Halal Tourism in Central Asia: Developing Service Systems in Uzbekistan

Davronbek Kodirov
Bukhara State University, Bukhara, Uzbekistan

Ugiloy Mavlonova
Bukhara State University, Bukhara, Uzbekistan

Turonbek Kodirov
Bukhara State University, Bukhara, Uzbekistan

Nilufar Allayarova
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

Abstract

This article discusses problems and prospects for the development of halal/Islamic tourism in Uzbekistan based on the presence of Islamic cultural heritage, objects associated with spiritual travel and spiritual places. The authors argue that instead of focusing on specific actors and firms within the industry, the analytical focus must be directed at the service system as a whole. The implications for policy and decision makers are clear: instead of focusing whether a specific operator offers a halal service, one must scrutinize the whole value-chain including the environment, governance, culture, infrastructure, institutional norms, and market conduct.

Keywords: halal tourism, service networks, service systems, Islamic culture, Islamic heritage, halal hotels, halal gastronomy

Introduction

Uzbekistan is famous for its hagioscope places and historical Islamic sites. The country has a potential to become an attractive tourist destination for different class of visitors and spiritual pilgrims who would be attracted to the sites of historical importance such as places related to the great scholars of the Islamic world (e.g. Imam Bukhariy, Imam Termizi). Moreover, Sufism followers may also be attracted to Ziyarahs of Sufi sheikhs and recognized avliya (i.e. saints). As well as being the cultural center of Islam in the country, there are many different historical places, madrassas, mosques, mausoleums and Sufi monasteries-khanakas. In addition, tourists can be potentially attracted by unique halal gastronomy and local crafts exuding the spirit of Islamic revival in the middle ages.

According to the Global Muslim Tourism Index (GMTI), by 2021, the number of Muslim tourists will increase to 156 million. According to experts, assuming return to normality post COVID-19, the total revenue might go up to 220 billion US dollars (CrescentRating). These indices are compiled annually and show not only a growing number of tourists, but also the sustainable development of the halal tourism industry (BBC, 2010). It is known that Muslim travelers are looking for a vacation destination that meets their needs. Such places should meet specific needs as halal food, clothing and tradition. "Halal" in Arabic means what is permitted in Islam and compatible with Sharia. According to Islamic canons - Sharia, Islam forbids carrion, pork, alcohol, revealing clothes, gambling, promiscuity, and unabashed entertainment.

The development of halal tourism is associated with rising middle-class incomes. That is why many countries are trying to attract tourists of this category, whether Muslim, Christian, Buddhist or secular. Among the members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Malaysia, the UAE, Indonesia and Turkey are the highest in the number of tourists. In the future, from these and other Muslim countries an influx of tourists to Uzbekistan is expected. Among non-OIC countries that accept Muslim tourists and provide them with services, the leaders are Singapore, Thailand and the United Kingdom. Interestingly, as a Buddhist country, Thailand has become an attractive halal tourist destination for Indonesian and Malaysian Muslims. Interest in Muslim tourists is exhibited by the UK. It is predicted that by 2020 the turnover from Islamic tourism will reach $4.1 billion (The Economist, 2013). This trend continues to grow, despite the escalation of Islamophobia in Europe and other non-Muslim countries. The facts indicate that the future potential of halal tourism may continue to increase despite current challenges posed by the spread of COVID-19. It is predicted that this potential of the Muslim tourism sector will have an impact on the development of the hospitality industry worldwide. This means that Uzbekistan needs to adapt to the attractive halal tourism market and meet the needs of Muslim tourists.

This research aims to provide an initial observation-based analysis of potential growth of halal tourism marketing systems in Uzbekistan. The authors, based on their preliminary observation, focus on the following questions: which elements in the Uzbek tourism services sector must be reformed in order to turn this sector into a viable service system? How it should be done? What are policy and institutional requirements for such reforms?

Literature Review

Service systems

This article proposes that the level of analysis in halal service research should go beyond individual market participants (e.g. consumers, firms) and focus on systems, networks, and ecosystems (Barile et al., 2016). Service systems are seen a set complementary resources, i.e. configurations involving people, knowledge, technology, institutions, organizations, which undergo dynamic changes while purposefully pursuing specific value generation (Maglio et al., 2009). The viable systems approach highlights a number of service systems characteristics: survival, viability, and complexity (Barile et al., 2012). Service systems consist of individual actors, however, the whole system in itself operates within a context. Service systems aim to survive, i.e. stay viable, within changing complex environments (Barile et al., 2016). Service systems are aggregated into networked service systems, which in turn are aggregated into service ecosystems (Barile et al., 2016). Service ecosystems refer to relatively stable, self-organized entities comprising resource-integrating actors who are driven by the aim to create value through service exchanges (Vargo and Lusch, 2011).

Marketing systems comprise service systems (Layton, 2007; 2015; Kadirov, 2018). Marketing systems evolve through different stages such as formation, growth, adaptation, and decline (Layton, 2015). Layton (2015) argues that marketing systems harbor a number of causal processes including social mechanisms (individuals interacting with each other), strategic action fields (individuals competing against each other), and market evolution (marketing systems evolve over time). Layton's views on marketing systems represent the foundational precepts of MAS theory. MAS theory posits that different actors contribute various endowments to the marketing system, while the whole system co-evolves based on acquired beliefs, evoked behaviors, and imposed practices. Kadirov (2018) proposed the public good theory of marketing systems. This theory posits that marketing systems are built in the form of a public good, where its benefits/harms are shared among participants.

Halal Foundations of Tourism

Halal tourism represents a halal service system. Various elements of "halal" must come together in order to turn a system into a halal industrial hub. Kadirov (2019) argues that halalizing should go beyond individual products or services. Th whole service system including market conduct, market practices, individual relations, cultural and normative foundations, value chains going through suppliers, policy foundations must conform to Islamic values. In general, Islam forbids things that harm a person, his mind, body, religion and life (Kadirov, 2020). Such things pose a threat to society, both materially and spiritually. The verses in the Sura Al-Ma'ida forbid bad deeds: "Oh you who believe! An intoxicating drink, maysir (sacrifice) on stone altars (and fortune telling) by arrows - bad acts inspired by the shaitan. Avoid this, maybe you will succeed. Verily, the shaitan, with the help of wine and maysir, wants to sow enmity and hatred between you and turn you away from the remembrance of Allah and Namaz. Will you stop (these obscenities)?" (The Qur'an, Sura Al-Ma'ida, 5: 90-91). In these verses, Allah forbids alcohol and gambling, altars and fortune-telling, considering them an abomination and calls these acts obscene and disgusting in the Qur'an, and also relates

them to the acts of Satan, since his acts are filthy and evil. Therefore, Islam calls on believers to refrain from these vices and deeds, and this is the path to success and happiness. Muslims avoid these actions in order to find happiness in two Worlds, ceasing to do what Allah forbade.

First of all, halal is pure food. The Qur'an in the 31st verse of the 7th Surah Al-Araf says: "Eat and drink, but do not waste, because He (Allah) does not love wastefulness (excessiveness)" (The Qur'an, Surah Al-Araf, 7:31). The great poet and thinker Saadi interprets this ayah: "By this ayah, Allah commands people to eat and drink what is permitted, pure blessings, He endowed his creations. One cannot overdo it by eating more than required which can cause harm to the body, either by purchasing very expensive and sophisticated dishes, drinks and clothes, or by eating prohibited foods. Allah does not like wasteful people, because wastefulness causes His anger and causes harm to the body and well-being. And in some cases, it leads to the fact that a person is deprived of the opportunity to give obligatory donations. In a word, this beautiful ayah orders to eat food and drinks, forbids refusing to give up food and drink, and forbids excess in this" (Al-Saadi, 2015).

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of the Lord be upon him) said: "The worst vessel that can be filled with man is his stomach. It is enough to eat as much as it is necessary to maintain strength. If this is too little, then: a third (of the stomach) - for food, a third - for drinking and a third - for breathing" (Musnad, Hadith No. 81, P.88.89). Another hadith says: "Respect bread" (As-Suyuti, 1990). As it is said in one reliable hadith: "A person does not know in what remnants of food God's grace - barakat is laid" (Bukhari, Hadith No. 5456). In the hadiths of the imams al-Bukhari and Muslim from Jabir, the words are given: "The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) forbade the eating of a donkey and allowed to eat horse meat" (Bukhari, Hadith No. 5520). From the above words one can find out what a Muslim can eat, and what he or she need to refrain from and not to eat.

However, halal tourism goes beyond halal food. Halal food is the minimum requirement, while other facilities such prayer rooms, ablution premises, prayer reminder systems, gender segregated areas for such services as pools, gyms, activities, sports are also required. In addition, other market offerings must be made halal.

Research Method

Research Context

The context for the current research is the city of Bukhara in Uzbekistan. Being part of the Islamic world, Bukhara is considered as the cultural center of Central Asia. During what some researchers call Eastern Renaissance, this region contributed to the development of Islamic culture, science and art. The heyday of Islamic culture in this region was in the middle ages, the ninth to the seventeenth centuries, linked to the development of the Samanids, Karakhanids, Khorezmshahs dynasties, as well as the post-Mongol conquest revival of Sufi-Amaritic orders (e.g. Kubravia, Naqshbandiya), the Timurid dynasties, and the Sheybanids (Ziyo, 2001).

Recently, in January 2020 Bukhara was recognized as the capital of Islamic heritage and culture. This decision was made at the 9th conference of the Ministers of Culture

of the Member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). On 18 December 2019 at the 11th Islamic Conference, three cities - Bukhara (Uzbekistan), Cairo (Egypt) and Bamako (Mali) were approved as the capitals of Islamic culture in 2020. The tradition of annually announcing selected cities in Muslim countries is carried out by the Islamic Organization for Education, Science and Culture (ISESCO). Cities from three Islamic regions — the Arab world, Asia, and Africa — are selected annually. Prior to this, in 2007, the Islamic Organization for Education, Science and Culture (ISESCO) declared Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan one of the three capitals of Islamic culture.

Bukhara, in fact, for several centuries has been the capital of Islamic culture. It is not surprising that in the Muslim world, epithets in the Arabic "Kubbatul-Islam" and in the Persian "Gumbazi Islom", which means "the Dome of Islam", are firmly entrenched in Bukhara (Narshakhiy, 944/1991). The fact that the city was recognized as the capital of Islamic culture once again confirms the contribution of this city and the broader region to the development of Islamic civilization and culture. As a rule, the capital of Islamic culture is obliged to hold a conference of Islamic culture ministers, which takes place biannually. Throughout the year, the city, chosen as the capital, hosts events aimed at the presentation of its culture and Islamic heritage. And this, in turn, helps with the development of halal tourism services. However, for the further development of halal tourism in Uzbekistan, it is important to resolve many issues and problems associated with the provision of halal facilities and services.

Research Approach

This investigation is based on a form of participant observation (Vinten, 1994). The authors adapted this method to the specific cultural context of Uzbekistan. They have taken a non-intrusive, situated, and culturally harmonious approach where the researcher does not stand out from the crowd. They immersed themselves into the flow of events surrounding the gradual development of the tourism sector in Bukhara. The authors slowly developed intimate, seamless, natural access to places, cites, organizations, communities, and other contexts where touristic offerings are developed and sold. Following the method of participant observation does not always guarantee effective outcomes based on the pursuit of rigorous research procedures (Vinten, 1994). Most often, observation is selective. However, triangulation based on observation at different points of time, across different locations, and among different researchers provides information that satisfies the criteria of credibility and conformability.

Results of Observation and Interpretation

Bukhara Halal Tourism Service System

After gaining independence, Uzbekistan went through a stagnant period in economic development. The revival of national identity and the religion of Islam is still in its infancy. During the period of Russian colonization and the Soviet rule, many mosques, madrassas and cultural monuments were destroyed or turned into warehouses, offices and state institutions. These sites were not used for their intended purpose. In addition, the country's population also moved away from Islam. Religion played only a formal role, was perceived as a custom, and was used only in traditional events, such as reading

the azan after the birth of a child, marriage during the reading of nikah, and in funerals (genaza, reading the suras from the Qur'an).

When it comes to the development of halal tourism, there are many problems and tasks that need to be addressed. The solution of the problems will require significant effort and labor. There are various obstacles and barriers, from the bureaucratic structure of state institutions to the poorly operating legislative systems. Moreover, the country's population is far from truly understanding the religion as a whole. Many do not have the required level of Islamic knowledge including proper Islamic conduct, while many do not know what is forbidden and what is halal. And this in turn creates difficulties in creating required services related to halal tourism. This will require not only the creation of infrastructure for Islamic tourism, but also the education and training of personnel for the provision of tourism services according to the canons of Islam. For example, in Uzbekistan there is an insufficient number of halal cafes and restaurants, roadside motels, catering outlets and hotels that comply with Sharia. In many cafes and restaurants there are no separate places for women and men, for families, prayer rooms and bathrooms. In addition, the staff of such establishments offers alcoholic beverages or provides services to alcohol-using clients. No halal cafes or restaurants are listed on the site halalguide.me in Bukhara. Except in September 2020, the cafe "Saffron" started to provide halal services. The recently restored Sahid Zarafshan Hotel also offers halal services and intends to receive the halal standard. Tripadvisor.ru is listed as a halal place. The vegetarian restaurant "Badreddin Restaurant" says that it has a wine cellar and sells the best local wines. What can be said about halal if such restaurants offer alcoholic beverages? From this we can conclude that even in the main historical cities of the country there are no halal food service establishments. For this, it is necessary to organize a gastronomic business with the principles of Islamic law in consultation with scientists on Islamic economics and Islamic tourism experts. It is required to create a map showing halal cafes and restaurants, Islamic hotels, and halal service providers.

For Muslim tourists, heritage sites such as maqbarah may be interesting for spiritual visitations. The cemetery of a Sunni Hanifi scholar Abu Hafs al-Kabir, a student of the Hanafi madhhab leader Imam Azam Abu Hanifah, is located in Bukhara. This place represents a spiritual place and was called "Tariq ul-Haqq", that is, "The Way of Truth". This cemetery was revered by the inhabitants of Bukhara and was the most visited. The Bukharians believed that a Muslim buried in this cemetery would rise on the Day of Judgment together with Abu Hafs al-Kabir (Narshakhiy, 944/1991). At the moment, various tours are organized to visit the mausoleums of the seven sheikhs of the Naqshbandi Sufism order in Bukhara. In this city, many sheikhs, tutors, saints of Sufi orders (tariqas) flourished in the pre-Soviet times (Bukhoriy, 2006). Although there are also many unsolved problems and matters with the condition of such places, government is trying to improve the situation by repairing roads, restoring mausoleums, mosques and cultural objects. This creates amenities for tourists. The government of Uzbekistan understands that with the development of tourism it is possible to provide the country's population with work and develop tourism infrastructure. In addition, the service sector will develop, local crafts will be revived, new service industries will appear, and new workshops/factories for souvenir production will form.

Elements of Tourism Halal Service System

Our observation led us to develop a model of authentically halal service systems. These halal service systems are based on several major elements of halal tourism services.

These elements are as follows:
- *Commercial services* networks which provide specialized halal tourism services through market exchange processes.
- halal nutrition networks: a) halal cafes and restaurants that offer the availability of a halal menu or at least the availability of some halal catering; b) a wide range of soft drinks and non-alcoholic beverages. Mini bars in hotels and houses with soft drinks are highly appreciated by many Muslim tourists.
- direct halalized touristic packages comprising tours, entertainment, shopping, and dining. These options must offer appropriate music, separate areas for women and men, family and baby care rooms. Also, there should access to a rich diversity of tours involving local history and culture of Islam. There must be options for choosing and booking a halal tour, various programs of routes.
- Islamic hygiene networks: a) traditional bath houses; b) pay toilets and taharah facilities; c) fee-based playgrounds, baby care rooms, and short-term family relaxation zones; and d) gender segregated areas.
- Muslim oriented facilities such as sports courts, pools and gyms. Many Muslims are interested in these networks when planning a vacation.
- Complementary services such as prayer reminder, prayer timetables etc.

What can be offered to Muslim tourists in Uzbekistan? Uzbekistan can best offer tourists such packages as desert wilderness hunting tours, mountain climbing and hiking, and winter activities and sports. Lakes can offer different types of recreation. Moreover, fishing, thalassotherapy, therapeutic therapy on mineral waters, agro-tourism, ecotourism, gastro-tourism, recreation tourism and other Halal forms of tourism are not contrary to Sharia.

- *Digital services* that enable and facilitate direct exchange:
- Recently, more and more Muslim online agencies and online agencies such as Booking.com and Trip Advisor (OTA) have become increasingly popular on the Internet for Muslims. One such platform is Halalbooking.com which offers a multiplicity of halal tourism destinations. This service was created by leading Muslims and top managers of leading world travel companies. Halalbooking.com expects revenue of one billion pounds in 2021 (The Economist, 2013).
- The advent of decentralized platforms. For example, the online service Bookhalalhomes.com is one of the world's leading halal home rental companies. This guarantees certified services unlike Airbnb. Halal menus and prayer rooms will allow Muslim tourists an appropriate vacation according to Islamic standards. For development in the regions of Uzbekistan, it is necessary to take into account the use of such online services and platforms.
- In addition, special applications for smartphones are being developed. The Thai Tourism Authority has launched an application to help Muslim tourists. This app helps tourists find halal products and services. The app also provides information on prayer times, food options and tours. Therefore, it is required to create such an application for Muslim tourists visiting Uzbekistan.

- Another app, HalalTrip, also helps Muslim tourists find a way to enjoy halal relaxation around the world. It is available for 65 destinations worldwide. HalalTrip selects and sells the necessary travel packages. It offers attractive tours for Muslim travelers, such as diving with white sharks in South Africa, visiting cultural and historical sites in Spain, or shopping in Dubai.

Globalization in tourism is being developed by OTA (Online Travel Agency), i.e. travel agencies selling their services via the Internet. However, in all respects, e-commerce in halal tourism has not come close to the first development compared to the development of OTA (Online Travel Agency) as in the West. Therefore, it is important for the restaurant and hotel industry to present their skills in terms of the halal preferences of Muslim tourists.

- Halal certification networks:
- It is necessary to create a halal certification system in the country. The Uzstandart Agency in accordance with the program of measures for the implementation and further application of international standards in the republic, together with interested departments, carries out focused work on the implementation of ISO 22000 and halal standards. Standards ISO 22000 are a series of international standards for management systems in the field of food safety. Halal standards establish requirements for the processes of production, storage, transportation, sale and labeling of products in accordance with the canons of Islam. It is worth noting that the implementation of these standards and certification for compliance with the requirements of these standards is the importance of successfully expanding sales markets for domestic Uzbek manufacturers, promoting the development of the tourism industry in the direction of pilgrimage, Islamic tourism and other types. Therefore, from 1 February 2018 the Uzstandart Agency introduced the state standard O'zDSt 3286: 2018 General Halal Food and Nutrition Products (UzNews, 2018).

- Public services that are complementary or free:
- access to municipal clean water and hygiene facilities
- access to communally maintained prayer facilities (e.g. masjids). Here, the presence of prayer rooms, the proximity of a mosque, the Qur'an for reading and audio for listening, are more significant.
- complementary public funded stay at hotels and free food/souvenirs.
- Islamic TV channels and educational programs: tourists should be able to watch news, not only through the Internet, but also on national television.
- Public safety and family-friendliness: It should also be noted that Muslims love to travel with their families. Wives and children, their upbringing and leisure are the highest priority in Muslim families. These factors influence the attractiveness of Muslim tourist destinations and create favorable conditions for the development and expansion of halal tourism in historical cities and natural landscapes of Uzbekistan.

- Cultural services based on the current lifestyle of the populations:
- Eastern or national halal kitchen: national cuisine is the main way to attract Muslims.
- Dress code: uniforms and clothing of tourism involved staff should not be contrary to Islamic customs and Sharia. Staff and workers should be modest, clean and in accordance with Islamic standards.

- Payer-oriented culture: ongoing azaan (call to prayer), prayer rugs availability, prayer timetables, indications of Qibla and the Qur'an. The hotel should have a timetable for prayers.
- Sharia interior design: the rooms should not contain objects contrary to Islamic canons, paintings and drawings with images of people and animals, sculptures. It is considered haram, that is forbidden to install equipment or objects that do not comply with Islamic ethics and standards.
- Appropriate entertainment: some types of entertainment (e.g. dance clubs, casinos) are contrary to Islamic ethics and Sharia. Therefore, some options such as discos, nudism, strip clubs, shows, pubs, casinos and gambling may not be appreciated positively by Muslim tourists.

Discussion and Conclusion

Halal Service Ecosystem Framework

In Uzbekistan, it is necessary to create conditions for halal service providing businesses by strengthening their rights with legislation. As the number of Muslim tourists increases, considering that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world, Muslim tourists are expected to become one of the most successful customers in the tourism market by 2025. This type of tourism will grow in regions where halal requirements are respected and encouraged. Under these conditions, an important factor in the development of the hotel business is the knowledge and study of the concept of halal. Until main global operators enter this promising market, Uzbekistan needs to work out and develop halal service technologies, as well as educate and train qualified service personnel in accordance with Islamic canons. Therefore, the state is faced with the task of creating the conditions for the development of the Islamic tourism ecosystem.

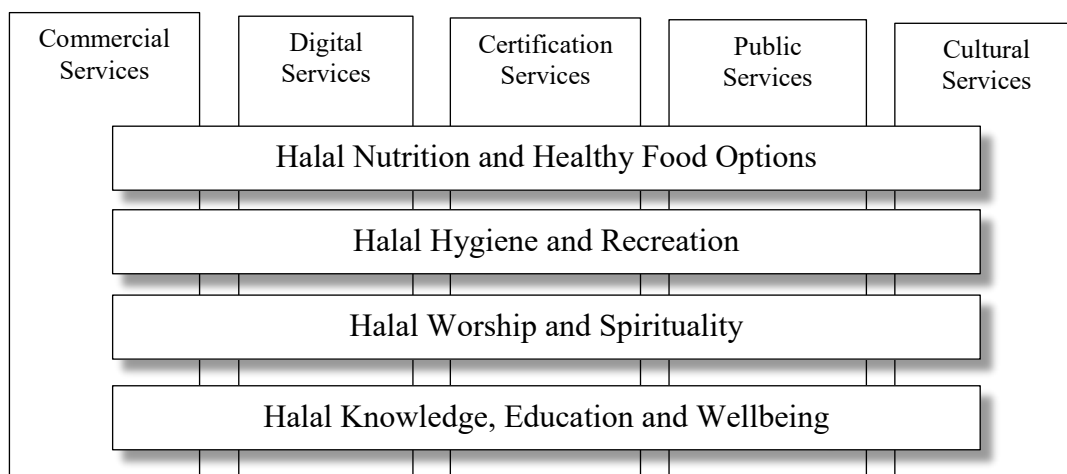**Figure 1:** Ecosystem of halal service systems

Figure 1 provides a general framework of a required halal tourism ecosystem. This framework shows that the development of halal tourism offerings is not simply the task of individual service providers and the level of their creativity. In addition to commercial services, a range of other service networks need to develop apace.

Conclusion

Halal services research is a new growing domain of academic investigation which serves as the broader context of the current research (Kadirov, Tjiptono, and Fam, 2020). In this paper, the proposed framework of halal service systems aggregated into the halal tourism ecosystem implies that "halal" should be lived as an authentic way of life within communities in order to be offered as a "service" in the market. Halal service is not something that is artificially created just for sale. The foundations of macromarketing, creating marketing systems for Muslim consumers support this view (Kadirov, 2014). In order to create halal touristic offerings, the whole society including businesses, organizations, communities, educational institutions, government, and other actors must work together to develop a coherent ecosystem. For example, a specific halal service can easily be tainted by non-halal elements such as corruption, non-Islamic conduct, bribery, and disrespect for humanistic values. Most researchers would consider such elements to be outside the marketing system. This research argues that such elements are at the heart of the halal service ecosystem.

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