

Halal Tourism: Travel Motivators and Customer Retention

ABSTRACT

This research was designed to identify halal-friendly travel motivation factors and unearth their role in Muslim customer retention process in Korea. Qualitative and quantitative procedures were used to achieve research objectives. A comprehensive structural model was developed to distinguish the role of all proposed indicators. Our results revealed that halal-friendly travel motivations are significantly associated with customer return on investment and satisfaction, and that such relationships contribute to improving customer retention. The effectiveness of higher-order structure of halal-friendly travel motivations was demonstrated. The formation of Muslim customers' post-purchase decision was significantly moderated by sense of belonging to a tourist destination.

Keywords: Muslim travelers, halal-friendly travel motivations, sense of belonging, customer retention, customer return on investment

Introduction

Due to a significant increase in the number of Muslim travelers visiting Korea, the impact of Muslim tourism is considerable, particularly in the medical field, lodging sector, transportation sector, education sector, foodservice sector, and cultural sector (Al-Ansi et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2015). According to Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) (2015), the total economy impact was

approximately 40 billion dollars of production and 20 billion dollars of value-added. More importantly, this emerging inbound Muslim tourism is anticipated to create more than 80,000 jobs (translators, medical tourism coordinators, educators, foodservice and lodging practitioners whose knowledge about halal is high, tour guides, travel agents, retail product makers, etc.), which are directly or indirectly associated with Muslim tourism. The numbers of jobs will be even greater if part-time jobs are included. This market can be even broader and bigger if the tourism environment in Korea become more halal-friendly.

According to Kim et al. (2015) and Al-Ansi et al. (2018) the halal-friendly environment and availability of Muslim-friendly attributes are very important aspects to attract Muslim tourists. Developing a halal-friendly environment in Korea will bring even more Muslim travelers than expected (Han et al., 2019). Correspondingly, jobs opportunities to cover the needs of Muslim tourists will be gradually generated among hospitality service providers (i.e., Hotels, restaurants, attractions, shopping centers, medical clinics, transportations, etc.) if the size of Halal tourism expands in Korea. Al-Ansi and Han (2019) reported that maximizing the Halal tourism size is highly increase the competitive edge of a destination, and strongly assist to penetrate a huge global market consist of 57 Muslim countries (OIC) worldwide. Besides, it will create greater value for expanding collaborations in other business sectors including foods manufactures, beauty and cosmetics industry, fashions, sports events, and international festivals (Olya & Al-Ansi, 2018). Therefore, the limited source market of Korean arrival tourists keeps its tourism growth faced many challenges to enhance its overall national economy by increasing the number of jobs, improve hospitality service quality, globalized its social environment, have better economic growth, and diversify the inbound tourism.

Halal tourism with the global Muslim population growth is undoubtedly becoming a huge niche market in the international tourism industry (Kim et al., 2015; Jeaheng et al., 2019). Despite this rapid increase, which will reach approximately thirty percent of the world population, the proportion of Muslim travelers among all inbound travelers in Korea is about 5.3%, which is somewhat low when comparing with other destination countries in Asia. In addition, the competition is getting severe in the international halal tourism industry (Kim et al., 2015) as many new tourism destinations are becoming halal-friendly (Kim et al., 2015; Shafaei & Mohamed, 2015) and as the established destinations are fortifying their tourism attributes to be more appealing to Muslim travelers (Battour et al., 2017; Olya & Al-Ansi, 2018; Jeaheng et al., 2019). Recently, Han, Al-Ansi, and Kim (2019) reported that the competitiveness of Korea as a halal-friendly destination is relatively weak among non-Muslim countries in Asia (e.g., Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong, India). Developing/offering halal-friendly products and services that comply with Islamic laws and retain inbound Muslim travelers through a halal-friendly tourism environment can be therefore indisputably important for Korea to be more competitive than rival destinations.

Korea strived to strengthen the tourism infrastructure to be considered as a halal-friendly destination in the last few years (Han et al., 2019). Indeed, along with the growth of the number of Muslim inbound travelers in Korea, the complaints about foods, accommodations, transportation use, service encounters, facilities, and shopping that are not sufficiently halal-friendly are in a rapid increase (Al-Ansi & Han, 2019). Muslim travelers often select a tourism destination in which halal-friendly attributes are found without difficulty (Olya & Al-Ansi, 2018), and such attributes become crucial halal-friendly travel motivators (Han et al., 2019). The availability of such motivators of Muslims' tourism-related decisions in Korea, however, has not been extensively examined. In

addition, despite the criticality of the concept of halal, there are not many conceptual/empirical studies on Muslim travelers' motivations and their possible influence on the retention process. Understanding Muslim travelers' motivations to visit Korea and the underlying dimensions of such motivations is thus undeniably essential. Moreover, attempts to identify how the possible motivation factors contribute to enhancing Muslim tourists' cognitive tourism evaluation (e.g., return on investment), satisfactory travel experiences, and repeat visitation to Korea are of utmost importance.

The present study was designed to investigate Muslim traveler retention processes by considering the role of halal-friendly travel motivations and its dimensions ([a] accommodations, [b] foods, [c] facilities, [d] service encounters, [e] locals and other travelers). Specifically, we aimed to (1) uncover the intricate associations among halal-friendly travel motivations, customer return on investment, and satisfaction with travel experiences in Korea in the formation of customer retention, (2) unearth the adequacy of the higher-order structure of halal-friendly travel motivations and its effectiveness in the proposed theoretical framework, (3) identify the mediating role of customer return on investment and satisfaction, (4) uncover the moderating role of Muslim travelers' sense of belonging, (5) assess the comparative importance of study constructs in determining retention.

Literature review

Halal tourism, its concept and scope

The term, halal tourism, is often alternatively used with Islamic tourism. Indeed, numerous researchers in diverse contexts have interchangeably utilized these concepts (e.g., Battour et al., 2017; Henderson, 2009; Jafari & Scott, 2014; Zamani-Farahani &

Henderson, 2010). Nevertheless, although the definitions of halal tourism and Islamic tourism in the extant tourism literature include similarity, some researchers argue that the definitions of halal tourism and Islamic tourism have also dissimilarity (Olya & Al-Ansi, 2018; Jeaheng et al., 2019). In particular, while the concept of “*Islamic*” is only applicable to the things directly associated with the Islamic faith or its doctrine such as Islamic principles, beliefs, law, and worship (Douglass & Shaikh, 2004), the concept of “halal” is applied to any activity or practice permissible to Islamic teaching (Sharia law) (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Specifically, Al-Qaradawi (2013) indicated that this term “halal” refers to “*that which is permitted, with respect to which no restriction exists, and the doing of which the law-giver, Allah, is allowed*” (p. 25). The key aspect of “*halal*” is “*permissible*”. In other words, its major aspect is “*religiously acceptable*” (Shafaei & Mohamed, 2015).

Jafari and Scott (2014) described Islamic tourism is the encouragement of travelers to follow the requirements of Sharia law. Battour and Ismail (2016) argued that Jafari and Scott’s (2014) definition of Islamic tourism is more adequate for halal tourism. One of the clearest definitions of halal tourism is provided by Battour and Ismail (2016). According to them, halal tourism refers to “*any tourism object or action which is permissible according to Islamic teachings to use or engage by Muslims in the tourism industry*” (p. 2). Likewise, Olya and Al-Ansi (2018) defined Halal tourism as an object, activity, or action related to tourism products and services which are permitted or lawful to be used or consumed, according to the Islamic law. Thus, Islamic law (shariah) is considered in this definition as the base to convey tourism-related products/services (e.g., halal travel package, halal restaurant, halal hotel and resort) to the target Muslim customers (Olya & Al-Ansi, 2018). Unlike WTM (2007), which confined halal tourism to only religious tourism, Battour and Ismail (2016) asserted that halal tourism includes both religious traveling but non-religious traveling in terms of purpose.

In addition, they indicated that halal tourism is locationally not limited to Muslim countries, whereas religious tourism fully or partially based on visiting purpose which is often related to religious beliefs (e.g., pilgrims) (Jafari & Scott, 2014). These outcomes are asserted in line with Shakiry (2006)'s and Carboni et al.'s (2014) indication that the scope of halal tourism is not limited to raveling with religious purposes. The scope includes all tourism types in condition that these tourism forms do not go against Islamic law and values.

Halal-friendly travel motivations

Travelers' motivation has long been an essential topic in the international tourism industry (Caber & Albayrak, 2016; Mak et al., 2009; Qu & Ping, 1999; Smith & Puczko, 2009). According to Crompton and McKay (1997), one's motivation is considered to be an internal variable that provokes, directs, and incorporates his/her act. In the same manner, Crompton and McKay (1997) indicated that travel motivations are "*a dynamic process of internal psychological factors (needs and wants) that generate a state of tension or disequilibrium within individuals*" (p. 427). Consistently, in this research, halal-friendly travel motivations refer to Muslim tourists' dynamic procedure of intrinsic psychological factors that direct their act and generate a state of pressure for conduction the behavior within themselves. Undoubtedly, strong halal-friendly travel motivations are the preconditions of Muslim travelers' pleasurable tourism experiences (Al-Ansi & Han, 2019).

Motivation to travel often affects tourists' decision-making processes (Qu & Ping, 1999). Muslim tourists' decision formation for international traveling is also under the significant influence of their traveling motivation, and Muslim travelers' overseas traveling

is an intended/directed behavior activated by their desire to fulfill their traveling needs and wants. Escape/relaxation, learning/discovery/thrill, bonding, and self-esteem/social recognition are important motivation categories of international/pleasure tourism (Hung & Petrick, 2011; Jung & Han, 2016). In the halal tourism sector, convenient access to Muslim culture (e.g., accessibility to Muslim prayer space/place, familiarity with Islamic culture or religion, convenient location of mosques), halal-friendly tourism facilities/attractions (e.g., shopping facilities, quality of tourism infrastructure [e.g., airport, train, transport, road], technology, availability/accessibility to visit featured locations of TV dramas and movies, sightseeing opportunity, cultural event/festival), halal-friendly service providers, halal-friendly travel environment and locals, and availability of halal foodservice operations can be important travel motivation dimensions (Kim et al., 2015; Shafaei & Mohamed, 2015).

Unlike international/pleasure tourism motivation studies, accessibility to halal-friendly tourism attributes (e.g., halal-friendly accommodations, foods and beverages, facilities/amenities, service providers, and locals and other people) is often regarded as one of the most important categories in the halal tourism context (Han et al., 2019; Jeaheng et al., 2019). This assertion is in line with Kim et al. (2015) indication that such Islamic attributes can be Muslim travel motivators, satisfying their traveling needs. Consistently, Vargas-Sánchez and Moral-Moral (2019) and Han et al. (2019) claimed that availability of such halal-friendly tourism attributes are key motivators of Muslim travelers' international destination choice and behaviors. Further investigation by Battour et al. (2017) justified the critical role of Islamic attributes (i.e., halal meals, Muslim worshiping facilities) in strengthening the associations between destination pull factors (i.e., natural scenery, atmosphere, shopping) and the overall Muslim satisfaction, which was developed based on the theory of pull-and-push motivation (Baloglu & Uysal, 1996). Their findings highly formulated the preferences of Muslim

travelers decision-process and motivations behaviors.

Understanding individuals' tourism motivations is believed to increase our knowledge about why they travel, what the reasons for their traveling are, and what they desire to fulfill from their traveling (Andriotis & Agiomirgianakis, 2010; Hung & Petrick, 2011; Jones, 2011). Motivations to travel are hence regarded to be a critical force behind tourists' all tourism activities (Andriotis & Agiomirgianakis, 2010; Sun et al., 2014). In this regard, tourism motivation is a widely researched topic in an international tourism context. Many researchers in diverse contexts indicated the criticality of travel motivations in explicating customers' post-purchase decision-making process and behaviors (Han & Hyun, 2017; Han et al., 2019). For instance, in their investigation of Muslim travelers' post-purchase behaviors, Han et al. (2019) found that halal-friendly destination attributes induce positive cognitive assessment of Muslims' travel experiences. They asserted that such destination attributes can be the important halal-friendly travel motivators. In the cruise tourism context, Han and Hyun (2017) examined customer retention process, and found that cruise travel motivations exerted a significant influence on customer cognitive perception about return on investment. Their finding also demonstrated the effectiveness of a higher-order structure of travel motivations. These researchers agree that travel motivations elicit customers' cognitive appraisal and perception of their product/service experiences.

Customer return on investment and its role

Customer return on investment indicates that patrons' cognitive comparison between the benefits achieved from a particular product/service consumption experience and the costs/sacrifices (monetary and non-monetary) involved in achieving such benefits

(Han et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2010; Wiedmann et al., 2009). If customers' perceived assessment of the benefits gained is greater than the costs/sacrifices, they feel that return on investment is high. That is, the possible achievement of the financial and non-financial advantages while experiencing the consumption of the product/service is the core aspect of customer return on investment (Babin et al., 1994; Han et al., 2017). Customers also perceive return on investment when experiencing the level of functional performances of product/service attributes is high (Kesari & Atulkar, 2016; Ryu et al., 2010). Olya and Al-Ansi (2018) justified the role of multiple risks in formulating Muslim customer pre-purchase process, which carefully demonstrates how the Muslim individual assess such tourism services and products benefits or losses.

The scope of customer return on investment normally includes reasonable/acceptable price searching, quality-seeking, and convenience-seeking, which are mostly related to the cognitive nature (Bhatnagar & Ghosh, 2004; Han et al., 2017). Researchers in the extant literature asserted the importance of customer return on investment in explaining customer post-purchase behaviors (Babin et al., 1994; Bhatnagar & Ghosh, 2004; Han et al., 2017; Ryu et al., 2010; Wiedmann et al., 2009). Particularly, the relationship between customer return on investment and customer satisfaction has been empirically supported by studies in hospitality and tourism (Han et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2010; Ryu et al., 2010). These researchers agree the positive and significant association between two concepts and the influence of such relationship on customer retention.

Satisfaction with travel experiences and its role

In consumer behavior and marketing, customer satisfaction is often regarded as one of the most powerful drivers of post-purchase

decisions/behaviors. Satisfaction is believed to be especially critical in developing/strengthening effective marketing/service programs, and thus being of interest to practitioners and researchers in diverse contexts (Dabholkar & Sheng, 2012; Hunt, 1997; Yang & Peterson, 2004). Satisfaction refers to “an evaluation rendered that the consumption experience was at least as good as it was supposed to be” (Hunt, 1997; p. 459). Diverse conceptualizations of satisfaction exist in the extant literature. Nevertheless, there is general agreement among researchers that the core aspect of satisfaction is the process of evaluation regarding customers’ perception of the discrepancy between the preliminary standards of the product/service performances and the actual performances of it or its attributes (Yang & Peterson, 2004; Yi, 1990). Indisputably, customers’ satisfactory consumption experiences with a product/service ultimately contribute to the increase in customer retention rate (Saha & Theingi, 2009; Oliver, 1999).

Sense of belonging and its role

Sense of belonging has been continuously receiving a substantial attention from the destination marketers and researchers in that it significantly contributes to the increase of tourists’ positive behaviors for the destination (repeat visitation, citizenship behaviors, willingness to protect the place, etc.). The sense of belonging refers to “*a multifaceted concept that characterizes the bonding between individuals and their important places*” (Scannell & Gifford, 2010a, p. 1). Consistent with this definition, researchers agree that the vital aspect of the sense of belonging is the emotional bonding (Giuliani, 2003; Low & Altman, 1992). The sense of belonging often comprises such dimensions as person, process, and place (Scannell & Gifford, 2010b). There exist two types of the sense of belonging (i.e., civic and natural) (Scannell & Gifford, 2010b). Although the simultaneous use of the term “sense of belonging” is frequent, in

some studies, these civic (e.g., Willilams et al., 1992) and natural (e.g., Vorkinn & Riese, 2001) factors have been separately examined. However, considering that destination country has both civic and natural aspects, investigating the sense of belonging in a simultaneous manner seems to be adequate in the present research context.

When travelers feel a strong sense of belonging to a specific tourism destination, they often feel emotionally connected to the destination and feel attached to it (Fournier & Lee, 2009; Hyun & Han, 2015; Tsai, 2014). According to Hyun and Han (2015) and Tsai (2014), the key for the development of a long-term enduring relationship between a company and its customers is boosting customers' sense of belonging to the company. In their empirical research, Hyun and Han (2015) also indicated that customers' sense of belonging affects their cruise post-purchase decision formation, acting as a moderator. In their recent study of customer loyalty generation process, Han and Hyun (2018) consistently, demonstrated that customers' sense of belonging moderates the strength of the associations among travel motivations, satisfaction, and loyalty. They identified that when customers feel a strong sense of belonging, they are more likely to engage in repurchase and word-of-mouth behaviors. This finding was in line with Fournier and Lee's (2009) indication that when patrons have a high sense of belonging to a particular brand community, patrons' decision formation for repurchasing the brand's products becomes stronger.

Research model and hypotheses

The proposed model is shown in Figure 1. The model comprised halal-friendly travel motivations, customer return on investment, and satisfaction with travel experiences as antecedents of customer retention, and included sense of belonging as a moderator. A total of 5 research hypotheses are contained in the proposed theoretical framework.

(Insert Figure 1)

Methodology

Specification of the domain of halal-friendly motivations

A thorough review of the extant studies (literature search) for the specification of domain of the research construct (halal-friendly motivation) was made. Islamic travelers' motivations encompass intrinsic needs and wants that lead their action and make a state of pressure for performing the action (Crompton & McKay, 1997), and it include various components (e.g., halal-friendly accommodations, foods, facilities, service encounters, locals and other people) (Al-Ansi et al., 2018; Han et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2015). As indicated earlier, the major aspect of halal is religiously permissible (Al-Ansi et al., 2018; Shafaei & Mohamed, 2015). Thus, the scope of halal-friendly travel motivation comprises Muslims' internal psychological factors that direct their travel behaviors and produce a state of tension for practicing such behaviors, which are religiously acceptable.

Generation of the measurement items for halal-friendly motivations

The measurement items for halal-friendly travel motivations were initially generated on the basis of the literature review (Al-Ansi et al., 2018; Han et al., 2019; Jafari & Scott, 2014; Kim et al., 2015; Rahman et al., 2017). In addition, a few more items were added based on qualitative person-to-person interviews: *“Hotel/accommodation interior decorations are free of any nudist paintings or pictures”*, *“Availability of Halal food attracted me to visit tourist places”*, *“Availability of prayer rooms attracted me to visit tourist places”*, *“Halal service providers in tourist places are well aware of Islamic rules”*, and *“Local people and other travelers generally had a positive attitude toward Muslim tourists”*. The interviews were with actual Muslim travelers visiting Korea and academic experts of halal tourism. In sum, a total of 4 measurement items were used to assess halal-friendly accommodations. We also utilized 4 items for the evaluation of halal foods, and used 4 items for the assessment of halal-friendly facilities. To measure halal-friendly service encounters, a total of 5 items were utilized. In addition, we used 3 items for the evaluation of halal-friendly locals and other travelers. These measurement items were thoroughly reviewed and refined by academic experts from Islamic countries. The measurement items used to evaluate halal-friendly travel motivations are shown in Table 1 and appendix.

(Insert Table 1)

Measurement items for other study constructs

Measures for other study variables were adopted from the previous studies (Byun & Jang, 2018; Fullerton, 2005; Henning-Thurau, 2004; Hwang & Lee, 2018; Hwang & Park, 2018; Lee et al., 2010; Lyu & Hwang, 2017; Oliver, 2010; Tsai & Wang, 2017; Zhao et

al., 2012). A 7-point Likert-type scale was used ([1] “strongly disagree” – [7] “strongly agree”). In addition, multiple items were used for the assessment of all research constructs. Specifically, we used 4 items to evaluate customer return on investment. Satisfaction with travel experiences was evaluated with 3 items. To measure a sense of belonging, we used 3 items. A total of 3 items were used for the assessment of customer retention. These measures along with items for halal-friendly motivations were included in the survey questionnaire. This questionnaire was then pre-tested with tourism academics and actual Muslim travelers. Afterward, a minor modification was made. Lastly, the survey questionnaire was finalized and perfected through academic experts’ reviews. The measures of study variables are exhibited in Table 1.

Data collection and samples

Three different versions of the survey questionnaires were developed. That is, the original version of the survey questionnaire in English was translated into Arabic and Malay utilizing a translation back-to-back method. A field survey using a convenience sampling approach was conducted in diverse areas in Korea (e.g., tourist sites, shopping districts, international airports, duty-free/department stores) where many international travelers often visit/stay. Muslim travelers are easily observable in such places. The surveyors approached to international Muslim travelers and ask them to participate in the survey. The survey participation was voluntary. The surveyors provided the brief explanation of the research to the participants. The filled questionnaire was returned to the surveyors onsite. A little souvenir was given to those who completed the questionnaire. This survey was conducted on Spring, 2018

for about a one-month period when the number of inbound tourists in Korea is highest. A total of 410 responses were gathered through this process. After the removal of unusable cases, our final sample size for data analysis was 391 cases.

Among 391 respondents, about 53.9% were female Muslim travelers, and about 46.1% were male travelers. Their age ranged from 19 years old to 69 years old with the mean of 28.8 years old. Regarding their frequency of travel to Korea, about 65.6% reported that it was their first time to visit Korea, followed by 2 – 3 times (23.5%), 4 – 5 times (5.2%), 10 times or more (3.6%), 6 – 9 times (2.1%). When their education level was asked, about 47.1% indicated that they hold a university degree, followed by graduate degree holders (27.5%), high school graduates or less (18.8%), and 2-year college graduates (6.5%). The respondents were from diverse countries (e.g., Malaysia, Indonesia, Uzbekistan, Brunei, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Yemen, Jordan, etc.). For the question of “*How important are halal-friendly accommodation/foods/tourism products when choosing a destination?*”, about 85.0% of the survey participants reported either “extremely important” (59.6%) or “important” (25.4%).

Results

Assessment of reliability and validity

A measurement model was created by conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Our result showed that the model contained an adequate level of goodness-of-fit statistics ($\chi^2 = 1190.418$, $df = 456$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.611$, RMSEA = .064, CFI = .914, IFI = .914, TLI = .900). All loadings (standardized) were significant ($p < .01$) (see Table 1). The composite reliability values of the measures were greater than the cutoff of .700 suggested by Hair et al. (1998). As shown in Table 1, the values fell between .813 and .936. Thus,

the internal consistency of construct measures was evident. In addition, average variance extracted values were all above the recommended threshold of .500 (Hair et al., 1998). The values ranged from .511 to .830. This result supported convergent validity of the construct measures. Moreover, the AVE values were greater than the between-construct correlations. Therefore, the discriminant validity of the measures was evident.

Assessment of the higher-order model and model comparison

A structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed. Our result revealed that the model contained an acceptable level of goodness-of-fit statistics ($\chi^2 = 1207.692$, $df = 394$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 3.065$, RMSEA = .073, CFI = .891, IFI = .891, TLI = .879). Table 2 and Figure 2 included details of the SEM results. As reported in Table 2 and Figure 2, our results of the higher-order model for halal-friendly travel motivations revealed that the higher-order latent construct is significantly associated with the five first-order factors ([a] accommodations, [b] foods, [c] facilities, [d] service encounters, [e] locals and other travelers). The coefficient values were .781 ([a] halal-friendly accommodations), .969 ([b] halal foods), .831 ([c] halal-friendly facilities), .813 ([d] halal-friendly service encounters), and .507 ([e] halal-friendly locals and other travelers), respectively. In addition, all relationships were significant ($p < .01$).

(Insert Table 2)

(Insert Figure 2)

The goodness-of-fit statistics of the higher-order model was significantly better than that of the first-order model ($\chi^2 = 1381.033$, $df = 387$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 3.569$, RMSEA = .081, CFI = .866, IFI = .867, TLI = .850) (see Table 2). Indeed, there was a significant chi-square difference between the first-order and higher-order frameworks ($\Delta\chi^2 [7] = 173.341$, $p < .01$). This result demonstrated the adequacy of the higher-order framework of halal-friendly travel motivations. The five first-order factors of halal-friendly accommodations ($R^2 = .610$), halal foods ($R^2 = .939$), halal-friendly facilities ($R^2 = .831$), halal-friendly service encounters ($R^2 = .661$), and halal-friendly locals and other travelers ($R^2 = .257$) were adequately accounted for by the higher-order factor.

Hypotheses testing

The hypothesized effect of halal-friendly motivations on customer return on investment was tested. Our result in Table 2 and Figure 2 showed the significant association between two variables ($\beta = .456$, $p < .01$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported. The effect of customer return on investment on satisfaction with travel experiences and customer retention was assessed. Findings revealed that customer return on investment exerted a significant influence on satisfaction with travel experiences ($\beta = .604$, $p < .01$) and customer retention ($\beta = .339$, $p < .01$). Therefore, Hypotheses 2 and 3 were supported. The relationship between satisfaction with travel experiences and customer retention was examined. Our result showed that the relationship was significant and positive ($\beta = .404$, $p < .01$). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was supported. Halal-friendly motivations explained about 20.8% of the variance in customer return on investment, and these two variables explained about 36.5% of the variance in satisfaction. In addition, about 44.4% of the total variance in customer retention was accounted for by its antecedents.

Assessment of indirect and total effect

The indirect effect of research constructs was examined. As reported in Table 2, halal-friendly travel motivations included a significant indirect effect on satisfaction with travel experiences ($\beta = .275, p < .01$) and customer retention ($\beta = .266, p < .01$). In addition, customer return on investment had a significant indirect effect on customer retention ($\beta = .244, p < .01$). This result implies that satisfaction with travel experiences along with customer return on investment acted as significant mediators within the proposed model. The total impact of study variables on customer retention was examined. As reported in Table 2, customer return on investment included the strongest total impact on retention ($\beta = .583, p < .01$), followed by satisfaction ($\beta = .404, p < .01$) and halal-friendly travel motivations ($\beta = .266, p < .01$).

Baseline model assessment and invariance test

A baseline model was generated to test the moderating effect of sense of belonging. A total of 391 responses were split into high ($n = 232$) and low ($n = 159$) groups of sense of belonging. A k-means cluster analysis was utilized for this group. Overall, our result showed that the baseline model included an adequate level of goodness-of-fit statistics ($\chi^2 = 1913.822, df = 810, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 2.363, RMSEA = .059, CFI = .837, IFI = .839, TLI = .825$) (see Table 3 and Figure 2). This model was then compared to nested models in which a specific path of interest was restricted to be equivalent between high and low groups of sense of belonging. As shown in Table 3, our findings from the chi-square test revealed that the path from customer return on investment to customer

retention was significantly different between two groups ($\Delta\chi^2 [1] = 5.552, p < .05$). This result supported Hypothesis 5a. However, our result showed that the linkage from satisfaction with travel experiences to customer retention was not significantly different across high and low groups of sense of belonging ($\Delta\chi^2 [1] = 2.681, p > .05$). Therefore, Hypothesis 5b was not supported.

(Insert Table 3)

Discussion

The present study offers a strong theorization pertinent to Muslims' halal-friendly travel motivations in explaining their post-purchase behaviors. This research was one of very few studies to develop a conceptual framework by comprising halal-friendly travel motivations as major variables and considering its effect on Muslim customer retention through customer return on investment and satisfaction. In addition, the present study was the first research to consider the possible moderating effect of Muslim travelers' sense of belonging to a non-Islamic tourism destination on their post-purchase decision formation. Overall, the findings of this study help us better understand the role of halal-friendly travel motivations, which enhance Muslim customers' return on investment, improve their satisfaction with travel experiences, and eventually elicit their repeat purchase behaviors. Moreover, our results help us better comprehend the importance of the concept "sense of belonging" and its moderating effect on Muslim traveler retention process. Given that Muslim traveler retention is indisputably one of the most critical challenges in the increasingly competitive international tourism

marketplace, our findings are critical in helping tourism policy makers and destination practitioners in Korea grow the number of Muslim travelers and their retention rate.

A particularly valuable point is the hierarchical second-order framework of halal-friendly travel motivations. It was evident that the five first-order factors ([a] accommodation, [b] food, [c] facilities, [d] service encounters, [e] locals and other travelers) belong to one global concept of halal-friendly travel motivations. That is, the commonality underlying these first-order factors were amply extracted by its higher-order factor. Our finding enriched the halal tourism literature by offering a hierarchical approach that distinctly captures motivations for halal-friendly travel. In addition, the parsimonious typology of such higher-order structure informs researchers and practitioners the efficiency of theorizing convoluted motivation factors more concisely in the halal tourism context.

Halal foods and halal-friendly facilities were two salient dimensions of halal-friendly travel motivations. Accordingly, for destination practitioners, increasing the availability of halal foods and halal-friendly facilities (e.g., prayer room, mosque) and enhancing the quality of such foods and facilities can be most essential to fulfill the important aspects of Muslims' needs/wants when traveling a non-Islamic destination. Halal-friendly service encounters, accommodations, and locals and other travelers were also identified as important dimensions of halal-friendly travel motivations. Thus, in order to better promote a destination product to Muslim travelers, it is necessary to improve the performance of halal-friendly service encounters, increase the availability of halal-friendly hotels, and making halal-friendly social environments in tourist sites. The efficient ways to increase the market share of halal tourism is very weakly understood. Employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, the present study successfully demonstrated that halal-friendly travel motivations and its dimensions are important sources for inbound tourism practitioners of Korea when

developing reliable strategies about how to boost the international halal tourism in Korea.

Our result from the test for metric invariance revealed that Muslims' sense of belonging to a tourism destination significantly moderates the association between return on investment and retention. Specifically, two variables were more strongly associated in the high sense of belonging group ($\beta_{CROI \rightarrow CR} = .349, p < .01$) than that in the low sense of belonging group ($\beta_{CROI \rightarrow CR} = .042, p > .05$). This finding implies that Muslim customers' perception regarding return on investment is more likely to result in customer retention when they feel a strong sense of belonging to a tourism destination. Our results offer theoretically crucial information that the customer return on investment and retention linkage is significantly dependent on the level of sense of belonging. The utilization of the concept of sense of belonging as a moderator would be therefore decisive for better comprehending Muslim travelers' post-purchase decision formation pertinent to a non-Islamic destination choice. From a practical point of view, our finding provides important insights. Our results informed destination practitioners in Korea that they need to make diverse endeavors in making a strong emotional bonding between tourist sites in Korea and Muslim visitors. At a similar level of perception regarding return on investment, Muslim travelers who feel a strong emotional bonding with such tourist sites are more likely to revisit the places.

Our examination of the indirect effect of study variables revealed that customer return on investment and satisfaction with travel experiences play a vital mediating role within the hypothesized theoretical framework. These two variables mediated the effect of their direct predictor(s) to their outcome variable(s). This finding implies that in order to maximize the role of Muslims' halal-friendly travel motivations in their retention process, dealing with return on investment and satisfaction is an important requisite. Given this evidence, it is essential for destination practitioners to focus on enhancing Muslims' cognitive perception that traveling to

Korea is worth the price and a good deal and on boosting their satisfactory experiences while visiting Korea. This effort would contribute to the stronger connection between halal-friendly travel motivations and customer retention.

The results of this research will be effectively used not only to make the hospitality and tourism products to be halal-friendly but also to educate potential employees/workers to better understand the concept of halal and the ways to interact/deal with Muslim travelers. That is, the findings and results of this research can be used as important materials 1) when making guidelines for Muslim travelers in hospitality, tourism, medical, transportation, and shopping sectors and 2) when educating/training managers, employees, coordinators, and service providers in such fields where one of their target customers are Muslim travelers (e.g., medical clinics, hotels, restaurants, shopping malls, airlines, duty free shops). Our empirical results can be also used as class materials in higher education. Materials related to halal and Muslim travelers to educate college students majoring in hospitality, tourism, airlines, business, and hospital management are scarcely available in Korea. Since college students are important future employees and managers in these fields, education materials including the results of this research can help prepare students for the emerging halal tourism market.

The present study contained several limitations. First, this study examined Muslim travelers' post-purchase behaviors in Korea. Their travel motivations and purchase behaviors can differ from other non-Islamic countries. As an extension of this study, future research should test the effectiveness of our proposed conceptual framework in other non-Islamic destinations. Second, the present research focused on the chain of halal-friendly travel motivations – customer return on investment – satisfaction for explicating customer retention formation. That is, this research centered on cognitive and affective approaches. According Oliver (1999, 2010),

conation is a vital concept in explaining customer post-purchase behaviors. Future research should integrate a conative process into the proposed theoretical framework for more comprehensive explication of customer retention formation.

Conclusion

Due to the steady increase of Muslim population worldwide, attracting and retaining international Muslim customers is of importance for the success of every tourism destination. Going beyond the existing conceptualization and theorization, this study was the first attempt to build a robust theoretical framework linking Muslims' halal-friendly travel motivations, return on investment, satisfaction, and retention in sequence by considering the moderating impact of their sense of belonging to Korea, which is a non-Islamic tourism destination. Overall, our theorization encompassing these concepts was entirely confirmed. In general, this research takes us one further step toward understanding halal-friendly travel motivations and its convoluted interrelations with return on investment and satisfaction with travel experiences in Muslim traveler retention process. The findings of this study could help destination marketers develop efficient ways to grow the number of Muslim travelers at an international non-Islamic tourism destination.

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Table 1. Measures and the CFA results

Measurement items (factor loading)	Mean	SD	CR	AVE
HA1: Hotels/accommodation providers in Korea offer Halal-friendly products/services that follow Islamic law (.608).	4.425	1.208	.814	.530
HA2: Hotel rooms offer a hand shower bidet in the toilet (.573).				
HA3: Hotel/accommodation interior decorations are free of any paintings or pictures with nudity (.837).				
HA4: Hotel/accommodation room's design offers privacy and confidentiality (.850).				
HFo1: Availability of Halal food attracted me to visit tourist places (.744).	4.928	1.397	.826	.543
HFo2: Halal food and beverage offered in tourist sites/places complies with Islamic law (.767).				
HFo3: Halal food outlets/restaurants in tourist sites clearly display a Halal logo (.710).				
HFo4: Halal food and beverage offered in tourist sites/places were clean, safe, and hygienic (.724).				
HFa1: Availability of prayer rooms attracted me to visit tourist places (.794).	4.512	1.412	.813	.524
HFa2: Separate prayer room facilities are offered to men/women in tourist places (.779).				
HFa3: In general, it is convenient to access a mosque (.582).				
HFa4: Halal facilities in tourist places offered are clean, safe and hygienic (.720).				
HSE1: Halal service providers in tourist places are well aware of Islamic rules (.902).	4.279	1.211	.831	.511
HSE2: Halal services offered in tourist places conform to Islamic law (.897).				
HSE3: In tourist places, female staff does not wear uniforms that do not comply with sharia law (e.g. <i>mini-skirts, transparent clothes, tights</i>) (.542).				
HSE4: In tourist places, male staff do not wear uniforms that does not comply with sharia law (e.g. <i>silky clothes, jewelry</i>) (.530).				
HSE5: In tourist places, local staff meets Muslim tourists with Islamic greetings (e.g. <i>Salam</i>) (.600).				
HLT1: I felt welcomed by local people while traveling to Korea (.659).	4.622	1.193	.837	.634
HLT2: Local people and other travelers generally had a positive attitude toward Muslim				

tourists (.828).

HLT3: In general, local people and other travelers were kind and helpful to Muslim tourists (.884).

CROI1: Traveling to Korea is worth the price (.785).

4.751 1.120 .902 .698

CROI2: Compared to other destinations, traveling to Korea is a good deal (.857).

CROI3: Traveling to Korea offers good economic value (.848).

CROI4: The total expenditure of traveling to Korea is acceptable (.851).

S1: Overall, I am satisfied with my travel experience in Korea as a Halal-friendly destination (.889).

4.523 1.390 .936 .830

S2: My decision to visit Korea for Halal-friendly travel was a wise one (.918).

S3: As a whole, I have really enjoyed myself while traveling to Korea as a Halal-friendly destination (.926).

SB1: I feel a strong sense of belonging to Korea as a tourist destination (.845).

4.820 1.210 .891 .732

SB2: I love Korea as a tourist destination (.859).

SB3: I feel emotionally attached to Korea as a tourist destination (.863).

CR1: I will visit Korea again in the near future (.904).

4.866 1.303 .858 .674

CR2: I am willing to revisit Korea in the near future (.914).

CR3: Korea as a Halal family-friendly place will be my first choice when it comes to choosing a destination (.609).

Note1. HA = halal-friendly accommodations, HFo = halal-friendly foods, HFa = halal-friendly facilities, HSE = halal-friendly service encounters, HLT = halal-friendly locals and other travelers, CROI = customer return on investment, S = satisfaction, SB = sense of belonging, CR = customer retention

Note2. Goodness-of-fit statistics for the measurement model: $\chi^2 = 1190.418$, $df = 456$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.611$, RMSEA = .064, CFI = .914, IFI = .914, TLI = .900

Note3. All standardized loadings were significant ($p < .01$).

Note4. All measures were assessed with a 7-point Likert-type scale from “*Strongly disagree*” (1) to “*Strongly agree*” (7).

Table 2. SEM results (n = 391)

Proposed paths			Standardize d estimates	t-values
H1	Halal-friendly travel motivations	⇒ Customer return on investment	.456**	6.315
H2	Customer return on investment	⇒ Satisfaction	.604**	11.417
H3	Customer return on investment	⇒ Customer retention	.339**	5.671
H4	Satisfaction	⇒ Customer retention	.404**	6.939
Total variance explained: R ² for customer retention = .444 R ² for satisfaction = .365 R ² for customer return on investment = .208		Indirect impact: β Customer return on investment - Satisfaction – Customer retention = .244** β Motivations – Customer return on investment - Satisfaction – Customer retention = .266** β Motivations – Customer return on investment - Satisfaction = .275**	Total impact on RI: β Motivations = .266** β Customer return on investment = .583** β Satisfaction = .404**	

Note1. Goodness-of-fit statistics for the structural model (higher-order framework): $\chi^2 = 1207.692$, $df = 394$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 3.065$, RMSEA = .073, CFI = .891, IFI = .891, TLI = .879

Note2. Goodness-of-fit statistics for the structural model (first-order framework): $\chi^2 = 1381.033$, $df = 387$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 3.569$, RMSEA = .081, CFI = .866, IFI = .867, TLI = .850

Note3. Chi-square difference test between the first-order and higher-order frameworks: $\Delta\chi^2(7) = 173.341$, $p < .01$

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 3. nvariance model results

Paths	High sense of belonging		Low sense of belonging		Baseline Model (Freely Estimated)	Nested Model (Constrained to be Equal)
	group (n = 232)		group (n = 159)			
	Coefficients	t-values	Coefficients	t-values		
CROI ⇔ CR	.349**	4.633	.042	.438	$\chi^2(810) = 1913.822$	$\chi^2(811) = 1919.374^a$
S ⇔ CR	.353**	6.876	.473**	4.876	$\chi^2(810) = 1913.822$	$\chi^2(811) = 1916.503^b$

Chi-square difference test:

^a $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 5.552, p < .05$ (H5a – supported)

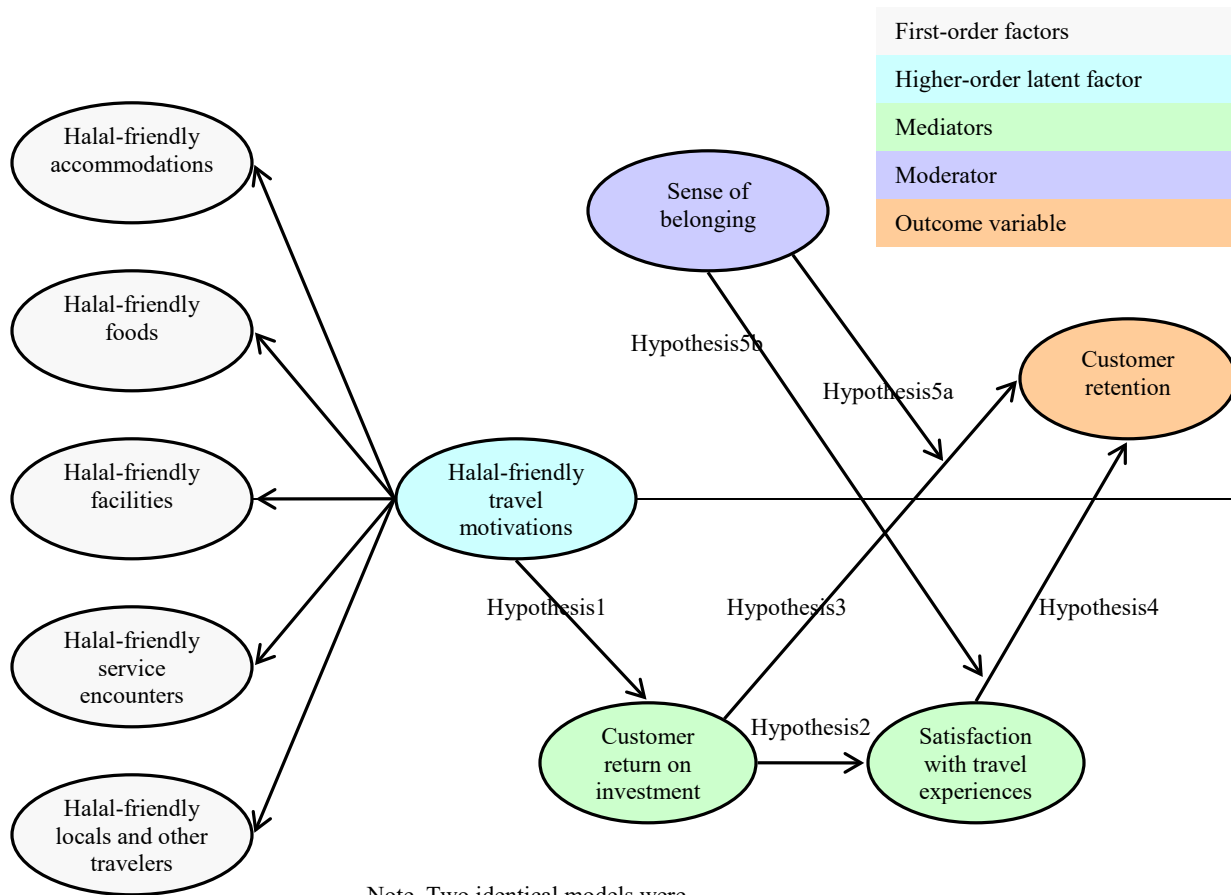
^b $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 2.681, p > .05$ (H5b – not supported)

Note1. CROI = customer return on investment, S = satisfaction, SB = sense of belonging, CR = customer retention

Note2. Goodness-of-fit statistics for the baseline model: $\chi^2 = 1913.822, df = 810, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 2.363, RMSEA = .059, CFI = .837, IFI = .839, TLI = .825$

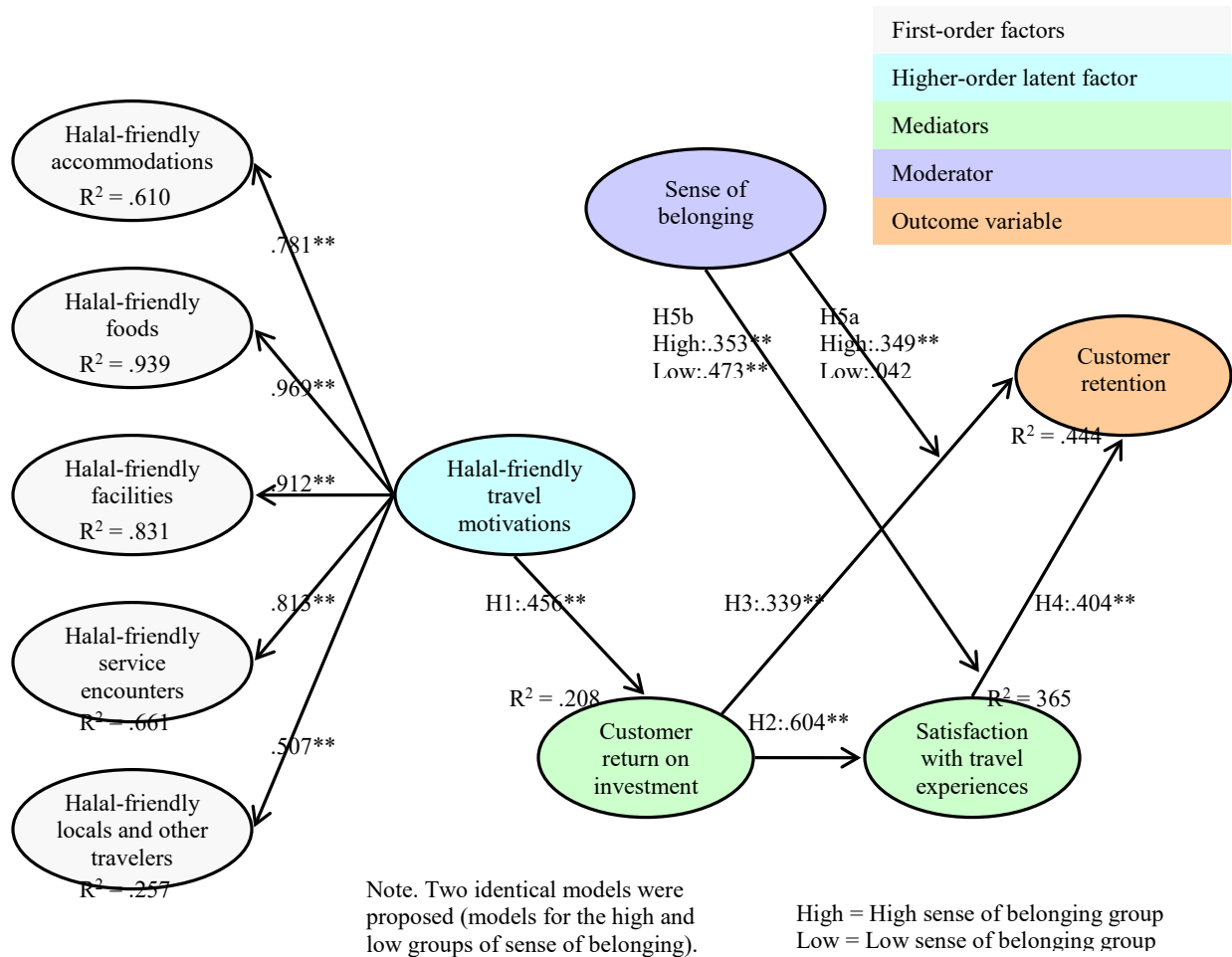
* $p < .05, **p < .01$

Figure 1. Proposed model



Note. Two identical models were proposed (models for the high and low groups of sense of belonging).

Figure 2. Results of the structural model estimation



Note1. Two identical models were proposed (models for the high and low groups of sense of belonging).

Note2. Goodness-of-fit statistics for the structural model (higher-order framework): $\chi^2 = 1207.692$, $df = 394$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 3.065$, RMSEA = .073, CFI = .891, IFI = .891, TLI = .879

Note3. Goodness-of-fit statistics for the structural model (first-order framework): $\chi^2 = 1381.033$, $df = 387$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 3.569$, RMSEA = .081, CFI = .866, IFI = .867, TLI = .850

Note4. Goodness-of-fit statistics for the baseline model: $\chi^2 = 1913.822$, $df = 810$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.363$, RMSEA = .059, CFI = .837, IFI = .839, TLI = .825