

HALAL IMAGE AND ATTITUDE EFFECT ON THE INTERNATIONAL MUSLIM TOURISTS' INTENTION TO VISIT HOMESTAYS IN SABAH, MALAYSIA: THE MODERATING ROLE OF HALAL AWARENESS

Azrin Jalasi ⁱ, Sylvia Nabila Azwa Ambadⁱⁱ & Nor Irvoni Mohd Isharⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ (Corresponding Author) DBA Candidate, Arshad Ayub Graduate Bussiness School, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Sabah Branch, Kota Kinabalu Campus. azrin_jalasi@hotmail.com

ⁱⁱ Associate Professor, Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Sabah. nabila1793@uitm.edu.my

ⁱⁱⁱ Associate Professor, Faculty of Business and Management, Arshad Ayub Graduate Business School, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam. irvoni@uitm.edu.my

Abstract	<p><i>This study aims to examine the influence of halal image and attitude on the international Muslim tourists' intention to visit homestays in Sabah, Malaysia. Also, halal awareness is tested as a moderator in the hypothesized relationship. The survey is a self-administered questionnaire disseminated online to selected international Muslim tourists worldwide. Using a non-probability quota sampling technique, a total of 286 samples were usable for further data analysis. The data were analyzed using SmartPLS 3.3.3 software. The study's findings indicate that halal image and attitude significantly influence the international Muslim tourists' intention to visit homestays in Sabah, Malaysia. However, the relationship between halal image and the Muslims' attitudes towards intention to visit the homestays are not moderated by halal awareness. The scope of the study is limited to international Muslim tourists' intention to visit homestays in Sabah, Malaysia only. Specifically, the local Muslim tourists are not included in this study. The study provides empirical evidence that the halal image of homestays and the Muslims' attitudes significantly affect the Muslims' intention to visit homestays. As for practical implications, the study's findings should improve and enhance the homestays' image following Islamic principles. Thus, it is hoped that homestays can improve their images in line with the Muslim tourists' future expectations.</i></p> <p>Keywords: <i>Halal, Image, Awareness, Attitude, Homestays.</i></p>
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INTRODUCTION

Since 1995, the homestay program in Malaysia has been announced as rural and cultural-community-based tourism. This activity aims to develop rural communities and decrease the economic imbalance between rural and urban areas. Initially, the homestay program in Malaysia was started in the 70s at the Kampung Cherating Lama in Pahang, when a local lady named Mak Long began providing breakfast, dinner and accommodation in her house to a group of tourists (Ibrahim, 2004). Later in 1988, the homestay program was officially launched by the government.

After decades, the number of local people involved in the program started burgeoning impressively throughout Malaysia, including Sabah. Sabah has recently shown the most enlightened growth in the industry among thirteen states in Malaysia. As of 2019, Sabah's homestay program was ranked as the highest-earning sector, with more than MYR6 million (Daily Express, 2020). In the same year, Sabah was also recognised as the leading tourist destination for homestays in Malaysia and honoured as a "Malaysia's Favourite

Destination" at the 47th edition of the Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA) Fair in the year 2019.

On top of that, Sabah also has received the highest number of international tourist arrivals for the homestay program for three consecutive years since 2017 (MOTAC, 2019). As noted in the recent MOTAC report, the international tourist arrivals to homestays in Sabah have increased tremendously to 93.7 per cent, from 2,999 in 2014 to 47,231 tourists in 2018. The domestic tourist arrivals also showed a notable increase of 70.3 per cent from 17,131 in 2014 to 57,852 in 2018 (MOTAC, 2019). This growth is expected to continue rising in the future. However, even though Malaysia was recognised as one of the Muslim-friendly countries in the world, a lower statistic of the international Muslim tourists' arrivals to homestay in Sabah remains obvious since the program was introduced in the state.

According to MOTAC (2019), about 86 per cent of the international tourist arrivals to homestays in Sabah are from China and South Korea. It indicates that the homestay sector in Malaysia, particularly in Sabah, is still unsuccessful in tapping the international Muslim travel market. As a result, this issue sparked a debate, as Malaysia is one of the top Muslim tourism destinations globally (Yusof et al., 2016). Besides, Sabah is also a vital tourism spot in Malaysia and the South Asian region (Khaled et al., 2013). This issue has drawn a critical question for this study: What factors influence the international Muslim tourists' intention to visit homestays in Sabah? Although the Muslims' behavioural intention has been widely studied, the studies of Muslims' intention toward tourist destinations such as homestays are still limited.

Moreover, the provision of Muslim-friendly tourism accommodation in Malaysia is still lacking. The argument arising from this matter is whether other tourism accommodation premises, such as homestays, are Shari'ah compliant (Othman et al., 2019).

According to Othman et al. (2019), many homestay operators still do not realise the importance of complying with the provisions of Islamic law. As a result, many homestay operators in Malaysia have failed to consider the halal image in their homestays business. In recent studies, Johan et al. (2020) discovered that Muslims with strong religious beliefs have a high intention to purchase Islamic products or services. Therefore, the development of the halal image among the homestays in Sabah cannot be overlooked. The homestay operators need to understand the crucial factors that strengthen Muslim tourists' intention to visit homestays.

The importance of international Muslim tourists' arrivals from the Muslim-majority countries to homestays in Sabah is undisputable. Besides generating more income for the country, this new emerging market creates many job opportunities for local people, especially those who emphasise the Islamic lifestyle, which subsequently benefits the economy. Hence, the tourist arrivals from Indonesia, Brunei and Middle East countries such as Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Syrian Arab Republic and Saudi Arabia to Malaysia (Hanim et al., 2010) cannot be overlooked by the government and the tourism operators in Malaysia. These tourists can impact the Malaysian tourism industry significantly. In the West of Malaysia, the homestay program is synonymous with Muslims because most homestay operators are Malays. Therefore, the program's 'halalness' is not a big issue.

Nevertheless, the situation might be different in Borneo, especially in Sabah. In Sabah, the homestay operators are multi-racial. There are a variety of ethnicities, cultures, customs and beliefs in the state. For example, in the Tambunan district, most homestay operators are from the KadazanDusun community, and most are non-Muslims. The situation will be different in other places of Sabah, such as Ranau and Papar. In Ranau, most of the homestay operators are Kadazan-Dusun community, and a majority of them are Muslims.

Similarly, in Papar, most homestay operators are Muslims, and most are Kedayan people. Hence, emphasising the halal image in the homestay business is crucial if they want to attract more Muslim visitors. The halal image shows that the homestay operators comply with Sharia laws. Furthermore, the statistics show that 70 per cent of the world's Muslim

population follows the halal standard (Lada et al., 2009). It indicates that worldwide Muslim communities mainly observe the concept of halal. According to Battour (2018), the halal standard-compliant is a crucial factor influencing Muslims' decisions when they decide to travel abroad.

The inability of a destination host to deliver accommodation facilities that adhere to the Islam principles will greatly discourage Muslim tourists from visiting or revisiting specific destinations (Battour & Battor, 2010). Therefore, this study represents a step forward in understanding how Islamic beliefs influence the intention of worldwide Muslims to visit destinations such as homestays. Hence, this study intends to offer empirical evidence of the halal image and attitude influencing international Muslims' intention to visit homestays. On top of that, the moderating effect of halal awareness is also investigated in the hypothesised link. It is hoped that this study may contribute to the Shari'ah-compliant homestays development in Malaysia in the future.

Intention

The intention is related to the brand selection tendency (Patwary & Rashid, 2016). In the context of Muslim consumers, faith is part of the intention and purchase decision. For Muslims, the process of searching for products or services must be faith-based needs. Specifically, Muslims prefer to choose a destination where Islamic attributes are highly available in tourism. It may allow for tourism activities within their religious norms and practices comprising facilities for prayer and worship, no liquor, Halal foods, and Islamic dress codes (Olya & Al-Ansi, 2018). Thus, intention refers to Muslims' readiness to visit homestays in this study.

Attitude

In the TPB model, attitude is defined as the degree of an individual's positive or negative feelings towards any object, person, institution or event (Ajzen (1991). Specifically, it refers to how the individual has a rating of behaviour given either good or bad. In Islamic tourism, attitude can be defined as an evaluation of Muslim tourists' halal brand services (Rahman et al., 2019). Hence, the assessment could be favourable or unfavourable based on the Islamic faith.

Earlier, Ajzen (1991) posited that attitude is one of the essential variables in predicting an individual's behavioural intention. Afterwards, more support was found by other scholars. Recently, Johan et al. (2020) discovered that a strong Muslim would have a positive attitude toward Islamic products or services, which later led them to purchase. Similarly, Farhat et al. (2019) also reported a positive and significant relationship between attitude and Muslims' intention to buy Family Takaful in Pakistan. In agreement with those findings, studies by Bashir (2019) and Memon et al. (2019) on halal-labelled products also agreed that attitude has a positive relationship with Muslim consumers' purchase intention. In other studies, Lada et al. (2009) explored the choices of halal products in Malaysia and found that attitude was correlated with Muslims' consumption of halal products.

Another recent study on halal-labelled foods in the United Kingdom has supported the positive correlation between attitude and Muslims' behavioural intention to purchase (Elseidi, 2018). Based on Elseidi (2018), Muslim consumers with positive attitudes are more likely to have greater intentions to purchase halal-labelled food in the United Kingdom. Correspondingly, Ng et al. (2019), in their studies of consumers' intention toward retirement villages, also revealed that attitude is significant in predicting the elderly buying intention of a retirement village in Malaysia.

Similarly, Patwary et al. (2018), in their study on Islamic hotels, also discovered the same result, in which attitude significantly influenced the consumers' intention to purchase Islamic hotel products in Malaysia. The same evidence was found by Suki and Salleh (2018) in their study of retail stores in Malaysia. They have discovered a positively significant relationship between attitudes and Muslim consumers' behavioural intention to patronize retail stores in Malaysia. Therefore, the following hypothesis is established:

* **Hypothesis 1:** There is a positive and significant effect of attitude on the international Muslim tourists' intentions to visit homestays in Sabah.

Halal Image

The halal term originates from an Arabic phrase that means permitted by Islamic law, while its opposite, haram, means prohibited or unlawful. From an Islamic standpoint, brand image is associated with a halal image, and it represents the perceptions of Muslim consumers on brand characteristics which later influences their purchase decision (Suki & Salleh, 2016). In the study of halal stores, Suki and Salleh (2016) treat halal images as the consumers' perception of brand characteristics that someone retains in their memory as a religious concept that guides their fundamental purchasing pattern.

Many past studies have proven the halal image's power in attracting Muslim consumers. Muslims, in particular, are keen to be associated with halal images and avoid attachment to non-halal images (Suki & Salleh, 2016). The studies of Salleh et al. (2020) were good examples of research in endorsing the effects of the halal image on consumers' behaviour. The research findings revealed that Muslim consumers prefer halal products and avoid the haram. Their studies asserted that consumers' may be further encouraged to go on with their intention to patronage the business premise with a halal image.

For most Muslims, a halal image must be present to inform them that the store complies with Shariah guidelines (Salleh et al., 2020). Muslim consumers are very cautious when dealing with retail stores by knowing the halal image standards and realizing the essentials of pursuing the halal commandment. According to Salleh et al. (2020), Muslim consumers may be negatively influenced by the absence of the premises' halal image. As a result, this situation may lead the consumers to engage less with the business premise. Also, consumers may not be well motivated to follow through with their next intention to patronage the business premise.

Studying Muslim consumers' intention to purchase halal labelled detergents in Indonesia, Rizkitysha and Hananto (2022) also have found that halal image directly affects Muslims' purchase intention. Similarly, Haque and Hindrati (2020) have asserted that the halal logo positively affects the Muslim purchase intention and removes the uncertainty in the consumers' thoughts. Based on Shaari et al. (2019), when Muslims buy a product, they will seek information regarding 'halalness'. If the product is certified halal, it will convince Muslim consumers to consume it.

Therefore, emphasizing halal image in a service business such as homestay is crucial if they target Muslims as their potential customers. The absence of the halal image in the service business may cause Muslim consumers to engage less in the business. Moreover, religious Muslims are more sensitive to the products and services halalness issues. At the start of the buying process, if a specific brand portrays the halal image to potential customers, they can decide whether to buy it based on other factors. As such, the following hypothesis is developed in this study:

* **Hypothesis 2:** There is a positive and significant effect of halal image on the international Muslim tourists' intentions to visit homestays in Sabah.

Halal Awareness

In general, awareness increases levels of consciousness about risks related to anything that could endanger human life and comes with knowledge and understanding of a particular issue (Awan et al., 2015), subject and situation (Galati et al., 2019). As regards Muslim consumers, awareness is always related to halal status issues. Also, different people would have different levels of awareness. Awareness is a relative concept where a person may be partially, subconsciously, or acutely aware of issues relating to the halal aspect of Allah's permitted.

In Islam, halal represents the symbol of hygiene, quality and safety (Ambali & Bakar, 2014). It mainly refers to everything allowed according to Islamic laws. It shows Muslim

consumers' ability to understand a particular issue related to what is permitted (halal) and not permitted (haram) in Islam. Similarly, Garg and Joshi (2018) also refer to halal awareness as the Muslim knowledge consumers possess to seek and consume halal products following Islamic law. Other scholars such as Suki and Salleh (2016) also agreed that halal awareness refers to an essential understanding of what is permissible and not permissible consumption based on the teachings of the holy book of the Quran.

Above all, the definition of halal awareness by Patwary et al. (2018) seems more appropriate for this study. According to Patwary et al. (2018), halal awareness refers to the act of concern about something permissible in Islam. Some scholars proved the effect of halal awareness in moderating the relationship between the variables. Studying the purchase behaviour of students in Indonesia, Vizano et al. (2021) have found that halal awareness moderates the influence of purchase intention on purchasing behaviour toward halal food products. In the study, they asserted that a higher awareness of halal will increase the relationship between buying interest and buying behaviour of halal foods.

In other studies, Rachmawati et al. (2022) revealed that halal brand awareness is moderating variable in the relationship between product knowledge and product involvement with purchase decision-making. They asserted that Muslim halal awareness could strengthen or weaken the relationship between the variables. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed to understand better the moderating role of halal awareness on the halal image and attitude relationship with the international Muslims' intention to visit homestays in Sabah.

* **Hypothesis 3:** Halal awareness is moderating the relationship between attitude and the international Muslim tourists' intention to visit homestays in Sabah.

* **Hypothesis 4:** Halal awareness is moderating the relationship between halal image and the international Muslim tourists' intention to visit homestays in Sabah.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The framework of this study is shown in Figure 1. The independent variables are attitude and halal image, while the intention to visit homestays is the dependent variable. Additionally, halal awareness is also tested as the moderator in the hypothesised relationship.

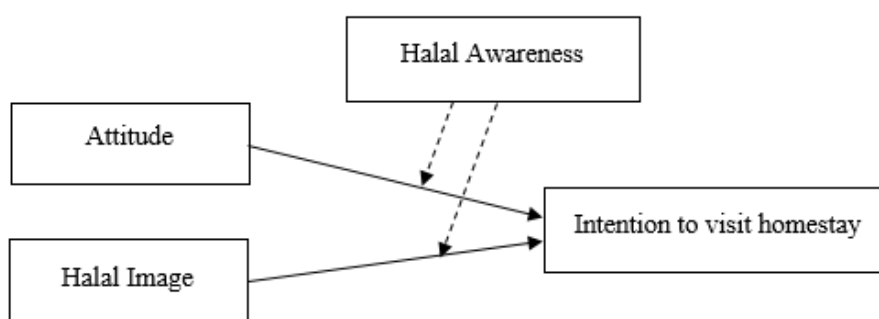


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

Respondent Profile

Respondents of this study are the international Muslim tourists worldwide who have an intention to visit homestays in Sabah in the future. A total of 350 online questionnaires were distributed to selected international Muslim tourists worldwide. After the data cleaning process, the remaining samples consisted of 286 respondents (145 males and 141 females). Most of the respondents were aged between 18 and 25 years old (109 respondents), which

represented 38.1 per cent of the total samples, followed by 34.6 per cent respondents aged between 26 and 39 years old (99 respondents) and 15.4 per cent respondents with age between 40 and 49 years old (44 respondents). Out of 286 respondents, 8.7 per cent of them were from the age group between 50 and 59 years old (25 respondents), and 2.4 per cent were from the age group above 60 years old (9 respondents).

Regarding the respondents' occupation, data collected showed that most of the respondents were employed, representing 51.7 per cent of the total samples (148 respondents). This number is followed by students that made up 36.0 per cent (103 respondents), while 8.0 per cent (23 respondents) of the respondents are self-employed. The rest 10 respondents are unemployed (3.5 per cent), and 2 respondents are retired (0.7 per cent). As for the respondents' country of origin, most of them are from Indonesia (54.5 per cent), comprising 156 respondents. This number is followed by the respondents from Brunei (25.5 per cent), with 73 respondents in total. Only 8.4 per cent (24 respondents) are from Middle East countries were participated in the survey, while the rest, 11.5 per cent (33 respondents), are from other countries worldwide.

Sampling Technique and Data Collection Method

This study is quantitative research, and the data was collected via an online survey. As a sampling technique in this study, non-probability quota sampling was employed. The quota sampling technique is considered the best alternative in the current study compared to other non-probability sampling techniques. Quota sampling is useful when access to an entire population is unavailable. Using the quota sampling method, the researcher created a sample involving individuals representing the population. On top of that, the researcher can also choose the samples according to specific traits or qualities.

The study utilized a self-administrated questionnaire and conducted surveys in several selected social groups, including the WhatsApp group platform. The online survey was established in a Google document form, and the link was sent through social networks, WhatsApp groups and emails. Data collection was conducted in the early month of June 2021. Further, the statistical SmartPLS 3.3.3 software was applied to analyze the data obtained from the respondents.

Measurement

All items proposed to measure the factors in this empirical investigation were adapted from previously validated instruments and revised to focus on the international Muslim tourists' intention to visit homestays in Sabah. The construct of intention was measured with scales adapted from Lam & Hsu (2006), while the attitude of Muslims was measured using the scales from Ng et al. (2019). On the other hand, Halal image was measured with scales adapted from Awan et al. (2015). Further, halal awareness was measured using the scales from Patwary et al., (2018). A 7-point Likert scale was used to reflect the respondents' answers.

RESULTS

Reliability and Validity of Measurements

In PLS-SEM, the first stage is to perform the measurement assessment to ensure that all variables' validity and reliability are satisfactory prior to hypotheses testing. In this stage, the following assessments were performed:-

- i. Internal consistency – Cronbach's Alpha, Composite reliability, ρ A-Dijkstra – Henseler's rho'
- ii. Convergent validity – Factors loading and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
- iii. Discriminant validity – Cross Loadings and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT)

As shown in Table 1, no items were removed due to low loading (less than 0.70), as suggested by Chin (1998). Overall, all internal consistency and convergent validity were satisfactory. Each construct achieved the composite reliability coefficients above the recommended cut-off of 0.7 (see Table 1). Therefore, items within each variable show high internal consistency and high reconstruction of the findings, as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Variables and Items	Factor Loading	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
1) Intention (INT)		0.901	0.752
I will probably visit homestay in Sabah in the future.	0.869		
I intend to visit homestay in Sabah in the next 3 years.	0.868		
I want to visit homestay in Sabah in the future.	0.874		
2) Attitudes (ATT)		0.953	0.801
Homestays is a good idea.	0.910		
Homestay is a wise idea.	0.915		
I like the idea of a homestay.	0.881		
Homestay would be pleasant.	0.903		
Homestay is appealing.	0.863		
3) Halal Image (HI)		0.965	0.872
Homestay has the best benchmark of halal commitments.	0.924		
Homestay is well known for its good reputation for Halal compliant.	0.956		
Homestay addresses all my halal concern.	0.919		
Homestay is trustworthy about Halal promise.	0.935		
4) Halal Awareness (HA)		0.945	0.775
I know and understand about halal.	0.847		
I am aware of halal due to religious obligation.	0.920		
If I go to a homestay, I will make sure that the product and service in the homestay are Halal.	0.924		
I will choose homestay if it is halal compliance.	0.883		
I think the government is responsible for halal product availability.	0.823		

Table 1: Result of the reflective measurement model

Discriminant Validity

The discriminant validity of Cross Loadings and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) was performed. The cross-loading indicates that discriminant validity is achieved, as the constructs are distinctly different from each other. In the other hand, the result in Table 2 shows that the HTMT values fulfil the recommendations by Henseler et al. (2015), which does not exceed 0.90. Hence, it demonstrates discriminant validity that means the degree to which one construct differs from the other.

Table 2: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) Results

	Attitude (ATT)	Halal Awareness (HA)	Halal Image (HI)	Intention (INT)
Attitude (ATT)				
Halal Awareness (HA)	0.622			
Halal Image (HI)	0.570	0.592		
Intention (INT)	0.713	0.470	0.564	

HTMT <0.90

Results of Hypotheses Testing

The next stage of Smart-PLS analysis is the assessment of the structural model or hypotheses testing. The hypotheses in this study were tested using the bootstrap re-sample technique with an iteration of 5000 sub-sample. As shown in Table 3, attitude toward the intention (H1: $\beta = 0.531$, $p = 0.000$) and halal image towards the intention (H2: $\beta = 0.247$, $p = 0.002$) have significant relationships.

Therefore, H1 and H2 are supported. In regards to the effect size assessment, this study applied the suggestions by Cohen (1988). According to Cohen (1988), effect size (f^2) values above 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 represent small, medium, and large effects. The table 3 further shows the f^2 value of attitude ($f^2 = 0.303$) and halal image ($f^2 = 0.064$). The results suggested that attitude has a medium effect size, and halal image has a small effect size on the international Muslim tourists' intention to visit homestays in Sabah.

The R^2 value for intention to visit is 0.442, which indicates that 44.2 per cent of the variance in international Muslim tourists' intention to visit homestays in Sabah can be explained by attitude and halal image. As suggested by Cohen (1988), the R^2 value that exceeded 0.26 indicates its substantial level of predictive accuracy. However, the analysis results show that H3 and H4 were not supported in this study. It indicates that halal awareness has no moderation effect towards the relationship between attitude, halal image and the international Muslim tourists' intention to visit homestays in Sabah.

Relationship	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation	T Value	LLCI (5%)	UCLI (95%)	P Values	Supported	f^2
ATT->INT	0.531	0.072	7.416	0.407	0.646	0.000	Yes	0.303
HI->INT	0.247	0.086	2.839	0.097	0.379	0.002	Yes	0.064

Relationship	R^2
ATT->INT	0.442
HI->INT	

Table 3: Hypotheses and Result for Direct Effect

Relationship	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation	T Value	LLCI (5%)	UCLI (95%)	P Values	Supported	f^2
ATT*HA->INT	0.064	0.055	0.970	-0.028	0.146	0.166	Not Supported	0.004
HI*HA->INT	-0.08	0.063	1.097	-0.175	0.024	0.136	Not Supported	0.005

Table 4: Hypotheses and Result for Moderating Effect

DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of attitude and halal image on the international Muslim tourists' intention to visit homestays in Sabah, Malaysia. Several important implications can be drawn from the study's findings, which apply to homestay operators, academicians, and policymakers. Firstly, the study results indicate that attitude has the most substantial influence on the international Muslim tourists' intention to visit homestays in Sabah, Malaysia. This finding supported earlier studies by Johan et al. (2020), Farhat et al. (2019), Bashir (2019), Memon et al. (2019), Ng et al. (2019), Patwary et al. (2018), Suki and Salleh (2018), Elseidi (2018), and Lada et al. (2009).

In short, the international Muslim tourists' attitude plays an important role in predicting their intentions to visit homestays in Sabah. When the international Muslim tourists have a positive attitude toward homestays in Sabah, they are likely to have a higher intention to visit the homestays. Secondly, it is found that the homestay's halal image also has a significant effect on the international Muslim tourists' intention to visit homestays in Sabah. This finding is consistent with the studies of Salleh et al. (2020), Haque and Hindrati (2020), Haque et al. (2019), Suki and Salleh (2018), and Shaari et al. (2019). It can be concluded that the absence of the halal image in the homestays business may lower the intention of international Muslim tourists to visit homestays in Sabah.

Thus, emphasizing halal image in homestay business is crucial if the homestay operators are targeting Muslim guests as their potential customers. However, halal awareness was found not to be significant as a moderator in this study. The findings of this study oppose the results of studies by Vizano et al. (2021) and Rachmawati et al. (2022). In particular, the results of this study confirmed that the international Muslim tourists' halal awareness could not strengthen or weaken the relationship between attitude, halal image and intention to visit homestays in Sabah. Thus, it is concluded that there is another moderator to be considered for future study.

Overall, the study results give benefits to researchers, homestay operators, and policymakers. First and foremost, this study makes a noteworthy theoretical and contextual contribution to the existing body of knowledge. Theoretically, this study provides a critical contribution to the current literature on the importance of halal image towards the Muslims' behavioural intention in the context of visiting homestays. Therefore, the study results should benefit both academics and practitioners to understand the relationships between the attitude, halal image and the international Muslims' intention to visit homestays.

From the theoretical perspectives, this study will contribute to Muslim consumer behaviour literature by providing empirical evidence to support the relationship between the attitude, halal image and the international Muslims' intention to visit homestays. Further, integrating Islamic constructs such as halal image and halal awareness into the existing conceptual research should provide more substantial knowledge in understanding the factors that influence the Muslims' behavioural intention. On top of that, this study also contributes to the existing literature by examining the moderating role of halal awareness in the relationship between the attitude, halal image and the international Muslims' intention to visit homestays.

In terms of managerial implications, the findings of this study will be beneficial to homestay operators. The results of this study should help homestay operators to get a better understanding of the crucial factors that contribute to the formation of international Muslims' intention to visit homestays in Malaysia, especially in Sabah. Also, the results of this study will create awareness among the homestay operators to establish homestays' halal image. It will further help the homestay operators and marketers to develop effective marketing strategies to increase the number of Muslim tourist arrivals to homestays in Sabah in the future.

Apart from that, the findings of this study will also provide helpful information for related government agencies to formulate suitable policies to support the homestays development in Sabah. Besides, the findings of this study can also assist the government to identify adequate supports and incentives for the local homestay operators in Malaysia to

stay competitive in the global tourism market. Hopefully, this study can trigger the development of Sharia Compliant Homestay (SCH) in Malaysia in the future.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the study's findings show that attitude significantly affects international Muslim tourists' intention to visit homestays. This result may be attributed to the fact that attitude is the most crucial predictor of international Muslim tourists' intention to visit homestays. On the other hand, halal image is also found to significantly affect the international Muslim tourists' intention to visit homestays. It indicates that the availability of Shari'ah-compliant homestays in Sabah is crucial.

However, like other studies, this study also faces some limitations, which lead to suggestions for future research paths. Firstly, this study covered only international Muslim tourists. This constraint results in relatively limited sample size, limiting the applicability of these findings to foreign Muslim tourists. Hence, the results cannot be used to explain the behaviour of all Muslims regarding homestay visitation in general. Thus, future studies could increase the sample size, and including the local Muslim tourists would be beneficial.

The following limitation of the study is the survey scope covering homestays in Sabah only; this study did not cover the whole homestays in Malaysia. Therefore, future research may consider replicating this study in other settings to confirm the present study's findings. Lastly, the present study examined only attitude and halal image over the intention. Other predictors such as subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, religiosity, and halal awareness should also be considered for future studies. In addition, it is also suggested that future research consider the moderating effect or mediating effect of other variables, such as culture and Islamic religiosity.

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