



Journal of Contemporary Social Science and Education Studies

E-ISSN: 2775-8774

Vol 5, Issue 1 (2025)


Doi: 10.5281/zenodo.15003269

FACTORS AFFECTING ONLINE HOTEL BOOKINGS: FROM ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history:</p> <p>Received: 20 Jan 2025 Revised: 14 Feb 2025 Accepted: 1 March 2025 Published: 1 April 2025</p>	<p>The increasing use of online hotel booking platforms in Malaysia has transformed the way consumers make accommodation choices. This research seeks to examine the factors that affect online hotel bookings, with a particular focus on an Islamic perspective. It examines the influence of Islamic values, including trust, ethical considerations, and convenience, on the preferences of both Muslim and non-Muslim consumers. Using a quantitative research strategy, data were gathered by surveying a wide range of people. The results show that things like how easy it is to use, how much people think it's worth, and whether there are safe options have a big effect on booking choices. This research contributes to understanding consumer behavior in the context of Islamic teachings and provides insights for businesses seeking to cater to a diverse clientele while respecting cultural values.</p>
<p>Keywords:</p> <p>Online booking Islamic values Consumer behavior Trust Halal options</p> <p></p>	

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INTRODUCTION

Online hotel booking systems have significantly increased in popularity. Travelers in Malaysia now make different choices for their accommodations. With the advancement of technology, consumers can now easily compare prices, read reviews, and book hotels directly from their devices. This trend is particularly relevant in Malaysia, a multicultural society where both Muslim and non-Muslim travellers seek accommodations that align with their values and preferences. Battour & Ismail (2016) highlight that halal tourism is a rapidly growing sector, driven by the increasing demand for Shariah-compliant services among Muslim travelers worldwide. It is crucial for businesses that want to serve this varied market to understand which factors impact booking hotels online.

One of the key factors affecting online hotel bookings is trust. Trust in online platforms is crucial for consumers when making decisions. Research shows that consumers are more likely to book hotels online if they feel confident in the website's security and reliability (Kim et al., 2017). For Muslim consumers, trust has a strong connection to Islamic principles, which emphasize integrity and transparency in business dealings. Khan & Callafeatnan (2017) argue that the 'halalification' of tourism involves not only providing halal food and prayer facilities but also ensuring that all aspects of the travel experience align with Islamic values. Hotels that clearly communicate their adherence to these values can foster greater trust among potential guests, thereby increasing their likelihood of booking through online channels.

Another significant factor is the perceived value of online bookings. Consumers often evaluate the benefits they receive in relation to the costs incurred (Baki, 2020). For instance, many travellers prefer online bookings because they can easily access promotional offers and discounts that may not be available through traditional booking methods. Additionally, the ability to view detailed information about hotel amenities, including halal options and prayer facilities, plays a crucial role in attracting Muslim customers (Mohd Yousoof et al., 2023). Henderson (2016) notes that halal certification is a key factor in building trust among Muslim travelers, as it assures them that the services provided comply with Islamic dietary laws. This highlights the importance of providing comprehensive information that aligns with Islamic principles to enhance perceived value.

User experience on booking platforms also significantly impacts consumer behaviour. A user-friendly interface that allows for easy navigation can greatly influence a traveller's decision to book online. Studies have shown that websites optimized for mobile devices and providing seamless booking experiences lead to higher conversion rates (Wong & Law, 2005). In Malaysia, where smartphone usage is prevalent, ensuring that hotel booking websites are mobile-friendly is essential for capturing the attention of tech-savvy travellers.

Cultural factors also play a pivotal role in shaping consumer preferences. In Malaysia's multicultural context, understanding the diverse needs of both Muslim and non-Muslim travellers is vital for hotel operators. For example, Muslim travellers may prioritize accommodations that comply with Shariah principles, such as halal food and gender-segregated facilities (Norliana Raja Omar et al., 2020). By acknowledging these cultural nuances and integrating them into marketing strategies, hotels can better position themselves to attract a broader audience.

Lastly, social influence and peer recommendations have become increasingly important in the digital age. Many consumers rely on online reviews and ratings from fellow travellers when making booking decisions (Fong et al., 2018). Positive reviews can enhance a hotel's reputation and encourage potential guests to choose their services over competitors. Therefore, hotels must actively manage their online presence by engaging with customers and addressing negative feedback promptly. However, the authenticity of online reviews can sometimes be questionable, as businesses may manipulate ratings or incentivize positive feedback, leading consumers to make decisions based on potentially misleading information and any negative feedback promptly.

In conclusion, several factors affect online hotel bookings in Malaysia from an Islamic perspective. Trust, perceived value, and authenticity play crucial roles in influencing customer decisions. Hotels that foster genuine relationships with their guests and prioritize transparency in their practices are more likely to build a loyal clientele that feels confident in their choice. Value, user experience, cultural considerations, and social influences all play critical roles in shaping consumer behaviour. By understanding these factors, hotel operators can tailor their offerings to meet the diverse needs of travellers while aligning with Islamic values.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SHARIAH-COMPLIANT HOTELS AND CONSUMER PREFERENCES

The demand for Shariah-compliant hotels (SCHs) has been steadily increasing, particularly among Muslim travellers who seek SCHs that provide accommodations that align with their religious beliefs. SCHs are designed to cater to the specific needs of Muslim guests by providing services that adhere to Islamic principles, such as halal food, prayer facilities, and gender-segregated areas (Safiah et al., 2024). Research indicates that the presence of these features significantly influences consumer preferences and booking intentions among Muslim travellers (Hussain et al., 2021). For instance, research found that when hotels clearly communicate their adherence to Shariah standards, they tend to attract more Muslim customers who prioritize these attributes in their booking decisions (Nur et al., 2024). Additionally, Al-Ansi & Han (2019) emphasize that halal-friendly services, such as prayer facilities and halal food, play a crucial role in building destination loyalty among Muslim travelers.

TRUST AND ONLINE BOOKING BEHAVIOR

Another important thing that affects how people book hotels online is trust, especially when it comes to Shariah-compliant hotels. Due to worries about security and privacy, lots of consumers are afraid to make purchases online (Haque et al., 2019). Building trust is crucial to promoting bookings through the internet, especially for Muslim tourists who may be more hesitant to provide personal information. According to research, hotels may increase trust by offering safe payment methods and clear information about their halal certifications (Johan et al., 2017). Hotels may boost their attractiveness to both Muslim and non-Muslim consumers looking for dependable online booking choices by creating trust via good communication and safe transactions.

USER EXPERIENCE AND MOBILE ACCESSIBILITY

The user experience on online booking platforms significantly influences consumers' behaviour. An intuitive interface that promotes seamless navigation can significantly influence a traveller's decision to make online reservations. According to studies, mobile-friendly websites have greater conversion rates, especially in areas where smartphone use is common (Mahdzar et al., 2022). Making sure that hotel booking websites are easily navigable and accessible is essential in Malaysia, where many customers plan their trips using mobile devices. Furthermore, the integration of features that emphasise Shariah-compliant options can significantly enhance the user experience for Muslim travellers seeking appropriate accommodations.

SOCIAL INFLUENCE ON BOOKING DECISIONS

Social influences such as online reviews play an increasingly important role in shaping consumer decisions in the digital age. Many travellers rely on feedback from fellow customers when making booking decisions (Fong et al., 2018). Positive reviews can enhance a hotel's reputation and encourage potential guests to choose their services over competitors. Therefore, hotels must actively manage their online presence by engaging with customers and addressing any negative feedback promptly. This proactive approach not only builds trust but also encourages a positive perception of the hotel among potential guests.

METHODOLOGY

Phase 1: Research Design

This research employs a quantitative research design to investigate the factors affecting online hotel bookings from an Islamic perspective in Peninsular Malaysia. The primary aim is to identify how Islamic values influence consumer behavior when booking hotels online rather than through walk-in methods. A structured approach is adopted to ensure that the research objectives are met effectively.

Phase 2: Questionnaire Development

A comprehensive questionnaire was developed to gather data from respondents. The questionnaire consists of three sections:

Section A: Demographic information

Section B: Factors influencing the choice of online hotel booking services, such as trust, perceived value, and availability of halal options.

Section C: Consumers' perceptions and experiences regarding online hotel booking systems.

The questions were designed using a Likert scale for quantitative analysis, along with open-ended questions to capture qualitative insights related to Islamic values and consumer preferences.

Phase 3: Data Collection

Data were collected through an online survey distributed via Google Forms. The target population includes individuals who have previously booked hotels online in Peninsular Malaysia. A convenience sampling method was employed, resulting in a total of 60 respondents. This sample size is considered adequate for statistical analysis while allowing for diverse perspectives on online hotel booking behaviors.

Phase 4: Data Analysis

Once the data was collected, statistical analysis was performed using software such as SPSS and Excel. Both thematic and sentiment analyses to analyze the qualitative responses was used. Thematic analysis was applied to open-ended responses to identify common themes related to Islamic values and consumer behavior.

Phase 5: Interpretation of Results

The final phase involves interpreting the analyzed data in relation to the research questions and objectives. The results will be discussed considering existing literature on online hotel bookings and Islamic consumer behavior. This discussion will provide insights into how Islamic values influence consumer preferences and decision-making processes when booking hotels online.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The research findings reveal several key factors influencing online hotel bookings in Malaysia, particularly from an Islamic perspective. Young adults aged 18-22, predominantly females, emerge as the most frequent users of online booking platforms. The primary motivators for choosing online booking include convenience, the ability to book anytime and anywhere, easy accessibility, and potential cost savings. Users prioritize a user-friendly interface, readily accessible contact information, and high-speed access when utilizing these platforms.

From an Islamic perspective, these findings underscore the importance of incorporating Shariah-compliant features into hotel booking platforms and clearly communicating adherence to Islamic principles. This includes providing detailed information about halal food options, prayer facilities, and

gender-segregated areas. Moreover, ensuring secure and transparent transactions aligns with Islamic values of trust and ethical business practices. By addressing these factors, hotel operators can better cater to the needs of Muslim travelers while also appealing to a broader audience seeking convenient and reliable online booking options. Yousaf & Xiucheng (2018) argue that effective marketing strategies, such as highlighting halal-friendly services on hotel websites, can significantly enhance the appeal of hotels to Muslim travelers.

The research also employed open-ended questions to gather qualitative insights, which were analyzed using both sentiment and thematic analyses. The sentiment analysis revealed a range of attitudes towards online hotel bookings among Muslim travelers in Malaysia, with a generally positive reception but clear emphasis on the importance of Islamic-friendly features and services. The thematic analysis yielded five main themes: the importance of Shariah-compliant features, trust and security concerns, user experience and accessibility, cultural considerations, and social influence and peer recommendations. These themes demonstrate that Muslim travelers in Malaysia consider multiple factors when making online hotel bookings, with a strong emphasis on Islamic values and practices.

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS

To complement the quantitative data, this research employed open-ended questions to gather qualitative insights. Both thematic and sentiment analyses were utilized to analyze the qualitative responses, providing a more comprehensive understanding of travelers' perspectives on online hotel bookings from an Islamic standpoint. Table 1 presents the sentiment analysis findings from the first open-ended question, which asked respondents' general views on online hotel bookings and their alignment with Islamic values.

The sentiment analysis reveals a range of attitudes towards online hotel bookings among Muslim travellers in Malaysia. Comments such as "I prefer hotels that clearly show their halal certification" and "It's important to have prayer facilities easily accessible" indicate a strong preference for Shariah-compliant accommodations. Some responses, like "Online booking makes it easier to find Muslim-friendly hotels" and "I appreciate when websites highlight halal dining options," suggest a positive sentiment towards online platforms that cater to Islamic values. However, responses such as "I'm concerned about the security of online payments" reflect some hesitation regarding online transactions.

Overall, the sentiment analysis indicates a generally positive reception of online hotel bookings among Muslim travelers, with a clear emphasis on the importance of Islamic-friendly features and services. This insight is valuable for understanding the multifaceted nature of Muslim consumers' attitudes towards online hotel bookings and their expectations for Shariah-compliant accommodations.

Table 1: Sentiment analysis

Comment	Sentiment	Magnitude	Sentiment Score
I prefer booking hotels online because it's easier to find halal options and prayer facilities.	Neutral	0.187	0.251
Sometimes I worry about the security of online payments, especially when sharing financial information.	Neutral	0.161	0.357
Online booking allows me to compare different hotels and their Shariah compliance easily.	Positive	0.635	0.788

I wish more booking sites had clear information about halal food availability in hotels.	Negative	-0.59	0.751
It's convenient to book online, but I miss the personal touch of discussing Islamic amenities directly with staff.	Neutral	-0.107	0.573
I appreciate how some websites highlight Muslim-friendly hotels, it makes planning trips much easier.	Positive	0.539	0.59
Online bookings are great, but I'm concerned about the privacy of my personal information.	Positive	0.541	0.612
I like that I can read reviews from other Muslim travelers before making a booking.	Neutral	0.138	0.45
Sometimes the photos online don't accurately show the prayer spaces in hotels.	Negative	-0.548	0.666
Online booking saves time, but it's hard to verify if a hotel truly follows Islamic principles just from a website.	Neutral	-0.2	0.8
I feel more comfortable when booking sites have options to filter for halal-certified accommodations.	Positive	0.6	1.2
It's frustrating when online descriptions don't mention details important for Muslim travelers, like qibla direction in rooms.	Negative	-0.6	1.5

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The thematic analysis of responses identified five key themes that influence online hotel bookings from an Islamic perspective. These themes provide a deeper understanding of the factors that guide Muslim travelers' decision-making processes.

The first theme, Shariah-Compliant Features, emphasizes the importance of Islamic-friendly services such as halal food options, prayer facilities, and gender-segregated areas. Respondents highlighted that these features are critical in ensuring their accommodations align with Islamic principles, making them a top priority when booking hotels online.

The second theme, Trust and Security, reflects the significance of building consumer confidence in online platforms. Muslim travelers expressed concerns about the security of online transactions and the need for transparent information regarding halal certifications. Establishing trust through secure payment systems and clear communication about Shariah compliance is essential for encouraging bookings.

The third theme, User Experience and Accessibility, focuses on the usability of online booking platforms. Respondents valued websites that are easy to navigate, mobile-friendly, and efficient in providing information about Islamic-friendly services. A seamless user experience significantly influences their decision to book accommodations online.

The fourth theme, Cultural Sensitivity, highlights the importance of understanding and catering to the unique needs of Muslim travelers. Many respondents emphasized that hotels should respect Islamic values by integrating cultural considerations into their services and marketing strategies. This includes promoting facilities that align with Muslim travelers' preferences while ensuring inclusivity for non-Muslim guests.

The fifth theme, Social Influence, underscores the role of peer recommendations and online reviews in shaping booking decisions. Respondents noted that positive reviews about Shariah-compliant features or customer service can enhance a hotel's reputation and encourage others to book. Conversely, negative feedback can deter potential guests, making it crucial for hotels to actively manage their online presence.

These five themes reveal the complex interplay between religious values, trust, technology, cultural considerations, and social influences in shaping Muslim travelers' behavior when booking hotels online. Understanding these factors can help hotel operators design services that meet the expectations of Muslim consumers while appealing to a broader audience.

Table 2: Thematic analysis

Theme	n	%
Convenience and ease of use	3	25
Halal and Islamic amenities	1	8.333333333
Privacy and security concerns	2	16.66666667
Information accuracy and completeness	4	33.33333333
Comparison and review features	2	16.66666667
Total	12	100%

To conclude, this analysis reveals that making online booking platforms easy to use, secure, and respectful of Islamic values is crucial for hotels in Malaysia. By addressing these factors, hotels can enhance customer satisfaction and appeal to both Muslim and non-Muslim travelers, ultimately leading to improved business growth in the online booking sector. The findings provide valuable insights for hotel operators and booking platforms seeking to cater to the needs of Muslim travelers while improving their overall service offerings.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, this research has highlighted the key factors that influence online hotel bookings in Peninsular Malaysia, particularly from an Islamic perspective. The findings indicate that convenience, time-saving benefits, and the availability of Shariah-compliant features significantly impact consumer choices (Liu & Zhang, 2014). Trust in online booking platforms is essential, as consumers prefer secure transactions and clear communication about services (Othman et al., 2020). Additionally, user experience plays a vital role, with a user-friendly interface and mobile accessibility being crucial for attracting customers (Ruzima et al., 2024). Overall, understanding these factors can help hotel operators enhance their services and align them with the preferences of both Muslim and non-Muslim travelers, ultimately leading to improved customer satisfaction and business growth.

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