

I What Does It Take To Be An Attractive Islamic-Oriented Travel Package Towards Satisfying The Needs Of Muslim Travellers?

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Abstract

Travel agencies have modernized the way they communicate their package tours to travellers through digital technology. It is however imperative to also understand travellers' needs in order to remain competitive in the market. In particular, it is crucial to clearly recognize the diversity in travel needs particularly the travel desires of Muslims travellers since they hold a different set of values and beliefs that guide their travel needs. Hence, this research attempts to understand the Islamic travel needs among the Muslim travellers and how such needs can impact the attractiveness of package tours in Malaysia. The travel needs of Muslim travellers i.e. travel motives, travel behavior and perceived travel barriers will be determined and tested against the attractiveness of packaged tours. This paper proposes a conceptual model so that further analyses can be conducted, and marketing strategies can be recommended to enhance the attractiveness of package tours developed by Travel agencies for the Muslim travellers. By gaining a better understanding, tour operators in Klang Valley, Malaysia will be able to enhance their marketing strategies, increase the demand for their package tours and attract more Muslim travellers to travel with them.

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1 INTRODUCTION

One of the pastimes that most people have tried or expect to do is travelling. Industries and business owners have supplied personalised travel plans to travellers in response to consumer demand, i.e. package tours that allow travel without the hassle of detailed preparation. In particular, Savvy travel agencies took advantage of today's digital technology to share their package tours via social media. This decision not only could stimulate digital engagement, it also serves an advertising strategy (Voorveld, Noort, Muntinga & Bronner, 2018 and Voorveld, 2019) as communications through interactive platforms tend to attract wider audiences than orthodox adverts. It is possible for almost everyone to travel in modern times, but each traveller holds a different set of values and beliefs that drive their needs for travel. For Muslims, it is more so as they become wealthier and observant of their religion's criteria (Alserhan, 2011). In order to adhere to Islamic requirements, Muslim travellers prefer to take special care during their journeys. Such commitment to religious consumption will be more evident as the industry-specific market goes forward. Thomson-Reuters (2018) reported that Islam is the fastest growing religion across the world and the Muslim market is composed of approximately 23.4 per cent or 1.6 billion of the global population. The travel needs of a Muslim thus may differ from the norm. Hence, it is imperative to grasp what exactly are the Islamic travel needs of a typical Muslim traveller in order to enhance the attractiveness of package tours among Muslims.

Furthermore, it is estimated that the Global Muslim Tourism Market (GMTM) outbound expenditure in 2011 was approximately USD126.1 billion which constituted 12.3% of total global outbound tourism expenditure. However, this amount does not include those of Hajj and Umrah market (Malaysian Islamic Tourism Centre, 2019). In the same research, Malaysian Islamic Tourism Centre (2019) reported that Muslim tourist expenditure from 2012 – 2020 is expected to grow to be approximately 4.79% per annum on average and by the year 2020, the growth in Muslim travel is expected to reach 4.8%. Interestingly, this figure is significantly higher than the global figure of only 3.8% (Malaysian Islamic Tourism Centre, 2019). As an Islamic country, Malaysia is one of the truly ideal Muslim-friendly destinations for driving the Islamic tourism sector in the right direction and location (Malaysian Islamic Tourism Centre, 2019). In addition, with this status and other benefits, such as an extensive and well-developed Halal network, strong Syariah compliant infrastructure, steady economic growth rate, government-backed business incentives as well as political and social stability, more and more numbers of Muslim travellers (locally and internationally) are expected to choose Malaysia as their preferred travel destination. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct this study to understand the true elements that could attract those Muslim travellers in choosing any package tours simultaneously increase the attractiveness of those package tours to meet the needs of Muslim travellers around the world.

1.1 Research Problem, Questions And Objectives

1.1.1 Research Gap

In Asian countries, Muslim travellers are more likely to be scattered because more than 60% of the global Muslim population is in Asia (Cornell University Library, 2017). In addition, in Southeast Asia, which

is dubbed as the 'Muslim archipelago' (Cornell University Library, 2017), about 25 percent of the global Muslim population resides. Among Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia is a country known for its dense Muslim population, similar to Brunei and Indonesia. Pew Research Centre (2011) estimated that 61.4 per cent of Malaysians were Muslim in 2010 and projected the number to increase to 64.5 per cent by 2030 while Kettani (2010) estimated that roughly 60 per cent of the Malaysian population would be Muslim by 2020. The growth of Muslim population is parallel to the Muslim market which in turn presents a prosperous opportunity of potential new business ventures. Islamic tourism's capacity for growth is increasingly recognised globally, according to the Malaysian Islamic Tourism Centre (2019). This field is the Muslim travel industry, the largest and most lucrative untapped niche market in global tourism. Islamic tourism has in the past meant religious travel to the Holy City of Mecca, such as Hajj and Umrah, but over the years, this concept has grown to include Muslims who travel for business, leisure and many more purposes. This new development in the world of Islamic tourism has given rise to the need for industry players which include restaurants, airlines, hotels and tour operators to understand the needs of these travellers and adjust their products and services so as to cater to the needs of this growing market segment. With a market potential of more than 50 Muslim countries and approximately 1.6 billion Muslims, remarkable opportunities await those who are willing to meet the demands for Muslim-friendly tourism products and services particularly the travel operators.

Knowledge regarding the travel needs of Muslim travellers would give travel agencies a head start of succeeding in these new ventures. Furthermore, studies that probe on the travel needs (e.g. Chhabra, 2012 and Chen & Shoemaker, 2014) have been conducted though the study on travellers within the boundary of religious context appears to be lacking. This paper henceforth offers to supplement such lack in order to provide the competitive edge needed by industry players.

1.1.2 Research Questions

There are several research questions that have been listed out in order to ensure the feasibility of this research. The items in the research questions are based on the variables that would be tested in this research. The research questions are as followed:

- RQ 1: What is the relationship between Travel Motives and the Travel Package attractiveness among Muslim travellers in Malaysia?
- RQ 2: What is the relationship between Travel Barriers and the Travel Package attractiveness among Muslim travellers in Malaysia?
- RQ 3: What is the relationship between Travel Behaviours and the Travel Package attractiveness among Muslim travellers in Malaysia?

1.1.3 Research Objectives

In order to answer all the components in the research questions, the research objectives that have been developed for this research are as followed:

- RO 1: To study the relationship between Travel Motives and the Travel Package attractiveness among

Muslim travellers in Malaysia.

RO 2: To study the relationship between Travel Barriers and the Travel Package attractiveness among Muslim travellers in Malaysia.

RO 3: To study the relationship between Travel Behaviours and the Travel Package attractiveness among Muslim travellers in Malaysia.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Travel Advertisement

The aim of the advertisement activity is to convince customers to do something, although in some cases the goal is simply informative; to warn the general public of the advertised product or business. The practice was a way of defining the advertised producer in the beginning (William, Sandra, John & May, 2007). Technological innovation allowed a larger audience to be reached and advertising became more focused on the provision of commercial information. Apart from visual, advertisement is infused with message appeals that play an important role to 'bright up' the advertisements. The way these messages are communicated is crucial towards the advertising success since one of the most important creative strategy decisions involves the choice of an appropriate appeal. Some promotional messages use rational appeals and are designed to communicate information regarding a product or service and appeal to the logical aspects of the consumer decision-making process. Through the rapid growth of the Internet and other social media channels, both customers and corporations have transformed ads into a critical communication system. Essentially, it is goal-driven public communication, and these targets can be evaluated to assess whether or not the advertisement was successful. The message is transmitted through several different kinds of mass media inside an advertising. Intertwining advertising with media however comes at a cost as changes in how media are used are challenging as well as beneficial towards adverts (Duff & Segijn, 2019 and West, Koslow & Kilgour, 2019).

2.2 The Attractive Package Tour

A package tour is a scheduled trip where tour operators, better known as travel agents, advertise and offer transport, lodging and meal arrangements together. In the 1840s, the package tour was initially used to travel to other geographical regions and future changes in global legislation and easing of border controls resulted in increased demand (Baxter, 2013). These tours were considered the most cost-effective way of travelling of the time and meant the popularisation of the package. Years later, travellers still opt for package tours though its role expanded by the late 1980s. Goodall (1990) reasoned the expansion was caused by traveler's preference of having a glimpse of knowledge regarding the destination beforehand. The group dynamics given by package tours have become the selling point for travellers in some parts of the world, especially among Europeans (Quiroga, 1990). The inter-tourist social interactions in a package tour setting in Europe, where the atmosphere can often be viewed as aggressive, are reassuring to the extent that it inspires them to seek new experiences. The same explanation, however, may cause some to be less drawn to package tours because of cultural and social factors. This concurs with Gholipour and

Tajaddini (2014) who clarified that travellers from countries that rather avoid uncertainties if possible, would take on a more collectivist approach and travel in groups instead. Technology development enables travelling options such as holiday deals, flight and accommodation prices that were once inaccessible to be easily compared, thus affecting the sales of package tours (Chiappa, 2013). However, as the ease, value and time-saving advantages that the tour provides are undeniable, travellers are still drawn to package tours. Tour-exclusive activities that can attract the attention of travellers have been encouraged by partnerships formed between different tour vendors and local operational expertise. Statistics in Malaysia report that 66 percent of local travellers prefer package tours rather than buying flights and hotels on their own. (GFK Research, 2015). Even though today's travellers are tech savvy, they still take into consideration the information provided in the package tours for their travelling plans. Frias, Rodriguez, and Castaneda (2008) justified that travellers regard available information as credible as any stated destination and its activities have been reviewed by field experts hired by travel agencies. Hence, travellers; at least Malaysians, are still attracted to package tours. In order to measure the attractiveness of package tour in this study, nine items developed by Frias, Rodriguez & Castaneda, (2008), Nishimura, King & Waryszak (2007) and Wang, Ma, Jao & Lin (2013) will be utilized for data collection and further analyses.

2.3 The Muslim Travellers

The notion of "self-concept" is instrumental in moulding consumer behaviour (Govers & Schoormans, 2005; Lindridge, 2005; Lindridge & Dibb, 2003; Bonne, Vermeir & Verbeke, 2007). The notion supports Salamn & Siddiqui (2011)'s claim that Muslim consumers' have the tendency to behave in a certain manner that is acceptable in the Muslim society. This is because members of a collectivist society are prone to be influenced by one another as they are more perceptive of their self-image with what they consume (Govers & Schoormans, 2005). Hence, Muslim consumption is a sensitive matter that involves careful deliberation in the decision-making process. Each religion has their own regulation that believers observe and follow in their daily action. Likewise, Islamic law covers the consumption habits of Muslims. For example, 'halal' is a common term among Muslims. In the industry, the term has been used to draw Muslim interest, such as Halal tour in the tourism industry and Halalal tour. Food in the food industry. In a multicultural nation such as Malaysia, indication of 'Halal' is sought after by Muslims in their purchasing deliberation. Studies conducted by Ambali & Bakar (2014) and Baharuddin, Ahmad Kassim, Nordin & Buyong (2015) implied that Halal consumption is associated with hygiene, safety, and quality of higher standard. For Muslim travellers, the travel needs of a Muslim should uphold Islamic beliefs and anything that goes against it are avoided. Traditionally, as mentioned above, Muslim travellers are recognised as those involved in travelling to the Holy City of Mecca to perform Hajj or Umrah, but nowadays, Muslim travellers are not only those who go to Mecca, but also those Muslims who travel for company, leisure or many more purposes (Malaysian Islamic Tourism Center, 2019).

2.4 The Muslim Travellers' Needs

Given that 84% of the global population is affiliated with some form of religion (Pew Research

Center, 2012), it is not surprising to see that religion has been central in some consumer studies (e.g. O'Guinn & Belk 1989; Izberk-Bilgin 2012; McAlexander, DuFault, Martin & Schouten, 2014). In view of the growth of the Muslim population, this paper focuses on the requirements for Islamic travel and how such needs affect the attractiveness of package tours among travelling Muslims. This is because it can be difficult to advertise to Muslim customers as advertisers must ensure that in their marketing communication they follow Islamic principles. Yet, little is known about the impact of package tour towards attracting the attention of Muslim travellers. The following shall discuss the attractiveness of package tours in relation to a Muslim travel motives, travel behavior and travel barriers. The discussion highlights issues and challenges that if address properly will benefit not only marketers and the tourism industry, but the travellers themselves as well.

2.5 The Travel Motives

Muslims, like other travellers are motivated by social influences in their travelling decisions (Carstensen, Isaacowitz & Charles, 1999). As reported by Malaysian Islamic Tourism Centre (2019) Due to several reasons such as the availability of Halal foods and Halal activities, good infrastructures that met the Syariah compliances, consistent economic stability of the country, the availability of Halal companies that received support from the Malaysian government as well as political and social stabilisation, Muslim tourists and travellers chose Malaysia as their preferred travel destination Thus, instead of attractive travel fares and availability of the travel schedule throughout the year, Muslim travellers are also more attracted to package tours that highlight these motives in their travel packages. Apart from financial and time constraints, travel motives are influential during the decision-making process. Cleaver, Muller, Ruys & Wei (1999) defines travel motives as the purpose of the trip. Such motives can be caused by the urge to gain new experiences (Chen & Shoemaker, 2014) or feel the real environment of Muslim environment society especially for those Muslim travellers who are living in a non-Muslim country. In addition, travellers are also searching for relaxation (Guillet, Lee, Law & Leung, 2011), thrill (Lim, Ramli, Yusof & Cheah, 2015) or simply to escape the everyday routine (Jiang, Scott & Ding, 2014). Studies show that all passengers (regardless of their religions) have shown a preference for package tours, particularly those involving social activities. Obrador (2012) claims that, families that travel on package tours have stronger familial bond while Kasim, Dzakiria, Park, Nor, Mokhtar & Radha (2013) added that Malaysians travellers in particular are able to conveniently meet new people despite being with relatives. Schanzel & Smith (2014) support the claim as the surroundings facilitated by package tours help strangers to become acquainted with one another. Meanwhile, Mehmetoglu (2007) and Yousefi & Marzuki (2012) mentioned that package tours revolving around shopping, sightseeing and dining are sometimes favored. Such kinds of behaviours preclude many physical activities, while socially mediated motivations remain. Box tour announcements provide travellers with knowledge about different destinations and events that can interest them. Nonetheless the degree of attractiveness of package tours depends on whether or not the promotional value has succeeded for travellers. As for this variable, fifteen items will be adapted from Chen & Shoemaker (2014), Yousefi, & Marzuki (2012) and Battour (2017). Hence, it is predicted that,

H₁ : Travel motives have a significant influence on the attractiveness of package tours

2.6 The Travel Behaviors

Travel behaviour is the manner in which travellers present themselves throughout the travelling period. Hence, the behaviour of a traveller affects the attractiveness of package tours. Lepp and Gibson (2008) clarified that travellers' willingness to take risks can influence the degree of package tour appeal as some travellers are more of a risk taker compared to others. Averse-risk travellers tend to have more control in their travelling as they prefer to be independent. Regardless, Ortega, Rodriguez and Philip (2014) emphasis that travellers often choose package tours with a comprehensive description by their standard that would be complementary towards self-enhancement. Studies (Pearce, 2013 and Morrison, Hsieh & O'Leary, 1994) indicate package tours offering similar comfort level that allow travellers to behave normally are more appealing. This is because comfort is defined by those who visit resorts through the availability of services and facilities and those who enjoy outdoor activities are likely to be drawn to package tours that enable them to rough it out. The comfort provided by package tours is however proportional to the perception of the advertised information by travellers. Muslim as travellers are distinctive travellers because they not only look at the comfort of the entire tour programmes, but also seek behavioural elements that are beyond what is normal, such as praying five times a day, reciting the Quran, reciting Do'a while travelling, and many more. They therefore search for facilities offered by travel packages, such as apps that they can download before travelling on their smartphone, such as qiblah direction, interactive. Do'as and prayers mobile apps and many more. This kind of behavioral aspects if available and offered by travel operators will be considered as attractive by Muslim travellers (Engku Alwi, & Saany, 2019). Therefore, based on the above explanation, it is hypothesized that there is a significant relationship between travel behavior and the attractiveness of package tours from the Muslim travellers' perspectives. In order to test this relationship, the ten items developed by Chen & Shoemaker (2014), Gokovali, Bahar & Kozak (2007) and Battour (2017) will be adapted.

H₂: Travel behaviors have a significant influence on the attractiveness of package tours

2.7 The Travel Barriers

The success of package tours in Asia was due to overcoming travel obstacles, highlighted by Law, Leung, Lo, Leung and Fong (2015). Travel barriers prevent travellers from making a conclusive voice for their travels and thus reducing the appeal of advertised package tours. These obstacles are often caused by time and financial limitations. (Shoemaker, 2000; Lee & Tideswell, 2005 and Tretheway & Mak, 2006) though younger travellers might be vulnerable to them more. Students and young adults have lesser disposable income, yet they might have more commitments in relation to their study or work. Ageing traveler also find the barrier challenging financially as most are retired thus possessed no earning power. These barriers also applied and faced by Muslim travellers (Battour, 2017). As an example, a travel or tour package to perform Umrah by tour operators is considered attractive by Muslim travellers (pilgrims) if the price of the package is reasonable and affordable (Khabibulina, 2016). In order to downplay the travel

barriers, package tours should therefore appeal to the cost-benefits of package tours. In addition, in the creation of an attractive tour package for Muslim travellers, distance from the destination will also be important to consider as it is linked to travel difficulties among some ageing travellers. Because of the distance to the destination, travel operators need to think of the appropriate way to shorten the travel time. The mode of transportation will solve this problem as well as the direction of the travel and the time that the travellers will be spent throughout the journey. It will be more attractive to travel by air with direct flights to the destination than those that include transit stops (Hambali, 2016). Therefore, in order to reduce the travel barriers, package tours should appeal to the distance and travel duration benefits of package tours. Physical barriers that restrict the activities of travellers often affect the appeal of package tours. Studies such as Dolnicar (2005), Anderson and Harrison (2010) and Chen and Shoemaker (2014) agreed that the barrier though seem less appealing to younger travellers, increases the attractiveness of package tours for ageing travellers due to health and dietary requirements or safety and security purposes. Gonzalez, Rodriguez, Miranda and Cervantes (2009) however noted that there are some who disregard this in order to feel young again. Consequently, attractive package tours should be able to overcome these barriers to attract more Muslim traveler to join the package. Another barrier is related to the fear of hassling which according to Chen and Shoemaker (2014) has led to the increased attractiveness of package tours. Travellers on tours can escape fear with greater ease as they can enjoy without inconvenience such as lack of companionship (Shoemaker, 2000 and Lee & Tideswell, 2005) and language limitation (Lepp & Gibson, 2008 and Backman & Dennis, 2009, Mancinni-Cross). By offering a hassle-free tour package to Muslim travellers, an attractive package tour should eliminate this barrier. The lower the travel barrier, the more enticing the package tour is. As for this variable, ten items developed by Chen & Shoemaker (2014), Battour (2017), Hambali (2016) and Khabibulina (2016) will be adapted to test the proposed hypothesis which predicts that there is a significant influence between the travel barriers and the attractiveness of package tours from the Muslim travellers' perspectives.

H₃: Travel barriers have a significant influence on the attractiveness of package tours

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Conceptual Framework

In order to understand the Islamic travel needs of Muslim travellers and how such needs can impact the attractiveness of package tours in Malaysia, this study adapts Chen and Shoemaker's (2014) travel need model. Chen and Shoemaker (2014) introduces the three dimensions of travel needs, which includes travel motives, travel behavior and travel barriers. This study will try to see the subsequent impact of those elements on package tours attractiveness. The conceptual framework in Figure 1 outlined travel motives, travel behavior and perceived travel barriers as the Islamic travel needs that affect the attractiveness of package tours offered Muslim travellers in this study.

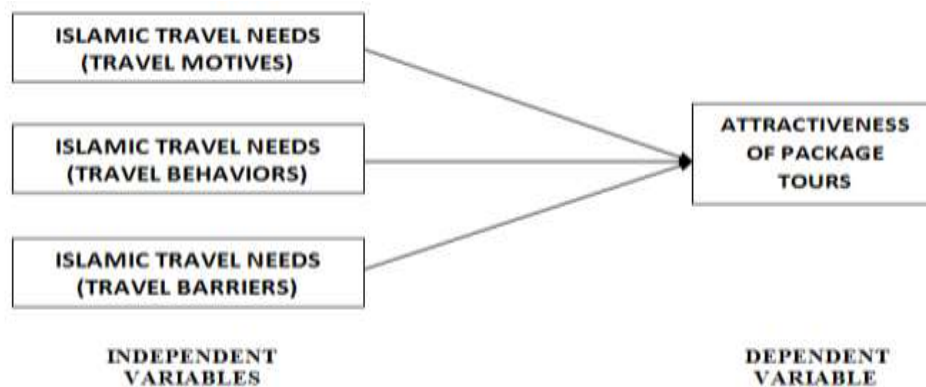


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

This study shall be quantitative in nature. Bryman & Bell (2011) supported this approach as it is more suitable for data tabulation and statistical analysis. Primary data will be collected from Muslim travellers using questionnaire survey. Bernard (2011) justified that questionnaires are suitable to collect data from a large pool of respondents to prove that the research is theoretically important. Potential respondents are aged between 15 to 80 years' old who are residing within the Klang Valley in Malaysia and sample population will be based on several pre-determined selection criteria. The Klang Valley residents were targeted by this study because they are influenced by comparable social contexts and would have equivalent opportunities to be exposed to similar package tour offerings. Once the survey response rate is considered adequate, the data collected will be evaluated for descriptive statistics and testing of variables using SPSS software. The age groups of travellers will be identified according to the norm prescribed by the United Nation for statistical accuracy.

3.2 Expected Outcomes

It is assumed that all the projected independent variables have a substantial relationship with the dependent variable with regard to the survey that will be carried out to support the development of this study. The explanation is that in the previous literature, all the variables have been checked earlier. Furthermore all variables are recognised and received a lot of validation from past academics and scholars in the relevant fields regarding their degree of importance among each other. Hence, it is wise to assume the outcome of this experiment would be positive. Therefore, based on the above explanation and all hypotheses, it is predicted that all the Islamic travel needs elements (travel motives, travel behavior and travel barriers) are significant in predicting and influencing the attractiveness of package tours in Malaysia.

4 CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION AND SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

4.1 Conclusions

Fundamentally, this paper serves as a framework for conceptual understanding on the issue pertaining to Islamic tourism especially the relationship between travel motives, travel barrier and travel

needs and the attractiveness of Islamic tourism tour packages so that the overall study is comprehended better. This paper proposes a conceptual framework to study the needs of travelling from a Muslim's standpoint and how their needs impact the attractiveness of package tours. The Muslim population growth resulted in the market expansion for Muslim travellers. These travellers may have different travelling needs since Islamic requirements encompassed its believers wholly including daily consumption. Therefore, the appeal of Muslim travellers to package tours can vary because they hold different values and beliefs. The literature highlights the role of ads in attracting Muslim travellers to package tours in order to provide a better understanding, while Islamic travel needs have been addressed in terms of travel motivations, travel actions and travel barriers. Outcome from this paper can bring huge benefits to government agencies, tourism operators, stakeholders in the industry as well as the public at large.

4.2 Implication to Islamic Marketing Theory and Practices

By offering a different perspective on the study of travellers, particularly by exploring the effectiveness of religious-oriented ads for package tours, this paper enhances current literature. This viewpoint gives a deeper understanding of what Muslim travellers want when they travel. The findings of this study foreshadow potential directions for the Halal tours and Halal tourism industry to prosper in parallel with the growth of the Muslim population within and outside Malaysia. This study shall reveal the perceived as well as the expectation of Muslim travellers towards package tours in terms of marketing communication and advertising messages. In order to develop more appealing and Islamic-oriented marketing strategies that are more attractive to Muslims, advertisers and marketers may therefore apply the information gained from this research. The findings of this study will benefit many brands and businesses, especially Halal-certified brands, as they will better understand the needs of Muslim travellers and will be able to tailor their advertisements effectively. Furthermore, government agencies that are responsible for the Halal industry in Malaysia [e.g. Halal Industry Development Corporation (HDC)] could treat this paper as a supplementary guidance on what they are supposed to do in relation to Halal consumption.

4.3 Implication to Islamic Tourism Industries

This paper contributes insights regarding Muslim travellers' needs and highlight possible gaps in tour operators' current offerings particularly the contents of the package tour advertisement. Hence, tour operators will be able to be more creative in their advertising and eventually demonstrate that they can put together better packages than travellers can independently speak on the Muslim travellers' needs. Subsequently, this study may theoretically allow travel agencies and tour operators to benefit from an increase in demand for their service, increase customer loyalty, and give the industry a more optimistic outlook. The findings of this study may also be used in the long run by government bodies and policy makers to upgrade tourism policies and practises in Malaysia. This will not only increase travel and tourism in Malaysia but could also encourage more international travels, which indirectly helps build better international relationships. Nevertheless, understanding gained from this paper is beneficial to travellers

themselves as they can better grasp their own travelling needs and maximize the convenience and value for their money when travelling.

4.4 Suggestions for Future Research

Nevertheless, this research is forensic in nature and therefore obvious weaknesses are bare. In a restricted region, unique groups will be targeted as rich qualitative data is needed instead. Further research should also include non-Muslim travellers and extend their coverage in order to explore the different perceptions between cities or states. The researchers would also like to recommend the future research to conduct an empirical research using the proposed framework and attest the predicted assumptions on the hypotheses to see the real answers and verify the predictions.

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