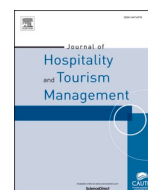


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Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jhtm

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

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Halalness

Attitude ambivalence

Social servicescape

Halal restaurant

Psychological discomfort

Behavioral intention

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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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2020.10.010>

Received 22 March 2020; Received in revised form 24 August 2020; Accepted 17 October 2020

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