies for halalness to alleviate such conflicting attributes, which may cause consumers to defer their choice. Our results of socio-demographic corroborate that Muslim tourists visit Chinese halal restaurants from across the globe. Therefore, it makes incumbent on managers to realize and understand tourists' basic needs and preferences respecting various cultures and religious beliefs. This can be supplemented by recruiting chefs and professionals from other Muslim countries to serve Muslim tourists. These administrative and marketing strategies would increase the revisiting intentions of Muslim tourists.

### 5.2. Conclusion, limitations, and future directions

With halal tourism increasing in non-Muslim countries, the authors selected China—the fastest-growing tourism market in the world—to understand the inbound Muslim tourists' attitude and behavior toward halal restaurants. We stepped forward and developed a model to

examine the impact of conflicting attributes at halal restaurants in the formation of inbound tourists' attitude ambivalence. Further, we examined the role of attitude ambivalence in determining consumers' psychological discomfort and associated behavioral responses. Our findings construe that conflicting attributes positively affect attitude ambivalence, which significantly engenders tourists' psychological discomfort and determine adverse behavioral intentions. In addition, consumers' religious beliefs significantly moderate the effects of conflicting attributes on attitude ambivalence. Moreover, the current study extended various nodes of literature through the proposed relationships between the constructs, which were overlooked by the extant scholars.

However, the current research is constrained by several limitations that underscore the opportunity for future scholars. First, the authors used three conflicting interior attributes of the halal restaurant, including halalness, social servicescape, and atmospherics, and examined their effects on inbound tourists' attitude ambivalence. We suggest the future researchers test conflicting exterior attributes of halal restaurants such as halal certification, halal logistics, and halal logos on Chinese consumers' attitude ambivalence. Second, the present study used the Chinese halal restaurant context with businesspersons, students, scholars, and government officials. The generalization of the current study's findings to other non-Muslim countries with leisure tourists and short-term visit may reap the anticipated benefits. Third, this study used the survey method and employed convenience sampling to collect data from inbound tourists. Future scholars can use experimental or qualitative studies to investigate the generalizability of the present study framework. Fourth, another aim of this research was to inspect the adverse behavioral intentions of inbound Muslim tourists through the interception of consumers' psychological discomfort. We suggest that future scholars should examine consumer behavior from the perspective of other adverse reactions such as avoidance behavior, negative word-of-mouth, and forced-choice. Finally, the present study has 72% of the survey respondents (samples) between 26 and 40, a considerably young group of tourists. However, it might be worthwhile to study (in the future) older and senior age groups of Muslim tourists and compare as to whether the older age groups have a stronger attitude ambivalence than the younger groups.

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