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THE EFFECT OF HALAL AWARENESS IN ENHANCING MUSLIM TRAVELLERS' EXPERIENCE AND SATISFACTION THROUGH RELIGIOUS RESPECT

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Abstract:

This study focuses on halal awareness provided by halal destination providers to enhance Muslim travellers' experience and satisfaction through religious respect. A survey involves Muslim travelers who visited halal destinations in Indonesia in 2024 with a total sample of 364. The analysis employs covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM), incorporating confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural model evaluation to validate the hypotheses. The results show the effective role of religious respect in the relationship between halal awareness, Muslim travellers' experience and satisfaction when they visit halal destinations. The framework significantly advances the theory of destination image emphasizing the crucial aspect of halal awareness in shaping the experience and satisfaction of Muslim travellers particularly the role of religious respect as a key factor in mediating these relationships.

Keywords: Halal awareness, religious respect, experience, satisfaction, Muslim travellers

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of Muslim travelers has attracted many scholars to explore Muslim travelers' behaviors toward halal destinations. Consequently, many Muslim and non-Muslim countries have begun to provide a halal service in their tourist destinations to capture this prospective market (Jia & Chaozhi, 2020). Muslim tourist satisfaction and loyalty remain relevant trends in halal tourism, while challenges include tourist satisfaction, service quality, and attracting Muslim travellers (Fauzi and Battour, 2024). Moreover, religious respect refers to various dimensions, such as reverence for religious beliefs, adherents, practices, and public presence (Bird, 2013). Prior research has found that religious beliefs significantly influence how these travellers perceive halal tourism destinations, their satisfaction levels, and their word-of-mouth recommendations about travel destinations (Rahman et al., 2022). Considering the above discussion, exploring how halal destination providers foster religious respect is a valuable endeavor to enhance Muslim travellers' experience and satisfaction.

Existing studies have explored Muslim travellers' experiences or satisfaction levels from different perspectives (Adham et al., 2024; Wu and Mursid, 2020). The findings of a literature review analysis of halal tourism suggest that both physical characteristics and psychological aspects are positively related to satisfaction (Gautam, et al., 2024). Focusing on halal awareness, some studies have explored the effects of halal awareness and certification on halal products (Usman et al., 2023), halal awareness in enhancing purchase intention of halal foods (Loussaief et al., 2024) and purchasing decisions towards halal products (Usman et al., 2024). In the context of halal destinations, research has examined the effect of halal awareness on the intention to engage in Muslim-friendly travel (Rostiani et al., 2024). Although scholars have

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examined the consequences of halal awareness, previous studies have not clearly explained how important these factors are for halal destination providers in enhancing Muslim travellers' experience and satisfaction when visiting halal destinations.

Scholars have adopted religious aspects as moderating constructs to predict Muslim travellers' attitudes or behavior (Abror et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2022). Concerning Muslim travellers at halal destinations, previous studies have only utilized the mediating role of perceived value (Abror et al., 2022), skepticism, emotional and functional value (Rostiani et al., 2024), and memorable religious experience (Bhandari et al., 2024), while the mediating role of religious respect has never been explored. This study thus offers new insight, focusing on the indirect effect of religious respect on the relationship between halal awareness in enhancing Muslim travellers' experience and satisfaction in order to fill this research gap. In particular, this framework attempts to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. To what extent does halal awareness indirectly affect Muslim travellers' experience, mediated through religious respect?

RQ2. To what extent do halal awareness indirectly affect Muslim travellers' satisfaction, mediated through religious respect? Present the background, formulation of the problem, the purpose or objective. It should be formatted using 12 point, Times New Roman, single spaced.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Destination Image Theory

Destination Image Theory pertains to the thoughts, ideas, and impressions people form after studying data gathered from various sources over time. It also describes the qualities and activities of a place. Typically, destination image refers to a tourist's overall impression of a location (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991) or their mental representation of that area (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). In the context of Destination Image Theory, this study adopts cognitive elements that halal destination providers have facilitated in their destinations, including halal awareness and religious respect. Halal awareness indicates a more profound grasp of the halal concept (Bashir, 2019), surpassing mere objective knowledge of halal criteria. Individuals with heightened halal awareness are likely to internalize halal principles more extensively in their lives, viewing them as crucial in their decision-making processes (Preko et al., 2023) and Muslim travellers who have a high level of halal awareness tend to be less skeptical about halal offerings (Rostiani et al., 2024). In addition, religious respect involves local community and service providers demonstrating respect and sensitivity towards Islamic customs, including attire and practices, ensuring a respectful environment for Muslim travellers (Abror et al., 2019).

The mediating role of religious respect in the relationship between halal awareness, Muslim travellers' experience and satisfaction

Scholars have found that religiosity plays a vital role in tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Abror et al., 2019). For Muslims, degree of religiosity is a determinant factor of the halal brand image (Rahman et al., 2020) that significantly influences tourist visits to halal destinations. Religiosity involves internalizing one's religion from the perspectives of aqidah, sharia, and character, which can become a key factor motivating Muslims to visit tourist destinations (Juliana et al., 2023). Religiosity involves two main dimensions: Islamic beliefs, such as faith in Allah's assistance, and Islamic practices, such as performing daily prayers (Abror et al., 2022). When travellers expect their destination and its products and services to align with their religious

beliefs and practices, they are more likely to engage with the destination and recommend it to others through word of mouth (Abror et al., 2022).

Previous studies have focused on religiosity as a central construct, acknowledging that individuals possess varying levels of religiosity based on their needs (Abror et al., 2019). Moreover, halal signs, such as halal labels and certification, halal attributes, halal brands, features, etc. play significant roles in determining whether consumers' purchases are closely linked to halal awareness (Arifin et al., 2023). It was found that halal awareness significantly affects the intention to purchase or consume halal products (Aslan, 2023). A recent study found that religiosity significantly moderates the relationships between awareness and purchasing decisions, and habit and purchasing decisions (Rafiki et al., 2023). In this study, religious respect specifically refers to the appreciation of Islamic religiosity, encompassing both belief in Islamic concepts and adherence to Islamic practices that it is assumed can mediate halal awareness, experience and satisfaction among Muslim travellers. Therefore, this study offers the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Halal awareness indirectly impacts Muslim travellers' experience through religious respect.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Halal awareness indirectly impacts Muslim travellers' satisfaction through religious respect.

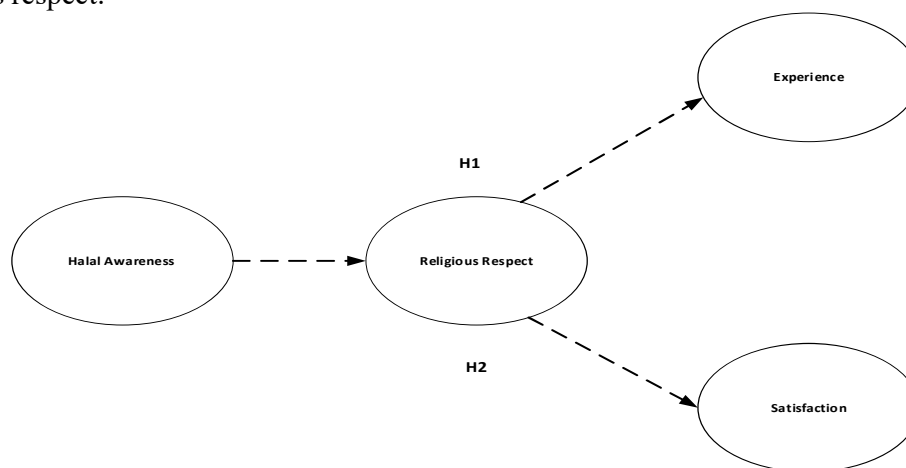


Figure 1. illustrates the conceptual framework

3. Method

Data collection procedures

This study surveyed Muslim travellers who have visited a range of halal tourism destinations in Indonesia using a questionnaire method. Using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = highly disagree, 7 = highly agree), this study surveyed respondents between June and August 2024, and provided a pulse reward of IDR 25,000 to those who filled out the questionnaire. The survey distributed 875 questionnaires randomly to selected halal travellers from all of the main islands of Indonesia; namely Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Maluku, and Papua. 381 completed questionnaires were received by the closing deadline, and after final checking 17 responses with incomplete and/or missing values were excluded. Therefore, a total of 364 completed responses were available for the analysis process, yielding a final response rate of 41.6%.

This study describes the characteristics of the respondents as suggested by Cox and Holcomb (2022), showing that 66.8% of respondents were female, with males making up the remaining 33.2%. The largest group of participants in this study were domiciled in Sumatra Island (33.8%), followed by Sulawesi (32.1%) and Java (26.1%). Considering the age of the participants, the most frequent category was under 20 years old (30.5%), followed by 30-40 years old (27.7%). Married participants made up 55.5% of the sample, while the remaining 45.5% were single, and the majority had an undergraduate-level educational background (65.1%). The largest groups of participants earned a household income of less than IDR 3,000,000, and visited halal destinations several times.

Measurement instruments

The item scale used to measure halal awareness was modified from a previous study conducted by Al-Ansi et al. (2021). We borrowed the Muslim travellers' experience scale from Rahman et al. (2020) and extracted the Muslim travellers' satisfaction construct from Battour et al. (2020). The last construct – religious respect – was extracted from Abror et al. (2019). Using IBM SPSS 28.0 software, we obtained a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO-MSA) value greater than 0.50 for each latent variable and extracted one component. The factor loading values for each item exceeded 0.771, and Cronbach's alpha for each construct exceeded 0.861, confirming the formation of a single factor (Hair et al., 2019).

3.3. Data analysis

We used covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) to evaluate the comprehensive model. This included performing confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and assessing the structural model to validate the hypotheses of the findings. Researchers recognize CB-SEM as well-suited for testing latent factors with reflective indicators, making it particularly useful for estimating theory-based common factor models (Jöreskog et al., 2016). Kline (2023) and Whittaker and Schumacker (2022) emphasize that CB-SEM offers a robust and reliable approach, delivering unbiased parameter estimates.

4. Result and Discussion

Assessment of validity and reliability

To assess convergent validity, this study applied the standardized factor loading (SFL) and average variance extracted (AVE) methods. For divergent validity, metrics such as the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT2), maximum shared variance (MSV), and average shared variance (ASV) were used. All items were shown to have SFL values above 0.721, with AVE values exceeding 0.618 for all constructs. Thus, convergent validity meets the established criteria (Garson, 2023; Hoyle, 2023). Furthermore, the HTMT2 ratio was below 0.85, and the MSV and ASV values were lower than the AVE values, as reflected in Table 2. These results indicate that the measurement items satisfy the requirements for divergent validity, in line with established guidelines (Henseler, 2021).

The study actively evaluated the constructs' reliability using McDonald's Omega coefficient (ω) and composite reliability (ρ_c), with recommended values above 0.70 for both measures (Raykov and Marcoulides, 2011). Our analysis indicates that both values exceeded 0.840 for all constructs in the model, demonstrating the reliability of the measures used. Finally, we obtained the GOFI indices for the CFA model: Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.934 > 0.90; Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) 0.932 > 0.90; Normed Fit Index (NFI) = 0.912 > 0.90; Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) = 0.856 > 0.85; Parsimony Goodness-of-Fit Index (PGFI) = 0.652 > 0.60;

root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = $0.066 < 0.08$; and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) $0.044 < 0.08$ (Jöreskog et al., 2016; Kline, 2023; Whittaker & Schumacker, 2022).

Assessment of full model

We utilized 10,000 resamples to ensure stable estimates (Kline, 2023), and evaluated key metrics including r-square (R^2), effect size (f^2), p-values, and t-statistics. The proposed model produced R^2 values of 0.224, 0.487, and 0.517 for religious respect, Muslim travellers' experience, and satisfaction, respectively, Cohen et al. (2003) indicate that these R^2 values fall within the acceptable range for social science research. Additionally, we calculated f^2 values, which ranged from 0.053 to 0.149, all exceeding 0.02. These results confirm the extent to which the null hypothesis is false and support testing the alternative hypothesis (Iacobucci et al., 2023).

Hypothesis validation

Standardized estimates were used to test the hypotheses of the full model simultaneously, and the results consistently supported the proposed hypotheses. Table 3 and Figure 2 visually present the outcomes of the potential mediating role of religious respect, providing concrete empirical support for the indirect effect paths connecting halal awareness with Muslim travellers' experience and halal awareness with Muslim travellers' satisfaction through religious respect. The analysis conducted robustly confirms these indirect paths. Specifically, the beta (β) value for halal awareness and Muslim travellers' experience through religious respect was 0.356 (SD = 0.077), while for halal awareness and Muslim travellers' satisfaction via religious respect the value was 0.454 (SD = 0.068). These relationships were shown to be significant, with p values < 0.05 . Consequently, the findings substantially support hypothesis 1 (H1) and hypothesis 2 (H2).

Table 1 displayed any details of the hypotheses results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Estimate	S.E.	C.R	Result
H1	HAW $\rightarrow$ RLR $\rightarrow$ EXP	.452***	.075	5.989	Supported
H2	HAW $\rightarrow$ RLS $\rightarrow$ STF	.276***	.069	3.982	Supported

Note: *** $p \leq .001$

HAW= Halal Awareness; RLR = Religious Respect; EXP = Muslim Travelers' Experience; STF = Muslim Customer Satisfaction

This study, grounded in Destination Image Theory, incorporates cognitive elements including halal awareness and religious respect provided by halal destination providers. Halal awareness entails a deep understanding of halal concepts beyond basic knowledge (Bashir, 2019), associated with the principle of Destination Image Theory, the main findings of this study are summarized in the four hypotheses presented above. The results reveal an indirect relationship between halal awareness and Muslim travellers' experience via religious respect. These findings suggest that halal providers can effectively address the need for halal awareness to serve Muslim travellers' experience. These results, showing the mediating role of religious respect, prove that when local community and service providers demonstrate tactfulness, respect, and sensitivity towards Islamic customs and traditions, particularly in handling Islamic attitudes and practices, they ensure a respectful environment for Muslim travellers (Abror et al., 2019). These findings are relevant to previous research reporting that religious beliefs

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significantly influence how Muslim travellers perceive halal tourism destinations, their satisfaction levels, and their word-of-mouth recommendations regarding travel destinations (Rahman et al., 2022).

These findings reveal that religious respect is crucial in mediating the relationship between halal awareness in order to enhance Muslim travellers' experience and satisfaction. The mediating role of religious respect encompasses knowledge, belief, implementation, and appreciation of Islam (Rafiki et al., 2023), showing that religiosity is closely linked to consumer perceptions, attitudes, and preferences (Salam et al., 2019). Unlike previous studies, which have often viewed religiosity as a moderating factor (Abror et al., 2019; 2022; Rahman et al., 2022; Rafiki et al., 2023), this study offers new insights by highlighting the mediating role of religious respect. While past research has focused on perceived value (Abror et al., 2022), skepticism, emotional and functional value (Rostiani et al., 2024), and memorable religious experiences (Bhandari et al., 2024) as a mediating construct, this study underscores the importance of fostering religious respect to enhance Muslim travellers' experiences and satisfaction.

5. Conclusions

Halal destination providers play a crucial role in serving Muslim travellers; therefore, studying the interaction between halal awareness, religious respect, and Muslim travellers' experience and satisfaction, as illustrated in Figure 1, can help providers to facilitate the provision of services that will enhance Muslim visitors' experience and satisfaction. The results of this investigation uncovered an indirect effect of halal awareness on Muslim travellers' experience and satisfaction, via religious respect. These findings confirm the importance for halal destination providers of facilitating halal awareness in order to enhance Muslim travellers' experience and satisfaction, echoing previous studies suggesting that halal services can capture the prospective market of Muslim travellers (Han, et al., 2019; Jia & Chaozhi, 2020), fulfill the needs of Muslim halal travel experience (Tabash et al., 2023) and enhance Muslim travellers' satisfaction (Abror, et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2020).

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