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Research paper



Gender Differences in Hotel Choice: A Case of Malaysian Muslims

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to provide gendered insights into tourist perceptions in hotel choice among Malaysian Muslims. Specifically, this study was to examine potential gender differences relating to the perceived importance of hotel attributes in building emotional bond with the hotel and post-consumption outcomes. A survey using self-administered questionnaire was conducted and a total of 474 completed and usable questionnaire were utilised for further analysis. A partial-least squares – structural equation modelling was utilised for the data analysis. The findings indicated that there were significant differences between males and females in regards to the effect of hotel attributes on revisit intention and word-of-mouth. Moreover, there was significant difference on the effect of brand attachment on word-of-mouth. The study attempts to fill the gaps in literature that assumes the effects of hotels attributes in building attachment and post-consumption outcomes (i.e., satisfaction, revisit intention and word-of-mouth) are significantly different between males and females. The findings of this study will provide some guidelines and valuable information to stakeholders of hospitality industry in their implementation of marketing strategies.

Keywords: *hotel attributes; brand attachment; post-consumption outcomes; satisfaction; revisit intention; word-of-mouth; gender*

1. Introduction

In recent years, tourism industry is increasingly becoming popular worldwide, especially among Muslim tourists. The growth of Muslim population has resulted in the rising of Muslim consumers' purchasing power as a market force and disposable income [1]. Malaysia, for instance, is a popular destination among Muslim consumers, particularly due to the fact that Islam being prominent and therefore it has an easy access to Halal services and foods.

The rapid development of hospitality industry has resulted in competitive rivalry among hotels over attracting consumers to stay and use their facilities [2]. Thus, it is essential to understand the needs, interests, and behaviours of different tourist markets in order to attract them to the destinations.

In previous years, there were numbers of media headlines that linked Islam with terrorism activities such as September 11 attack, April 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, as well as November 13, 2015 Paris attack. Since then, there has been an increase in Islamophobia which makes Muslim people feel unsafe and targeted, as well as an increased preference to congregate within Muslim sphere. As a result, they are changing their travel behaviour and redirecting their choices towards Muslim-friendly destinations [3].

2. Literature Reviews

Studies that attempt to identify hotel attributes categories, reflecting traveller' staying experience are common [4]–[8]. However the results are often mixed. The factors affecting guests' choice of hotel are rather complicated [9]. Previous literature shows the influence of product or service attribution in building brand attachment [10], [11].

Although it is commonly believed in these modern days that the differences of travel patterns between men and women are much less pronounced than before, gender differences related to travel and tourism still remain substantive [12]. Evidently, women are more likely to be the primary leisure vacation planner and gatekeeper of household tourism decision making among Western couples and families [13]. A study in the US [48] showed that although men dominate the business travel market, the same was not true for the leisure market as women are taking as many and even more holidays than men Therefore, understanding on the interests and activities of retrospective consumers from a gender perspective is crucial to the planning and marketing of tourism operators such as hotels.

Nevertheless, it is noted that there are only limited research that attempt to address gender perspectives in tourism behaviour [14]–[16]. While a great deal has been learned about gender differences

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in travel patterns in developed urban societies, little is known about gender differences in travel patterns in nations of developing countries [17]. This dearth of knowledge impairs the effective design and marketing of tourist products which would lead to gender-blind marketing and consumer dissatisfaction [18]. The importance to incorporate gender perspective in tourism studies and study women and tourism systematically has also been emphasized by several scholars (Norris & Wall, 1994).

Although there are number of studies that discuss gender differences in tourism, most of them focus on the tourism development's aspects [12], [19].Only few research have been conducted to examine service attributes and consumer's psychological states. This study, therefore, was to provide gendered insights into tourist perceptions in regards to hotel choice. In particular, the study was to examine potential gender difference relating to the perceived importance of hotel attributes in building emotional bond with the hotel and post-consumption outcomes. The effect of heterogeneity has hardly be seen in the hospitality and tourism field. Consumer heterogeneity is reflected in the concept of segmentation. The consideration of the existence of heterogeneity among other factors are required in the hospitality industry. The present study reflected the gendered differences which served as the main contribution of this study. Consumer segmentation is very important in the field of marketing particularly in service sectors where it is fundamental that firms or hotels adapt their strategies to certain segments of consumers that present different preferences and needs, which can, in addition, yield further benefit to them [20]. This study is expected to facilitate tourism operators to better understand and serve the nature of tourism market from the gendered perspectives, so as to better design and market the hotel products and services.

2.1. Conceptual Framework

The means-end chain theory (MEC) serves as the study's underpinning theory. This theory suggests that the way consumers relate to product can be represented by a hierarchical model of three interconnected levels namely product attributes, consequences of use and personal values [21]. The original development and application of MEC took place in the area of marketing and advertising research [22]. Conceptually, MEC theory suggests that consumers are viewed as goal-oriented decision makers who choose to perform behaviours that seem most likely to lead to desired outcomes [23] in order to maximize their desired consequences and minimize their undesired consequences. The merit of MEC lies primarily in its acknowledgement of the existence of linkage between the product attributes and personal values (Claeys & Abeele, 2001). According to Jiang, Scott, and Ding (2014), the application of MEC theory in tourism industry is not well developed. Nevertheless, this theory has relevant and potential application in tourism research and it should receive wider academic debates [25].

The research framework for this study consisted of five constructs namely hotel attributes, brand attachment, and post-consumption outcomes which were represented by satisfaction, revisit intention and word-of-mouth. Hotel attributes is defined as the degree to which tourists find various services and facilities offered by the hotel are important during their stay [26]. Drawing from [27], brand attachment is defined as a strong bond or linkage between the brand and the self. Following Baker and Crompton (2000), satisfaction is defined as consumers' fulfilment response and their individual state after experiencing a stay. Revisit intention is defined as the desire to visit in a specific timeframe a prior destination for the second time [29]. Word-of-mouth is any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or a company, which is made available through offline or online channels [30].

The relationship among observed variables under study suggests some differences in regards to their intensity which arise from the influence of various factors among which is the consumer's characteristics. Marketing literature suggests that socio-demographic factors reflect moderating effects in consumer behaviour. For instance, it is revealed that gender [31], income [32] and age [33] show the effect of moderation in consumer behaviour. Thus, we proposed that tourists' gender will moderate all the relationships in the conceptual model (Figure 1). These arguments lead us to advance the following hypotheses:

H1: The strength of the relationship between hotel attributes and brand attachment will differ between male and female tourists.
H2: The strength of the relationship between hotel attributes and satisfaction will differ between male and female tourists.
H3: The strength of the relationship between hotel attributes and revisit intention will differ between male and female tourists.
H4: The strength of the relationship between hotel attributes and propensity of word-of-mouth will differ between male and female tourists.
H5: The strength of the relationship between brand attachment and satisfaction will differ between male and female tourists.
H6: The strength of the relationship between brand attachment and revisit intention will differ between male and female tourists.
H7: The strength of the relationship between brand attachment and propensity of word-of-mouth will differ between male and female tourists.

2.2. Methodology

This study employed a survey utilizing self-administered questionnaire. A total of 1000 questionnaires were distributed between March 2017 and July 2017. A non-probability sampling method namely purposive sampling was utilised. The unit of analysis was Muslim individual consumers in Malaysia who at least have stayed in a hotel within the last year. A total of 474 completed and valid questionnaires were used for further analysis. Table 1 represents the demographic information of the respondents.

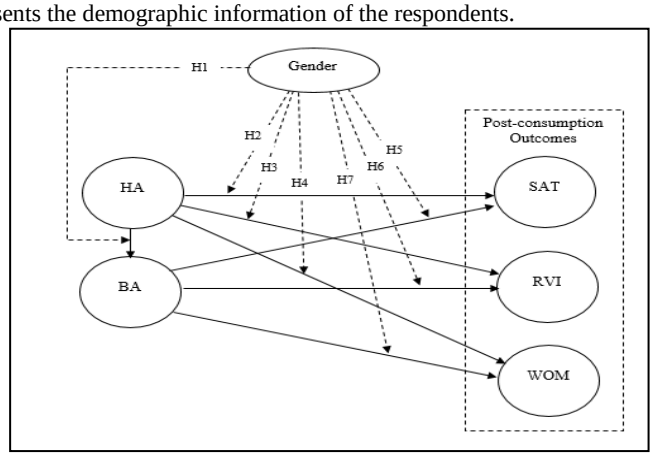


Fig 1: Conceptual Framework

Notes: HA=Hotel Attributes; BA=Brand Attachment; SAT=Satisfaction; RVI = Revisit Intention; WOM=Word-of-Mouth
– – ▶ Moderating effects

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristic

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	254	53.6
	Female	220	46.4
Age	20 - 29 years old	377	79.5
	30 - 39 years old	56	11.8
	40 - 49 years old	35	7.4
	50 – 59 years old	5	1.1
	60 years old & above	1	.2
Marital Status	Single	366	77.2
	Married without children	28	5.9
	Married with children	77	16.2
	Divorced/Separated/ Widowed	3	.6
Education	SPM	34	7.2

	STPM/Diploma/College	123	25.9
	Bachelor Degree/Professional Degree	299	63.1
	Postgraduate Degree	18	3.8
Monthly	Less than RM1,999	254	53.6
Income	RM2,000 - RM3,999	137	28.9
	RM4,000 – RM5,999	53	11.2
	RM6,000 – RM7,999	14	3.0
	RM8,000 – RM9,999	8	1.7
	RM10,000 and above	8	1.7

2.3. Measures

There were three parts in the questionnaire. The first section addressed the respondents' travel behaviour. The second section asked respondents to rate questions with regards to research constructs which consisted of five elements namely hotel attributes, brand attachment, and post-consumption outcomes which were represented by satisfaction, revisit intention and word-of-mouth. The hotel attributes was adopted from extant literatures using seven-point Likert scale [4], [7], [8], [34]–[36]. Then followed by brand attachment [27], [37], and satisfaction [38], [39]. All items used seven-point Likert scale (1 = strong disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Revisit intention [40], [41] and word-of-mouth (Karjaluoto, Munnukka, & Kiuru, 2016; Kim, Kim, & Kim, 2009) were measured by seven-point Likert scale (1 = least likely to 7 = extremely likely). The final section of the survey contained demographic type questions.

2.4. Data Analysis

Partial Least Square – Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), a variance-based structural equation modeling was used to test the model. The PLS was chosen because (1) the research model was rather complex and (2) a part of the structural model was formative measured construct. Therefore, the use of PLS is advisable (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). This study utilised SmartPLS 3.2.7 software.

2.5. Results and Findings

The research study obtained and compared data on gender between male tourists (male = 1, $n^{(1)}$ = 254) versus those female tourists (female = 2, $n^{(2)}$ = 220). The final assessment of the groups' analysis was made through permutation test as its multimethod approach yields additional confidence in the final result [44].

2.5.1. Measurement Invariance

Firstly, prior to the execution of multigroup analysis, it was essential to ensure the number of observations in each group met the minimum sample size requirement based on the rules of thumb (i.e., 10 times rules). Based on these considerations, the group specific sample size was sufficiently large (5 x 10 = 50 observation per group). Thus, STEP 1 namely configural variance was established.

To test for measurement invariance, the MICOM procedure was executed. The compositional invariance was assessed by comparing the correlation c between the composite score of the first and second group with the five per cent quantile. The compositional invariance was achieved when the quantile was smaller than or equal to the correlation c for all constructs. This result was further supported by p-values that were higher than 0.05. Based on Table 2, compositional invariance had been established for all multi-item constructs in the model.

Table 2: Summary of MICOM Test (STEP 2)

Composite	Original Correlation	5% quartile of the empirical distribution of c	p-value	Composition-al invariance established?
Brand Attachment	1.000	1.000	0.300	Yes
Hotel Attributes	0.626	0.440	0.577	Yes
Revisit Intention	1.000	1.000	0.685	Yes
Satisfaction	1.000	1.000	0.272	Yes
WOM	1.000	1.000	0.917	Yes

Furthermore, the full invariance was achieved in the STEP 3 if the mean and variance original difference fell between 2.5 and 97.5 per cent boundaries. In addition, partial invariance was achieved when only one of the two (mean or variance) original difference fell between 2.5 and 97.5 per cent boundaries. As observed in Table 3 and Table 4, only composite's variance ratio fell between the confidence interval, thus, partial invariance was achieved. The p-value ($p > 0.05$) further supported these findings.

Table 3: Summary of MICOM Test - Mean (STEP 3)

Composite	Difference of the composite's mean value (=0)	95% confidence interval	p-value	Equal Mean Values?
Brand Attachment	0.488	[-0.178; 0.182]	NA	No
Hotel Attributes	0.032	[-0.179; 0.175]	0.706	Yes
Revisit Intention	0.333	[-0.181; 0.178]	0.000	No
Satisfaction	0.246	[-0.179; 0.178]	0.008	No
WOM	0.301	[-0.185; 0.180]	0.001	No

Table 4: Summary of MICOM Test – Variance (STEP 3)

Composite	Logarithm of the composite's variances ratio (=0)	95% confidence interval	p-value	Equal Variance?
Brand Attachment	-0.250	[-0.260; 0.275]	0.066	Yes
Hotel Attributes	0.137	[-0.345; 0.324]	0.481	Yes
Revisit Intention	-0.192	[-0.291; 0.307]	0.203	Yes
Satisfaction	-0.230	[-0.295; 0.287]	0.128	Yes
WOM	-0.227	[-0.299; 0.318]	0.159	Yes

Next, the output of permutation test was examined. P-value which was less than 0.10 indicated that there were significant differences between groups. As observed in Table 5, it is found that the effect between HA → RVI showed significant difference between male (p^1 = 0.187) and female (p^2 = -0.008), supporting H3. Likewise, significant difference was also found between male (p^1 = 0.246) and female (p^2 = 0.050) for HA → WOM. Thus, H4 is supported. The effect between BA → WOM also showed significant difference between male (p^1 = 0.486) and female (p^2 = 0.713). Thus, H7 is supported. Other hypotheses as such H1, H2, H5, and H6 are not supported.

Table 5: Summary of Permutation Test for Gender

Hyp.	Path	Path Coefficient			p-value
		Male	Female	Difference	
H1	HA → BA	0.366	0.403	-0.037	0.679
H2	HA → SAT	0.118	-0.013	0.131	0.134
H3	HA → RVI	0.187	-0.008	0.194	0.060
H4	HA → WOM	0.246	0.050	0.197	0.064
H5	BA → SAT	0.682	0.690	-0.008	0.905
H6	BA → RVI	0.681	0.729	-0.048	0.618
H7	BA → WOM	0.486	0.713	-0.227	0.029

2.6. Discussion

Based on the findings, the effect of hotel attributes towards revisit intention and propensity of word-of-mouth are stronger for males rather than females. This is somehow contradict the previous findings that suggest women tend to involve themselves more in recommending and have higher repurchase intentions than men [45]–[47]**.** One of the reasons may be due to the fact that the decision on important attributes in the hotel offering may be dominantly decided by men because they are the breadwinners and hold the purchasing power. Hence, they tend to involve themselves more in recommending and having higher revisit intention to the same hotel. It is also observed that brand attachment effect on propensity of word-of-mouth is stronger in female than male. This is relevant due to the fact that generally women are more prone to express their emotional states rather than male.

3. Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to provide gendered insights into tourist perceptions in hotel choice among Malaysian Muslim. Specifically, this study intends to examine potential gender differences relating to the perceived importance of hotel attributes in building emotional bond with the hotel, and post-consumption outcomes. This study will contribute to hospitality literature by exploring the role of gender, where it is assumed that the effects of hotel attributes in building attachment with the consumer is more stronger on women rather than men. With this understanding, hotel operators would be able to formulate more unique and effective strategies in marketing, highlighting the gendered insights.

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