

The Model for Development of Service Quality According to Shariah Principles to Increase the Competitiveness of Hotel in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province, Thailand

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Abstract

Muslim tourists are a large and growing tourism market. Hat Yai District, Songkhla Province, is the center of trade and business in the southern region. However, the number of Shariah-compliant hotels is few, and the services do not respond to the needs of Muslim tourists. This study aimed to improve the service quality of Shariah-compliant hotels in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province, and establish a practical model of Shariah-compliant hotels that responds to the behavior and needs of Muslim tourists. This research used a qualitative research method. Data were collected by using interviews. The collected data were analyzed using content analysis and descriptive statistics. The results revealed that customers could be divided into 3 groups: 1) foreign tourists 2) Thai tourists and 3) customers for meetings, seminars, and weddings. Muslim customers who want halal food and drinks were needed the most, followed by a qibla direction symbol in the room and a washroom equipped with a bidet, hand shower, or water hose. The findings also showed that the entrepreneurs used various strategies to provide their customers with unique services and create awareness of Shariah services by naming their hotels using Muslim names. The model for developing a prototype of the Shariah-compliant hotel to respond to the needs of Muslim tourists consisted of 3 key components: 1) customer needs; 2) potential and readiness of entrepreneurs; and 3) Shariah principles. The Shariah-compliant hotel model could be categorized into two levels: 1) partially Shariah-compliant hotel and 2) fully Shariah-compliant hotel.

Keywords: Service Quality, Shariah Compliant Hotel, Hatyai District

JEL Classifications: M31 Z31 Z32

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1. Introduction

The tourism business arises to meet the needs of tourists who need accommodation, food, tour services, transportation, etc. Hotels are classified as a type of tourism business that generates employment, distributes income in their particular area, and encourages the establishment of many branches of business. The expansion of the tourism business in Thailand appears to cause a rapid hotel business expansion in the country. As a consequence of this, the business is argutely competitive, requiring hotels to enhance service strategies to attract their target customers.

Muslim tourism is a large tourist market. The main factor contributing to the expansion of Muslim tourism is the increase in the Muslim population and the changing lifestyle of middle-class Muslims who are more interested in traveling. In addition, Muslim-friendly tourism services and facilities are considered another convenience factor encouraging Muslims to travel, resulting in a significant expansion of Muslim tourism. Relevant issues on Muslim-friendly tourism management have thus received considerable attention nowadays. Thailand recognizes its importance as displayed in the “Muslim Friendly Destination” project launched by the Tourism Authority of Thailand to penetrate the Muslim tourist market, bringing in domestic tourists as well as those from ASEAN countries. Muslim tourists’ needs may not be different from other groups of tourists in general. However, the travel of Muslim tourists is required to follow Islamic principles, in which their lifestyles are different from those of others practicing other religions. The differences are in terms of dress, shopping, travel, food, and accommodation. Therefore, the services and facilities during the trip must comply with Islamic principles. Improving the quality of services for Muslim-friendly travel is a key issue in developing the capacity to increase tourism competitiveness in the Muslim market.

Hatyai District in Songkhla Province is the center of trade, transportation, communication, education, and tourism in South Thailand and is the gateway to Thailand’s deep south. Because of this, Hatyai District becomes a tourist destination for both domestic and international tourists, with thousands of hotels located there. Malaysian tourists are claimed to be the main tourists. There are also a great number of tourists from the deep south of the country, which includes the following three provinces: Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Given that most of the population in Malaysia and Thailand’s deep south practices Islam, the growing demand for Shariah hotels is a result. At present, many hotels have changed their services to increase their competitiveness in the Muslim tourism market. However, the service quality improvement for Muslim tourists has faced many challenges, for example, a lack of standards of Shariah hotels, a lack of understanding of the behavior and needs of Muslim tourists, and a lack of understanding of Shariah services of entrepreneurs, etc. Furthermore, hotel services in the hotel business provide services not only to Muslim tourists but also to other groups of customers. Their service principles have to be balanced. As a result, the number of hotels that provide Shariah services in Hatyai District is still limited and may not sufficiently satisfy the Muslim customers’ needs.

Due to the justifications mentioned above, the development of Shariah hotels can be an important strategy for hotel businesses to create customer satisfaction and bolster business competitiveness. Therefore, the information on the behavior and needs of Muslim tourists, the potential and availability of entrepreneurs, as well as the understanding of the principles of Shariah service are considered key factors. Nevertheless, such information, particularly in the Thai context, does not appear abundant. Hence, this study examined the development of hotel service quality according

to Shariah principles in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province, and investigated the extent to which it responded to the behavior and needs of Muslim tourists. This study will also increase the competitiveness of hotels in the Muslim travel and tourism market of Thailand.

2. Literature Review

Service quality is whatever the customer perceives it to be (Dauda & Lee, 2016). Service quality is considered from the perspective of customer needs and aims to meet the needs of customers both inside and outside the organization rather than a quality dimension. The quality of service is different from the consideration of product quality, which mainly considers the product itself and the production process. But the service quality is determined by both the process and the results obtained from that service. The results of the service depend on the interaction between the service provider and the customer. Therefore, service quality is important because providing good quality service creates satisfaction for service users, creating a good image for products and services, and returning customers use the service repeatedly. Customers are demanding better services, so the improvement of hotel service quality to respond to the needs of Muslim customers has a direct influence on customer satisfaction.

Shariah-compliant hotels are categorized as service innovation because Shariah-compliant hotels are a new service concept adopted and implemented by hotels (Salleh et al., 2014). Shariah-compliant hotel can be a tool to improve service quality and competitive advantage in hotel industry. Shariah-compliant hotel or Islamic hotel is a trending concept in the hotel business nowadays and is a niche market in the hospitality industry. Shariah is an Arabic word meaning guidelines that all Muslims should follow (Doi, 1984). It refers to the Law of God which governs every aspect of the life of every Muslim. Shariah also involves everything that Muslims are allowed to practice. Shariah-compliant hotels are hotels that serve Islamic principles. It pertains not merely to serving halal food and beverages but also to hotel operations that abide by Shariah principles (Jurattanasan & Jaroenwisan, 2014; Sahida et al., 2011; Saad et al., 2014; Samori & Rahman, 2013). Moreover, Muhammad (2009) defined Shariah-compliant hotels as hotels where products, services offered, and financial transactions are fully obeyed Shariah principles, from serving halal food and beverages to implementing all parameters of Islamic values for health, safety, environment, and the benefits on economics to all mankind regardless of race, faith, or culture. Also, Ahmat et al. (2015) defined that a Shariah-compliant hotel is not merely concerned with the operational side ; actually, it starts from the initial stage of designing the hotel, and the most critical part is to make sure the financial transaction strictly complies with the Islamic principles.

From these mentioned definitions, it can be concluded that a Shariah-compliant hotel is a hotel that follows Islamic principles to meet the needs of Muslim tourists, and its operation includes such matters as design, service, facilities, and financial system.

However, there are no formal criteria for Shariah-compliant hotels or established model for Islamic hotels. Several academics describe a set of characteristics and attributes of Shariah-compliant hotels; for example, Rosenberg & Choufany (2009) categorized them into three groups. The first group includes the prohibition of alcohol and the provision of halal food only. Most of the staff working in the hotels should be Muslim. The female staff works on female-only floors, whereas the male staff works on male-only floors. In each hotel room, conservative television service, Qurans, and prayer mats are provided. The second group pertains to hotel designs and interiors. This involves beds and toilets that should not be located to face Mecca, the art designs in the hotels that do not depict the human form, separated facilities for males and females, separated floors

for single males, single females, and families, and symbols in the rooms indicating the direction of Mecca, and no entertainment venues, such as nightclubs. The last group relates to hotels' financial arrangements that are in line with the zakat principles.

Tongsamsi et al. (2018) mentioned 7 characteristics of hotel service arrangements that conform to Shariah principles. The first characteristic involves religious practices, which include the provisions of documents indicating the location of as well as the directions to a mosque or a prayer room, a water spray in the bathroom, a prayer mat or a prayer room, prayer dresses, schedules for prayers in hotel customers' rooms, Adhan announcements via audio players, Mecca direction symbols, Quran services, Hajji information, and Imams who lead all prayers five times a day. The second characteristic is on staff in that the hotel staff should include Muslim staff, and male staff should provide service to male customers while female customers should be provided with services by female staff. Moreover, the staff should dress according to Islamic principles and also in conformity with local culture. The third characteristic involves room design and decoration. This encompasses a sign indicating the direction towards Mecca, the location of a bed and a bathroom that does not face Mecca, the pictures in the room that do not depict humans or animals, and decoration and design with separate layers. The fourth characteristic is the equipment provided in the room, which must be halal products, such as cosmetics, soap, shampoo, and toothpaste. Additionally, such products must have non-animal-derived ingredients. The fifth characteristic includes services offered over a fasting period. Namely, halal food should be served to Muslim customers before morning, adequate food services should be available in the hotel's restaurant, there should be tarawih prayer leaders, and provision of Quran in the room and suitable TV channel services. The sixth characteristic relates to finance. To this, there should be an Islamic finance service point and the setting up of a zakat payment service. The last characteristic involves general services which incorporate halal food services warranted with halal food certification. Muslim customers should be offered non-alcoholic drinks. Other facilities include swimming pools, sports rooms, and spas separated for men and women. Suitable television channels are delivered. The hotels must not have gambling machines and contain entertainment venues, such as nightclubs. Female staff members are required to offer services to female customers and their children, whereas male customers' services have to be performed by male staff.

Henderson (2010) proposed opinions on Shariah-compliant hotel facilities, which include provisions of non-alcoholic drinks and halal food only, Qurans and prayer mats in every room, beds, and toilets that do not face Mecca, bidets in the bathroom, prayer rooms, entertainment following Islamic principles, most staff that are Muslim, conservative staff dresses, separate facilities for men and women, and Islamic financial systems.

Table 1: The Attributes of Shariah-Compliant Hotel

| Authors | Attributes |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Rosenberg & Choufany (2009) | 15 features in 3 groups: Operations are as follows: no alcohol drinks, Halal food only; majority staff are Muslim; female staff for single female floors; male staff for single male floors; conservative television service; Quran and prayer mats available in each room. Design and Interior as follows: larger function rooms to cater male and female separately, Qibla sign (direction of Makkah), no red-light entertainment, beds and toilets should not be placed to face the direction of Makkah, decoration and art should not depict the human and animal form, separated health facilities for male and female, separated floors for single male, single female, and families. Finance as follows: hotel financed through Islamic financial arrangements. A hotel should follow the zakat principles. |
| Samori & Rahman (2013) | 12 features as follows: Halal foods and no alcohol to be served on the hotels; having the Holy Book Quran, prayer mat, and arrow that indicate the direction of Qibla; beds and toilets positioned not to face the Qibla; prayer rooms available on the premises and hotels; no inappropriate entertainment; predominantly Muslim staff with a proper Islamic code of dressing; a separate salon; recreational facilities and swimming pool for men and women; a separate room/floor for unmarried couples between male and female; a tourist dressing code; no gambling and alcohol drinks in the hotel lobby or restaurant; no prohibited foods and beverages in the hotel fridge; Islamic funding. |
| Omar et al. (2013) | 22 features in 5 groups: Food & beverage as follows: no alcoholic beverage; Halal food and beverage; cooking utensils in clean condition. Facilities as follows: segregation facilities by gender; ablution in bathroom; comfortable prayer spaces or rooms; Holy Quran; prayer utensils; Qibla direction; Islamic practices booklet; prayer call in the hotel rooms; Halal toiletries; prohibit non-Islamic entertainment. Financial as follows: Islamic finance; following Zakat principles. Interior design as follows: no human depict form; Islamic calligraphy art; separate bathroom and toilet; bed and toilet should not face the Qibla. Operations as follows: staff attire that covers aurat; hotel employee; Islamic clean and comfortable environment; hotel employees should practice Islamic attitudes. |
| Jurattanasan & Jaroenwisan (2014) | 16 features as follows: No alcohol; Halal food only; Conservative television service; majority of staff of Muslim faith; Quran and prayer mats available in each room; separate recreational facilities for men and women; Makers in the rooms indicating the direction of Mecca; no entertainment such as nightclub; bed and toilet should not be placed to face the direction of Mecca ; art in the hotel should not depict the human form; bidets in the bathrooms; appropriate entertainment; hotel financed through Islamic financial arrangement, and hotel should follow the Zakat principles. |

| Authors | Attributes |
|-----------------------|---|
| Razalli et al. (2015) | 64 features in 5 groups as follows: administration, common areas, bedroom, services and food and beverages, |
| Fazil et al. (2023) | 15 features in 4 groups: Operations as follows: Muslim staff, staff attire; Halal foods; no alcohol policy; entertainment limits. Design and interiors as follow: room layout; toilet facilities; prayer facilities; arts; segregated recreational space. Financial as follows: Islamic funding; Zakat. Infotainment (Learning) as follows: Islamic books; history and past Islamic scholars; religious talk through hotel television channel; Islamic calligraphy. |

Source: Author's compilation

From the literature review, it was found that Shariah-compliant hotels are different from conventional hotels .The differences can be compared as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Differences between Shariah-Compliant Hotels and Conventional Hotels

| Differences | Shariah-compliant hotels | Conventional hotels |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Facilities | There are facilities provided according to hotel standards and following Islamic principles, such as prayer mats, Qurans, prayer rooms, necessary equipment for Muslim customers, qibla symbols, and separate facilities for women and men. | There are standard hotel facilities, such as clean rooms, swimming pools, and spas. |
| Food and beverages | Only halal food and beverages are served. | Food and beverages in general are served. |
| Design & Interiors | The interior design follows Islamic principles, such as the end of the bed and the bathroom that must not face the qibla, and statues or images of people and animals are not included in the decoration. | The general decorative design depends on the level and type of hotel. |
| Services | The services follow Islamic principles, such as no nightclubs, no entertainment or alcohol services, no gambling facilities, and no non-Islamic TV programs entertainment services. Muslim staff have to be the majority of the hotel staff, and these staff members have to dress appropriately. Female staff work on single female floors and male staff on single male floors. | General services depend on the level and type of hotels, such as nightclubs, entertainment venues, and conference rooms. |

| Differences | Shariah-compliant hotels | Conventional hotels |
|-------------|--|---|
| Finances | The financial system is based on Islamic principles and the principle of zakat, in which money is donated back to communities. | The financial system is based on economic principles. |
| Management | Economic principles) profit and loss (and Islamic principles are highlighted. | Economic principles)profit and loss(are underlined. |

Source: Author's compilation

In addition, Salleh (2014) divided Shariah-compliant hotels into 3 categories. For example, the basic level service consists of Halal food, no alcohol, Qibla signage, prayer mat, and a bidet in the room. The intermediate level service consists of separate recreation facilities for male and female, no adult entertainment, prayer time, amosque location. And the extensive level of service consists of Zakat counters, Islamic-related brochures, classes, Azan at floor level, and Islamic tourism packages.

3. Methodology

The research on the development of service quality according to Shariah principles to increase the competitiveness of hotels in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province, aimed to develop a model of Shariah hotel services that responds to the behavior and needs of the Muslim tourists.

In this research, a qualitative research approach was employed under the phenomenological research strategy to understand dynamic social phenomena based on human understanding and natural social interactions. The data was collected by using in-depth interviews. Using a purposive sampling method, the primary informant groups in this study were classified into 3 groups. The first group included 6 hotel business entrepreneurs who provide services to their customers according to Shariah principles and have been certified with halal food service standards, or the standards particularly implemented in Thailand's deep south to promote Muslim tourism in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province. Those hotels were selected and divided according to the size of the hotels: small hotels (fewer than 100 rooms), medium hotels (101-200 rooms), and large hotels (201 rooms or more), and data from each type of hotel: 2 samples per hotel.

The second group included 45 customers who received hotel services according to Shariah principles in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province. Those customers were selected and divided according to the size of the hotels: small hotels (fewer than 100 rooms), medium hotels (101-200 rooms), and large hotels (201 rooms or more), and data from each type of hotel 15 samples per hotel, with the criteria for selecting key informants being Muslim customers who have used services in hotels according to Shariah principles in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province, not less than 2 times.

The third group involved 3 Islamic religious representatives who were an Islamic committee of Songkhla Province and Halal directors and private organizations, namely the Thai-ASEAN Halal Tourism Trade Association.

The study adopted the in-depth interview through purposive sampling to understand the practice and generate a model of Shariah hotel services that responds to the behavior and needs of the Muslim tourists in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province. The interview questions were developed based on research studies, reports, articles, and other forms of documents. Concerning qualitative data analysis, content analysis was applied. Categories based on relevant themes were established after verification of the data. The

data were sorted into categories. Subsequently, the results were summarized and discussed in the following section.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1. 1 Hotel business situation in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province, Thailand

Hatyai District is the center of economy, trade, and tourism in South Thailand, as it is full of many shops, markets, and shopping centers. It has attracted people and tourists from the past to the present. These make the economy in Hatyai District vibrant. In addition, Songkhla is the province with the highest border trade value in Thailand due to its border adjacent to Malaysia. From the interviews, it was found that most of the operators identified Malaysian tourists as their main hotel customers. Furthermore, tourists from Thailand's deep south were considered to be another group of customers. This group of tourists visited Hatyai District for several reasons. For example, some of them traveled there on weekends for relaxation, such as shopping for products and receiving services, as there were not many shopping malls, supermarkets, and hotels in their hometowns. Others traveled to Hatyai District to visit their children who have studied in educational institutions in Songkhla Province or to receive health services in large hospitals located there. Owing to these, the hotels in Hatyai District were in high demand, with over ten thousand hotel rooms available. According to the data from the Department of Provincial Administration, there were 177 hotels or establishments with 11,929 rooms legally registered to provide accommodation services. Most hotels in Hatyai District were small-sized hotels with less than 100 rooms. Most of the room rates ranged from 500 to 999 baht. There were also many resorts and apartments for daily renting that are not registered in the system. Due to a great number of hotels and rooms, the competition in the hotel business in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province, appeared to be quite high. In addition, there were 3 groups of hotel customers in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province, as described below.

The first group comprised foreign tourists. Most of them were from Malaysia and Singapore, traveling on group tours or with travel agencies. Malaysian tourists, in particular, preferred to travel to Hatyai District and other nearby areas during weekends, traditional holidays, and long holidays.

The second group embodied Thai tourists who traveled there for business, relaxation, or other personal purposes. Many of them stayed in Hatyai District before visiting other nearby provinces, for instance, going on a trip to the Andaman Islands, such as Koh Lipe in Satun Province, or to Betong District in Yala Province, which is a popular tourist destination these days. This group of tourists also included those from Thailand's deep south, and the majority of them were Muslims.

The last group included those receiving hotel services for meetings, seminars, and weddings. These customers were Thais whose hometowns were either in Songkhla Province or in other nearby areas. Most of them received hotel restaurant and meeting room services and rarely stayed overnight in the hotel rooms.

Hotel businesses in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province, were not much affected by the violence in Thailand's deep south. Meanwhile, the violence in the area was another factor encouraging Hatyai District to become popular among those in the deep south. Namely, they deemed the district safer for them to travel. Moreover, Hatyai District itself has been the gateway to Thailand's deep south, which consists of Yala Province, Narathiwat Province, and Pattani Province. Being the gateway, Hatyai District has been consequently prosperous in terms of economy and trade.

As a result, hotels in HatYai District have altered their services to attract Muslim customers by adjusting their service and providing facilities to respond to the needs of Muslim customers and create competitive advantages. While tourist attractions and shopping malls have adapted to be friendly to Muslim tourists, for example, adding halal corners in shopping malls or Khlong Hae Floating Market that mainly focuses on halal food.

4.2. 2 Hotel service strategies according to Shariah principles in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province

In terms of accommodation, Thailand is a non-Islamic country, so Thailand has started providing Islamic accommodation for the convenience of Muslim travelers. In addition, a Shariah-compliant hotel does not have any clearly defined requirements or established standards. Therefore, it was found that hotels providing services according to the Shariah principles are different. List of hotels in the study as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: List of Hotels

| No. | Name | Star Rating | Number of Rooms |
|-----|---------|-------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Hotel A | 4 | 230 |
| 2 | Hotel B | 3 | 79 |
| 3 | Hotel C | 3 | 140 |
| 4 | Hotel D | 3 | 215 |
| 5 | Hotel E | 3 | 100 |
| 6 | Hotel F | 3 | 253 |

Source: Author's compilation

Table 4: The Hotel Service According to Shariah Principles

| No. | Hotel operations practices | Hotel A | Hotel B | Hotel C | Hotel D | Hotel E | Hotel F |
|-----|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1 | Separate prayer rooms and prayer areas for males and females | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 2 | Prayer mats in each room | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 3 | Prayer mats being available or upon request | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 4 | Qibla symbols | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 5 | A prayer timetable in each room | | ✓ | | | | |
| 6 | Qurans in each room | | ✓ | | | | |
| 7 | Qurans being available or upon request | | ✓ | | | | |
| 8 | Separate male and female service areas, such as swimming pools and separate male and female hair salons | | ✓ | | | | |
| 9 | Beds and toilets positioned not to face the Qibla | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| 10 | Decorations without statues or images of people or animals | ✓ | | ✓ | | | |
| 11 | Separate room/floor for unmarried couple between male and female | ✓ | | | | | |
| 12 | A water pipe connected to a clean faucet in the bathroom | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 13 | Only halal food | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |

| No. | Hotel operations practices | Hotel A | Hotel B | Hotel C | Hotel D | Hotel E | Hotel F |
|-----|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 14 | The availability of Halal food in hotels | | | | ✓ | | |
| 15 | No prohibited beverages in the hotel fridge in the room | | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 16 | No prohibited beverages in the hotel lobby or restaurant | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 17 | Unavailability of nightclubs or other entertainment venues that are contrary to Islamic principles | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 18 | No gambling | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 19 | Provision of suitable TV programs according to the Islamic principles | ✓ | | ✓ | | | |
| 20 | Predominantly Muslim staffs with a proper Islamic code of dressing | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 21 | Male staff should provide service to male customers, while female customers should be provided with services by female staff | | ✓ | | | | |
| 22 | Islamic financial principles | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 23 | Zakat principles | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |

Source: Author's compilation

Table 4 shows that hotels have services according to Shariah principles differently. Some hotels offer partial or basic Islamic services, while others offer advanced services. The table showed that hotels have services according to Shariah principles differently from providing basic Islamic services to advanced services. Thailand has Buddhism as its national religion and has a multicultural society, especially in Hat Yai District, Songkhla Provinces, where Thai Buddhists, Muslims, and Chinese live together. Therefore, the hotels have many groups of customers. As a result, Shariah-compliant hotels have different levels of service. While the Middle Eastern and Indonesia, where the majority population is Muslim and governed by Islamic values and law. The hotels are fully Shariah-compliant. Therefore, Shariah-compliant hotels are provided different services depending on the country's sociocultural context.

In addition, the attributes of a Sharia-compliant hotel service differ according to the operator's business principles or concepts. Given the entrepreneurs' faith and strong intentions in Shariah principles, full and authentic Shariah-compliant hotels would result. As for those aiming at attracting more Muslim customers, Muslim customers' basic needs would be offered, and partially Shariah-compliant hotels would accordingly be a consequence. Here, the entrepreneur's religious belief became a significant factor. Arguably, providing that the entrepreneurs were Muslims who very well comprehended Islamic principles, Shariah principles would be applied with priority placed on faith rather than profits. However, there was no requirement that a Shariah-compliant hotel had to be owned by Muslim entrepreneurs. Still, hotel entrepreneurs should at least understand Islamic principles and appropriately translate them into practice.

Moreover, Sharia-compliant hotels in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province, apply strategies to differentiate such services from those of other hotels, enabling them to be unique and to meet Muslim customers' needs, satisfaction, and confidence, such as halal food, a water pipe connected to a clean faucet in the bathroom, and Qibla symbols. These

were different from other hotels that offered their customers clean rooms, including such facilities as TVs, refrigerators, and air conditioners. On top of that, Muslim customers' awareness of a Shariah-compliant hotel in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province, was triggered by the hotels' Muslim names, such as Yannati Hotel and Alfahaj Hotel. The names of the hotels reflected the nature of the services underlined in the Shariah principles. With this, Muslim customers could expect such services when staying at the hotels. Moreover, another strategy exploited by the Shariah-compliant hotels in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province, was to give confidence and friendly services to Muslim customers by ensuring halal food with a halal kitchen certification certified by the Central Islamic Committee of the province. Concerning a public relations strategy, the entrepreneurs used advertising channels via social media, such as Facebook and Line Application. On such online media, former customers visiting Shariah-compliant hotels could recommend the hotels to others. While the online channels were crucial, a word-of-mouth strategy was also considered influential.

The research findings on the effects the Shariah-based services had on hotel business operations in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province, revealed a positive one on the hotel business as a whole and the hotel business in particular. With confidence arising, more Muslims tended to use the hotel services. The Muslim hotel customers have maximized, especially those using the services for meetings, seminars, and weddings. Accordingly, the hotels' revenues have been growing. Nevertheless, the Shariah hotel services did not result in hotel room rate increases. Such rates still comply with the 1-to 5-star hotel tourism accommodation standards.

4.2. 3 Needs of Muslim customers using hotel services in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province

Muslim customers' needs and expectations when using hotel services in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province, could be grouped into the following four aspects: religious practices, decorative design, halal food, and general services.

For the religious practices, they needed prayer rooms and separate prayer areas for men and women, prayer mats for service users, a prayer timetable in each room, qibla symbols, and Qurans in the room.

In connection with the decorative design, they needed the separation of male and female service areas and the arrangement of the ends of the bed and the bathroom that did not face the qibla direction. Moreover, as they claimed, people or animal statues or portraits should not be decorated in the hotels. Another need was the separation between the single woman floor and the family floor, or a separate floor should be provided, especially for women. In addition, a water pipe connected to a clean faucet in the bathroom needed to be provided.

Regarding halal foods, these needed to be available in the hotels. Halal kitchens were required to be separated from regular kitchens. Prohibited beverages, such as alcoholic drinks, must not be available at all.

Concerning general services, they claimed that entertainment facilities must not be contrary to Islamic principles. To them, most hotel staff should be Muslims who have dressed appropriately according to the Islamic religion; female staff should provide services to female customers, while male staff should offer these services to male customers; and the hotels' financial management should conform to Islamic financial principles as well as the zakat principle, in which donations needed to be performed to the needy. Moreover, the findings showed that Muslim hotel customers needed halal food to be served in the hotels, a halal kitchen separated from regular kitchens, qibla symbols, prohibition of forbidden drinks or alcoholic beverages, water pipes connected to the clean faucet in the bathroom, and prayer timetables in the hotel rooms.

As can be seen above, hotel Muslim customers had the highest demand for halal food and religious practices, as these were basic amenities for them.

Nevertheless, the reasons for not staying at Shariah-compliant hotels in Hatyai District, Songkhla province, were also reported. The reasons included an inconvenient location, expensive room rates, and the lack of understanding of the principles of a Shariah-compliant hotel. These demonstrated the influence of other marketing mix factors on hotel customers' decision-making. Still, the Muslim customers considered religious services as a secondary factor when selecting their accommodation.

Furthermore, Muslim hotel customers in Hatyai District also had different needs. Some desired to receive fully Shariah services, while others preferred partially Shariah ones. Notably, it appeared that Shariah hotel requirements or standards were available. Hence, hotel entrepreneurs could determine the extent to which Shariah services could be provided according to the entrepreneurs' resource availability and service potential.

4.4.4 Shariah-compliant hotel model

Nowadays, many hotels have applied the Shariah principles in their hotels, but a clear model of the Shariah services does not appear to be established. Shariah-compliant hotels offer different services depending on the entrepreneurs' preferences. Potentially, this may not lead to their sustainable development and growth. Because of this, based on the findings in the research, a conceptual framework was proposed as a guideline to develop a model of Shariah-compliant hotels to respond to the needs of Muslim tourists based on hotel entrepreneurs' potential and readiness. The aforementioned framework comprises 3 key elements as follows:

1) Customer requirements

A Shariah hotel is a hotel management concept formulated to satisfy hotel customers' needs. As a consequence of this, to improve the Shariah service quality, the needs of Muslim customers should be taken into account. Different customers may possess different needs. That is to say, some require fully Shariah services, while others may prefer partially Shariah services.

2) Entrepreneurs' potential and readiness

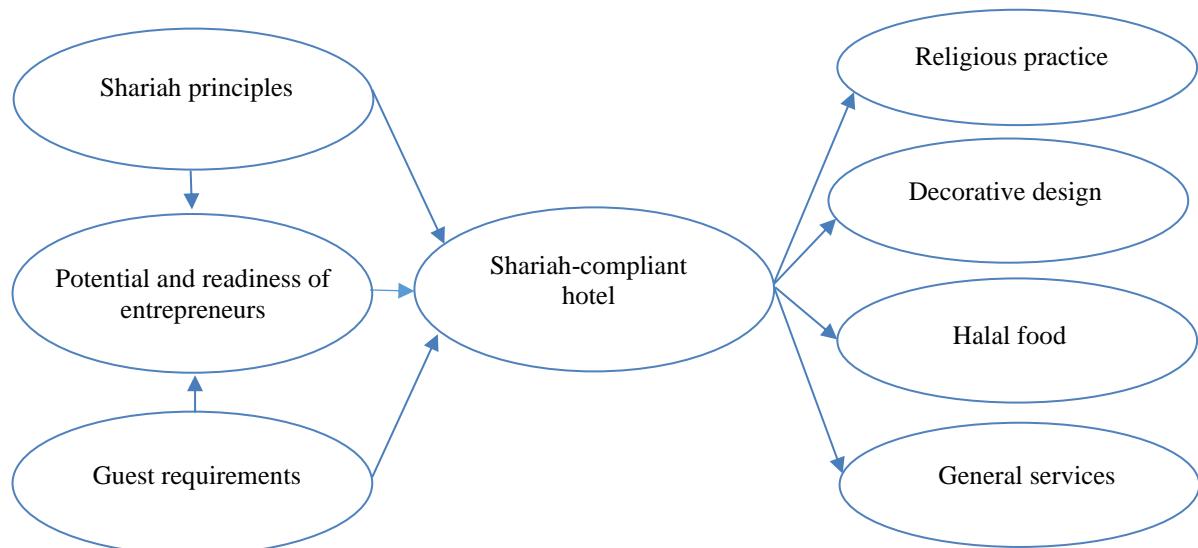
The hotel services following the Shariah principles are voluntarily provided by the entrepreneurs. There are no standards or regulations. Therefore, such services can be designated given that Islamic principles are adhered to and hoteliers' readiness and potential are taken into account.

3) Shariah principles

Shariah hotels are the hotels translating Shariah principles into practice. There is no provision clearly stating accommodation principles in Islam. The application of such principles to hotel contexts then makes such hotels different from other hotels, particularly those on facilities.

The conceptual framework for developing a prototype of a Shariah-compliant hotel described above can be formulated to meet the needs of Muslim tourists based on the potential and readiness of entrepreneurs, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure1: Proposed Shariah-compliantHotel Model



Source: Author's compilation

Sharia-compliant hotels are voluntary services provided by hotel operators or entrepreneurs .There are no mandatory standards or requirements .Thus, Shariah hotel services cannot be defined with only one form or level .Rather, these contain many levels of services .Here, the Shariah service model being proposed consists of 2levels of services below.

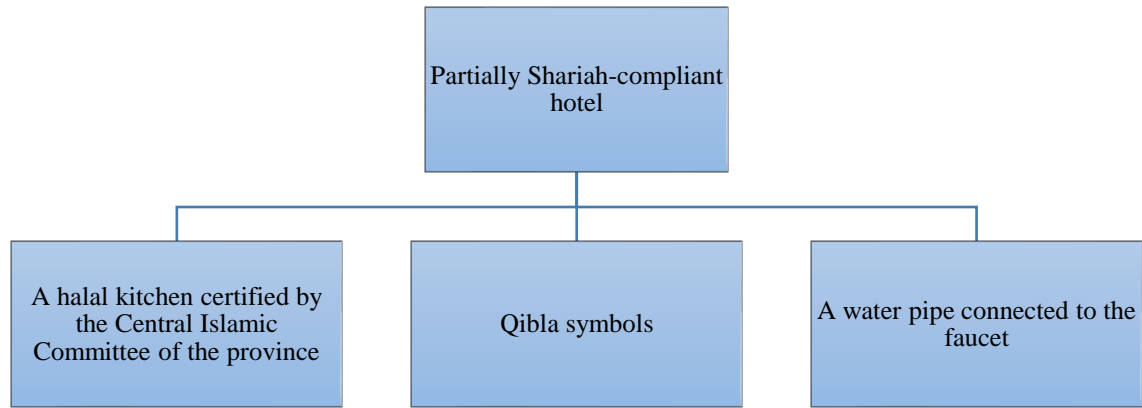
1) Partially Shariah-compliant hotel

This hotel type provides services according to Shariah principles to respond to Muslim customers' basic needs, mainly providing Shariah-compliant services and halal food .This, according to the research findings, was what Muslim customers demand the most .The partially Shariah-compliant hotel provides three basic services: 1 (a halal kitchen certified by the Central Islamic Committee of the province; 2 (qibla symbols; and 3 (a water pipe connected to the faucet, as shown in Figure 2.

2 (Fully Shariah-compliant hotel

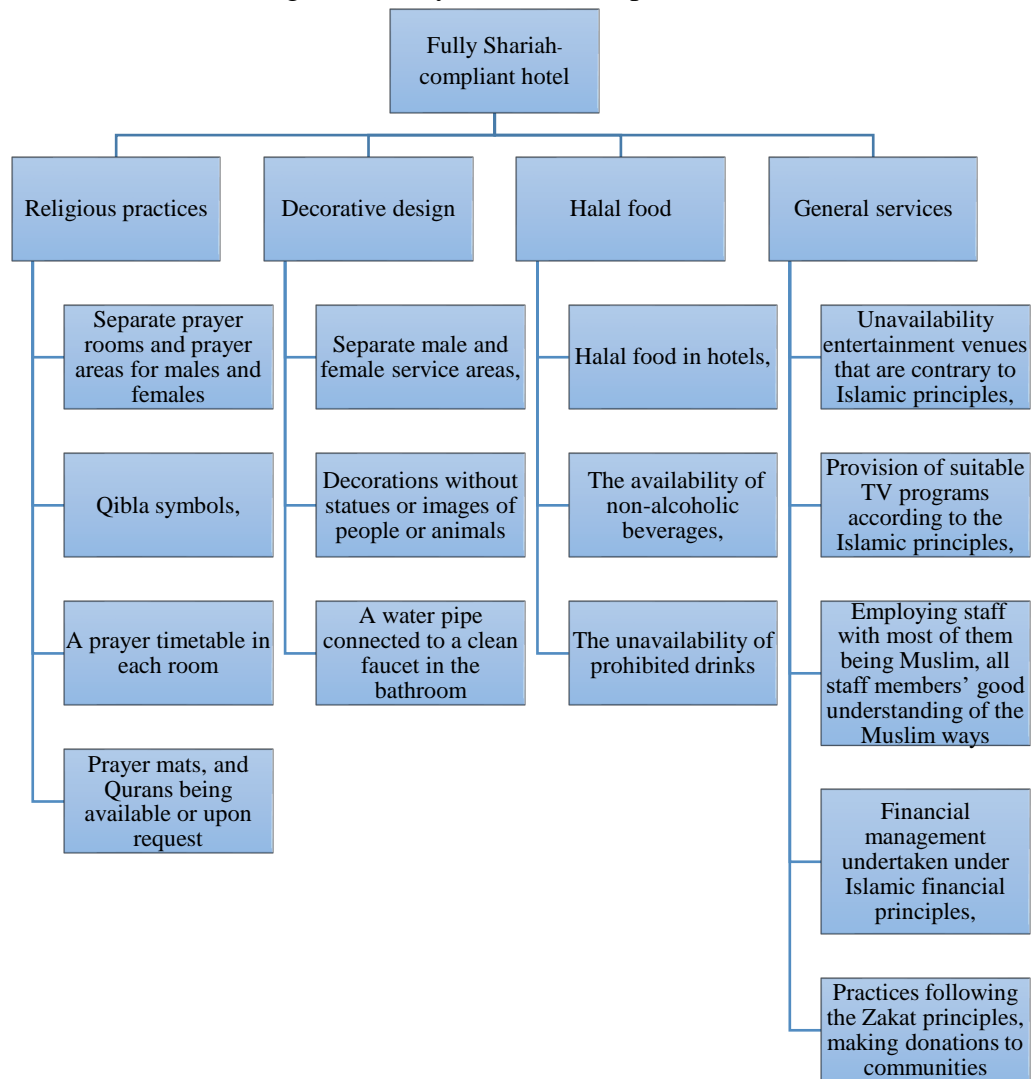
This hotel type provides full Shariah services to respond to the needs of Muslim customers in all aspects, including religious practices, decorative design, halal food, and general services. The religious practices consist of the following components :separate prayer rooms and prayer areas for males and females, qibla symbols, a prayer timetable in each room, prayer mats, and Qurans being available or upon request. The decorative design includes separate male and female service areas, such as swimming pools and separate male and female hair salons; decorations without statues or images of people or animals; and a water pipe connected to a clean faucet in the bathroom .The halal food involves the availability of the food type in hotels, the availability of non-alcoholic beverages, and the unavailability of prohibited drinks. Regarding general services, these include unavailability of nightclubs or other entertainment venues that are contrary to Islamic principles, provision of suitable TV programs according to the Islamic principles, employing staff with most of them being Muslims, all staff members' good understanding of the Muslim ways of life and practices and principles of good services, financial management undertaken under Islamic financial principles, and practices following the Zakat principles, making donations to communities, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 2: Partially Shariah-Compliant Hotel



Source: Author's compilation

Figure 3: Fully Shariah-Compliant Hotel



Source: Author's compilation

4.2 Discussion

In this section, the research findings will be discussed as follows:

Halal food and Islamic-related services were most needed, as these were fundamental amenities for Muslim customers .Therefore, such food and services that conform to the Shariah principles should be provided. The services are, for instance, the

availability of halal kitchens, qibla symbols, and water pipes connected to clean faucets to purify themselves before praying. These are consistent with the study of Sriprasert et al. (2013), who investigated the behavior and needs of halal tourism in Thailand's areas near the Andaman Sea to accommodate tourists in Muslim countries. They found that Muslim tourists' demands for halal tourism could be divided into 4 issues: restaurant needs, spa salon needs, public facility needs, and hotel needs. Among the 4 issues, the hotel needs were ranked first. The tourists claimed that they needed signs showing directions for prayer, halal food and restaurants within the hotels, provision of the Quran, prayer mats, and prayer timetables in their rooms. Also, they desired to stay at hotels with beds and bathrooms that are not directed toward Mecca.

The Muslim customers would like to have a separation between the unmarried women and men and the family floors. This is consistent with the study conducted by Sriprasert et al. (2013), which can explain that in the Thai context, there is no cultural or Islamic statute of limitations that governs social interactions between individuals and between the sexes like those in the Middle East.

The Muslim customers used religious services as a common element in selecting a hotel. This can be explained by the fact that, to Muslims, religious practices are of significance. It displays faith and reverence given to the Only One God. However, the marketing mix factors still influence their decision to stay in the Shariah-compliant hotels. Shariah hotel services do not affect room rates. Room rates themselves depend on service quality and facilities provided by the hotel.

The hotel services implementing Shariah principles in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province, can be classified into 2 types as follows: partially Shariah services and fully Shariah services. On the former, the services focus on meeting the basic needs that the Muslim customers demand and attach importance to, such as a halal kitchen, a symbol of the qibla direction, and a water pipe connected to the faucet in the bathroom. Regarding the latter, the full Shariah services aim at fully satisfying the needs of Muslim customers. These can be explained by the fact that Hatyai District in Songkhla Province is considered to be a multicultural society. There are different groups of tourists. Providing services to satisfy the differences appears to be a priority for the hotels there. Moreover, the socio-cultural context of Thailand also affects the Shariah service types. In a country ruled by Islamic values and laws, full Shariah services are performed, while in socially and culturally diverse societies, the management of the service types can vary.

5. Conclusion and Policy Inferences

According to a survey on Muslim customers' needs, it was found that religious services and halal food were valued the most. Therefore, Shariah-compliant hotels should sufficiently provide religious facilities, for example, the Qibla direction in the rooms, a prayer room and a separate prayer room for men and women, and a water pipe connected to the faucet in the bathroom for washing. In addition, the hotels should possess halal kitchen certification standards to ensure food services and create friendly service images following Islamic principles. Halal food is particularly important, and it is Muslim customers' primary requirement. Besides, Shariah-compliant hotels should have a human resource selection and development system that aligns with the business strategy that Shariah-compliant hotels focus on. Therefore, hotel staff members need to understand the Muslim lifestyle and be able to provide appropriate services to their customers. Shariah hotel services should have Shariah hotel service certification to ensure authentic Shariah hotel services are provided. This is considered to build hotel customers' confidence and protection.

Although Shariah-compliant hotels focus on providing specific services to respond to the needs of Muslim customers, marketing mix factors still influence the customers' decision in selecting the hotel. Therefore, entrepreneurs of Shariah-compliant hotels should develop their services to be standardized, as the hotel business is highly competitive. Complete and adequate services should then be provided to respond to the customers' needs.

Shariah-compliant hotels provide services that are different from general hotels. Some services, such as alcoholic beverages and anti-religious TV programs, will not be provided. Shariah hotels should create awareness amongst their customers that the service characteristics provided are different from those of other hotels. Because of this, the information on the hotel type should be more publicized. The lack of understanding of attributes of Shariah-compliant hotels can result in their decision-making to stay at the hotel. This should be notified to the customers in advance at the hotel check-in desks so that they will be able to make decisions on their stay. Moreover, Shariah-compliant hotels can create an image and recognition for their customers, either with a Muslim name or by using symbols to reflect the identity of the Shariah hotel service. Also, comprehensive information should be constantly updated on a hotel website or application to facilitate those interested in staying at Shariah-compliant hotels. This can be considered a marketing promotion and can also encourage the hotels to improve their services to meet the needs of Muslim hotel customers.

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