

Divine Dining Decisions: Unveiling the Influences on Concept Restaurant Choices among Urban Muslim Millennials' Visit Intention

Azreen Jihan Che Mohd Hashim

azreenjihan@usim.edu.my

Muhamad Azrin Nazri

muhdazrin@usim.edu.my

Sumaiyah Abd Aziz

sumaiyah@usim.edu.my

Junaidah Abu Seman

junaidah@usim.edu.my

Faculty of Economics and Muamalat, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), Malaysia,

Muhammad bin Majid

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Johor,

Kampus Segamat, Malaysia,

muhdmajid@uitm.edu.my

**Corresponding Author: azreenjihan@usim.edu.my*

Abstract

Purpose: The popularity of concept restaurants is surging everywhere; they are typically found in ideal shopping centers, particularly in urban areas. There is a lack of research on how Malaysian urban Muslim tourists perceive their spirituality as unique when patronizing Halal restaurants in Malaysia. Thus, this study focused into how visit intention is impacted by exploring the spiritual formation which are spiritual intelligence and spiritual congruence with other predictors which are perceived price, Halal food and beverages, facilities and physical environment towards the visit of intention to engage in Muslim-friendly restaurants in Malaysia.

Design/methodology/approach: This study's survey approach included the use of a questionnaire. To extract the findings, 150 digital surveys were distributed by email and Google Form to urban Muslim millennial customer in the Klang Valley by using a purposive sample technique. The digital questionnaire will be created in the next stage of the study using Google Form, delivered at random via email and social media, and physically administered at numerous concept restaurant locations in the Klang Valley. The obtained data is evaluated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM).

Research limitations/implications: The main drawback is that the research sample only includes Malaysian local tourists among urban Muslim millennials. To expand its applicability, the researchers could test the research model in multiple countries. This study does not consider the origin country of a concept restaurant outlet, which is another limitation. Besides, in the future, a study should examine the preferences and differences in visit intention made by local and international tourists towards the urban Muslim tourist, especially among generation Z.

Practical implications: Theoretically, this study will be valuable for academics and researchers studying the visit intention of Muslim-friendly concept restaurants in Malaysia. Besides, the findings will inform tourist destination managers and the government about how to encourage tourists to engage in the growth of Halal tourism in Malaysia.

Originality/value: Multiple issues have recently gone viral on social media, with concerning the Halal status of prominent concept restaurants in Malaysia. As a result, the study intends to fill a gap in the literature by investigating the effects of Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services (MFHS) on spiritual congruence, spiritual Intelligence, perceived price, Halal food and beverage, and facilities in Malaysian concept restaurants. The study seeks to empirically examine the influence of pull factors to visit intention to concept restaurant outlet in Malaysia.

Keywords: spiritual intelligence, spiritual congruence, perceived price, Halal food & beverages, facilities and physical environment

Introduction

A demand-driven shifts in food service industry preferences and tastes have contributed to the Malaysian market more competitive. Malaysia is unquestionably impacted by the hype culture. The new, swiftly developing tourism things in the Halal tourism sector are Muslim-friendly hospitality services and Halal travel, including hotels, airlines, and food and beverage services. Tourism that upholds Islamic principles is known as Halal tourism. A total of 14 states in Malaysia, and each has a distinct cuisine and culture. For Malaysia to keep its position as one of the top Halal-friendly travel destinations, it is imperative that the country's citizens understand their own aspirations and expectations as potential tourists. This will help practitioners, especially in luring local urban Muslim millennial tourists living in Malaysia.

According to a Pew Research Center report from 2023, 75% of adult Malaysians consider themselves Muslims. According to Bernama (2023, June 5), at the Halal in Travel Awards in Singapore, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) named Malaysia the "*Best Muslim-Friendly Destination*." Besides, the Minister of Communication and Digital, Fahmi Fadzil believes that the whole value of the Muslim-friendly travel, media, and leisure industries would be US\$7.7 trillion (RM35.7 trillion) by 2025. The accomplishment strengthens Malaysia's reputation and leadership position in all sectors of Muslim tourism and Muslim-friendly travel and hospitality (MFTH).

Dining Revolution: The Rise of Viral Concept Restaurants

Malaysian behavior today involves more domestic vacations, with an increasing number of Malaysians taking the time to travel across the states, Cuti-Cuti Malaysia-style, and Jalan-Jalan Cari Makan. Tourism Malaysia data suggests that the number of domestic tourists has constantly increased, reaching 221.3 million visitors in 2018, a 7.7% increase over the previous year. Additionally, the younger generation of people is traveling to visit more than just beautiful and historical sights. One of the aims of modern travel today is for lifestyle, self-rewarding, or in local language, 'healing' which is frequently sought by tourists seeking relaxation, spiritual healing, and an escape from their daily lives. Today, a bunch of urban Muslim millennials are going to discover a good restaurant and go food hunting with their family or friends. As a result, today's trend of food viral and society ever-changing lifestyle, new eating habits are emerging (Jualiana, 2021; Hairon et al., 2017).

Nowadays the outlet restaurant offers an innovative concept and atmosphere that persuades customers to go beyond the food menu listed. With the global market's rapid evolution has resulted in restaurant facing intense competition to attract and retain customers (Ling et al., 2023; Talib et al., 2021). However, the trend attracts urban Muslim millennial beyond self-consciousness and shows clear-cut class differences in decision making (Sharee & Muhammad, 2018). Malaysia's trendy concept restaurant now has a unique and personality. As a result, newer generations are drawn to this trend and may go beyond their Muslim self-consciousness to reach Halal decisions. As a result, it is critical to explore the spiritual formation of younger generations' intentions, particularly among millennials, to engage in Muslim-friendly restaurants in Malaysia. There is an absence of research about how Malaysian urban Muslim tourists perceive their spirituality to be distinctive when patronizing Halal restaurants in Malaysia. In this study, two sorts of spirituals were chosen to be assessed toward visit intention; spiritual intelligence and spiritual congruence. It also explores the influence of other variables such as perceived pricing, Halal food and drinks, and facilities and physical environment.

Urban Muslim millennial

The Muslim population's profile, which is young and highly educated, has high disposable income, and is highly attached to social media, has contributed to the growth of this segment. urban Muslim millennial generations differ from previous cohorts in their willingness to be more adventurous, capable, and invest more money in travel to enrich their lifestyle. Numerous studies shows that travel motivation, religiosity and Islamic attributes of destination are highly important in encouraging the intention of urban Muslim millennials to visit Halal tourist attraction (Juliana et al., 2023). The future of tourism and hospitality is being shaped by the unique service needs of Muslim Millennials and young adults, who are already transitioning into parenthood (Supaijo & Fermansyah, 2019).

Halal tourism stakeholders must acknowledge the needs of Muslim millennial tourist to attract them. Due to the importance of the internet and social environments in the daily lives of Muslim millennial tourist, there is a demand for more smartphones and the internet to share experiences on social media (Vargas-Sánchez & Perano, 2018). Being millennials, they usually look to the internet for ideas on places to visit. Social media has made travel much easier. They often search for an interesting restaurant to visit. They have access to food guide accounts to find good food recommendations in the state. Social media has a geotagging and hashtag function that allows users to tag the locations of restaurants where they took their pictures. Users on the platform can create their own travel itinerary by clicking on the location tag and crafting their list of must-see places in the area. Thus, this research focuses specifically on investigating the factors of influencing the urban Muslim millennial generations to visit intention at hipster outlet restaurant.

Literature review

The discussion of previous empirical research related to the subject is the focus of this section. The study's dependent variable, visit intention, and the independent factors, spiritual intelligence, spiritual congruence, perceived price, Halal food & beverages, facilities and physical environment are all covered by the review of the literature.

1.1 Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services (MFHS)

The MFHS requires a comprehensive study on a Muslim-friendly restaurant in the food and beverage business. Numerous studies have linked intention to visit with competence to enjoy and adapt to the restaurant's concept, particularly with the growing trend of hipster cafes and various ideas offering more than just a meal (Ling et al., 2023; Talib et al., 2021; Sharee and Muhammad, 2018; Hairon et al., 2017). Restaurants are no longer merely places to dine, they can also provide 'Instagramworthy' concepts and creative atmospheres (Juliana, 2021). This is especially popular with the younger generation (Sharee & Muhammad, 2018). Everyday defined restaurants now self-identify and promote food as part of their distinct identity (Talib et al., 2021). Food culture is inextricably connected to ethnic, religious, and cultural identities. It is about more than just one ethnic or community, but it is about a group of people pursuing what interests them (Edensor, 2020).

1.2 Trend to Tradition: The Phenomenon of Concept Restaurants

Most of the prior research has focused on the concept of hipster cafés, which often serve coffee and pastries. According to Jaciow and One (2021), a hipster café is a classic, urban, independent coffee shop that serves distinctive, minimalist, artful, and trendy coffee drinks. Talib et al., (2021) defined hipsters as those who follow the latest fads and styles, particularly those that are not traditionally popular, and adapt style, fashion, and aesthetic to persons and items. They enjoy socializing and are willing to embrace adventures that make them feel hip and cool. Stylish shops and restaurants have transformed Malaysia's immediately discrete shopping mall communities into massive retail area (Talib et al., 2021; Sharee and Muhammad, 2018).

According to Hairon et al. (2017), food culture concentrates on the unique attributes of its goods, encompassing ingredients, preparation methods, and presentation. Furthermore, the novelty and uniqueness of a culture's products determine its authenticity and value, which can be criticized through their preparation, presentation, and elements (Ling et al., 2023). In Malaysia, there are restaurants that offer a new concept of preparation and presentation of the food that's getting hit nowadays. For example, *Shellout* restaurant that consider eating without a plate and gloves, a Korean and Japanese themes restaurant that features a steamboat and grill like *Sukiya* and *Kfry*, besides, at certain restaurants a robotic machine is being used to serve food, and so forth (Azwa, N., et al., 2022). Customers who participate in an authentic environment are more likely to establish a strong loyalty for return visits (Ha and Jang, 2010). According to Setiawan (2019), businesses in the food and beverage industry are experiencing a burgeoning market and food is not the sole attribute offered by restaurants.

1.3 Spiritual intelligence

The definition of the spiritual intelligence from Islamic perspective are begins with a belief in Allah's existence and Unity (Oneness) (Tawhid). The fundamental component to spiritual intelligence in an Islamic context is the believers' quality of relationship with Allah and love for Allah (Hanefar, S. B., et al., 2016). When it comes to halal, the food sector in Malaysia appears to never cease. Furthermore, Malaysia's trendy concept restaurant now has a unique and personality. As a result, newer generations are drawn to this trend and may go beyond their Muslim self-consciousness to reach Halal decisions. To gain a competitive edge, it would be interesting to examine the self-conscious or inner strength differences in response to Halal-friendly destination attributes among tourists. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2011), belief is one of the belief elements that can have a diversified effect on the product or service

assessments. It is firmly believed in most tourism and hospitality studies that tourists' perceptions and expectations are greatly influenced by their self-exploration and experiential value (Forgas-Coll et al., 2012; Yuksel, 2004).

1.4 Spiritual Congruence

According to Hahsim A.J. et al., (2020), spiritual congruence is It expresses and epitomizes an individual's intangible demands through tangible character, attitude, and acceptance in their daily activities. A person with good spiritual congruence will be much happier than a person who does not, since the latter will always be able to avoid conflict in their decision-making. The more positive feedback received towards the product, the higher the likely degree of individual to have future purchases. The researcher discovered that consumers believe that spiritual congruence is essential in influence attitude of individual, thus, this research suggests that spiritual congruence play a significant role in one's intentions to engage and match with their actual self-image and ideal self-image in Muslim-friendly concept restaurant. Jeong and Jang (2018) demonstrated tourist self-image toward casual and fine-dining restaurant which have a significantly different level of perception with restaurant services. While Kainthola, S., et al., (2024) said millennials who want spiritual enrichment while traveling often seek out places that provide a peaceful and welcoming atmosphere.

1.5 Perceived Price

Perceived price is a significant factor to consider when examining consumer visit intentions, particularly in hipster restaurants. Hipster restaurants often advertise themselves as unique, trendsetting, and offer an experience that extends beyond meals. Considering how customers perceive prices at such establishments can have an enormous effect on their decision to attend. Customers nowadays will determine whether the perceived value is equal to the price (Parikh, 2004). They may be willing to spend more for an exclusive and trendy experience, yet they expect the quality, ambiance, and service to be worth it (Wu & Liang, 2009). Hipster restaurants can give an entire experience besides to a decent meal. Customers may therefore be prepared to spend more for special environments, themed decor, live performances, or other extras. Furthermore, looking through user reviews and comments on websites like social media and review web pages, particularly that related to pricing, may indicate how well the actual price matches what customers are expecting (Sharee & Muhammad, 2018). Business owners and managers can make accurate decisions on pricing strategies by closely examining how customers perceive the prices in hipster restaurants. This will help to ensure that the perceived value of the establishment follows customer expectations and encourages return visits.

1.6 Halal Food & Beverage (F&B)

The demand for Halal-certified food and beverages has been growing, not only in Malaysia but globally. The increased awareness of Halal certification is driven by several factors, including religious beliefs, health considerations, and a general desire for transparency and assurance in food products (Ali & Ahmad, 2023). As a local tourist in Malaysia seeking Halal food and beverages, find a diverse array of options given the country's rich multicultural and multi-ethnic society. Malaysia is known for its vibrant food culture, and you can experience a variety of Halal dishes influenced by Malay, Chinese, Indian, and other ethnic cuisines. Malaysia has a significant Muslim population, and adherence to Islamic dietary laws (Halal) is a fundamental aspect of the faith. Obtaining Halal certification is crucial for F&B establishments to cater to the needs of the local Muslim community (Azam & Abdullah, 2020).

According to the Halal development centre (HDC), there is a growing awareness and demand for Halal products not only among Muslims but also among non-Muslims who may choose Halal-certified products for various reasons, including quality assurance, hygiene, and ethical considerations (Aransyah et al., 2019). By displaying a visible Halal certification from a recognized authority assures Muslim tourists that the restaurant complies with Halal standards in food preparation and sourcing. This ensuring that the kitchen is dedicated to Halal food preparation and using Halal-certified ingredients are crucial aspects for Halal restaurants in Malaysia. Besides, clearly labelled menus indicating that all dishes are Halal help Muslim tourists make informed choices. F&B establishments, including restaurants, manufacturers, and suppliers, are recognizing the importance of diversifying their offerings to cater to a broader audience (Hairon et al., 2017).

Consequently, Halal certification allows them to tap into a larger market share. The trend toward obtaining Halal certification reflects the F&B industry's responsiveness to consumer preferences, market dynamics, and the global movement towards more conscious and ethical consumption. As awareness continues to grow, businesses that prioritize Halal practices are likely to see increased acceptance and success in the market (Imama, Kohana, M., & Kamada, M., 2019).

1.7 Facilities and physical environment

According to Hairon et al. (2017) restaurants with trendy and aesthetically pleasing interiors, murals, or unique decor is likely to attract younger customers who appreciate visually appealing and Instagram-worthy settings. The entire experience they design needs to fit the tastes and way of life of the younger demographic. In order to determine Muslim, the willingness of consumers to pay for food that offer religious services, Saville & Mahbubi (2021) studied preference attributes as Muslim tourist in Japan. The study reveals that the availability of prayer rooms is the most important attribute, followed by other attributes like Halal-labelled food. Indeed, having a prayer room in a restaurant may be a considerate and significant especially in Malaysia where the Islam that require daily prayers. Now, several Malaysian restaurants have set apart areas or prayer rooms specifically for Muslim customers to pray in peace before or after their meals.

In addition, most restaurants nowadays provide free and strong Wi-Fi, enabling younger customers to work or chat online while they consume, stay connected, and express their dining experiences on social media. Offering Wi-Fi and charging stations to Muslim visitors who might wish to stay connected or charge their mobile devices while visiting helps improve their overall experience (Imama, Kohana & Kamada, 2019). Moreover, by implementing online reservation systems, scan QR code and use mobile apps for ordering can enhance convenience for younger customers who prefer digital interactions. Other than that, by providing charging stations or outlets at tables allows customers to keep their devices charged, addressing the needs of a tech-savvy generation (Hussein, 2019).

These facilities contribute to a holistic Halal dining experience for Muslim tourists in Malaysia, where they can enjoy a meal in accordance with their cultural and religious preferences. It is worth noting that the level of facilities can vary, and high-end restaurants might offer more extensive services compared to smaller establishments.

1.8 Visit Intention

Numerous studies show a positive correlation exists between tourist satisfaction and their desire. Revisit is a sign of tourist loyalty and enjoyment of specific services and destinations (Prayag, 2009). According to some researchers, the destination of a tourist's behaviour is their interest in visiting (Santoso, 2019; Kim and Kwon, 2018). Huang (2015) affirms that word of mouth intention and loyalty are part of tourist behavioural intention, and this variable is influenced by tourists' interpretation and satisfaction with specific destinations. The study shows that when tourist fulfil their interests, they are more likely to be loyal and repeat their actions. The visit intention to hipster restaurants can indeed have an impact on the Muslim Halal hospitality industry in Malaysia. It is depending on how well businesses navigate challenges and leverage opportunities. Adapting to changing consumer preferences, maintaining Halal standards, and embracing inclusivity can contribute to the industry's growth and appeal to a diverse customer base.

Theoretical Framework

Figure 1 shows the proposed conceptual framework of factors influence the hipster restaurant among the urban Muslim Millennial in Klang Valley towards Hipster restaurant, which are spiritual congruence, spiritual intelligence, perceived price, Halal food & beverage and facilities and physical environment are the independent variables. While visit intention to restaurant is the dependent variable to be tested for this study.

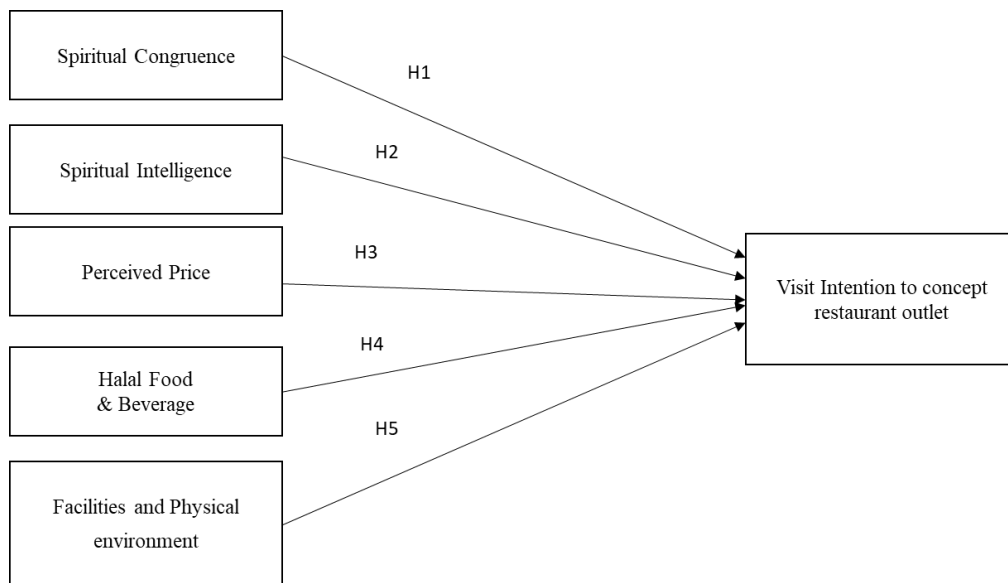


Figure 1: Theoretical framework.

Hypothesis

H1: There is positive significant between spiritual congruence towards visit intention to hipster restaurant.

H2: There is positive significant between spiritual intelligence towards visit intention to hipster restaurant.

H3: There is positive significant between perceived price towards visit intention to hipster restaurant.

H4: There is positive significant between Halal food and beverage towards visit intention to hipster restaurant.

H5: There is positive significant between facilities towards visit intention to hipster restaurant outlet.

Data collection method

A questionnaire was used in this study's survey procedure. 150 sample were given the questionnaire by the purposive sampling technique. There will be two parts of the questionnaire's content. The initial section gathers the profile of customers who have visited Malaysia and the surrounding area, while the next part has test questions for the model, which consists of five constructions. Each respondent of the population is a tourist from urban Muslim Millennial who has been to a concept restaurant outlet in Malaysia. The digital questionnaire will be collected in the next stage of study with Google Form, distributed at random via email and social media, and physically administered at many concepts restaurant throughout the Klang Valley. The acquired data is analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

Implication of the study

The findings of this study could be useful to government agencies and tourism service providers in promoting and positioning Halal-friendly concept restaurant outlet through strategic management among local tourist specifically, urban Muslim millennials. As a local tourist, individual should acquire appropriate information or literacy regarding Halal, particularly in the concept's restaurants outlet. As a result, they will be satisfied, trusting, and willing to contribute to tourism growth by assisting others in the destinations. Therefore, the study aims to bridge the gap in literature by conducting the factors on influencing spiritual congruence, spiritual intelligence, perceived price, Halal food and beverage and facilities toward intention to visit Halal outlet restaurant in Malaysia.

Conclusion

Malaysia is a popular tourist destination, and viral concept restaurants outlet with Halal offerings can enhance the overall appeal to urban Muslim millennial tourists who seek unique and trendy dining experiences while adhering to Halal standards. The visit intention to concept restaurant outlet can indeed have an impact on the Muslim Halal hospitality industry in Malaysia. If concept restaurants cater to a diverse range of tourist, including Muslim customer, it can contribute to the diversification of Halal dining options. This aligns with the growing trend of urban Muslims millennial seeking unique and trendy dining experiences.

Besides, the Halal hospitality businesses that embrace viral restaurant trends, it provides an opportunity to position themselves as modern, relevant, and appealing to a younger demographic, while still maintaining Halal integrity. Maintaining Halal certification standards with unique or non-traditional offerings can be challenging. Ensuring compliance with Halal requirements while offering innovative dishes may require additional attention to sourcing and preparation processes. Some concept restaurants may unconsciously overlook cultural sensitivities, and it is important for the Halal hospitality industry to strike a balance between modernity and spiritual belief respect. This includes considerations for food presentation, decor, themes, and events. With this new phenomenon there may be increased competition within the Halal dining sector. Thus, establishments need to differentiate themselves effectively and offer a unique value proposition to attract and retain the tourist to visit.

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