

**Why not travel to Malaysia? Variations in Inbound Tourists' Perceptions towards
Halal-friendly Destination Attributes**

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Mohamed Azali

School of Business and Economics, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
azali@upm.edu.my

Norazlyn Kamal Basha

School of Business and Economics, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
norazlyn@upm.edu.my

Yee-Shan Chang

School of Hospitality, Tourism & Events, Taylor's University, Malaysia
ccyshan1018@gmail.com

Xin-Jean Lim

School of Economics and Management, Xiamen University Malaysia.
lim.xinjean@yahoo.com

Jun-Hwa Cheah*

School of Business and Economics, Universiti Putra Malaysia
jackycheahjh@gmail.com

*corresponding author

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ABSTRACT

The importance of halal tourism has prompted countries and business operators to place more emphasis on this lucrative sector. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of halal-friendly destination attributes on inbound tourists' behavioural intention in the context of Malaysia. Furthermore, a comparative analysis was conducted to investigate the similarities and differences between Chinese and Indonesian Muslim tourists. A total of 666 observations were collected using surveys and the datasets were analysed via PLS-SEM. The empirical results show that both countries have indicated variations in terms of preferences for social environment, services and facilities. We contribute to the knowledge on the constitutive attributes of the halal-friendly destination, while providing theoretical explanations for the differences among Muslim tourists in the Asian markets. Finally, directions for future research are proposed.

KEYWORDS: *Halal Tourism, Halal-Friendly Destination Attributes, Behavioural Intention, Nationality, Malaysia*

INTRODUCTION

Halal tourism is considered as one of the most lucrative and niche market segments in the tourism industry. The term halal (حلال) originates from the Arabic language which means “permissible, legal, acceptable, and allowed in the Islamic law” that covers all aspects of Muslim life (El-Gohary, 2016; Olya & Al-ansi, 2018). Mohsin, Ramli, and Alkhulayfi (2016) emphasized that halal tourism refers to the provision of tourism products and services that conforms to the values of Islamic laws and regulations. In year 2018, international Muslim tourists were estimated to reach 140 million, representing 10% of the world tourism industry (Crescent Rating, 2019). This figure is expected to ascend to 230 million by the year 2026, with tourism revenues of over USD \$200 billion (Global Muslim Travel Index, 2019). The rapid growth of halal tourism is partly because of continuing growth among Muslim population (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Han, Al-Ansi, Olya, & Kim, 2019). To put this into perspective, the statistics of the World Population Review (2019) showed that the population of Muslim is expected to account for 26% of the world’s population by 2030 and will continue to grow as years go by. The growth of this segment can be attributed to the profile of the Muslim population which are young and highly educated, having high disposable income and extremely attached to the use of social media (The Star, 2015). Compared to previous cohorts, the younger Muslim generations are more adventurous, capable and willing to invest more money in travelling as a way to enrich their lifestyle.

Drawing from this perspective, numerous countries around the world have begun to highlight halal-friendly tour packages and destinations in their country as a way to attract Muslim tourists (Reuters & Standard, 2016; Yousaf & Xiucheng, 2018). For instance, Japan’s International Airports (i.e., Narita and Kansai) have provided sufficient numbers of prayer rooms for Muslim tourists (Halal Media Japan, 2019). This has caused many halal restaurants

are mushrooming in major cities of Japan such as Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto to offer Muslim tourists with authentic and “halal” Japanese food. Similarly, New Zealand has also begun profiling itself as a halal-friendly destination by refocusing its marketing strategies and providing its touristic sites with more halal-friendly facilities (Razzaq, Hall, & Prayag, 2016). The findings of the index from Global Muslim Travel (GMTI) (2019) highlighted that Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Morocco, Bahrain, Oman and Brunei are the top 10 halal-friendly destinations among Islamic countries (or Organization of Islamic Cooperation, OIC). Meanwhile, Singapore, Thailand, United Kingdom, Japan, Taiwan, South Africa, Hong Kong, South Korea, France, Spain and Philippines are listed as the top halal-friendly destinations among non-Islamic nations (or non-OIC) (GMTI, 2019; Han et al., 2019). It has become increasingly crucial that both Islamic and non-Islamic nations offer halal-friendly facilities and environments to develop the halal hospitality in their home countries and stimulate revisit/recommend intention among Muslim tourists.

Despite significant contribution of this market segment to the nation’s economic growth, research on halal tourism is largely ignored in Malaysia. The population in Malaysia comprises of more than 60% Muslim (Henderson, 2016), and is increasingly recognized as the world’s leading destination for Muslim tourists. According to The Sun Daily (2019), Muslim tourists in Malaysia are expected to contribute about US\$ 3.6 billion to the nation’s GDP by 2020. Malaysia has also received almost US\$ 600 million in direct tax contribution from the inbound Muslim tourists, which represent nearly a quarter (24.4%) of the total received in Asian (The Star, 2018). The Southeast Asian regions are among the highest number of tourists, with China and Indonesia at the top of the list. Specifically, the total numbers of China and Indonesia tourists in Malaysia were 3.28 million and 2.9 million, respectively in 2018 (Tourism Malaysia, 2019). This is not surprising, as Malaysia has all the necessary ingredients to ensure a worry-free holiday based on Islamic principles.

In order to be Islamic-compliant, participating hotels, restaurants, and airlines should only serve halal certified food, abstain from serving alcoholic beverages and be equipped with adequate prayer facilities (Islamic Tourist Center of Malaysia, 2015). More importantly, the Chief Operating Officer of GMTI (2019) stressed that it is extremely vital for members of OIC countries to create a clear and coherent strategy to attract Muslim tourists. To maintain the potential of Malaysia as a halal-friendly travel destination, practitioners today must overcome challenges on how to meet the increasing expectations of Muslim tourists. Thus, it would be interesting to examine how well Malaysia performs in meeting the needs of Muslim tourists from the perspective of inbound tourists, particularly from neighbouring countries such as China and Indonesia.

From academic perspectives, the existing research on halal tourism is relatively limited (e.g., Battour & Ismail, 2016; Mohsin et al., 2016; Oktadiana, Pearce, & Chon, 2016), in which majority of studies that focused on Muslim tourists' behaviours are simply those that comply with the aspect of religiosity (Abror, Wardi, Trinanda, & Patrisia, 2019; Eid & El-Gohary, 2015). Subsequently, it will be interesting to examine cross-country differences in response to halal-friendly destination attributes from tourists of different nationalities' perspective in order to gain a competitive edge. Needless to say, both the terms - nationality and tourism have come together at various intersections. As Kotler and Armstrong (2011) pointed, nationality represents one of the sub-culture components that can cause a diversifying effect on product or service evaluations. In most tourism and hospitality studies, it is widely argued that tourists' perceptions and expectations significantly vary from their country of origin (Forgas-Coll et al., 2012; Yuksel, 2004). For example, Kuo (2007) indicated that the level of satisfaction derived from hotel services is greatly different among tourists from Taiwan, Japan and United States. Another study by Kim and Malek (2017) found that tourists from Western and Asian countries exhibit different expectations towards destination image and destination loyalty in South Korea.

Indeed, segmentation by nationality is an effective practice to group tourists that share similar cultures and values (Forgas-Coll et al., 2012). Therefore, in order for Malaysia to remain as one of the top halal-friendly destination, it is essential to understand the desires and expectations of potential tourists across countries, which, in turn, provide workable solutions to practitioners. With regards to halal tourism, however, the investigation of how tourists from different nations perceive the halal facilities and services offered in a particular country is scarce. Therefore, we aim to bridge the gap in literature by conducting a comparative analysis to further understand the similarities and differences that exist between Chinese and Indonesian Muslim tourists towards halal-friendly destination attributes in Malaysia. China and Indonesia, in particular, have been among the largest sources of inbound tourists for the country.

Academically, this study advances tourism literature by examining halal-friendly destination attributes on behavioural intention of Muslim tourists in Malaysia. Furthermore, the outcomes of this current research aim to validate the effects of nationality (i.e., China vs. Indonesia) on Muslim tourists' behaviour. Practically, this study may provide useful insights to government agencies and tourism service providers on how to position and promote halal-friendly destinations through the strategic management of tourist perceptions.

The paper is organized as followed. Firstly, the theoretical foundation and a series of hypotheses are presented. The procedure for collecting data and findings from this empirical study are then explained. This is subsequently followed by the discussion of results, with implications for academics, tourism service providers and policymakers. Finally, the possible directions for future research are discussed.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND HYPOTHESES

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) suggests that relationships between people are formed on the basis of tangible and intangible resources exchange (Blau, 1964). Given that individuals evaluate these exchanges by taking into account benefits and costs involved, this evaluation ultimately affects their perception of the corresponding exchanges and behaviours (McGehee & Andereck, 2004). Hence, during this exchange process, individuals are more likely to opt for a course of action that promises them with greatest amount of rewards (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012; Ward & Berno, 2011).

A recent systematic review by Khan and Hefny (2019) showed that SET is one of the most leading theories that is widely applied in tourism studies. Conceptually, in tourism literature, SET is applied to describe the process of exchanges between tourists and tourism service providers. More specifically, tourists are more supportive towards a particular destination and are more motivated to participate in an exchange interaction when the benefits outweigh the cost of travel (Maruyama, Keith, & Woosnam, 2019). Indeed, it is very likely that tourists will exhibit positive responses (e.g., satisfaction, revisit, etc) when benefit is obtained from a host destination (Rather & Hollebeek, 2019; Seetanah, Teeroovengadum, & Nunkoo, 2018). Vice versa, tourists may also refuse to visit a certain destination again if the destination did not meet their needs (Kim & Petrick, 2005). Undoubtedly, the relationship between perceptions of tourists and the attributes of tourist destination is based largely on SET (Ward & Berno, 2011). Hence, this theory strongly supports the behavioural outcome (i.e., revisit/recommend intention) that this study assert.

Although SET has been dominantly used in various tourism disciplines such as rural tourism (e.g., Chuang, 2010; Latkova & Vogt, 2012), sustainable tourism (e.g., Lee, 2013), religious tourism (e.g., Kreiner, Shmueli, & Gal, 2015) and cultural tourism (e.g., Wang &

Chen, 2015), there is still a gap on how destination attributes may affect travel behaviour in the context of halal tourism. Therefore, the present study extends the framework of SET by incorporating five components of halal-friendly destination attributes, namely, social environment, facilities, food and beverages, services and locals and staff and its ability to influence Muslim tourists' behavioural intention. By extending the use of SET, we also take into account the moderating effect of nationality to explain the possible differences in Muslim tourists' perceptions towards a halal-friendly destination. The following section present a series of hypotheses developed for this study.

Halal-friendly Destination Attributes and Behavioral Intention

Understanding the behavioural intention of tourists has been acknowledged as a way to establish a meaningful and sound basis for marketing strategies (Kim & Kim, 2018). A plethora of hospitality and tourism research concludes that behavioural intention is indicative of the decision-making process that captures tourists' mindset to real preferences, indicating the long-term and short-term intention to revisit (Di Pietro, Di Virgilio, & Pantano, 2012; Han & Hyun, 2018). Likewise, tourism scholars complied behavioural intention as a construct that includes intention to recommend and revisit intention (e.g., Han et al., 2019; Tanford & Jung, 2017).

The importance of destination attributes has arguably become important motivating factors that triggers behavioural intention, particularly in the tourism sector. For instance, Lee, Hwang, and Shim (2019) discovered that the attributes of festival experience (i.e., escape, playfulness, togetherness, sacredness, and placeness) were the key factors that influence the perceived value of festivalgoers in South Korea. Albayrak, Caber, and Çömen (2016) suggested that characteristics of shopping centers (e.g., opening hours, lighting and ambiences, accessibility) were highly associated with tourists' perceived value and behavioral intention. In addition, the dimensions of service quality (i.e., tangibles, reliability, responsiveness,

assurance, empathy) were important factors for generating repurchase intention among airline passengers (e.g., Chen, Li, & Liu, 2019; Chiu, Liu, & Tu, 2016).

Thus, it is reasonable to look into the behavioral intention of Muslim tourists through the lens of halal-friendly destination attributes. Under the guidance of religion, Muslim tourists often use Shari'ah (Islamic law) to determine the choice of visit or not to visit a destination. Shari'ah and the term "halal" have a major impact on tourism activities, products and services offered to Muslims. For example, Qibla signs (prayer direction), availability of the Quran, alcohol-free food and beverages, gambling-free as well as conservative dress codes among staff are the main attributes that satisfy Muslim tourists in the choice of accommodation during the trip (Razzaq et al., 2016). Drawing from this notion, Han et al. (2019) have proposed five tangible and intangible forms of halal-friendly destination attributes (i.e., social environment, facilities, food and beverages, services, and local staff).

(1) Social Environment: Tourist's satisfaction on a destination has been significant in formulating a high level of delight, comfort, motivation and acceptance (Lee & Park, 2019; Pestana, Parreira, & Moutinho, 2019). The difficulties of finding a comfortable and secure environment are likely to a challenge for Muslim tourists to stay there (Alrawadieh, Alrawadieh, & Kozak, 2019). As such, the provision of a halal-friendly environment has become a necessity in areas where Muslim tourists often visit (e.g., airports, hotels, shopping centres, restaurants).

(2) Facilities: The provision of mosques near the attractions, in-room prayer facilities, separate gyms and swimming pools according to gender are a must for Muslim tourists (El-Gohary, 2016; Mohsin et al., 2016). Hotel rooms are also considered Muslim-friendly by providing copies of the Quran, Qibla direction, prayer mats, alcohol-free minibar and water usage-friendly bathrooms.

(3) Food and Beverages: The exploration of foods and beverages have become a leading selling point to reinforce image of a country and promote its cultural heritage (Ellis,

Park, Kim, & Yeoman, 2018; Lim, Ng, Chuah, Cham, & Rozali, 2019). Similarly, one of the most important aspects of traveling is the availability of halal cuisine (Yousaf & Xiucheng, 2018). Host destinations should design an enrich culinary experience for Muslim tourists within the Islamic parameters (Baker, Murrmann, & Green, 2013) which most commonly refers to the avoidance of serving non-halal foods such as pork and alcohol in order to demonstrate respect for the Muslim tourists.

(4) Services: The quality of the services has been assessed as a key feature in the tourism industry and provided a constant source of enjoyable experiences, which in turn creates a competitive advantage (Baker et al., 2013; Tsang, Lee, & Qu, 2015). In particular, services provided to Muslim tourists must be strongly based on Islamic principles and must be adapted to their lifestyle (Eid & Abdelkader, 2017).

(5) Locals and Staff: Studies conclude that a hospitable atmosphere or "hospitality" are the most basic elements to create memorable and meaningful experience for the tourists (Suhartanto, Brien, Sumarjan, & Wibisono, 2018). In addition to offer excellent products and services, it is important for tourists that the host country welcomes them through generosity, the desire to please and show respect and friendliness (Brida, Disegna, & Osti, 2012; Das & Acharjee, 2013). Fundamentally, tourists who have a favorable consumption experience with the product or service are certainly inclined to respond positively. These past experiences play a vital role in affecting individual behaviors, especially when revisiting or recommending a destination (Antón, Camarero, Laguna, & Buhalis, 2019; Santos, Caldeira, Santos, Oliveira, & Ramos, 2019).

Therefore, it is crucial for destination providers to design products and services with a "halal" focus that add value to the travel experience among Muslim tourists (Chanin, Sriprasert, Rahman, & Don, 2015; Eid & El-Gohary, 2015). We proposed that social environment, facilities, food and beverages, services, locals and staff are important halal-friendly destination

attributes that can influence the behavioral intention of Muslim tourists. As grounded by SET, the following hypotheses are therefore proposed:

Hypotheses 1₀: Social Environment does not impact on behavioral intention.

Hypotheses 1_a: Social Environment has a direct positive impact on behavioral intention.

Hypotheses 2₀: Facilities do not impact on behavioral intention.

Hypotheses 2_a: Facilities have a direct positive impact on behavioral intention.

Hypotheses 3₀: Food and Beverages do not impact on behavioral intention.

Hypotheses 3_a: Food and Beverages have a direct positive impact on behavioral intention.

Hypotheses 4₀: Services do not impact on behavioral intention.

Hypotheses 4_a: Services have a direct positive impact on behavioral intention.

Hypotheses 5₀: Locals and Staff do not impact on behavioral intention.

Hypotheses 5_a: Locals and Staff have a direct positive impact on behavioral intention.

Nationality of the Inbound Tourist as a Moderator

Nationality refers to the membership of an individual in a particular country (Griffiths & Sharpley, 2012). This term is commonly used in cross-cultural research to indicate the behaviors, beliefs, motivations, or perceptions of individuals (Jin, Hu, & Kaven, 2016). Scholars have often classified tourist based on nationality to better understand their travel motivation (e.g., Jönsson & Devonish, 2008; Prayag & Ryan, 2011), satisfaction towards the destination (e.g., Campo & Garau, 2008; Pantouvakis, 2013) and spending behaviour (e.g., Marcussen, 2011; Thrane & Farstad, 2012).

Examining the perceptions of tourists based on nationality appears to be an important concern that underlies the success of a particular destination, as individuals' perceptions are often based on their sub-cultural background (Nowak & Kochkova, 2011; Ting, Fam, Cheah,

Richard, & Xing, 2019; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2001). Likewise, Steenkamp's (2001) contended that understanding the behaviour of tourists based on their nationality offers greater insights when attracting and serving heterogenous markets. For instance, a cross-country study conducted by Prayag and Ryan (2011) revealed that nationality has the greatest impact on tourist perceptions towards destinations. Furthermore, Sinclair-Maragh (2017) argues that nationality plays a significant role in tourism development in Jamaica. More recently, Hammad, Ahmad and Papastathopoulos (2019) further confirmed that perceptions of tourism development in United Arab Emirates differ significantly depending on nationality. These arguments imply that tourists with different backgrounds in terms of nationalities may have different expectations which lead them to perceive a country differently.

A similar conclusion can be drawn from the Asian market. As noted by Ooi (2019), Fam et al. (2009), and Ting et al. (2019), Asia is a diversified market where individuals within each of these countries are found to behave differently. In this case, the differences in behaviours that exist between Chinese Muslim and Indonesian Muslim can be explained based on nationality. In general, Confucianism is an important traditional Chinese belief that shapes the culture in China (Hsu & Huang, 2016; Pun, Chin & Lau, 2000). The major teachings of Confucius include a number of principles that guide behaviour in human relationships and are essential to maintain social order. From the perspective of virtue, Confucianism has a considerable impact on individual mind-set and behaviour through promoting the importance of: "ren" (benevolence), "yi" (righteousness), "li" (propriety), "zhi" (wisdom), and "xin" (sincerity) (Zhang, Wan, & Cheng, 2020). Tracing its roots, the Islamic tradition among Chinese Muslim has been synthesized with Chinese philosophy (i.e., Confucianism) since the Ming era (Leslie, 1998). As a minority in the country, Chinese Muslims are subject to assimilation or integration into the culture of the majority, namely the "Han Chinese" (Fan, 2000). Although the policy of "sinicization" has affected Chinese Muslims in many ways that

have led to changes in their culture and religious identity, the fundamentals in terms of lifestyles, customs and traditions still remains (FATHIL, 2019). In the same way, both Confucianism and Islam co-exist peacefully within Chinese Muslim practices, especially when embracing life values (Yang, 2013). For instance, it has been shown that both Confucianism and Islam hold mutual emphasis on sympathy, tolerance, a sense of community, and genuine acceptance to ensure global prosperity (The Edge Markets, 2019).

Meanwhile, Indonesia contains a rich variety of cultures that is influenced by a multitude of religions which includes Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity, which in turns, leads to variety of belief systems. Indeed, Indonesian Muslims are generally very spiritual and take religious practices seriously in daily rituals. Despite the huge population of Muslims in the country, the country's national slogan, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) has been adopted by Indonesians through various ethnic and social views (Indonesia Investments, 2019). Thus, mainstream Indonesian Islam is moderate because in many places, Islam is intertwined with traditional customs that give it unique qualities and characteristics.

Drawing from these literatures, tourists from different nationalities are expected to have different needs and desires (Pizam & Susmann, 1995). Since the halal tourism industry in Malaysia continues to grow and attract a wide array of tourists from all over the world, this presents an interesting query on the moderating role of nationality (i.e. China and Indonesia), especially in the expectations of tourists towards halal attributes of a destination. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypotheses 6a₀: Nationality (i.e., China and Indonesia) does not moderate the relationship between social environment and behavioural intention.

Hypotheses 6a_a: Nationality (i.e., China and Indonesia) moderates the relationship between social environment and behavioural intention.

Hypotheses 6b₀: Nationality (i.e., China and Indonesia) does not moderate the relationship between facilities and behavioural intention.

Hypotheses 6b_a: Nationality (i.e., China and Indonesia) moderates the relationship between facilities and behavioural intention.

Hypotheses 6c₀: Nationality (i.e., China and Indonesia) does not moderate the relationship between food and beverages and behavioural intention.

Hypotheses 6c_a: Nationality (i.e., China and Indonesia) moderates the relationship between food and beverages and behavioural intention.

Hypotheses 6d₀: Nationality (i.e., China and Indonesia) does not moderate the relationship between services and behavioural intention.

Hypotheses 6d_a: Nationality (i.e., China and Indonesia) moderates the relationship between services and behavioural intention.

Hypotheses 6e₀: Nationality (i.e., China and Indonesia) does not moderate the relationship between locals and staff and behavioural intention.

Hypotheses 6e_a: Nationality (i.e., China and Indonesia) moderates the relationship between locals and staff and behavioural intention.

A research model (see Figure 1) was developed to address these hypotheses. On the other hand, extant literature suggested that young, highly educated female Muslim tourists are more likely to have higher expectations that may affect travel decision making. Therefore, gender¹, age², and education³ were included as control variables (Aziz, Hussin, Nezakati, Raja Yusof, & Hashim, 2018; Lin, Mao, & Song, 2015).

¹ Females often make decisions and spend more on travel than males. For instance, the wife will decide what will be best for the family, ensuring that all parties are satisfied during their stay at the destination.

² Young tourists tend to make more effort to understand their current Halal needs, especially in terms of appropriate activities and packages during travelling.

³ Similarly, highly educated tourists have higher demands and expectations of suitable Halal's packages and activities compares to lower educated tourists.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

On-site survey was carried out in the international departure hall of Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and at various popular tourist attractions such as Putrajaya, Malacca, Penang and Cameron Highlands. Muslim tourists were selected with two screening questions (“Are you a Muslim?” followed by “What is your country of origin?”), which only inbound Muslim tourists from Indonesia or China were invited to take part in the investigation. In the meantime, five professional tour guides who were fluent in English, Indonesian and Mandarin were employed to assist in distributing the questionnaires.

By using face-to-face approach, a total of 700 responses were distributed between June and August 2019. According to Travel Guide Malaysia (2019), the peak travelling season in Malaysia is between the months of June and August, where hotels and tourist attractions are often crowded with tourists due to the good weather and the lowest offers. Consequently, a total of 666 (87%) useable questionnaires were collected and deemed suitable for analysis. Overall, the sample size fulfilled the minimum requirement of 189 with an effect size of 0.15 and a power level of 95% in post-hoc power analysis (Fink, 2017).

Research Instruments

All the instruments that used in this study were adapted from established sources. In particular, six items from behavioural intention (i.e., intention to recommend and revisit intention) were adapted from the scales developed by Currás-Pérez, Ruiz-Mafé, and Sanz-Blas (2013) and Jani and Han (2011). Five components of halal-friendly attributes (i.e., social environment, facilities, food and beverages, services as well as locals and staff) were adapted

from Han et al. (2019). A 7-point Likert scale, anchoring from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) was chosen to capture more accurate responses (Nunally & Bernstein, 1978; Saleh & Ryan, 1991). The questionnaire comprises two sections; the first section sought to understand the demographic profiles of the participants included questions regarding gender, age, highest level of education, visiting group, country of origin and purpose of visiting Malaysia; while the second section included the measurements of the scale items. To increase the response rates, the questionnaire was translated into Mandarin and Indonesian language by professional translators to ensure the reliability of the items. Translations were further verified using back-to-back translation technique (Brislin, 1970). Before data collection, the comprehensibility and clarity of scale items were checked by 10 qualified experts from academia and industry (Hulland, Baumgartner, & Smith, 2018). Subsequently, a pilot study was performed to check the ambiguity of the questions and possible procedural problems (Hulland et al., 2018). The result of the pilot study with 30 inbound tourists indicated the reliability of the research instruments.

Respondent Profiles

The demographic profiles of the respondents showed an equal sample ratio for nationality (i.e., Indonesian Muslim (52.85%) and Chinese Muslim (47.15%) and gender (i.e., female (53%) and male (47%)). The majority of the respondents were aged between 21-30 years old (35.74%) and 31-40 years old (23.42%), whereas the remaining respondents were aged between 41-50 years old (22.97%) and 51 years old and above (17.87%). The education background can be categorised as respondents who obtained either an undergraduate degree (58.56%), graduate degree (17.12%), completed secondary education (15.92%), postgraduate degree or higher (4.35%), and no education or incomplete secondary education (4.05%). In terms of travel companionship, many of the Muslim tourists were found to be solo-traveller

(30.30%), followed by with family (25.80%), through organized tours (25.70%), and friends (18.20%). Moreover, fascinating history and culture (20.12%), amazing wildlife and nature (20.12%), delicious cuisines (19.97%), beautiful beaches (18.92%), visit friends/ family or relatives (11.56%), and business trip (9.31%) are their main purpose of visiting Malaysia (see Supplement Table 1).

DATA ANALYSIS

In the current study, SPSS version 25 is used to perform descriptive analysis. This study also draws on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to explore and predict the research model relationships (see Fig.1) (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019; Hwang, Sarstedt, Cheah, & Ringle, 2020). Additionally, to study the differences in the behaviours across the nationality of the inbound tourists (i.e., Chinese Muslim vs. Indonesian Muslim) (see Fig.1), this study applied the permutation test and multi-group analysis in PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2018; Ting et al. 2019). Corresponding to this purpose, SmartPLS 3 was used to estimate the proposed research model (Hair et al. 2018; Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015; Sarstedt & Cheah, 2019).

Data Preparation

The common method bias was accessed through the Harman's Single Factor (Podsakoff et al., 2003) and the full collinearity assessment (Kock & Lynn, 2012). By following Fuller, Simmering, Atinc, Atinc, and Babin's (2016) guideline, the findings showed that the largest variance is explained by an individual factor was 31.108% (< 40%). Furthermore, Kock and Lynn's (2012) full collinearity yielded a variance inflation factor (VIF) of 3.33 when a dummy variable was regressed with respect to all the variables in the model (refer Supplement Table

2). Thus, both results provide assurance that common method bias does not constitute a threat in this data.

Assessment of Measurement Model

To assess the convergence validity and internal consistency of the datasets (i.e., combined datasets, China dataset and Indonesia dataset), quality criteria such as loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) are examined (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Gudergan, 2017). Table 3 depicted that all the item's loadings exceed the recommended value of 0.5, except for SE5. Therefore, this item (i.e., SE5) was deleted due to low loading for all three datasets (Hair et al., 2017). Both the CR and AVE values were above the threshold limit of 0.7 and 0.5, respectively (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015; Hair et al., 2017). It can be concluded that convergent validity is established between these three datasets (refer Supplement Table 3).

Subsequently, to assess discriminant validity, the heterotrait and monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correction criterion was used (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019; Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). From the supplement Table 4, it is showed there are no discriminant validity issues for the combined dataset, China dataset and Indonesia dataset, where the results do not contravene the threshold value of HTMT₉₀ (Gold, Malhotra, & Segars, 2001).

Assessment of higher-order construct

This study followed the procedures introduced by Cheah et al. (2019) and Sarstedt, Hair, Cheah, Becker, and Ringle (2019) in the evaluation of the higher-order construct (see Supplement Table 5). First, a path coefficient between 0.891 and 0.920 is obtained from the redundancy analysis, thus establishing convergent validity. Second, all dimensions with VIF

values below 3, indicating that the dimensions are distinct for each dataset. Lastly, as shown in Supplement Table 5, all two dimensions of behavioural intention (i.e., intention to recommend and revisit intention) are statistically significant. Thus, it was reasonable to capture this domain as a higher-order construct, in line with previous tourism research (e.g., Choo, Ahn, & Petrick, 2016; Tanford & Jung, 2017).

Assessment of Measurement Invariance

Before proceeding to perform a multigroup analysis, it is crucial to perform an invariant test using MICOM method to ascertain whether the meaning of the measurements understood by two groups of Muslim tourists (i.e., Indonesia and China) (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016). Firstly, configural invariance is established (see earlier Table 3 and Table 4) because the research models' set-ups and the model estimations (or PLS algorithm) are similar across the settings of two countries. Secondly, compositional invariance test is examined using the permutation test in PLS. The result substantiates all the original composite score correlations ($c=1$) are equal to or greater than the 5%-quantile of the composite score correlations, hence the compositional invariance is established (see Supplement Table 6). Finally, full measurement invariance that consists of the difference in composite's mean value and logarithm of the variance ratios are checked. The results are unable to establish the full measurement invariance because the composites' equality of mean values and variances across the two datasets yields a non-significance difference (see Supplement Table 6). Overall assessment depicts that partial measurement invariance is established in the present study, thus providing a reasonable indication to analyse and compare the nationality differences (i.e., Indonesia and China) that moderate the proposed research model (Henseler et al., 2016).

Assessment of Structural Model

Lateral collinearity between the constructs was examined (Sarstedt, Ringle, & Hair, 2017). Table 1 illustrated that the VIF values for each constructs were lower than the threshold value of 3.3, inferring that collinearity is not an issue (Becker, Ringle, Sarstedt, & Völckner, 2015; Mason & Perreault, 1991).

Thereafter, the three control variables (i.e., gender, age, and education level) demonstrated no significant effect across the datasets (combined dataset, China dataset, Indonesia dataset). Subsequently, it is evident that the combined dataset exhibits that facilities ($\beta=0.087, p < .05$), food and beverages ($\beta=0.241, p < .001$), locals and staff ($\beta=0.216, p < .001$), and social environment ($\beta=0.225, p < .001$) positively influence on behavioural intention with an exception for services. By assessing the China dataset with the exception of facilities and services, the result shows that food and beverages ($\beta=0.249, p < .001$), locals and staff ($\beta=0.258, p < .001$), and social environment ($\beta=0.163, p < .05$) on behavioural intention are positively significant. Finally, dataset from Indonesia shows that all attributes with the exception of services positively influence on behavioural intention (see Table 1).

Despite significant relationships are established, it is important to consider the effect sizes (f^2) of the paths (Cohen, 1988). The result from combined dataset illustrates that food and beverages, locals and staff as well as social environment exhibit a small effect size on behavioural intention (0.032 to 0.037). However, facilities and services on behavioural intention exhibit a trivial effect size (0.002 to 0.005). In relation to China dataset, food and beverages, locals and staff as well as social environment exhibit a medium effect size on behavioural intention (0.117 to 0.217), except for facilities and services that indicates a trivial effect size (0.007 to 0.013). While the dataset from Indonesia illustrates that all attributes have a medium effect on behavioural intention (0.033 to 0.037), except for services with a trivial effect size (0.009).

Table 1 also reported the R^2 values to exhibit the variance explained for each sample. The values of 30% and above exhibit that every model acquires sufficient capacity to explain tourists' behavioural intention to visit Malaysia. Lastly, the predictive relevance (Q^2_{predict}) was examined using the PLSpredict technique (Chin, Cheah, Liu, Ting, Lim, & Cham, 2020; Sharma, Shmueli, Sarstedt, Danks, & Ray, 2019). This additional analysis is considered important in line with the emphasis of PLS-SEM – focusing on exploration and prediction results. Q^2_{predict} values larger than 0 exhibit a satisfactory predictive quality result for each model (Sharma et al., 2019).

[Insert Table 1 here]

Multi-Group Analysis (MGA)

Table 2 shows the results of the multigroup findings that is generated from four different approach: the Permutation Test (Chin & Dibbern, 2010), the Henseler's bootstrap based MGA (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009), the Parametric Test (Keil et al., 2000), and Welch-Satterthwait Test (Sinkovics et al., 2016; Welch, 1947). Based on Table 2, all the permutation, parametric and Welch-Satterthwaite tests show significant difference between China and Indonesia ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$) on the relationship between facilities on behavioural intention, service on behavioural intention, and social environment on behavioural intention (see Hair et al. 2018; for the guidelines). Concerning the Henseler's PLS-MGA test, the $p\text{-value}$ of less than 0.05, indicating 5% level of significant differences between specific path coefficients between China and Indonesia datasets (Henseler et al., 2009; Sarstedt, Henseler, & Ringle, 2011). Based on the result in Table 2, both facilities, services, and social environment on behavioural intention shows a significant difference between China and Indonesia datasets ($p\text{-value} > 0.95$). Overall, the result was consistent with all the four approaches (i.e., permutation, Henseler's bootstrap-based MGA, parametric, and Welch-Satterthwaite test) that

there is a significant difference between the datasets from China and Indonesia, particularly the relationships between facilities, services, social environment towards behavioural intention. Therefore, the result clearly indicates that tourists from Indonesia are more attracted to the attributes of facilities, services, and social environment compared to the tourists from China when evaluating Malaysia as a halal destination.

[Insert Table 2 here]

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

With regards to the future growth of halal tourism at a global stage, the findings of this study have broadened the body of knowledge by examining the interrelationship between halal-friendly destination attributes (i.e., social environment, facilities, food and beverages, services and locals and staff) that impact on behavioural intention. Furthermore, the differences that exist between Muslim tourists from China and Indonesia are also investigated.

Drawing from SET, the first series of research hypotheses examines on how halal-friendly destination attributes influence behavioral intention among Muslim tourists. The results are consistent as prior literature, that suggests the compliance of tourist attractions to the Islamic Shari'ah law in order to promote Malaysia as a halal-friendly destination (e.g., Battour & Ismail, 2016; Vargas-Sánchez & Moral-Moral, 2019). As hypothesized, social environment is a crucial factor that creates positive response to recommend and revisit Malaysia as a halal destination. In this case, social environment incorporates the combination of physical and non-physical attributes such as decorations, painting, design and atmosphere of the destination (Al-Ansi & Han, 2019; Han et al., 2019). Therefore, it is suggested that adherence to basic Islamic values when designing a social environment, including artifacts, symbols, shapes and colors is

important to retain Muslim tourists. In addition, our empirical results are in parallel with the research conducted by Al-Ansi, Olya, and Han (2018) which confirmed that halal food and beverages are critical attribute that has influence on Muslim tourists during a trip. Undeniably, food and beverages have been acknowledged as basic needs that is positively associated with the satisfaction and the intention of the future behaviour of Muslim tourists (Salleh, Hamid, Hashim, & Omain, 2014). Apart from that, the availability of halal-friendly facilities is also found as a factor that stimulates revisit/recommend intention among Muslim tourists. Moreover, halal-friendly locals and staffs is one of the attributes that should not be overlooked. As pointed out by Jeaheng (2019), the provision of halal facilities is one of the most desired factors by Muslim tourists during their travel. In fact, staff working in hotels and other tourist service centres are expected to provide services that conform to halal standards, i.e. pay particular attention to the provision and maintenance of services in accordance with Muslim values. For example, according to Islamic teachings, men and women are expected to dress with dignity and modesty when serving in public (Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010). However, the study found an insignificant relationship between halal-friendly services and behavioural intention, which is in conflict from existing literature. This might indicate similarities with past study of Al-Ansi et al. (2019) which discussed on the high levels of multi-risk perceived by Muslims (e.g., health, psychological, financial and social risk) when consuming halal services in multi-cultural country. Overall, the results support H1_a, H2_a, H3_a and H5_a, except for H4_a.

The second series of the hypotheses examines how the relationships between halal-friendly destination attributes (i.e., social environment, food and beverages, facilities, services and locals and staff) result in different behavioural intention across nationalities. The comparative analysis provided support for H6_{aa}, H6_{ba} and H6_{da}, which shows significant differences in the relationship between social environment, facilities and services towards behavioural intention. For instance, Chinese Muslim's revisit/recommend intention is mostly shaped by food and

beverages as well as local and staffs, whereas Indonesian Muslim' perceive social environment, facilities and services as important attributes when revisit/recommend Malaysia as a halal-friendly destination. As a result, this study has examined the importance of halal-friendly destination attributes in a cross-cultural context. These findings are consistent with previous literature which the perception of tourists is different across nationality (Dedeoğlu, Balikçioğlu Dedeoğlu, & Küçükergin, 2018; Kozak, 2001; Soldatenko & Backer, 2019).

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this study provides significant insights to hospitality and tourism literature. As an attempt to develop Malaysia as a halal-friendly destination, this study proposed and tested a model to examine important attributes that influence Muslim tourists' behaviour. Specifically, SET was applied to conceptualize the relationships between halal-friendly destination attributes (i.e., social environment, facilities, food and beverages and local and staffs) on behavioural intention. The present results corroborated to the core principal of SET, in which tourists who perceive more benefits towards the halal-friendly destination attributes will exhibit with greater intention to recommend or revisit Malaysia in the near future. This converges again with the study of Gursoy and Rytherford's (2004), that highlighted that tourists' perceptions are among the key predictors that will significantly impact tourism development. On top of that, the use of SET was also extended by adding nationality as a moderator to examine the difference in perceptions among inbound tourists. In accordance to past research, Asiann are characterized as having diversified cultures that can make individual's perceive and behave differently (Huang & Crofts, 2019; Ting et al., 2019). In the present study, the assessment of the MGA analysis demonstrated significant differences among Chinese Muslim and Indonesian Muslim's evaluation of halal-destination attributes in Malaysia. The attributes that are mostly significantly different between Muslim tourists from China and Indonesia were

social environment, facilities, services, food and beverages as well as local and staffs. Consequently, SET provides a sound theoretical basis for the study of tourists' behavioural intention (i.e., revisit/recommend). Indeed, the expectations of tourists are "cultural-bound" (Pantouvakis, 2013), whereby the destination attributes are perceived differently depending on nationalities, which provides much needed empirical insight to the limited literature in this area.

Managerial Implications

Our study also provides several beneficial implications for practitioners. Particularly, Malaysia Government and tourism service providers can effectively implement halal-friendly strategies to increase the visiting intentions of existing or potential Muslim tourists to various destinations in Malaysia.

Firstly, in order to comply with a Muslim-friendly social environment, tourism service providers should consider improving the physical environment of tourist sites with more halal-friendly ambience. Adhering to basic Islamic values, when designing a social environment that includes artifacts, symbols, shapes and colors (i.e., calligraphy of the word Allah, mosaics, no depiction of creatures with a soul) is important to retain Muslim visitors. Decorations, designs and paintings placed at tourist places should also be free from nudity. Besides physical design, it is also strongly recommended that halal tourist spots should be free from *haram* business activities (e.g., nightclubs, casinos, red light district or bars). Placement signs that endorse halal social behaviour, such as prohibition of revealing clothing and overly intimate public behaviors can help enhance Malaysia's overall image as a halal-friendly destination.

Secondly, the findings indicate that tourism service providers should take the necessary measures to ensure that all food prepared for halal-conscious tourists are complied with Islamic principles. For example, serving food and drink that are free from prohibited components according to the Islamic law, such as pork and alcohol. Shari'ah compliance in food and

beverage also refers to the use of utensils, equipment and machinery that has been cleansed according to Islamic law. Hence, Muslim tourists can be reassured of food and beverage halal compliance by the halal certification issued by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM).

Next, the availability of halal facilities (e.g., prayer rooms or mosques) are important to meet the needs of Muslim tourists during excursions as it is a religious requirement for them to pray five times a day (Stephenson, 2014). Providing convenience for Muslims to perform their five pillars of Islam would help to mitigate any challenges of travelling as a righteous Muslim, and thus encourage more time spent at a tourist site. On top of that, tourism service providers and business operators are highly recommended to enhance their existing facilities by providing gender-separated facilities such as gyms, spas, swimming pools and healthcare centres to display a strong sense of halal awareness that will ultimately drive revisit/recommend intention among Muslim tourists.

Apart from delivering halal-friendly products and services, it is also essential for destination business providers to increase awareness and knowledge on Islamic culture among locals and staff. Having said that, tourism service providers should provide extensive training for staff in the hotels and other tourist service centres in order to offer tourists with a high-quality and memorable experiences. Correspondingly, Islamic organizations should actively participate in providing advisory consultations to the tourism and hospitality industries to promote Malaysia as a halal-friendly destination.

Last but not least, the assessment of nationality revealed differences in both Indonesian and Chinese Muslims, which implies that tourism service providers should consider nationality when tailoring their marketing tools in penetrating these markets. Results revealed that social environment, facilities and services are significant attributes that influence behavioural intention (i.e., intention to recommend and revisit intention) among Indonesian Muslims.

Therefore, when trying to reach the Indonesian Muslim market, promotional messages should place more emphasis on destination environment (e.g., decoration, atmosphere and environment), facilities (e.g., prayer facilities and gender-separated facilities) and services (e.g., tour packages related to Muslim identity and heritage). On the other hand, advertisements which focused on Chinese Muslim tourists should highlight the friendliness of the locals and staff such as versatile language skills (i.e., Mandarin and English). In terms of food and beverages, both government and tourism service providers should promote more on the availability of various “halal” ethnic cuisines such as delicacies from baba nyonya (peranakan), Borneo (i.e., Dayak cuisines), and East coast of Peninsular Malaysia (i.e., nasi dagang).

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Halal tourism is a lucrative sector that is largely untapped at present. The number of Muslim tourists visiting Malaysia is expected to increase substantially from year to year. However, comparatively limited research has been placed on exploring Muslim tourist behaviours. Our study identified and highlighted effective attributes that will significantly improve the image and overall perception of Malaysia as a halal-friendly destination. In essence, social environment, facilities, food, and beverages as well as locals and staff were perceived as significant halal-friendly destination attributes that influence behavioural intention. Furthermore, a comparative analysis was applied to examine the moderating role of nationality. This empirical study confirms that Muslim tourists from different country are not all the same. Therefore, it is necessary for the Malaysian government and tourism service providers to take national diversity into account when promoting the country as a halal tourist destination. In summary, all the objectives of this study were achieved.

Parallel with any study, the present work contains some limitations that may serve as a starting point for further research. Firstly, this study tested the five different halal-friendly

destination attributes on behavioural intention based on a pure quantitative methodology, which might overlook other potential determinants. Future studies can conduct a preliminary qualitative study to explore on other possible halal-friendly destination attributes that could influence the behaviour of Muslim tourists. Secondly, both groups of participants involved in this were from Asian nations (i.e., China and Indonesia), with the possibility that they are quite similar in some aspect (i.e., developing countries in the Eastern region). Therefore, in order to better serve the broader market, future work can be conducted by incorporating Muslim tourists from other Western countries, such as Europe and United States to gain more insights and better build Malaysia as a reliable halal-friendly destination. On the other hand, there are some studies argued that the concept of “global tourist” has emerged with diverse expectations rooted by their cultural values (Huang & Crotts, 2019; Torres, Fu, & Lehto, 2014). Thus, future studies can contribute to the halal tourism literature and practice by taking into account the cultural values of Hofstede (e.g., uncertainty avoidance, power distance, individualism vs collectivism) to yield more robust outcomes by linking cultural norms and values in evaluating Malaysia as a halal-friendly destination. Furthermore, it is worth noting that virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are two technological breakthroughs that stimulate the growth of halal tourism (Global Muslim Travel Index, 2019). Given the importance of the topic, future research should explore the impact of technologies on the tourism experience in the context of halal tourism.

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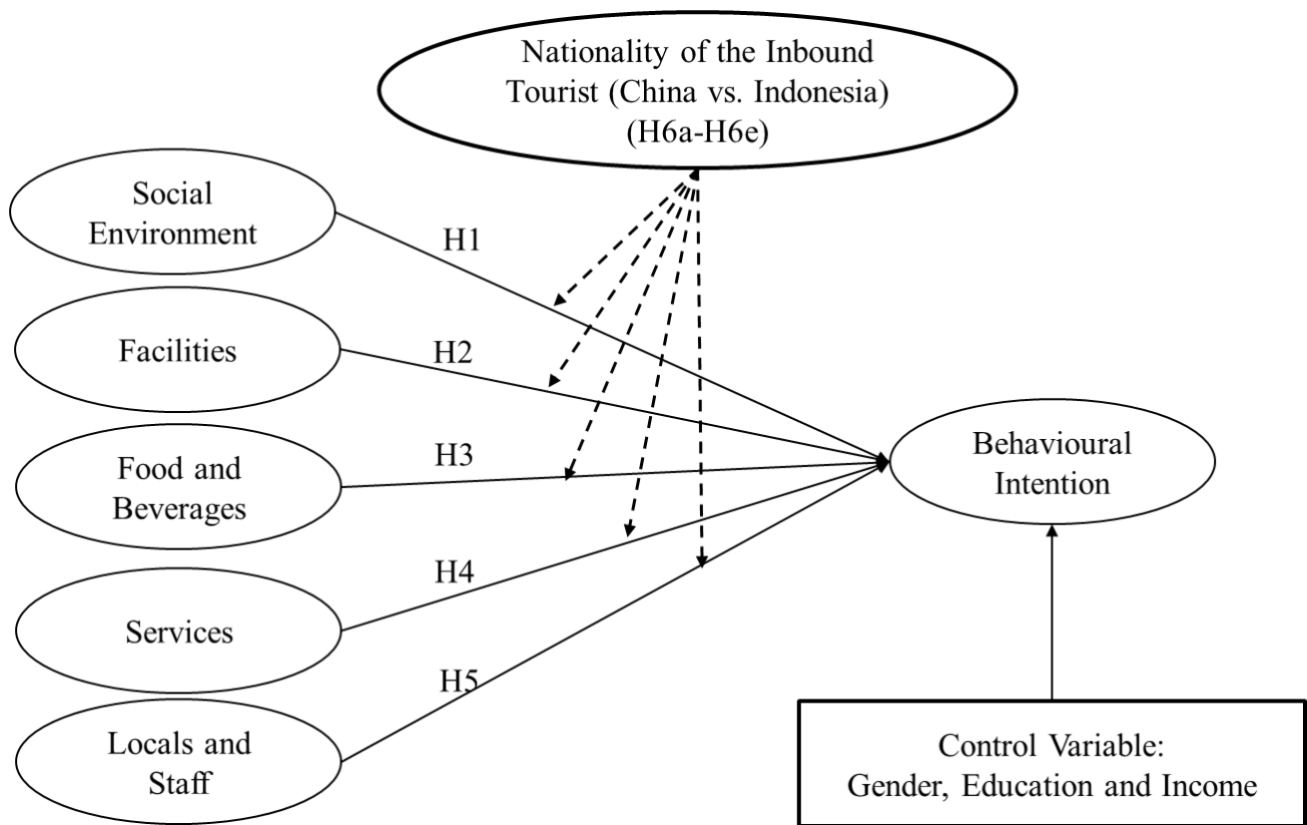


Figure 1: Research Framework

Table 1: Assessment of the Structural Model

Dataset	Relationship	Std Beta	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	CI	VIF	f2	R2	Q2_Predict	
Combined (n=666)	H1) Social Environment -> BI	0.225	0.057	3.934	0.000	(0.132,0.320)	2.477	0.034	0.399	0.299	
	H2) Facilities -> BI	0.087	0.050	1.724	0.042	(0.002,0.167)	2.288	0.005			
	H3) Food and Beverages -> BI	0.241	0.049	4.913	0.000	(0.160,0.322)	2.587	0.037			
	H4) Services -> BI	-0.049	0.053	0.922	0.178	(-0.137,0.037)	2.258	0.002			
	H5) Locals and Staff -> BI	0.216	0.051	4.213	0.000	(0.132,0.299)	2.427	0.032			
	Control Variable										
	Gender -> BI	0.014	0.022	0.649	0.198	(-0.031,0.057)					
	Age -> BI	0.007	0.057	0.131	0.210	(-0.108,0.118)					
	Level of Education -> BI	0.042	0.030	1.400	0.170	(-0.087,0.032)					
	China (n=314)	H1) Social Environment -> BI	0.163	0.078	2.092	0.018	(0.032,0.286)	2.176	0.117	0.310	0.214
H2) Facilities -> BI		0.011	0.077	0.137	0.445	(-0.118,0.135)	2.611	0.007			
H3) Food and Beverages -> BI		0.249	0.068	3.638	0.000	(0.137,0.360)	2.811	0.217			
H4) Services -> BI		-0.168	0.072	2.324	0.010	(-0.284,-0.048)	2.509	0.013			
H5) Locals and Staff -> BI		0.258	0.073	3.514	0.000	(0.141,0.381)	2.903	0.213			
Control Variable											
Gender -> BI		-0.051	0.040	1.266	0.098	(-0.134,0.025)					
Age -> BI		0.072	0.048	1.500	0.079	(-0.003,0.208)					
Level of Education -> BI		0.010	0.029	0.350	0.256	(-0.045,0.070)					
Indonesia (n=352)		H1) Social Environment -> BI	0.264	0.082	3.215	0.001	(0.127,0.399)	2.749	0.330	0.512	0.422
	H2) Facilities -> BI	0.136	0.067	2.027	0.021	(0.017,0.239)	2.172	0.154			
	H3) Food and Beverages -> BI	0.232	0.075	3.094	0.001	(0.107,0.356)	2.308	0.252			
	H4) Services -> BI	0.105	0.077	1.360	0.087	(-0.016,0.237)	2.001	0.009			
	H5) Locals and Staff -> BI	0.209	0.069	3.018	0.001	(0.088,0.318)	2.056	0.215			
	Control Variable										
	Gender -> BI	0.072	0.050	1.440	0.081	(-0.010,0.209)					
	Age -> BI	0.010	0.029	0.350	0.210	(-0.045,0.073)					
	Level of Education -> BI	-0.009	0.043	0.220	0.170	(-0.090,0.079)					

Note: BI (Behavioural Intention); CI (Confidence Interval); VIF (Variance Inflation Factor)

Table 2: Assessment of Multi-Group Analysis

Relationship	Std Beta (China)	Std Beta (Indon)	Std Beta Difference (China vs Indon)	Permutation	PLS-MGA	Parametric Test	Welch– Satterthwaite
				p-values	p-value	p-value	p-value
Facilities -> Behavioural Intention	0.011	0.136	-0.126	0.011	0.965	0.012	0.018
Food and Beverages -> Behavioural Intention	0.249	0.232	0.017	0.858	0.437	0.872	0.871
Locals and Staff -> Behavioural Intention	0.258	0.209	0.050	0.644	0.315	0.627	0.627
Services -> Behavioural Intention	-0.168	0.105	-0.273	0.006	0.996	0.005	0.005
Social Environment -> Behavioural Intention	0.163	0.264	-0.102	0.018	0.957	0.017	0.019

Note: Indo = Indonesia