

CHALLENGES OF TARGETING POTENTIAL UNTAPPED MUSLIM TOURISM MARKET NICHE: LEARNING FOR NON-MUSLIM DESTINATIONS

Md. Ruhul Amin Mollah¹ and Leyaket Hossain Mahamood²

Abstract

Targeting Muslim travelers is an important choice for many destinations since Muslim population is growing consistently. It is very high time to look at Muslim tourism market and to take initiatives to be competitive world tourism market leader by attracting and catering this large market niche. This research study aims to discover the potentiality of this market, challenges of targeting this market, and the ways to successfully attracting this market segment by non-Muslim destination, China. The research used qualitative analysis on 17 interviews' data by following formal interview data analysis structure. The research found out that Muslim tourism market is a big market and has potential for flourishing Chinese Halal restaurants, tour operating, and hotel businesses. It also identified eight challenges. These include lack of enough facilities, limited suppliers of Halal materials, lack of knowledgeable staff, high cost, lack of Muslim chef, dealing with non-Muslim customers, achieving trust, and language barrier for satisfying this market niche. The study prescribed nine measures to overcome those problems. These are ensuring availability of Halal food, establishing Muslim friendly hotel, government's separate tourism department for Muslim tourists, making tourism agreement, providing training facilities for tourism staffs, advertisement, empowering Muslim leader's role for tourism, establishing souvenir shops for Muslim tourists, and smart phone applications in English, Chinese, and Arabic language for successfully attracting and exploiting this market opportunity.

Key words: Muslim tourism, Tourism market, Halal tourism, Souvenir shops, Arabic language

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the most important and fast expanding revenue earning sectors of the world economy. In international tourism industry, Muslim people represent a large niche market. Battour et al. (2013) stated that undoubtedly, Muslim tourists constitute a broad tourist market with special religious and cultural requirements. It has been observed that there is a growing potential for a new tourism concept incorporating halal hospitality. As the numbers of the Muslims throughout the world are increasing and purchasing powers of them is high, the opportunity to be recognized with halal logo should not be left behind by the food manufacturers and premises (Bozorgaghideh & Beegam, 2015). Many Muslim countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey etc. have positioned themselves as attractive destinations for Muslim tourists. In increasingly competitive tourism market place, many non-Muslim countries are trying to target and serve this large market. Non-Muslim majority countries including Spain, Bosnia, India & the UK are

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Accounting & Information Systems; JnU.

² Associate Professor, Department of Accounting & Information Systems; JnU.

aggressively targeting the sector (Dinar Standard, 2015) and some other non-Muslim countries like Australia, Thailand, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, countries in Europe are specifically catering to attract this tourism segment (Korres, 2008). There should be some necessary conditions such as alcohol-free drinks, pork-free foods, dress-code for both of men and women, places for praying, separate pools for men and women, bathrooms equipment for praying preparation etc. to attract this segment (Mustafayeva et al., 2012).

The fundamental problem is that non-Muslim entrepreneurs, tour operators, destination marketers, hoteliers, and other stakeholders are not knowledgeable about these Halal needs and Muslim tourists' behavior. Knowledge about Muslim tourists' behavior and needs are highly needed for tourism business sectors (tourism policy makers, tour operators, hoteliers, and other stakeholders) to develop, promote, and sell tourism products that suit to the unique needs of large Muslim tourism niche market. Muslim tourists particularly require food and services according to their religious tenets and in non-Muslim countries, the distinctive requirement of Muslims in terms of food, daily prayers, and a travel pattern is a big concern. Halal food, Halal hotel, Halal transportation, Halal food premises, Halal logistics, Islamic finance, Islamic travel packages, and Halal spa etc. are needed for Muslim tourists. Islam & Kärkkäinen (2013) stated that the distinctive needs of Muslim tourists create challenges for non-Muslim tourism planners, destinations marketers, and entrepreneurs for offering products and services that are suitable for Muslim tourists. These needs require extra effort and risk taking. Therefore the research paper aims to find out the untapped Muslim tourism market's prospects, challenges of catering Muslim tourists' needs in non-Muslim destination, and to point out the strategies for non-Muslim destination marketer to successfully cater Muslim travelers' requirements.

2. Literature Review

Travel and tourism have been significant leisure activities of human beings from time immemorial (Gani & Mir, 2013). Travel by Muslim people has a long custom and leisure activity of them is rising and set to become a influential business force, given the number and predicted increase of the Muslim people worldwide (Henderson, 2009). Muslim population is growing at the faster rate than the non-Muslim population and presently it is found that almost 1.619 billion Muslims (23% of the global population) in 200 countries where 62.1% of the Muslims live in Asia-Pacific, 19.9% in the Middle East and North Africa, 15.0% in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2.7% in the Europe and 0.3% in the U.S.A. This trends indicate that by 2030 Muslim population will be 26.4% of the world's total population. (<http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population/> cited in Akyol & Kiliç, 2014). The growth of the Muslim people and their growing disposable income makes a large potential that cannot be ignored for most destinations and the increasing number of Muslim tourists creates larger demand for Halal/Muslim Friendly products and services (Cetin & Dincer, 2016).

Muslim tourists have some unique needs and demands which create challenges for suppliers of those needs as well as destination marketers in catering the needs of

Muslim and non-Muslim customers (Straitstimes, 2016). To cater to this growing segment of the tourism industry, travel agencies, hotels, airports, restaurants, and other destinations face some challenges such as smoke and alcohol-free hotel and restaurant, Halal food, prayer facilities etc. (Halalexpo, 2016). One of the basic challenges is misunderstanding that pork-free means halal; finding halal restaurants and Muslim-friendly facilities is also the fundamental challenge – even in nations such as India, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and China which have a strong desire to cater to the needs of Muslim tourists (Ttgmice, 2014). Convincing central governments in relaxing the visa processes for Muslim travelers while keeping their destinations safe and providing shared values, availability of prayer facilities and mosques, segregated facilities for women are the big challenges for destinations (Cetin & Dincer, 2016). Non-Muslim tourism destinations faces some troubles such as sharia compliant food, muslim friendly tour packages and destinations, Halal label hotels, restaurants and even airlines not serving alcohol and pork, facilitating prayer timings, the hotel rooms with Qibla pointing signage stuck on the ceiling or in drawers, and a prayer mat to allow the Muslim travelers to perform their religious obligations and some other facilities separate for men and women such as in hotels and resorts etc (Bozorgaghideh & Beegam, 2015). In non-Muslim countries, the distinctive requirement of Muslims in terms of food, daily prayers, and travel patterns necessitates certain adjustments in the tourism offering of most destinations (Timothy & Iverson, 2006). To cater to Muslim tourists' needs, destinations need to concentrate on separate hotel rooms for women and men, separate dining quarters allocated to women and families, beds and toilets positioned away from Mecca, toilets fitted with a bidet shower or health faucet, Islamic entertainment (e.g. conservative television channels, no seductive music, geometric and non-figurative patterns of decoration), halal-friendly complementary toiletries (Stephenson, 2014 cited in Nassar, Mostafa, & Reisinger, 2015), halal food with no pork and no alcoholic beverages (Hashim et al., 2007; Stephenson, 2014 cited in Nassar, Mostafa, & Reisinger, 2015), prayer and worship facilities where a traveler can find prayer mats and copies of the Qur'an (Syed, 2001; Battour et al., 2010; Stephenson, 2014 cited in Nassar, Mostafa, & Reisinger, 2015), Islamic dress codes (Zamani-Farahani and Henderson, 2010 cited in Nassar, Mostafa, & Reisinger, 2015) and the Islamic call to prayer (Battour et al., 2011, 2013; Eid, 2013 cited in Nassar, Mostafa, & Reisinger, 2015). Recently, a number of Muslim and non-Muslim countries attract Muslim tourists offering halal tourism services and the destinations have severe headache about separate pools, halal drinks, food and entertainment, prayer time announcing, prayer rooms, no music, and dress code, separate spa facilities, swimming pools and beaches for men and women (Gabdrakhmanov, Biktimirov, Rozhko, & Mardanshina, 2016).

The Tourism Authority of Thailand predicts a huge growth in Muslim visitors from the year 2016; it could exploit the location advantages by receiving more tourists from the neighboring countries of Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam and it has the ability to cater Muslim travelers by providing Arabic-speaking staff, Halal food options, prayer facilities in the airport, Muslim-friendly hotels and restaurants, and tourist attractions (Puangniyom, Swangcheng, & Mahamud, 2017). In 2013, Japan received an estimated 300,000 Muslim tourists and

this figure could reach one million by 2020 (Japantoday, 2015). In Muslim minority countries such as Taiwan, Vietnam, China, and South Korea, Halal tourism is considered a good business opportunity. Some non-Muslim destinations such as Japan, Philippines, and Brazil offered Muslim friendly solutions/options to scenario seen as problematic by Muslim travelers (Battour & Ismail, 2015). The tourism and hospitality industry of China has positioned itself into one of the most promising and fastest-developing industries in the national economy by the reform and opening door policy. China's international tourism hit a boom period since 1990 and it holds an impressive position as the world's third biggest country in terms of international tourist arrivals (Jain, 2014). China's rich diversity of attractions and tourism resources, the reform and opening up policies, rapid urbanization, the relaxation of restrictions on foreign travel, and the appreciating Chinese currency are attributed to boom in China's inbound tourism (Nyaupane et al., 2006; World Tourism Organization, 2013a; Zhang & Heung, 2002; Zhang et al., 2003 cited in Tsang et al., 2015). China's heavy concentration of inbound tourism mainly is in three municipalities and nine provinces such as Liaoning, Hebei, Beijing, Tianjin, Shandong, Jiangsu, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hainan which have favorable conditions from both demand- and supply-side tourism factors (Wen, 1998). China has become one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. The Beijing Olympics in 2008, the Expo Shanghai 2010, and other international events further promoted China's country image. Due to food adulteration, Halal food producers and marketers can take the whole China as their potential markets, Halal not just for Muslims but for all.

There are a plethora of researches germane to tourism and Islam in recent years (AlHamarneh & Steiner, 2004; Aziz, 2001; Battour, Ismail & Battor, 2010a, 2010b; Din, 1989; Sanad et al., 2010; Stephenson, 2014; Timothy & Iverson, 2006; Zamani Farahani & Henderson, 2010 cited in Kessler, 2015). However, halal tourism to cater Muslim tourists is an untapped area of research and more researches of how to develop non-Muslim destinations friendly for Muslim travelers are needed (Battour & Ismail, 2015). Therefore, the above literatures find out the room for conducting research on the potentiality of Muslim tourism, challenges for catering Muslim tourists by non-Muslim destinations and find out the ways of successful catering to Muslim tourists' needs.

3. Objective

This is an in-depth interview data-based research paper. The paper aims-

- To explore the potentiality of Muslim tourism market segment and the challenges to provide the Muslim friendly tourism services in China.
- To suggest the ways that Chinese government and the Chinese tourism industry can adopt to accommodate Muslim tourists' needs by taking into account religious beliefs.

4. Methodology

In-depth interview was conducted with tour operators, hoteliers, and restaurant owners. The main objective of applying in-depth interview is to explore, understand,

and provide in-depth coverage of the individual's perspective on a particular idea or situation (Rubin & Rubin, 1985; Seidman, 1998; Silva & Correia, 2008 cited in Alsawafi, 2013; Zikmund, 1994; Berg, 2009; Sarantakos, 2005). Interviewees were selected from Hebei, Beijing, Ningxia, Guilin, and Guangzhou in China. These places are the hub of business, tourism and communication, and foreign Muslim as well as Chinese Muslim tourists could easily be found. Interview was conducted through personal visit and telephone. Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2007) stated that the sample size in qualitative research should not be too large that it is difficult to extract thick, rich data; on the other hand, it should not be too small that it is difficult to achieve data saturation (Flick, 1998; Morse, 1995), theoretical saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), or informational redundancy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Conducting 20 to 30 interviews is considered acceptable and acknowledged within the scope of social research to generate sufficient constructs to crystallize deeper meanings regarding the topic of conversation (Ginsberg, 1989; Warren, 2002 cited in Alsawafi, 2013). An extremely large number of articles, book chapters, and books recommended that 5 to 50 participants are adequate for qualitative research (Dworkin, 2012). So considering these as well as the limited number of Muslim hotels, tour operators and Muslim restaurants, the researcher collected 17 usable interviews from Muslim restaurants, Muslim hotels and tour operators in China. The following table provides information about type, place and number of interviewees and the ways of conducting interview.

Table 1: Interviewee Selection

Type of interviewee	Number	Way of Approaching	City in China
Restaurant owners/ employees	7	Face to face interview	Beijing, Baoding, and Shijiazhuang
Travel Agencies employees	7	Face to face as well as telephone conversation	Beijing, Ningxia, & Guilin
Hotel owners/ employees	3	Face to face interview as well as telephone conversation	Shijiazhuang, Beijing, and Guangzhou

Formal systems for the analysis of qualitative data have been developed in order to help researchers get at the meaning of their data more easily. Rubin and Rubin (1995) said that these systems involve:

- coding techniques for finding and marking the underlying ideas in the data;
- grouping similar kinds of information together in categories;
- relating different ideas and themes to one another.

Following this system, interview recordings and notes were transcribed into text manually. The researcher carefully read the transcribed data of the recorded interviews and did the content analyses of the transcript, marked underlying data, categorized the similar information in the headings- 'potentiality', 'challenges', and 'recommendations' and then presented the data into meaningful segments. Then, meaningful segments were coded in order to communicate the findings more easily.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Demographic profile of the interviewees

The researcher has conducted 17 interviews to get the data related to the potentials of Muslim tourism market niche in China, challenges to satisfy Muslim tourists' need and recommendations to cater to Muslim tourists in China. In demographic table 2, it is seen that female participants (n = 9, 52.9%) were more than male (n = 8, 47.1%) participants. It may be due to the fact that in service-oriented organizations, more female employees or workers work there. In terms of age, 31-40 years age group was the largest participant group which was followed by 21-30 years age (n = 3, 17.6%) and 41-50 years age (n = 3, 17.6%) groups respectively. There were 10 interviewees in the 31-40 years age group which represented 58.8% of the participants. The smallest age group (51- above years) had only one participant. Regarding the type of organization, Muslim restaurants and Muslim service providing travel agencies were 7 (41.2%) and 7 (41.2%) respectively. Three interviews were conducted in Muslim hotels which represented 17.6% of the total participants. Table 2 also shows that the most of the participants were managers of the organizations which represented 82.4% (14) of the total participants. 2 participants were owners of the organization which indicated 11.8% of total interviewees and 1 participant was waitress in Muslim restaurant.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of the Participants

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Female	9	52.9%
Male	8	47.1%
Total	17	100.0%
Age		
(21-30) Age	3	17.6%
(31-40) Age	10	58.8%
(41-50) Age	3	17.6%
(51-Above) Age	1	5.9%
Total	17	100.0%
Type of the organization		
Muslim hotel	3	17.6%
Muslim restaurant	7	41.2%
Muslim service providing travel agencies	7	41.2%
Total	17	100.0%
Position		
Manager	14	82.4%
Owner	2	11.8%
Waitress	1	5.9%
Total	17	100.0%

5.2 Potentiality of Muslim tourism

Tourism is related to various aspects of Islam. China is a non-Muslim tourist destination. It is a very big country from the context of both area and population. It has many tourism attractions and highly enriched and distinctive culture. Muslims are the minority group in China where approximately 20000000 Muslim people live in. In the whole world, there are 1.6 billions Muslim people. Domestically it is minority market but globally it is very big and promising tourism market. It has a good commercial potentiality. This tourism market can make different benefits for different levels of people. It is lucrative market segment for any destination. Almost all interviewees expressed the same opinion in this context.

“Domestically it is minority market. Internationally it is a good market and very promising.” (Interviewee 1, Muslim Restaurant owner, Age 40 years).

“Muslim tourist is a big market. It has good potentiality. Muslim people are increasing in the world.” (Interviewee 6, Muslim Restaurant worker, Age 23 years).

“Muslim travelers are very promising. It has a good potentiality. Muslim travelers from many countries ask many questions about traveling in China.” (Interviewee 8, Muslim travel agency manager, Age 38 years).

“Muslim customers are many in the world. It is a big and very promising market. It has a good potentiality for Chinese tourism sector.” (Interviewee 11, Muslim travel agency manager, Age 40 years).

“There are more than 20000000 Muslims in China and 1600 millions in the world. Therefore this group has a big commercial potentiality.” (Interviewee 14, Muslim travel agency manager, Age 35 years).

“There are 1600000000 Muslim people in the world. This tourism market can make different benefits for different level people.” (Interviewee 15, Muslim hotel manager, Age 41 years).

Here the respondents stated about the number of Muslim people in China as well as in the world. In terms of number, they think that this group is a big market.

5.3 Challenges for catering Muslim tourism market

As the fastest developing market segments, Muslim tourism market cannot be overlooked by destination marketers and tourism operators. At present many non-Muslim destination are trying to attract this large market niche. To cater to the needs of the Muslim tourists, different destinations face different kinds of challenges. Here the researcher conducted interviews with Chinese Muslim restaurant owners, tour operators, and hoteliers to know the challenges faced by them to serve the inbound and domestic Muslim tourists. After analyzing all the interviews, the researcher identified eight challenges. These are given below:

1. Lack of enough facilities: Islamic tourism has attracted both Muslims and non-Muslims travelers all over the world by offering the same kinds of facilities but non-Muslim destinations need to ensure some customized facilities to attract Muslim tourists. Muslim tourists are different from other tourists. They demand Halal food, Muslim restaurant, and prayer facilities. These are fundamental needs of Muslim tourists. They are highly concern about Halal food where they never compromise. But China is non-Muslim destination where these facilities are not enough. There are some tourist places where there is no Muslim restaurant and no praying facilities. Before going for traveling, Muslim customers ask for these facilities especially Muslim foods.

“Some facilities for Muslim tourists are not enough, especially mosques and restaurant. It is difficult for ensuring praying facilities in some cases.” (Interviewee 11, Muslim travel agency manager, Age 40 years).

“Though our travel agency is Muslim specialized travel agency, we face some problems regarding food service. We need to take Muslim tourists in some tourism places where getting Muslim restaurant is a big challenge.” (Interviewee 12, Muslim travel agent, Age 37 years).

“China is not Muslim country. We do not have adequate facilities such as Muslim food, mosques, praying facilities which Muslim tourists frequently ask for.” (Interviewee 9, Muslim service providing travel agency manager, Age 37 years).

2. Limited Suppliers: It is very necessary to keep collaboration with relevant service providers to facilitate Halal-compliant services to Muslim tourists. To prepare Halal food; Muslim restaurants need to buy Halal raw materials specially meat. They can buy chicken, beef, mutton from Muslim suppliers who slaughter the animals according to Shariah principles. In China, the number of those suppliers is very limited. Muslim restaurant owners are indirectly forced to buy raw materials from limited number of particular Muslim shops. Tour operators also need to maintain a linkage with some specific Muslim restaurants. Selecting Muslim oriented suppliers to cater to the Islamic tours in terms of restaurants, hotels, sightseeing, and tour guides is very challenging task for tour operators in China. Tour operators also said that some Muslim restaurants do not follow the Muslim rules & standard, and shortage of Muslim restaurant hinders the development of this market.

“Some Muslim shops cannot meet requirements. Sometimes we are indirectly forced to buy materials (chicken, beef, mutton etc.) from a specific Muslim shop.” (Interviewee 7, Muslim Restaurant owner, Age 44 years).

“Some Muslim restaurants cannot meet standard of Muslim religion. Muslim restaurant shortage hinders the development of this market.” (Interviewee 12, Muslim travel agent, Age 37years).

“We are facing the challenge to meet the requirements in the aspects of eating, living, and traveling, etc. and to provide personal & customized service.” (Interviewee 14, Muslim travel agency manager, Age 35 years)

3. Lack of knowledgeable staff: Service staffs need to be able to anticipate and read guests' needs and they also need to be able to interact with guests from diverse

ethnic and religious backgrounds on a daily basis. As Muslim tourists have unique set of needs, it is necessary for staffs to know their Muslim guests and their nuances to better serve them. They should know where the nearest mosque is, the direction of Makkah and when local prayer times are, where the Muslim restaurant is, etc. Some respondents, in this regard, stated that Many staffs in travel agencies are not knowledgeable or do not have any training about those particular needs of Muslim tourists. Recruiting professional staffs who have better understanding about the Muslim religious rules, restrictions, and sensitivity of Muslim culture is a big challenge.

“Many staffs in travel agencies are not knowledgeable about the needs of Muslim tourists. Muslim culture is different. Therefore they have some special needs for which there is a need for Muslim culture knowledgeable staff.” (Interviewee 8, Muslim travel agency manager, Age 38 years).

“Recruiting professional staffs who know the Muslim culture and Muslim tourists’ needs is difficult. Understanding religious rules, restrictions and sensitivity of religious culture is big challenge.” (Interviewee 10, Muslim travel agent, Age 32 years).

4. High cost: Currently China is able to provide low cost raw materials for other countries for further/ additional processing. But China has low concentration on Halal products or Halal raw materials. Almost all respondents said that compared with non-Halal materials, Halal materials in China are expensive. They need to buy Halal products or raw materials from some specific Muslim shops where supplies of Halal products are very limited but the price is high. In non-Muslim countries like China, the Halal goods’ flows are small, suppliers need to maintain a designated storage zone or racks for Halal raw materials or products, they do not have dedicated Halal infrastructure as it would increase the cost of Halal products dramatically and would result in certain countries Halal products are not available.

“Cost is high compared with non-Muslim restaurant. Muslim restaurant owners must be careful so that foods or food ingredients do not mix with Haram materials.” (Interviewee 1, Muslim Restaurant owner, Age 40 years).

“The cost for catering Muslim tourists’ needs is little high compared with other customers.” (Interviewee 8, Muslim travel agency manager, Age 38 years).

“Price is little high. We need to follow many special requirements to satisfy Muslim tourists. They want Halal food. They want praying facilities.” (Interviewee 17, Muslim Hotelier, Age 51 years)

5. Lack of Muslim chef: In order to prepare Halal food, chef plays an important role in restaurants. Chef should have sufficient knowledge about Halal meat, Halal raw materials and Halal ingredients. There is nothing in Islam to say that you have to be a Muslim to serve Halal meat or foods. Here interviewees said that for running Muslim restaurant manager or owner and cook need to be Muslim. They think that non-Muslim cook and manager do not have sufficient knowledge in preparing Halal foods. Chinese Muslim restaurants have a big disappointment. It is difficult for them to get a chef who can cook genuine Chinese Muslim food. Many local chefs do not

have any knowledge in Chinese Muslim food. It is not easy to get Muslim cook in China.

“It is very hard to run a Muslim restaurant where the numbers of Muslim people are not more and Muslim chef is not available.” (Interviewee 1, Muslim Restaurant owner, Age 40 years).

“Although waiter or waitress can be non-Muslim but cook and manager must be Muslim. Getting Muslim chef is not so easy.” (Interviewee 2, Muslim Restaurant owner, Age 31 years).

6. Dealing with non-Muslim customers: Since China is not a Muslim country, it is hard for Halal restaurants to survive if they don't serve wines because most of the tourists are non-Muslims now-a-days. It is very common to see wines served at Halal restaurants in big cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen in China. One respondents stated that many non-Muslim tourists come to eat in his restaurant and ask for wine. This wine service he cannot provide because it does not meet with Muslim restaurant standard. However, Some Halal restaurants are very strict on alcohol and wines are strictly prohibited at those Halal restaurants. Another interviewee said that sometimes non-Muslim tourists come with non-Halal food to eat in Muslim restaurant. They cannot allow them to eat that non-Halal food with Muslim customers. They think it is a big challenge for them and they may lose customers.

“Sometimes non-Muslim customers come with non-Halal food in our restaurant but that time we cannot allow them.” (Interviewee 6, Muslim Restaurant waitress, Age 23 years).

“We saw that non Muslim customers come here with wine or ask for wine which is problem for our standard.” (Interviewee 7, Muslim Restaurant owner, Age 44 years).

7. Achieving trust: Muslim tourists are very sensitive to consume products and services. China is a non-Muslim tourist destination. Muslim tourist is a completely new market segment for China. China does not have strong brand or famous standardization system for Halal tourism to certify Halal friendliness in hotels, resorts, cruise, restaurant, airport and parks. Non-Muslim destinations like Singapore, Thailand, New Zealand, France, USA, and Australia have already created good image and Halal standardization which help create a trust in the mind of Muslim tourists that they will get easily Halal facilities in those destinations. Respondents stated that when they offer different Muslim traveling services in China, Muslim tourists ask so many questions regarding their sensitivity in traveling China. They also stated that it will not be difficult for China to deal with the Muslim tourists because, for one, China has a strong Muslim population comparing with neighboring countries such as Singapore, Thailand, Japan, and Korea but China needs to create strong Halal tourism brand and belief to Muslim tourists. This is a big challenge for tourism organization in China to attract Muslim tourists.

“Muslim tourists want to know many things before traveling. Many Muslim tourists do not know the Muslim facilities in China.” (Interviewee 3, Muslim Restaurant owner, Age 28 years).

“We offer many Muslim tour services. But creating a good impression about Halal services to Muslim tourists by non-Muslim destination is a big challenge. We should have a strong Halal standardization authority for ensuring Halal products and services to Muslim tourists.” (Interviewee 14, Muslim travel agency manager, Age 35 years).

8. *Language barrier:* Although language problem is not a special challenge to cater to a Muslim tourist, almost all respondents indicated about language barrier. Language problem exists to cater to all kinds of foreign tourists who speak in different language.

5.4. Recommendations

There were some suggestions for Chinese tourism organizations and government given by the interviewees which are given below:

1. *Ensuring availability of Halal food:* Interviews revealed that many hospitality businesses in China are still unaware about the Halal food and its significance to Muslim customers. All interviewees suggested that one of the effective means to attract Muslim tourists is to ensure availability of Halal food in the destination primarily which is considered the highest priority for Muslim tourists. As Muslim tourists are becoming more comfortable with the availability of Halal food, the prime suggestion by the interviewees that tourism organizations and government should take initiatives to set up more Halal restaurants near the tourist spots.

“...Tourism organization should respect Muslim religion. In some popular tourism cities, there must be more Muslim restaurants. Muslim restaurant should use specific symbol for indicating Muslim restaurant.” (Interviewee 8, Muslim travel agency manager, Age 38 years).

“...Paying more attention for Muslim foods. Arranging suitable tourism environment for Muslim tourists.” (Interviewee 9, Muslim service providing travel agency manager, Age 37 years).

2. *Establishing Muslim friendly hotel:* Muslim tourists look for Muslim friendly hotel especially when they travel with family or women. They like to stay at that hotel where prayer space, no alcohol beverage, no pork, and Halal foods are provided. Therefore, some interviewees recommended that Muslim friendly hotels or at least Muslim friendly separated sections in hotels should be available in the destination. Tourism organization and government should invest in this field and give urgent consideration to develop China as Muslim friendly destination.

“...It will be better to improve the facilities in the hotels for Muslim tourists..”(Interviewee 13, Muslim travel agent, Age 40 years).

3. *Government’s separate tourism department for Muslim tourists:* China National Tourism Administration (CNTA in short) is an agency in charge of tourism and entrusted with the responsibility to plan and coordinate the development of the Chinese tourism industry. It has many internal departments, supervision bureau, affiliated organizations, subordinate associations, and many institutions in foreign countries to develop, monitor, and supervise tourism activities in China. Some interviewees suggested that now-a-days it is very important for CNTA to set up a

separate department which will attract, develop, and promote Chinese tourism for Muslim people all over the world.

“Government should pay more attention on Muslim tourism. It should set up new department for attracting Muslim tourists and taking initiatives to set up necessary things for Muslim tourists- for example, supply of Halal food, more Muslim restaurants, and Muslim friendly facilities in hotel.” (Interviewee 3, Muslim Restaurant owner, Age 28 years).

4. *Making Tourism Agreement:* China is rolling out a series of initiatives to capture a larger share of the Muslim outbound market from Muslim majority countries. It is recommended by interviewees that Chinese government should make cooperation agreement for tourism with Muslim tourism destinations like Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, Singapore, and Thailand to set up China as Muslim friendly destination. They also recommended that Chinese tour operators should make and sign tourism contracts with counterparts from different Muslim countries and destinations where Muslim tourists are traveling.

“Government can take initiative to make traveling agreement with Muslim majority countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Iran and can modernize the Muslim attracted tourist places in China. Travel agencies can make contract with travel agencies in Muslim destinations” (Interviewee 12, Muslim travel agent, Age 37 years).

5. *Providing training facilities for tourism staffs:* Training is very important in hospitality and tourism industry as most of the employees have direct contact with customers. Here some interviewees suggested training tour operators, hoteliers, hotel staff, restaurant owners, and tour guides to get proper knowledge about Muslim tourists, their needs, behavior, and sensitivity.

“Tourism organizations must understand Muslim culture, behavior, and tradition at first. Their staff must respect religious belief. They need training on that.” (Interviewee 6, Muslim Restaurant waitress, Age 23 years).

“Staff in tourism related organizations should be cultivated and trained properly to understand Muslim tourists’ needs and demands.” Interviewee 11, Muslim travel agency manager, Age 40 years).

6. *Advertisement:* Advertisement is also necessary for attracting Muslim tourists. One interviewee suggested that travel agencies can give many Muslim tour offers and advertise it on online media, social media, websites indicating Muslim heritage places, facilities of Halal food and other needs for Muslim in China. By media, government should introduce Halal institutions and available facilities in China for Muslim tourists.

“Government can encourage Muslim group traveling and for this purpose can advertise, can introduce Halal institutions and focus the development of Muslim attracted tourist places. Travel operator should give more Muslim offers on online and electronic media” (Interviewee 6, Muslim Restaurant waitress, Age 23 years).

7. *Empowering Muslim leader's role for tourism:* Government and tourism organization should properly cooperate with Muslim leaders in China to set up more Muslim restaurants and more facilities for Muslim tourists.

"...Cooperating with Muslim organization's leaders so that they encourage setting up more Muslim restaurants." (Interviewee 4, Muslim Restaurant manager, Age 28 years)

8. *Establishing souvenir shops for Muslim tourists:* One respondent recommended that destination authority should facilitate souvenirs related to Islamic heritage and culture such as 'khat' (Islamic calligraphy) pieces, Mushaf art, carved wooden rehal as well as women's Islamic clothing and accessories such as 'telekung' (prayer outfit), hijab, and caftans which are especially popular with Muslim visitors.

"It is necessary to make availability of souvenirs for Muslim tourists like women's Islamic clothing, Islamic calligraphy, prayer outfit etc." (Interviewee 14, Muslim travel agency manager, Age 35 years)

9. *Smart-phone application:* Some of the respondents suggested tourism organizations develop internet facilities and introduce some application software to make holiday enjoyable and Muslim friendly. This application will be helpful for Muslim tourists to find Halal-friendly hospitality products and services, such as hotels, destination guides, holiday packages, airport guides, shopping centers with prayer rooms and Halal restaurants.

"Tourism related organizations should develop internet and online facilities for customers. They can use some apps in different languages which will help Muslim tourist find nearby restaurant, praying facilities, preferable shopping center, and hotels." (Interviewee 1, Muslim Restaurant owner, Age 40 years).

"Government and tourism organizations can spread use of internet and apps. So that Muslim tourist can easily get information and can identify the location of Muslim restaurant very easily." (Interviewee 5, Muslim Restaurant manager, Age 35 years).

"Tourism organization and government can make joint efforts and can make some apps in English and Arabic languages to easily identify Muslim restaurants." (Interviewee 7, Muslim Restaurant owner, Age 44 years)

5.5 Discussions

The data show that Chinese tourism organizations think Muslim tourism market is high potential market. Respondents often cited that it is very 'big market' and it has large 'young demographic people'. This is supported by the findings of Razalli et al (2013) and Samori & Sabtu (2014). Khan & Janmohamed (2011 cited in Stephenson, 2014) stated that it is the fastest growing market and 42% of the Muslim people are under 30 years now. It is said by respondents that although China does not have many Muslim people comparing with non-Muslim in China, there are 1.6 billions Muslim people in the world. They also indicated that Chinese Muslim is also a good market. Currently Chinese tourism sector is not getting expected number of Muslim tourists comparing with some other non-Muslim destinations. Respondents

stated that if China can provide necessary facilities for Muslim tourists, it could exploit this good commercial potentiality. They said that this market has special urge for Halal food. Therefore, if China can target and attract this market, Halal food and other Halal related business will be booming. Halal food business can be attracted simultaneously to both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists. In this aspect, Ben-berry (2008); Ben-berry (2011 cited in Anonymous, 2011) opined that strong demand for Halal food products is seen in a number of non-Muslim countries and acceptance of Halal has sprung in non-Muslims. Some respondents cited that China has many Muslim tourists' attractive places, mosques, culture & history, and Muslim food besides other world famous things. These can be very helpful to attract this big market.

The analysis of the interviews states that interviewees cited many challenges to cater to this special need based tourists (Muslim tourists). These challenges are grouped under 8 categories. As a non-Muslim destination, China lacks in enough facilities such as mosques, Halal food, praying space or facilities. Respondents stated that in many tourist places in China, these facilities are not enough for Muslim tourists and in some cases; it is very difficult for tour operators to manage these facilities for their Muslim customers. Every business is linked with suppliers. It is very tough for Chinese tour operators, Muslim restaurant, and hotel owners to keep backward linkage with limited number of Halal products and services' suppliers in China for catering to Muslim tourists. Another challenge, as the respondents cited, is finding knowledgeable staff. Muslim tourists expect respect for their religious rules and restrictions. Therefore, there should be staffs who know about Muslim people's behavior, religious restriction, praying timetable etc. Cost is another important challenge for tourism businesses in China. Almost all respondents said that Halal material's cost is high in China and Halal material's flow is still very low in China. One reason for this high price is low concentration on Halal product business.

Respondents said that Halal tourism-related business such as tour operators, restaurants, and hotels need to charge also high price on Muslim tourists. In Muslim country, it is very easy to set up Halal kitchen and to get Muslim chef and managers. In non-Muslim destination, China it is very tough for restaurant owners to get Muslim chef or chef who has enough knowledge about genuine Chinese Muslim food. Some of the interviewees stated that in Muslim restaurant, a good number of customers are non-Muslim. Sometimes they come to restaurant with wine or some non-Halal foods which are embarrassing for Muslim tourists as well as Muslim restaurant owners. Restaurant owners said that it is a big challenge for them to deal with this issue. Some restaurants do not allow it but some restaurants need to allow it for survival or making high profit. Halal brand plays a significant role for attracting Muslim tourists. Branding Halal tourism is not very easy task for non-Muslim destination. Tour operators said that Muslim people ask many questions about availability of Halal food, praying facilities, Muslim friendly facilities for family tour in China. "Where can I eat Halal food?", "Where can I perform Salat (prayer)?" are some of the questions, Muslim travelers always ask when they travel in China. They have high concern and doubt about availability of these facilities because China still is in lagging behind to brand itself as Muslim friendly destination comparing with Singapore, Japan, France, and Thailand etc. Respondents also indicated about

language barrier although it is not special challenge from Muslim tourist catering. The overall interview data revealed that tourism industry in China are facing some challenges related to certain dietary rules, dress and behavior, hotel facilities, praying facilities, alcohol-free beverages etc. to cater Muslim tourists.

For attracting Muslim tourists in non-Muslim destination, China interviewees gave some suggestions. The data showed that availability of 'Halal food' in or near destination is recommended by interviewees. In Halal food requirement, Muslim tourists do not compromise. Interviewees also recommended providing Muslim friendly hotel services where there should be praying facilities, Halal food, qibla direction in the room, and no alcohol beverage. They also suggested setting up government's new department for looking after Muslim tourists' needs and taking necessary steps to meet those needs. Interviewees also recommended that the government and tour operators should make tourism agreement with top Muslim tourist receiving destinations and tour operators of Muslim countries to get better understanding about how to cater Muslim tourists. Some interviewees cited that tourism staffs should receive training on catering Muslim tourists and for this purpose government & tourism organizations should give training facilities to tour operators, hoteliers, hotel staff, restaurant owners, and tour guides. Muslim leaders should play their role to set up more and more Muslim restaurants and Halal food facilities to meet Muslim tourist food needs. Government is recommended to cooperate with local or regional Muslim leaders in China. More and more souvenir shops for Muslim tourists should be set up beside destinations. Interviewees also recommended that the government and tourism organization can advertise the Muslim friendly tour offers and facilities in China to lure Muslim tourists from different corners of the world. The use of Smart-phone application in Chinese, English, and Arabic language is recommended by interviewees so that Muslim tourist can easily get hotels, destination guides, holiday packages, airport guides, shopping centers with prayer rooms and Halal restaurants.

6. Conclusion

Travel and tourism industry has overcome many challenges for meeting unique needs of different kinds of tourists, like aged people, disabled people, and gay travelers; accordingly, Muslim tourists must be considered as highly potential untapped niche market of tourism industry. It is expected that Muslim tourism market could be competitive in the coming next years. Deciding to serve any group of customers will depend on the ease with which the destination can address the target group and the opportunities versus the cost of doing so. This research concluded that Muslim market's potentiality is very high in tourism industry. This research showed eight challenges for non-Muslim destinations to cater Muslim tourists' needs and demands. It also found nine crucial recommendations from interviewees to successfully cater this market segment. Although the interview data showed some challenges to consider for catering Muslim tourists' needs in China, potentials are so vast and far reaching that they greatly outweigh the challenges. If a non-Muslim country seeks to catch this segment and wants to stay competitive, it should take challenges to cater and satisfy the distinctive needs of Muslim travelers.

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