

Halal Tourism in Indonesia: Does it attract only Muslim Tourists

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ABSTRACT

Indonesian Halal Tourism became a raising mode to attract Muslim Tourist by Ministry of Tourism Republic Indonesia. Indonesia, as a non-Muslim country by nation ideology, tries to highlight the spiritual spirit of Islam as a culture to attract more tourists and put it into physical practice by having more tourism hospitalities; such as Halal Hotel that has Halal certification, which provides less or even none of alcohol beverages and serves only food based on Halal dietary. Indonesia in developing tourism brand of “Indonesia The Halal Wonders” would possibly lead into positive and negative possibilities. This article used literature review to reach data about Halal tourism in Indonesia. It has a tendency for tourism halal markets to lose the customers that are not Muslim travellers.

Keywords: Halal Tourism, Indonesia, Muslim, Tourist

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia often describes as a Muslim country based on most of the population, not on the law regulation which rules the government system, if compared to Brunei Darussalam for example, Indonesia is having five official religions and hundreds of ethnic groups, but boasts as the world's largest Muslim population.

Recently, Indonesia has halal tourism marketing strategy that is implemented by The Ministry of Tourism to brand some places as the most suitable vacation places for Muslims. Thus, Indonesia, as a non-Muslim country by nation ideology, tries to highlight the spiritual spirit of Islam as a culture to attract more tourists and putting it into physical practice by having more tourism hospitalities; such as Halal Hotel that has Halal certification, which provides less or even none of alcohol beverages and serves only food based on Halal dietary.

Having said that, I will try to discuss whether the marketing effort designed directly for Muslims could affect non-Muslim visitors to make prejudice about Indonesia as a country that choose only to prioritise Muslims visitors. Or it can possibly attract more non-Muslims western population to see Islamic culture as a cultural heritage and see it as an option of their vacation places.

DISCUSSION

Cross-Cultural Marketing and Religion as Culture Tourism

There are basic specifications of tourist destination if they want to be recognised through their brand. According to Uskokovic (2012) it is important to highlight each of the following aspects: (a) the tourism brand has to be realistic that will be perceived positive and negative in a way it wants to

be seen, (b) brand that wins shows and recognised through its real value, (c) brand-building is also a risk of positioning at the market, (d) brand is created, not announced. It takes high numbers of small efforts, (e) brand consists of expectations, products, images and services and a continuous search for emotions and impressions that remain at visitors' memories, (f) visual identity matters to represent the right product, (g) having possibility in improving the brand quality of local products and the usage of other positive experience with a purpose of having global tourist market positioning.

As brand-positioning plays the role of how a tourism place wants to be perceived, Herbig (2014) claims that psychological aspects play an important role to any product as important as its physical aspects. Thus, different cultures provide different values to different psychological approach. Local norms and cultures eventually take into the account of possible adaptation of products as much as it is affecting its physical features. Subsequently, the effect of culture upon a product can be directly tied to the total product concept. Local cultural tastes often have forced many international companies to modify components, and possibly the entire product, to be successful.

Consumers have vague but definite stereotypes associated with various countries and products that are created by its created brand. As Holliday, et al. (2004) mentioned that stereotyping is learned by making generalisations about the group, ethnic, age, gender or nation. For example, Herbig would say that Scotland is associated with Scotch whisky; France with perfume, wine and cheese; Italy with pasta. Those are then, becoming a stereotype that describes particular societies' behaviour. Such as French people would be drawn having wine in each meal, which is different with

British people that are having it only for special occasion.

Thus, can be distinguished by material and symbolic culture, which reflects different kinds of human activity. Material culture defines as food, clothes or housing, and symbolic culture defines as religion, sport or art and much more. Culture becomes transformed from a process whereby local individuals or groups engage in cultural activities and create meanings.

On the top of that, it gets more complicated if a “tourist dimension” is added. Having said that culture nowadays is seen as merchandise in the tourism market (Vukonic, 1998) in which culture is created specifically to attract tourist. However, Vukonic also explains that culture in its fullness remained a dominant tourist motivation. As culture divided into both material and spiritual, a spiritual potential is the root of all meanings, answers and solutions concerning about human being and its fundamental factors. That becomes a primary aspect that can offer a reliable historical support and can represent a proof for absolute values. As people are giving more attention to historical background, cultural identity and cultural meanings.

Which subsequently, it is a good reason for a restoration of cultural momentums. Vierde (1995, cited in Vukonic, 1998) supports that such action is a good idea without danger to restore a cultural understanding of the visitors. Vukonic thus coming to a realisation that the presentation of cultural heritage to tourists, especially regarding religion as symbolic culture, relies exclusively on marketing and its implementation to tourism. It is then can be said that the way of cultural heritage and identity are communicated must be highlighted, as Nuryanti (1996) adds that the primary challenge in linking histories of culture and tourism lies in a reconstructing the past to the present through interpretation.

Halal Tourism and Islam Stereotypes

Halal tourism in general defines as a tourism product and service that covers the needs of Muslim travelers concerning dietary and praying requirements. Bon and Hussain (2010) propose a definition which Halal tourism is mainly a Muslim- oriented tour that is created to address Muslim considerations. The concept of Halal itself used in general term for things that are allowed to be done, not just being applied to only foods. It also includes all aspects of life, therefore relates to the approval form of behaviours. In similarity, might be made with the image of Islamic banking practices, in which Khalil (2010) explains that the idea of Halal tourism introduced by hoteliers after the Sharia laws in the banking and investment sector is recognised.

A categorisation of Halal tourism comes up as Vukonic (1998) mentioned that based on some numbers of theories, there is a conclusion that says there is no kind of tourists’ behaviour in tourism. There is nothing as a universal tourism or a comprehensive tourist experience, but more into plenty of types of tourism and experiences (Watson and Kopachevsky, 1994; cited in Vukonic, 1998). This is then developed for practical implementation of the market segmentation strategy for tourism diversity which has been recognised in tourism as a commodification.

Commodification describes as a process, under modern economic and social science influence, in which the activities that are done is evaluated regarding their exchange value. If that is taken into the account of tourism content, in the end, it means that they must meet various human and material needs for the commodity to be exchanged. However, products in tourism are purely symbolic power to instruct other goods in exchange (Vukonic, 1998).

Nevertheless, Thompson (1999, cited in Vukonic, 1998) argues that a symbolic meaning of a tourism product does not change its position in the market, it urges those who sell it always to innovate through research on types of marketing activities can be used to marketing. As the presentation of culture through tourism must reflect the reality and authenticity that marks in the mind of the tourist.

As in marketing terms, culture is an essential ingredient of a tourist product (Vukonic, 1998). Thus, Halal tourism cannot easily be escaped from public stereotyping. Muslims stereotyped as having a culture of fanatics, irrational, primitive and dangerous by daily events in which it involves the relationship between the Western and Muslim World, Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe and North America (Shadid and van Koningsveld, 2002). Media publications often support the generalisation that the threat of the Muslim enemy is not new in the Western world. This factor can contribute to the decision of non-Muslim Western travellers to visit a particular area that is labelled with Halal tourism. However, essentially those negative prejudice is public facts that are known as not based on solid facts. The negative behaviour of the Western people to Islam and Muslims is analysed and increasingly considered as myth (see Esposito, 1992; Hadar, 1993; Shadid en van Koningsveld, 1995; Halliday, 1995; Lawrence, 1998; cited in Shadid and van Koningsveld, 2002).

Another argumentation according to Shadid and van Koningsveld (1995) that Islamic threat should be considered as a myth is because Muslims have never carried out a significant military action in the West. Conversely, Muslims in Europe have more frequencies to be fallen as victims in terrorist actions. The image of Islamic and Western culture cannot collide, that Muslims cannot fit into European societies are generated by

unfounded prejudice towards Islam and Muslims. The other issues such as polygamy, veiling school girls and the negative influence of Islamic ideology can be traced back to issues raised by politicians and press which blown it way too much.

Tourism Brands of Indonesia; Indonesia The Halal Wonders & Wonderful Indonesia

Anholt (2005) claims that tourism is a fundamental aspect which most often promoted as the nation's brand. Thus, it might have a different portion on people's perception of the country as a whole. That statement relates to Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism in developing the brand of Halal Tourism that claims Indonesia as The Halal Wonders on its tourism tagline. Before initiating Halal Tourism, Indonesia has always been consistently promoting "Wonderful Indonesia" as a general marketing positioning to countries abroad. Developing both brands at the same time might as well putting Indonesia in a risk market positioning which slowly switches Indonesia's brand position as a Muslim country.

As Uskokovic (2012) had mentioned at the beginning of literature review, that tourism brand is not announced, and it is a small effort put in numbers of continuous actions. As much as building a brand is having a risk of positioning, the marketing approach of "Wonderful Indonesia" is having less danger in being stereotyped compare to Halal-tourism. Although concerning expressing emotions and having the possibilities to be mentally engaged in tourists perception is Halal-tourism approach, both brands have the chance to be developed to represent local products that bring the usage of positive experience which the goal is making the

brands have the market positioning in global tourist markets.

What can be learned from Indonesia's Halal tourism is that it recognizes opportunities. Indonesia has been a prominent location for halal tourism as it has thousands of mosques across the country. It offers one-year warm weather, low price to travel and halal food is provided in most places. Thousands of mosques are accessible across the country. As reported by *theworldfolio.com* (2016) a soft launch of halal tourism occurred in 2012, which was in Aceh, West Sumatra, Riau, Lampung, Banten, Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, Yogyakarta, East Java, West Nusa Tenggara and South Sulawesi. The services on 'halal-friendly tourism' are tourism operators also provide halal friendly hotels and halal restaurants, tours, trip planning and spas. The idea is to ensure an entirely comfortable experience for Muslim visitors.

theworldfolio.com (2016), adds that The Ministry of Tourism of Indonesia, Arief Yahya, states that Indonesia would like to increase the visitors to 5 million people through Halal tourism by 2019. Of the last two years, a 14,7% annual income increase from foreign exchange of Muslim tourists. It invests \$200 million to promote all forms of tourism, \$29 million has been dedicated to attracting guests interested in halal tourism. The MENA region has been the major focus of these efforts. Based on official data, in 2015 only 182,143 tourists came from the MENA to travel Indonesia. Out of 12 million visitors expected by the end of 2016, the government estimates only 300,000 will be of MENA origin International recognition for Indonesia's development of this sector is also growing. The SofyanHotel Betawi (located in Jakarta) won the Best Halal Hotel award during the 2015 World Halal Travel Summit in Abu Dhabi. Lombok was rated Best

Halal Tourism Destination and Best Halal Honeymoon Destination, among 12 others nominated Muslim-friendly places (*theworldfolio.com*, 2016).

Indonesia brings "Unity in Diversity" as a national saying which helps in marketing drives which make culture as merchandise that can be sold. Indeed, the Western travellers who are coming to Indonesia can visit Bali and can feel international atmosphere without having too much exposure to Muslim cultures, but to open the access for Halal tourism to non-Muslims is an opportunity worth the try such as Islamic historical tours, for instance.

However, the intention of The Ministry of Tourism to only targets Muslim travellers would possibly create a gap that foster stereotype predicted which comes from non-Muslim travellers. Related to that, Stangor (2000) claims that a stereotype is a form that people make to categorise social environment. Stereotype and Prejudice often arise under unconsciousness, which make people quickly make generalisation towards a nation without having any awareness of the nation's cultural values. As human stereotyping arises from the distinction between an in-group and an out-group, thus negatively it has a tendency to create prejudice within the out-group people who would just hear "Indonesia The Halal Wonders" for the first time. The visual brand would also play important role in this, as Uskokovic (2012) mentioned that visual identity matters to represent the right product.

Through some advertisement of tourism (see appendix 1), it can be seen that it only represents one type of social being and high possibly creates a feeling that Non- Muslims is not welcome or not prioritised to be entertained in Indonesia. In a positive way, it can be used as a culture restorations and explaining cultural meanings to explain locals' behaviour, which have possibilities to

foster the opportunities of Halal tourism has the chance to make every traveller with any religious background discover the culture identities and culture values within Islam and feel as if they are part of in-group people even though they are not Muslims. It also has possibilities in preventing over-generalisation that is created by Medias and publications that classify Islam with negative behaviour which eventually causes problematic stereotyping, or Indonesia stereotyped as a Muslim country.

Back to the main challenge in linking histories to culture and tourism that can be achieved through communicating the past and present time interpretations (Nuryanti, 1996), this marks the marketing of Halal tourism is not an easily done effort to do to balancing the demands of non-Muslim and Muslim tourists. Thus, Halal tourism label might make the non-Muslim Western travellers want to travel to a destination with certain attributes. For example, some hotels in Indonesia offer sharia service that might appear not attractive to non-Muslim guests, which this can be either opportunity or misfortune for the hospitality business. Although, for Western people particularly, it is considered as a myth that they cannot respect the culture of Islam. As Shadid and Van Koningsveld (1995) have mentioned that the image of Islamic and Western culture cannot collide, that Muslims cannot fit into European societies are generated by unfounded prejudice towards Islam and Muslims.

However, this culture segmentation in intercultural communication helps in changing religion views to be defined as culture. It fosters tourism marketing by having halal tourism marketing strategy. Vukonic (1998) claims that culture in its fullness becomes a dominant tourists' motivation although great global structural changes in general as well as

in tourism-wide stress the significance of structural in tourism development in a certain area. That it opens possibilities for Indonesia in implementing Halal tourism to restore the negative stereotype of Muslims through the authenticity of culture shown in a secular and democratic country that has Muslims as majority citizens. It can also be a movement to break down the stereotype of Muslim being perceived as a negative community.

But it is not possible for Indonesia to attract tourists only by blowing-up the tourism brand of halal tourism, even to non-Muslim tourists, as Nuryanti (1996) criticised that the primary challenge in linking histories of culture and tourism lies in a reconstructing the past to the present through interpretation. As Indonesia is not a Muslim country, it is quite a challenge to reconstruct the past to make Islam as a heritage culture touristic spot to explore due to the diversity that Indonesia has and it cannot only represent Islam. Which is why, the best option possible for Indonesia is implementing two tourism brand positioning, which is "Wonderful Indonesia" and "Indonesia The Halal Wonders".

CONCLUSION

Being aware of the knowledge about culture will certainly, open the opportunity of Indonesia to develop the brand of Halal tourism which meets the needs enough numbers of Muslims all over the countries. Thus, having the knowledge about prejudice and stereotype is also important to prevent negativity that might come up from a tourism marketing activity that mostly perceives as a nation's identity.

Having said that, Indonesia in developing tourism brand of "Indonesia The Halal Wonders" would possibly lead into positive and negative possibilities. It

has a tendency for tourism halal markets to lose the customers that are not Muslim travellers. However, in a positive way, the product packaging of Halal tourism can be developed as cultural heritage tours for non-Muslim as an effort to drag the non-Muslims travellers as an outgroup people, to be an in-group people in understanding

Islam as a form of culture instead of a religion that can only be enjoyed by Muslims. Such as targeting those people who has the same type of food dietaries. As it was said that brand-positioning plays the role of how a tourism place wants to be perceived, Herbig (2014) then mentioned that psychological aspects play an important role to any product as important as its physical aspects. Thus, different cultures provide different values to different psychological approach so that I can meet certain needs. I believe there is huge potential for halal-tourism to be developed to eventually come up with marketing activities that is matched with those other societies or religions that has the same needs as Muslim people that can be accommodate though Halal-tourism product packaging.

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Appendix 1:



Picture 1. World Halal Tourism Summit 2016 Promo, Available through:
<http://www.indonesia.travel/uploads/3a4e4ad06c6f247b45a0e121551421066c885c25-fa6d9.jpg>
[Accessed in 4 January 2016]

Appendix 2



Picture 2. World Halal Tourism Summit 2016 Promo, Available through:
<http://indonesia.travel/uploads/ed435c13a874599fde71ea0b8506340dad11ea6e-6cf94.jpg> [Accessed in 4 January 2016]