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FORMULATING HALAL HOTEL MARKETING FOR BUDGET HOTELS

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Abstract. There has been an increasing trend of Muslim traveling across countries. Budget hotel plays an important role to accommodate especially youth Muslim travelers and low budget travelers who are price sensitive. Muslim market has been increasingly an attractive market for tourism industry, thus this is also a big opportunity for budget hotels to offer their services. Halal tourism becomes a must have in the industry to accommodate Muslim tourists. Muslim tourists are generally concern if hotel they stay are Muslim friendly and could accommodate their halal life style. Some of the needs of Muslim visitors during their stay are: the hotel provides a sign of *qibla* direction, mat for praying, facility for ablution, wet toilet (water instead of tissue) in toilet, staff wearing modest dress, no pork on food, no alcohol, relevant music with Islamic atmosphere and no adultery entertainment. Therefore, halal hotel is far beyond halal food, but also not least to mention the segregation of public facilities for female and male as for majority of Moslem halal is a life style, including during travel. However, these facilities at budget hotels might be challenges due to several limitation faced by budget hotels such as narrow building and land size, limited resources, low price, etc. The objective of this research is to analysis the appropriateness for budget hotels to be halal budget hotels using TOWS analysis and to formulate a model for halal budget hotel service. Research methodology uses qualitative approach as this is an exploratory type of research. The analysis also equipped by both primary data through in depth interview with selected informants and secondary data from previous research and publications. Observation study was also conducted at several budget hotels at several states in Malaysia. Suggestions for future research and research implications are provided.

Key words: *Muslim tourist, Budget hotel, Halal hotel marketing, Halal tourism, Qualitative research.*

I. INTRODUCTION

14. Background

International tourism has become one of the largest and most vital economic sectors of the global economy driving huge flows of people, commodities, and capital. Tourism has been and continues to be an important foreign exchange earner to many countries (Samori and Rahman 2013). There has been also an increasing trend of Muslim traveling across countries. As result there has been increasing demand for Muslim traveler accommodation. The world is experiencing a rise in the number of international halal tourists, travelers who choose to abide by the guidelines of the Islamic religion with respect to appropriate behaviors whilst travelling (Abdul-Razzaq, 2016; COMCET, 2016). Tourism sector is a sector that has been identified by many governments as a catalyst for the economy. Halal industry has been becoming a lucrative

market globally either for products or services. However, the services sector such as tourism has yet to tap into this lucrative market even though the halal travel is gaining popularity globally. There is a need for standard framework of halal friendly tourism (Zulkifli, *et al.*, 2013).

Nowadays, Muslim Market is growing. It is a lucrative market accounted to 1.6 billion people or 23% of the world population. In aggregate, the global expenditure of Muslim consumers on food and lifestyle sectors is being estimated to be \$1.62 trillion in 2012 and is expected to reach \$2.47 trillion by 2018. These figures form the substantial potential core markets for halal food and lifestyle sectors as it represents more than \$8 trillion in GDP (Thomson Reuters, 2013). Not just large in number the Muslim travelers are also becoming more aware towards halal food and services while they are having their vacation (Bhuiyan, *et al.*, 2011).

Halal or Muslim-friendly accommodation establishments are defined as accommodation establishments that address some of the needs of Muslim travelers. Muslim-friendly accommodation establishments could be further segmented into those with focused offerings targeting Muslims and addressing the full range of Muslim lifestyle needs, and those with mixed offerings attempting to accommodate Muslims, however, their core consumers are non-Muslims and as such they do not address the needs of Muslim guests to the same extent as Muslim-friendly accommodations with focused offerings. There is currently no published estimate for the total number of Muslim-friendly accommodation establishments globally (COMCET, 2017).

One type of popular accommodation is budget hotel. Budget hotel plays an important role to accommodate especially youth Muslim travelers and low budget travelers who are price sensitive. This of course different with the luxury hotels and resorts, where the share of international tourism is significant, are less controlled and have a more liberal atmosphere even in Moslem majority countries (Nooraslinda *et al.* 2010 in Samori and Rahman 2013). Budget hotel is relatively price cheaper when compared with luxury hotels and budget hotel just provide basic services and facilities (Teng, 2010 in Yu, 2012). Budget hotels are the hotels that focus on customers who are middle and small enterprise business people, leisure and self-help tourists, house prices moderate, small and medium-sized hotel (Xiao *et al.*, 2011, in Yu, 2012).

Halal tourism becomes a must have in the industry to accommodate Muslim tourists. The Success of tourist visit often depends on how acceptable is the hotel they stay with Muslim norms and the availability of facilities to conduct *ibada* (worship) such as *Sala* (praying).

Muslim tourists generally concern hotel where they are staying are Muslim friendly and could accommodate their halal life style. Some of the needs of Muslim visitors during their stay are: the hotel provides a sign of *qibla* direction, mat for praying, facility for ablution, wet toilet (water instead of tissue) in toilet, staff wearing modest dress, no fork on food, no alcohol, relevant music with Islamic atmosphere and no adultery entertainment. Therefore, halal hotel is far beyond halal food, but also not least to mention the segregation of public facilities for female and male as for majority of Moslem halal is a life style, including during travel. However, these facilities at budget hotels might be challenges due to several limitation faced by budget hotels such as narrow building and land size, limited of resources and facilities, limited of management, low price, and limited of capital.

Samori and Rahman (2013) studied to illustrate several features and the characteristics of hospitality services which come within the Islamic context which are universally accepted and tailored with the tourist packages especially to accommodate the needs of the upcoming boom

of Muslim travelers and vacationers from the Middle East West Asia and other Islamic countries.

Up to today there is no specific formulation on how budget hotel can be adjusted into halal budget hotel. In the other hand, there is a growing need of halal budget hotel service for Muslim budget travelers which in turn can also be offered and accepted by non-Muslim budget travelers.

1.2. Research Objectives

This research focuses on the application of halal concept in budget hotel industry as research on halal application for budget hotel is still very limited. Therefore, the objective of this research are firstly to analysis the appropriateness for budget hotels as halal budget hotels using TOWS analysis (threat, opportunities, weaknesses and strength) for bases in delivering of future Halal hotel concept for budget hotels. Secondly to formulate a model for halal budget hotel service marketing using the benchmark of Sofyan hotels, a halal hotel located in Jakarta Indonesia.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Hotel is an establishment of the services such as accommodation, food and drinks for or temporary residents who intend to stay at the hotel (Medlik and Ingram, 2000 in Zulkifli et al., 2013). Earlier times hotel industry is commonly known as lodging industry which providing overnight accommodation to the guests who stay away from home. The halal hotel is not only concern on food and beverage but, it should precisely define on products, equipment, services and activities in the hotels itself (Jeffery, 2008 in Sabidin, 2015) and compliance with sharia principles.

Budget hotels are usually considered as the 1 star Hotel because they provide lodging at very cheaper price varies from \$30-\$40/room/night, some with breakfast offered in this price. The guest rooms are with very limited facilities, like single bed, water bottle and iron board. The location is usually near highways and Exits. Long term lodging with cheap price is also served (Budget hotel, 2012 in Yu, 2012).

Budget Hotel is a hotel format that compare with the traditional Full Service Hotel (Markel, 2012). The Most prominent characteristics of budget hotel are the cheap prices, and its "B&B" (bed + breakfast) service mode. Budget hotel first appeared in United States in the 1950s, and it is quite a mature hotel form in European and American countries today (Budget hotel, 2012 in Yu, 2012). Another characteristic of budget hotel is the hotel that focuses on the customers who are middle and small enterprise business people (business travelers), leisure and self-help tourists (leisure travelers), it is small and medium-sized hotel with moderate house price. The "budget" means "cost" and "worth". It refers to the "price" rather than just in the sense of "cheap" (Yu, 2012). Therefore typically they reduced facilities and services to accommodate low price offering as the main characteristic of budget hotels is the supply of a basic service with low price. Budget hotels thus focus on customers who are price sensitive, low budget, not searching for luxury rather to fit them while staying with good sleep and standard breakfast. This group of customers preferring lower price, but make a point on comfort instead of sophistication because of the efficiency reasons.

The basic characteristics of budget hotel are as follows:

Table 1: The Basic Characteristics of Budget Hotel

1. Location: 20	The areas along the roads close to or at the entrance of the city. Location in strategic points. In cities, in or out of commercial areas. Located close to train, bus stations or subway.
2. Size and diversity:	Facilities are limited, only the room, reception, office, a small snack bar, and a room for necessity equipment. A small laundry. As an alternative, laundry services can be contracted or a small medium laundry company which also supplies service to a group of hotels of the same chain. In order to avoid elevators, a horizontal architecture or low building when possible is preferred.
3. Lobby:	Only a reception and a small resting area.
4. Guest rooms: 40	The number of guest rooms ranging from 60 or less to a little more than 100 approximately. The guest rooms typically smaller than similar ones in upper categories. No special guest rooms for handicapped people. Room as well as the bathroom can be significantly smaller. Guest rooms with only one bed cannot be fitted with guest rooms containing two beds. Limited or no furniture in the guest rooms
5. Parking:	The number of parking spaces is not always enough or equivalent to the number of rooms. Mostly even no parking lot available.

Source: Adapted from Andrade *et al.*, (2000), in Yu (2012):

In the other hand, 42 Scott (2012) in Rogerson (2013) stated that hotels are classified into two main categories, limited-service hotel and full-service hotel. A limited-service hotel is a free-standing property hotel that does not provide extra services such as restaurants, front desk staff, and housekeeping or provide all facilities. A full-service hotel is differentiated by a variety of services when compare to budget hotel (limited service hotel). Customers at full-service properties have more choices, for instance, an extra restaurant and beverage 37 vice that consist of cocktail lounges, formal restaurants, and coffee bars and so on. The large full-service hotels may have a small shopping center with retail shops and gift boutiques to provide convenience to customers who stay at the hotel. There will be laundry service and valet service, swimming pool, fitness center, health spa and even beauty salons. A newsstand and cosmetics counter may also be offered. Even more, they may also offer more service you may have not thought about. The largest of the full-service hotels may offer a wide array or unique and

accommodating services that will be good for larger groups, businesses, commercial activities and celebration event.

According to Alessandro Fiorentino (1995), TRI Hospitality Consulting (2007) and Blanco *et al.* (2011) Rogerson (2013) the budget hotel concept shares certain strategic elements. First, budget hotels mirror the corporate culture and the values of the company they belong to. Second, the budget hotel product is different from traditional economy accommodation, which generally pursues an undifferentiated marketing strategy without making any particular effort to target selected segments of demand – budget hotels are targeted to business customers and frequent travelers, and to maximize occupancy to families, leisure travelers and VFR (visiting, friends and relatives) tourists. Third, providing a clean comfortable room is the core service element of the budget product – standard rooms with selected facilities, unique human resources policy, specific location and price. Fourth, with respect to service delivery, accommodation providers do their best to make their budget system unique by modifying and innovating the way they work. Fifth, the budget hotel relies on a distinct image in order to be clearly positioned in the mind of customers as good products in the economy market offering consistency and value for money. Fiorentino (1995) in Rogerson (2013) further stated that the budget segment of hotels is largely located in people intensive flow areas, such as main roads, airports and busy city centers. Budget hotel customers are people belonging to all market segments and all socioeconomic groups.

The characteristics of budget hotels are commonly distinguished through the ownership and facilities in which common operators of these hotels normally involved professionals such as lawyers, engineers, accountants and doctors who basically have a very partial knowledge of the hotel operation, individuals with limited formal education or experience directly related to the hospitality industry who inherited family business as well as small investors. In terms of facilities, these hotels do not offer ancillary facilities on top of the standard basic accommodation facilities. Budget hotels could be registered as hotel, resort, lodging house, rest house, motel, hostel, guest house or inn. With an average room rate as low as RM80 per night; budget hotels are capable at holding customers with an average length of stay of 4 consecutive nights per visit (Abdullah *et al.*, 2012).

Halal or Muslim friendly hotel is one of the hotels which provide the halal services to the Muslim travelers. This type of hotel is not limited to serve halal food and beverages but the operation throughout the hotel would also be managed based on Islamic principles such as providing halal food and drink, no alcohol beverage being served in the hotel premises, qibla sign provided in each room, prayer mat, copied of holy Quran, provide ramadhan facilities, such as ramadhan buffet and also for early breakfast (sahur) during ramadhan. Halal hotel should also focus on their operation, design of the hotels and also their based financial of the hotel. Facilities at the hotel should be operating as accepted in sharia principles. For example facilities such as spa, gym facilities, swimming pool, guest and function should be separated for males and females (Zulkifli, et al, 2013; MasterCard and CrescentRating on Global Muslim Travel Index, 2016). Therefore, Halal standard can be classified into some elements such as: quality management from perspective of Islam - food and beverages, facilities, also finance, insurance, travel package, transportation/airlines, and other travel/accommodation related activities. The word halal is an Arabic word for permissible, and is used to refer to everything that is permissible for a practicing Muslim. Conversely, the word haram, the Arabic word for forbidden, is used to signify the things that are forbidden for a Muslim to consume or engage in (Battour and Ismail, 2015).

Abdul-Razzaq (2016) and Razalli, *et al.* (2013) argued that the notion of halal encompasses all the aspects of Muslim's life. However, halal is widely associated with food and what is allowed to be consumed by Muslims. The Quran contains many food-related verses outlining the permissible foods, such the Ayah (verse) mentioned in Surat Al Maaidah (The table) in the Quran: "All things suitable [for eating] have been permitted to you" (5:4).

Not surprisingly, the concept of Halal also extends into the realm of the tourism industry. Carboni *et al.* (2014) state that halal tourism has found a favoring amongst Muslim travelers who prefer to choose goods and services that follow the Islamic teachings so as to abide by Sharia (a set of rules derived from the Quran and the Prophet's (peace be upon him) Sunna that dictate the daily lives and practices of Muslims whilst travelling (Abdul-Razzaq, 2016; Razalli, *et al.* 2013).

The hospitality industry has also seen a rise in the popularity of Islamic-friendly services (Battour *et al.*, 2014). Although most efforts in accommodation and lodging development in the past have been dedicated to a secular market, whilst deeming religious needs as less important, catering to religious needs has gathered in pace in recent years (Weidenfeld and Ron, 2008). Islamic hospitality has developed over the past decades and has become a valid part of the hospitality and food service industry with several recognized features (Stephenson, 2014, in Abdul-Razzaq, 2016).

III. METHODOLOGY

Research methodology uses qualitative approach as this is an exploratory type of research. The analysis also equipped by both primary data through in sessions of depth interview with selected informants and secondary data from previous research and publications (library research). Observation study was also conducted at several budget hotels at several states in Malaysia and observation to a halal hotel in Jakarta Indonesia (Hotel Sofyan Betawi) as benchmark. Data analysis is made through studying the relevant available data to match with research objectives in form of descriptive analysis. Threat, opportunity, weaknesses and Strength (Tows) analysis is also provided to support the analysis and discussion.

List hotels observed: Kop Town Hotel and Tune Hotel (Kuala Lumpur), Hotel Bahagia (Langkawi Island), Explorer Hotel (Malaka city), Traveler Hotel (Kota Kinabalu, Sabah), Malabar inn Hotel (Pulau Penang), and one halal hotel as model/benchmark: Hotel Sofyan Betawi, Jakarta Indonesia. All the budget hotels can be booked via Traveloka.

Hotel Sofyan Betawi as the halal hotel for benchmarking is a 3-star hotel with the sharia hotel theme and managed in accordance with the Islamic sharia. Guests are offered to stay with friendly services and halal facilities in a strategic location that is suitable for Muslim leisure travelers and business people. The hotel is located in Menteng Central Jakarta. It is 50 km away from Soekarno Hatta International Airport and this can be easily accessed from the airport (Hotel Sofyan Betawi, 2017).

Hotel Sofyan Betawi offers halal services and all the essential halal amenities and numerous on-site facilities to satisfy the guests starting from Muslim welcoming tradition by receptionist to the very friendly greeting and services upon arrival. In addition, all guestrooms feature a variety of comforts. Many rooms even provide towels, sofa, mirror, wireless internet access (complimentary), TV set. Hotel also provides the relaxing atmosphere of the sharia based fitness center, massage and garden view are available. Entertainment facilities are based

on sharia. TV channel offers no adultery channel. Most channels are Muslim station based channels.

Hotel management believes that Sharia products are good for all, both for Muslims and non-Muslims. As for food, Muslims are the main needs of halal food and everything is lawful, therefore, halal certification is available as all of the subject matters have to be certified. Not only halal food and drinks but also restroom provides enough water for washing, whether to urinate or even to bathe. This is sometimes rarely found in conventional hotels. The ease of purification including toilets, showers, as well as the availability of rinse water, not just tissues is provided. This is to cater for Muslims also for *wudlu* (ablution). To worship in addition there is a large mosque across the hotel, but for guests who would like to worship in the hotel in each room there is also the direction of *Qibla*, prayer mat and Al-Quran. The *mushola* (small mosque) is also available.

It is hopeful that the finding of this research can provide information to indicate the importance for the budget hotel industry stakeholders to have knowledge and fully prepared with the opportunities and challenges that they might be facing prior developing Halal budget Hotel.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Based on study in several budget hotels in Malaysia it was discovered that generally the budget hotels are located in the central of the city where access to public transportation is easy and convenience. Size of the budget hotel is small which contain only 30 to 100 rooms available up to two – four floors. Lifts are very limited it can be only one or two lifts for the whole hotel. In certain case such as hotels with only two up to 3 floors can be no lift at all. Breakfast is very standard with only one menu or limited choice. Certain budget hotels even do not provide breakfast at all. Room size is very limited with only 4x4 meters or 4x5 meters including bathroom and toilet. There are small empty space in between bed and the wall which might be suitable for Muslim guest to use individual praying, for one person only. AC and TV set most available. Price is in between RM. 75 –RM. 150 (Malaysian ringgits). There are limited promotional activities held for their hotels since their focus is to sell the room only. However, brochures or leaflet mostly are available. Since marketing and promotional activities is very limited Abdullah *et al.* (2012) found that the businesses depend highly on walk-in customers as well as word of mouths.

The budget hotel staff employees ranging from three (3) to ten (10) staffs depending on the number of room units and services provided. The staffs are in-charged in cleaning, housekeeping, marketing/reception, maintenance and handling reservation. 1 or 2 staffs are in charge as receptionist(s) with additional duties as cashier and phone operator. Operational decision making process is mostly at the owners' full discretion.

Further it was found no swimming pool is available, nor spa and gym facilities. No in room meal service order is common. No night entertainment at all, but also no public prayer facility for Muslim guests. Welcome drink or complementary drink mostly available with 1 to two bottles of water in certain budget hotels. Mostly budget hotels do not provide mini refrigerator/mini bar.

The positive side of budget hotel is that it is a type of bed and breakfast traveler activity which is fit with the budget travelers who are not searching for a luxury accommodation. Mostly the rooms are provided for rest especially to take sleep. Therefore it is understood that

mostly they do not have night entertainment or pub and also alcoholic bravery is not likely available. Considering this situation making it into a halal budget hotel seems will be easier. To convert into halal budget hotel the owners need only to provide *ibada* (prayer) facilities and additional room for praying outside of the room which can accommodate 10-30 persons should be suitable, Muslim staff and to conduct standard sharia operation both for guests and staff. But challenges also arise.

Even though many (Muslim) guests do not question the availability of complete *ibada* facilities, rather they more concern on customer service and the cleanliness of the room. Formatting halal budget hotel is also an option. For many budget hotel owner, due to lack of budget, providing additional facilities for Moslem prayer practice is challenge. Especially for non Moslem Hotel owners who target their guests for every body and do not take into account any religion life style, unlike the Muslim owners.

The following is Budget Hotel Threat, Opportunity, Weaknesses and Strength (TOWS) Analysis:

Table 2: Budget Hotel TOWS Analysis

<p>Threat:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The emergence of home stay alternatives, 2. Air BnB internet application based accommodation, 3. Attractiveness of the upper stars hotel for leisure. 	<p>Opportunity:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The growing budget travelers who seek standard service not luxury, 2. Muslim Back packer, 3. Muslim Millennial traveler.
<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not so convenience/the absence of luxury, 2. Limited facilities, 3. Narrow space, 4. Standard service 5. Standard Meals often no meals at all. 	<p>Strength:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Location (good access), 2. Affordable price, 3. Efficient, 4. Economical.

Sourced: Data process, 2017.

Based on TOWS analysis the opportunity of budget hotel to convert into halal budget hotel is open. However, owner or management of budget hotel should take into account some limitation and challenges facing in turning it into budget hotel. Basic halal service at budget hotel can be facilitated as general budget hotel also facilitates basic services only. At least guest can exercise their duty as Muslim while staying and feel comfort with the hotel Islamic atmosphere.

There are some positive aspects in turning general budget hotel into halal budget hotel such as with limitation of budget hotel typically the hotel is not accommodated with night entertainment and alcoholic drink. Second consideration is since the option into halal budget hotel also depends on owner or management policy, especially when the owner still would like to focus to Non-Muslim market, therefore this is management policy.

With these challenges and limitations proposed model for halal budget hotel would be very standard and minimize: A *mushola* within the hotel for guests as the room is so narrow to accommodate praying especially when guests come with a partner. However, small space in the room should be allocated for individual Muslim praying. It can be a space between bed and the wall. It is understood that with this tiny space might not feel comfortable. Quran and *shala* equipment such as Mat and *Sarong/Mukena* for ladies can be still provided in each room, also *qibla* direction and running water facility for *wudlu* and ablution. There is a need of wet toilet.

Islamic greeting by staff such as *assalamua'laykum* can be use and part of the SOP, also greeting on the telephone. Also to create Islamic atmosphere the printing of mosque, soft music, adzan (prayer) calling, Islam calligraphy is suggested to hang on walls in side of and outside of rooms. Staff dress codes to adjust with Moslem appropriate dress. No smoking sign and *shala* time information is provided in each room, as well in the lobby.

Room entertainment such as TV programs, should be selected with Islamic norms. No adult movie provided, as well other programs which might unsuitable with sharia principles. Facilities such as gym (if any) can be separated between men and women, at least have a turn basis between male and female.

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The model of halal budget hotel encounters some barriers especially in term of facilities to support the required halal requirements. Some of the barriers are: the limited space of the room, limited space of hotel building for having a small mosque (*mushola*) and human resources barrier. However, despite all the challenges and barriers the budget hotel is also open for the opportunity for the halal budget hotel or at least Muslim friendly budget hotel. Standard sharia principles are already there since generally budget hotels have no alcoholic drink provided, no disco or pub, no night club as space is very limited and no night/entertainments facilities available. As the budget hotel is merely functioned for taking a rest and sleeping comfortably, then the concept of halal budget hotel is fulfilled with a very standard service and minimize.

As this is an exploratory research with qualitative nature then future research by using quantitative method is strongly suggested.

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