

HALAL MARKETING STRATEGIES OF MALAYSIAN HOMESTAY PROVIDERS ON HALAL DESTINATION BRAND EQUITY

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Abstract: Malaysia has a distinct position in global tourism as a predominantly Muslim country. The nation is notable for attracting Muslim tourists. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for homestays in Malaysia increased dramatically in recent years. This encouraging rise demonstrates how the homestays are having a significant influence on Malaysia's tourism industry. Thus, the homestay programme has been acknowledged as a crucial driver of Malaysia's economic growth. However, the lack of research on homestays in the context of *halal* tourism highlights an important gap in understanding how these services may successfully satisfy the demands of Muslim tourists while adhering to Islamic practices. Due to the growing popularity of *halal* tourism, thorough studies need to be conducted to systematically analyse the degree of *halal* practices and *halal* marketing strategies in the homestay industry. By addressing this gap, this research aims to provide significant insights into the effectiveness of *halal* practices and *halal* marketing strategies in the homestay industry and develop a model of *halal* destination brand equity. This research intends to provide a broader understanding of how to optimise homestays for the *halal* tourism industry and contribute to the wider field of *halal* tourism research.

Keywords: *Halal* tourism, Homestay, Economic growth, Brand equity, Islamic practices

1. Introduction

Halal tourism, a niche market segment catering to Muslim tourists, is transforming the global tourism industry. This demographic is a growing sector, boosting local economies through higher spending on accommodations, dining, and tourism activities. *Halal* tourism involves travelling following Islamic guidelines (Rahman et al., 2020). It includes *halal* cuisines, safe accommodations, accessible prayer facilities, gender-segregated amenities, and authorised activities. The *halal* characteristics in travel destinations, such as accommodations, positively impact tourists' satisfaction (Antoni & Dwita, 2020; Saifudin, 2021). Tourists perceive *Shariah*-compliant accommodations as attractive and secure and have a positive attitude towards Islamic cultures (Suhailah Abdul Muin et al., 2024). According to Amalia et al. (2024) and Yuniningsih et al. (2024), destinations that combine cultural experiences with *halal* compliance attract more tourists, offering unique and fulfilling experiences valued by Muslims. Shafazawana Mohamed Tharikh et al. (2023) and Mursid (2022) have indicated that the perceived value of *halal* services directly influences tourists' satisfaction and willingness to return.

Halal tourism encourages ethical and responsible travel habits that connect with sustainability principles, and community support. Abbasian (2021) and Yuniningsih et al. (2024) specified that destinations which prioritise Islamic guidelines can build welcoming environments that attract not just Muslim tourists but also others interested in ethical tourism practices. *Halal* tourism promotes cultural interactions and understanding, focusing on hospitality, culinary experiences, and community participation. It fosters a sense of community involvement and authentic experiences, fostering a meaningful relationship between tourists, and local communities. Homestay programmes, which include local families, offer tourists the opportunity to experience daily routines, traditions, and hospitality, enhancing their understanding of diverse cultures (Andespa et al., 2020; Zuhri et al., 2022). These programmes prioritise safe accommodations, *halal* cuisine, prayer facilities, gender-segregated amenities, and authorised tourism activities, ensuring Muslim tourists' religious duties respected while providing authentic cultural experiences (Sibyani & Adiwinarto, 2023).

Malaysia has been named the top destination for Muslim tourists for the ninth consecutive year (CrescentRating, 2024). The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) also recognised Malaysia as the Top Muslim-Friendly Destination of the Year for the second consecutive year. Malaysia generated RM14.70 billion from these arrivals in 2023. Amini Amir Abdullah et al. (2020) believed that improving *halal* tourism without compromising Malaysian culture could grow the industry while respecting Islamic values. Malaysia's homestay programme is deemed suitable for *halal* tourism due to its market potential of over 50 Muslim countries and 1.6 billion Muslims (Islamic Tourism Centre [ITC], 2023). Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture (MOTAC) promises to continue promoting Muslim travel to Malaysia, even if it involves altering the country's tourism landscape (Intan, 2022). A destination with high *halal* brand equity attracts Muslim tourists by satisfying their Islamic needs and demands and gives them a competitive edge in the *halal* tourism industry by improving market share and income. It builds a strong reputation, increasing trustworthiness among tourists and promoting return visits.

2. Research Problem

Malaysia has a distinct position in global tourism as a predominantly Muslim country. Thus, the country is notable for attracting Muslim tourists. Muslim tourists frequently seek accommodations that reflect their religious practices, such as *halal* cuisine, prayer facilities, and gender-segregated amenities. While many studies have examined *halal* certification in the food industry, such examinations in the homestay industry are limited (Andespa et al., 2020; Pratama et al., 2023). The gap in understanding the integration of *halal* practices and *halal* marketing strategies in the homestay industry underlines the need for further research.

Previous research discovered that there is a lack of comprehensive models in *halal* tourism that combine the essential characteristics of brand equity, such as brand recognition and image (Yulianto et al., 2021). Research on the connection between *halal* brand equity and consumer behaviours, particularly those affecting Muslim tourists' preferences, is also limited. According to Hasan (2023), emotional attachments play a significant role in revisit intentions, but psychological and cultural elements affecting tourists' views of *halal*

businesses need further investigation. Andespa et al. (2020) reported that stakeholder perspectives, including local communities, tourism operators, and government agencies, are sometimes overlooked in understanding *halal* brand equity. Since community engagement in *halal* tourism development is relevant, further research is needed to understand the larger implications for brand equity.

Halal practices in homestay environments pose challenges for Muslim tourists, including inconsistency in knowledge and application. Many providers lack a thorough understanding of *halal* hospitality requirements (Aziz & Moniruzzaman, 2022), leading to poor services (Nor Hidayatun Abdul Razak et al., 2019), such as the lack of *halal* cuisine options, prayer facilities, and gender-segregated amenities. This might cause discomfort for Muslim tourists, as a result, affecting their overall experiences (Azrin Jalasi & Sylvia Nabila Azwa Ambad, 2021; Siti Zakiah Abu Bakar et al., 2023). The opposition towards implementing *halal* tourism can occur due to varying perspectives on what qualifies as *halal* practices (Wahyudin et al., 2021), which may restrict efficient communication and coordination among local governments, community leaders, and homestay providers in the *halal* tourism industry (Rachmiatie, 2023). This knowledge gap requires focused training and learning resources for homestay providers to improve their understanding of *halal* practices (Hariani & Hanafiah, 2023). Addressing this knowledge gap is crucial for ensuring Muslim tourists' satisfaction and comfort.

Homestay providers often struggle to effectively communicate their *halal* offerings to potential guests, leading to insufficient marketing and promotion. This lack of exposure can make it difficult for Muslim tourists to find suitable accommodations (Destiana & Kismartini, 2020). The absence of standardised *halal* marketing strategies also poses challenges, as there are various perceptions of *halal* practices that lead to confusion among tourists (Ukus et al., 2024). A consistent marketing plan that emphasises *halal* features is crucial to attract Muslim tourists and enhance their understanding of available options (Dewi, 2022). Without such a plan, providers may miss out on opportunities to attract Muslim tourists seeking for *halal*-friendly accommodations (Yusnita Yusof et al., 2021).

The *Maqasid al-Shariah* theory is a crucial component in *halal* tourism, promoting the welfare of people, and society by safeguarding five essential elements: religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. This framework can guide homestay providers in aligning their services with Islamic guidelines and expanding their offerings to Muslim tourists. While some research has begun to address the integration of *Maqasid al-Shariah* into *halal* branding, comprehensive frameworks that clearly relate *halal* brand equity to *Maqasid al-Shariah* objectives are limited (Nahidloh & Qadariyah, 2021). Nahidloh and Qadariyah (2021) stressed the importance of this integration for ensuring *halal* tourism branding that aligns with Islamic beliefs and principles.

3. Literature Review

Homestays are accommodations where tourists stay in private homes for over 24 hours for leisure, business, or other purposes (Rohaslinda Ramele Ramli et al., 2020; Munira Saaidin et al., 2023). They turn rural residential resources into recreational facilities, allowing

tourists to experience local culture (Hui, et al., 2024). Homestays have expanded into cultural, farm, and heritage accommodations (Pratim Chatterjee et al., 2024). They enable tourists to interact with local communities, cultural heritage, and social interactions, resulting in an immersive experience (Takaendengan et al., 2022). Collaboration and sharing are involved, allowing tourists to directly experience homestay providers' daily life and culture (Rahayu, 2023; Ghimire & Neupane, 2022).

3.1 Halal Tourism

Halal tourism is a form of travel that aligns with Islamic principles and values, offering services such as gender-segregated accommodation, prayer facilities, and *halal* cuisine. It aims to enable Muslim tourists to practice their Islamic practices while on travel (Madnasir & Cahyani, 2024; Andespa et al., 2020). According to Pratama et al. (2023), *halal* tourism often integrates local customs and traditions, allowing tourists to participate in the destination's culture while adhering to their Islamic practices. It is often referred to as Sharia-compliant tourism, Islamic tourism, or Muslim-friendly tourism. Sharia-compliant tourism ensures all activities, services, and goods adhere to Islamic principles (Ismanto & Devy, 2022; Suban et al., 2021). Islamic tourism, according to Usman et al. (2019) and Widodo et al. (2022), encompasses religious, cultural, and *halal* tourism, emphasising the relationship between tourist activities and Islamic principles. Muslim-friendly tourism is inclusive of services that cater to non-Muslims who value *halal* principles like cleanliness and ethical consumption (Wulandari et al., 2023; Suban et al., 2021). *Halal* tourism is supported by various facilities and services offered by the community, businesses, government, and local governments according to Islamic and Shariah standards.

The *halal* tourism industry is profitable, with projections approaching \$200 billion (Rodrigo & Turnbull, 2019; Wisker et al., 2020), driven by the increasing Muslim population, which currently represents 30% of the global population (Muharis et al., 2023). This demographic shift has led to a demand for Islamic-based travel experiences, such as *halal* cuisine, prayer facilities, and gender-segregated services (Mohamed et al., 2022). Many destinations are upgrading their offerings to cater to this demand (Wan Muhammad Wan Sulong et al., 2020; Abhari et al., 2022). *Halal* tourism is expanding to include non-Muslim tourists, making it more appealing to a larger market group. Government initiatives, such as the Indonesian government's legislation and training programmes (Syufa'at et al., 2024), and technology and digital marketing (Destiana & Kismartini, 2020), have contributed to its growth. These factors not only facilitate Muslim tourists but also boost the economic vibrancy of communities integrating *halal* practices into their tourism operations.

3.2 Halal Destination Brand Equity

Halal destination brand equity is a crucial aspect of a destination's success. It involves raising awareness about *halal* options (Destiana & Kismartini, 2020), such as *halal* cuisine, prayer rooms, and gender-segregated amenities, through effective marketing methods (Rahman et al., 2020; Rahmawati et al., 2021). A positive brand image is achieved by consistently providing excellent services that meet the needs of Muslim tourists. Nahidloh and Qadariyah (2021) have indicated that the perceived quality of services, such as

accommodations and dining options, significantly influences tourists' views of a destination's brand. Destinations that prioritise *halal* compliance and create a friendly atmosphere can improve their brand image and brand equity (Andespa et al., 2020).

Brand loyalty is another key element, as loyal customers are more likely to return and recommend a destination (Hasan, 2023). Destinations that offer memorable experiences through cultural involvement, hospitality, and adherence to *halal* values are more likely to attract repeat customers. Stakeholder engagement is essential for developing a coherent *halal* tourism experience, resulting in complete marketing strategies, improved infrastructure, and higher service quality (Almeira et al., 2023; Zarkasyi et al., 2022). Local community engagement can ensure services meet cultural and religious requirements, increasing the destination's appeal.

Halal destination brand equity is influenced by factors such as brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty, and stakeholder collaboration. Brand awareness influences Muslim tourists' understanding of a destination's *halal* services, which can be enhanced through marketing initiatives, travel fairs, and collaboration with Muslim-friendly influencers. Brand image refers to tourists' perceptions of a destination, including its *halal* cuisine, prayer facilities, and safe accommodations. Brand loyalty is driven by consistent, high-quality experiences that align with Islamic principles and values and loyalty programmes that reward repeat visits. Stakeholder engagement is crucial for developing a unified *halal* tourism offering, allowing local governments, tourist boards, and hospitality providers to collaborate and share resources.

3.3 *Halal Practices in the Homestay Industry*

Halal practices in a homestay environment are crucial for catering to Muslim tourists' needs and demands throughout their stay. These practices are governed by the objectives of *Maqasid al-Shariah*, which prioritise the preservation of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth.

3.3.1 *Halal Cuisine*

Halal cuisine is a type of food and beverage that adheres to Islamic dietary laws, ensuring all products are certified *halal*. This practice is crucial for Muslim consumers and business providers, as it addresses religious, health, and ethical concerns (Nursita et al., 2024). Suhaida Herni Suffarruddin et al. (2023) and Lada et al. (2024) emphasised that homestay providers should provide comprehensive information about their suppliers, including ingredients and preparation procedures, to ensure the quality of their food. Offering *halal* meal alternatives can enhance tourists' experiences and maintain the integrity of a Muslim tourist's life. Emphasising sanitation and safety in *halal* cuisine promotes mental clarity and physical energy, supporting sustainability and justice across the food supply chain. This is consistent with the objective of *Maqasid al-Shariah* in preserving life and intellect, where meals are prepared with a focus on health and well-being.

3.3.2 Prayer Facilities

Prayer facilities are essential for Muslims to perform their daily prayers in a clean, pleasant environment. They are found in various places like mosques, public buildings, airports, and hotels, particularly in areas with large Muslim populations or where *halal* tourism is promoted. The quality of these facilities can significantly enhance the experiences of Muslim tourists and community members (Uldiman et al., 2020; Habib et al., 2020). Homestay providers should respect these practices by providing designated prayer areas, offering privacy and comfort, and promoting a sense of community and belonging. These facilities also encourage reflection, meditation, and clarity, improving mental health and allowing for a break from travel stress. Additionally, prayer facilities promote family-centered practices, fostering a culture of faith and enabling customs to be followed even when away from home. Ultimately, it assists tourists in preserving their religion, which is the primary objective of *Maqasid al-Shariah*.

3.3.3 Gender-segregated Facilities

Gender-segregated facilities are essential in *halal* tourism, promoting modesty and tolerance for gender distinctions. These facilities are found in hotels, recreational areas, and public places (Soonsan & Jumani, 2024), providing seclusion and comfort for both male and female tourists (Aloud et al., 2022; Madkhali et al., 2023). Homestays may also establish gender segregation in facilities like swimming pools and recreational areas. This practice upholds the *Maqasid al-Shariah* objective, promoting lineage preservation and maintaining family cohesiveness. Gender segregation also reduces discomfort and misconceptions, fostering mutual respect and understanding. This contributes to a peaceful and harmonious environment, aligning with *Maqasid al-Shariah's* goals of social stability and individual respect.

3.3.4 Cleanliness and Hygiene

Cleanliness and hygiene are crucial in *halal* tourism, as they satisfy Islamic practices and protect the health and safety of tourists. According to Randeree (2019), the emphasis on cleanliness and hygiene in *halal* tourism derives from Islamic guidelines, which promote purity and cleanliness in all aspects of life, including food, personal behaviours, and living conditions. *Halal* cuisine must adhere to Islamic dietary regulations and meet strict sanitary requirements, ensuring a hygienic atmosphere and avoiding cross-contamination with non-*halal* goods (Soonsan & Jumani, 2024). Prayer facilities must be well-kept, with frequent cleaning to ensure authenticity (Habib et al., 2020). Homestay providers must also prioritise cleanliness and sanitation in rooms and communal spaces, ensuring fresh bedding and linens. This contributes to the objectives of *Maqasid al-Shariah*, promoting life and intellect preservation. By adhering to cleanliness and hygiene standards, homestay providers not only fulfil tourists' needs but also adhere to Islamic guidelines. This promotes well-being, safety, and mental clarity, especially for Muslim tourists who engage in Islamic practices like prayer. A clean and hygienic environment promotes tranquillity, allowing tourists to connect with their religious beliefs and surroundings.

3.3.5 Authorised Tourism Activities

Authorised tourism activities are services and experiences that adhere to Islamic guidelines and cater to the needs of Muslim tourists. These activities often include cultural and religious events, such as visits to mosques and local religious celebrations. They also offer educational opportunities and a deeper understanding of Islamic customs and local culture (Andespa et al., 2020). Engaging local communities in tourism activities promotes cultural exchange and mutual respect, improving the authenticity of the experience and empowering them economically (Aziz Abidin Azmi Puat et al., 2024). Authorised tourism activities also play a crucial role in preserving the objectives of *Maqasid al-Shariah*, promoting essential human interests like religion, life, intelligence, lineage, and wealth. They also promote health and safety guidelines, protecting tourists from potential damage and exploitation.

3.4 Halal Marketing Strategies

Halal marketing is a strategic approach that aligns with Islamic principles and values (Romadhon et al., 2024), ensuring commercial actions are ethical. According to Uula and Maziyyah (2022), *halal* marketing covers various topics, including marketing activities, consumer behaviour, and awareness of Islamic products. Companies must make sure their marketing approaches meet with the objectives of *Maqasid al-Shariah*, which prioritise the preservation of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth. This approach is particularly important in the hospitality industry, as it attracts Muslim tourists, improves products, and creates a friendly environment.

3.4.1 Segmentation and Targeting

Halal marketing is a segmentation method that helps businesses identify and target specific customer segments within the Muslim community. By understanding demographics, tastes, and habits (Shah et al., 2019), businesses can develop more relevant and appealing marketing messages (Marso & Haslida Hasan, 2020). By catering to various consumer groups, businesses can increase customer satisfaction, develop trust, and promote responsible consumption, contributing to the community and promoting overall well-being.

3.4.2 Positioning and Brand Image

Halal marketing strategy involves positioning and brand image to differentiate products and build relationships with Muslim consumers. Understanding the target market, including Muslim tourists, is crucial for effective positioning. Research by Lestari et al. (2022) showed that Muslim consumers seek *halal*-friendly choices for religious, health, and ethical reasons. Marketers must adjust their branding efforts to meet these individual demands and preferences. Brands should portray themselves as trustworthy, promoting ethical sourcing, health advantages, and family values. By cultivating a brand image that reflects integrity, respect, and social responsibility, businesses can generate a committed consumer base and contribute to the community's welfare.

3.4.3 Utilising Digital Marketing

Internet platforms have revolutionised *halal* marketing, allowing businesses to target Muslim consumers effectively through social media, influencer marketing, and content marketing. Harahsheh et al. (2019) and Yağmur and Aksu (2020) highlighted the need of using digital platforms to successfully reach potential Muslim tourists while advertising these destinations. Digital platforms are crucial in promoting *halal* products and engaging customers through tailored advertising (Zamrudi & Bae, 2022; Rizq & Muslichah, 2023). *Halal* food companies can use social media to promote recipes, cooking advice, and *halal*-related instructional content, boosting community involvement and brand loyalty (Isa et al., 2024). Customised content marketing educates customers about *halal* procedures, maintaining religion, and ethical consequences.

3.4.4 Cultural Sensitivity and Messaging

Halal marketing strategies should be culturally appropriate and consistent with Islamic beliefs, avoiding images or messages that violate Islamic principles. This can boost brand credibility and consumer loyalty (Hosain, 2021). Ethical advertising emphasising social responsibility and community support can appeal to Muslim customers (Rahman et al., 2024). Effective messages should be relevant to Muslim customers' values and beliefs, and promotional materials should demonstrate knowledge of Islamic practices. This can build a sense of belonging, strengthen community bonds, and promote ethical consumerism and responsible actions.

3.4.5 Community Engagement and CSR Initiatives

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes can enhance brand loyalty and image by promoting community initiatives, sponsoring events, and collaborating with local groups (Saima et al., 2024; Amani, 2024). These approaches can foster long-term consumer relationships. *Halal* brands can demonstrate their commitment to ethical values and social responsibility by actively participating in community development, sponsoring local projects, financing educational programmes, supporting local crafts people, and participating in environmental sustainability initiatives.

4. Expectation of *Halal* Destination Brand Equity Model

The *halal* destination brand equity model is an innovative framework that incorporates *halal* practices and *halal* marketing strategies into the context of the Malaysian homestay programme. It also adopts the concept of *Maqasid al-Shariah* to improve the overall experience and branding of *halal* tourism. This model provides a complete approach to how the Malaysian homestay programme may capitalise on the rising demand for *halal* tourism while adhering to Islamic values, particularly in terms of addressing Muslim tourists' demands and encouraging ethical, and sustainable practices. *Halal* destination brand equity model is designed upon previous studies and findings in the areas of *halal* tourism, brand equity and Islamic principles.

Previous studies on destination branding reveal that a destination's brand success is based on its capacity to identify itself in the market while also creating emotional and functional ties with tourists. Shuang et al. (2023) and Srivastava et al. (2022) emphasised that a clearly defined destination brand has been shown to have a substantial impact on tourists' perceptions and subsequent behavioural intentions, including whether they would return or promote the destinations to others. Therefore, determining a destination's important features is crucial for preserving competitive advantages and guiding strategic marketing initiatives (Shuang et al., 2023). In this context, *halal* approach and Islamic principles act as differentiators that could assist the Malaysian homestay programme to establish a strong brand identity in the *halal* tourism industry.

The five objectives of *Maqasid al-Shariah* are placed at the outer layer of the model to ensure that all aspects of *halal* tourism, from the operational practices to the marketing strategies are in full alignment with Islamic principles. The *Maqasid al-Shariah* theory is integrating into this model to act as a framework for ensuring that all components of the Malaysian homestay programme contribute to the overall well-being of the community and society. It is supported by Aziz Abidin Azmi Puat et al. (2022) which reported that the application of *Maqasid al-Shariah* in hotel industry can establish settings that uphold Islamic principles, like offering *halal* food alternatives and guaranteeing tourists' privacy, and safety. Nadhirah Nordin et al. (2022) emphasised the importance of businesses using complete models that match with *Maqasid al-Shariah* principles, which aim to safeguard human benefits and promote sustainability. Moreover, destinations may distinguish themselves from non-*halal* competitors by concentrating on tourists' well-being and fulfilling their spiritual and cultural demands (Abdul Latheef, 2024).

Halal practices are central to this model. These practices correspond to the observance of Islamic principles that govern numerous aspects of tourism activities. These may include ensuring that food is *halal*-certified, the availability of prayer facilities, accommodations adhering to Islamic cleanliness standards (Busaini et al., 2023), and the overall environment upholds Islamic principles such as modesty, privacy, and ethical behaviour. Busaini et al. (2023) and Mursid (2022) indicated that *halal* certification raises the perceived value of tourism products, lead to the customer satisfaction and trust. This is crucial because Muslim tourists frequently want to be sure that the services they use meet their religious needs, which can have a big influence on their trip experience as a whole (Ekka & Bhardwaj, 2024).

Halal marketing strategies in this model are designed to attract Muslim tourists by highlighting Malaysia's distinctive *halal* offerings. The marketing approaches focus on Malaysia's *halal*-certified services, *halal* cuisine, and Islamic cultural events. The Malaysian homestay programme is positioned as a *halal* destination that provides an authentic experience of local culture and customs while keeping to the highest *halal* standards. Nadhirah Nordin et al. (2022) underlined that integrating business strategies with *Maqasid al-Shariah* principles can improve the perceived value of *halal* products, hence attracting a broader customer base. *Halal* marketing strategies can greatly improve the overall customers' experiences, especially customers' satisfaction, through clear information on *halal* offerings and services are easily accessible. According to Pratama and Harahap (2024),

successful marketing strategies should concentrate on meeting the requirements of Muslim tourists to improve their entire experience.

This model provides a comprehensive framework that combines *halal* practices, *halal* marketing strategies, and the *Maqasid al-Shariah* theory to produce a distinct and sustainable tourism offering. This concept not only meets Muslim tourists' spiritual, ethical, and cultural demands, but it also contributes to the larger aims of economic growth, community welfare, and environmental sustainability. By adhering to these fundamental principles, the model has the potential to expand the Malaysian homestay programme, establishing it as a premier destination for *halal* tourism.

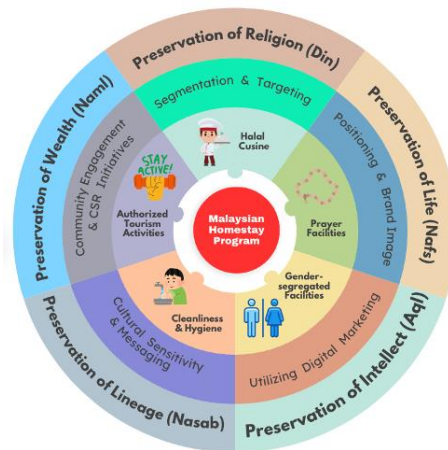


Figure 1. An Expectation of *Halal* Destination Brand Equity Model

5. Discussion

This research aims to develop a brand equity model for *halal* tourism by investigating Muslim tourists' perceptions of *halal* destinations. It will contribute to the literature on destination branding by integrating *halal* practices like *halal* cuisine, prayer facilities, gender-segregated areas, and authorised tourism activities. The research will also provide a framework for *halal* practices in the homestay industry, defining operational and service standards for an authentic *halal* experience. It will also offer effective *halal* marketing strategies, such as digital strategies, cultural sensitivity, and niche targeting, to assist academics studying consumer behaviours, cultural marketing, and tourism marketing. The research will provide new perspectives on how destination branding for *halal* tourism may be developed, maintained, and sustained.

Homestay providers need to understand how *halal* destination brand equity affects Muslim tourists' accommodation preferences. This research can help the operators market themselves as *halal*-friendly accommodations by using consistent branding and effective marketing strategies. Emphasising *halal* standards can build a strong, trustworthy brand that appeals to Muslim tourists. By setting themselves apart from conventional accommodation, homestays can create a unique selling proposition (USP). The research findings can help providers improve operational procedures to comply with Muslim tourists' needs and demands and communicate their *halal* offerings effectively. This promotes the expansion and

sustainability of homestays as viable hospitality options by emphasising successful marketing strategies.

The research aims to promote *halal* tourism in Malaysia by understanding destination brand equity and developing *halal*-certified destinations. This will help establish standards and legislation for *halal* procedures in the tourism industry, including criteria for accommodation, restaurants, and services. The findings can also establish incentives for businesses complying with *halal* practices. The government can stimulate economic growth in the tourism industry by promoting *halal* tourism through subsidies, tax breaks, and grants. Strengthening diplomatic relationships with Muslim-majority countries and international Muslim organisations can also benefit from *halal* tourism policies. This will establish Malaysia as a global pioneer in culturally sensitive tourism.

6. Conclusion

Halal practices and *halal* marketing strategies play a critical role in creating Malaysian homestay programmes as a key component of the country's *halal* destination brand equity, which can significantly boost the economy through *halal* tourism. Homestays can attract a broader demographic of Muslim tourists looking for authentic and compliant experiences by incorporating *halal* practices into their offerings, such as ensuring that food is *halal*-certified, providing prayer facilities, and offering cultural experiences aligned with Islamic values. Effective *halal* marketing strategies that highlight these *halal* practices, and Malaysia's rich cultural heritage, may boost visibility and attractiveness in the highly competitive global tourism industry. Showcasing the distinctive features of the homestay experience and highlighting the personal tales of local hosts will help draw in more potential guests. Additionally, as more tourists opt for *halal*-compliant accommodation, local economies will benefit from the creation of jobs, support for small businesses, and promotion of community growth. Overall, by presenting homestay programmes within the context of *halal* tourism, Malaysia may not only build its brand equity but also capitalise on this industry as a significant contributor to economic growth.

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