Islamic branding as communication strategy of halal tourism promotion in non-Muslim country

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Abstract

Muslims have specific products and services preference that affected by their *syariah*-based needs. In the tourism sector, the growth of Muslim tourists continues to increase and projected to continue to grow. South Korea sees this as an opportunity and try to engage an Islamic branding campaign with *Muslim Friendly Korea* as a campaign to promote the country's tourism. The purpose of this study is to find out how South Korean government builds a tourism brand with the concept of halal tourism to attract large Muslim market through food products in South Korea. Given South Korea has been worldwide known by the entertainment industry or Korean pop culture that has been worldwide. As well as typical South Korean food that uses lots of pork and alcoholic beverages where it is forbidden to Muslims. This research uses qualitative approach, with document analysis method. The literature review as the data analyzed is obtained from the official website of the South Korean tourism organization, articles, books, journals and videos. Results of this study indicate that South Korean government, through the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) do some ways to build a Muslim friendly tourism in South Korea through food products. Such as, provide official site of South Korean tourism that has information about culinary with *halal* label. KTO also organizes an event, named *halal Restaurant Week*. Besides that, a mobile phone application was also made to facilitate Muslim travelers who wants to find information about halal restaurant, barcode scanning food products to indicate halal food products and direction for worship place and schedule.

Keywords: Islamic branding; Korean tourism; Muslim tourists; communication promotion

1. Introduction

Muslim population in the world is now on the second rank after Christian population. *The Pew Research Center* mentioned that Muslim population in 2010 was 23% after Christians population for 31% of the world's population. Muslim population is expected to continue increase. And by 2050 Muslim population can reach 30% of the world's population. Most of Muslim population, coming from several countries with rapid economic growth, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey and Middle East countries. These countries are increasing the middle class with high levels of education and disposable income. Therefore, this group is an important segment for businesses in all sectors and projected as one of the largest consumer segments.

Muslim market has products and services preference that affected by their *syariah*-based needs. Muslims around the world search for what is called *halal*, and the opposite is called *haram*. Therefore, there is demand for *halal* products and services, in accordance with Islam's law.

In order to capture the large Muslim market with special needs, a strategy is needed. One of them is by doing religious branding that can be used to build a brand that appeals to a global religious population that has a common value. In this case, the Muslim population. Religious branding here is meant as an Islamic Branding. For Muslims, branding cannot be separated from religious values, which states that all actions are not out of human desire, but because of God's guidance. What makes Islamic branding different is that consumers do not

merely buy products based on comfort, desire and needs but also as a worship. This kind of understanding makes Islamic branding stronger in building a relationship with customer rather than conventional branding.

This Islamic branding has been done in every business sector, one of them is tourism sector. Concept of *halal* tourism is experiencing significant growth. *Halal* tourism concepts are applied in several countries that have different names, such as *Islamic Tourism, Halal Friendly Tourism, Halal Travel, Muslim-Friendly Travel Destination* etc. The decrease of halal tourism and Muslim-friendly tourism is currently being promoted because many Muslim tourists who travels around the world. According to Travel MasterCard-Crescentrating Muslim Global index in 2015, Muslim travel market is worth 145 trillion dollars by 2014, with 108 million Muslim tourists representing 10% of the entire economy of the trip. It is expected to grow to 150 million visitors by 2020 and 11% of the market with expenses that is projected to grow to 200 million dollars. The growth of this Muslim tourism market has contributed to increasing demand from this segment for lodging, eating, shopping and other sectors.

The increased demand for halal tourism is used by some countries for the tourism industry sector, for example is South Korea. South Korea is carrying *"Muslim Friendly Korea"* as a tourism campaign. *Muslim Friendly Korea* campaign was promoted because many Muslim visitors in Korea recently. Approximately, there are 750,000 Muslim tourists visit South Korea every year. Indonesia itself is known as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world shows the increasing number of visits to South Korea in 2015 to 2016 as much as 50%.

The purpose of this study is to find out how South Korean government builds a tourism brand with the concept of halal tourism to attract large Muslim market through food products in South Korea. Given South Korea has been worldwide known by the entertainment industry or Korean pop culture that has been worldwide. As well as typical South Korean food that uses lots of pork and alcoholic beverages where it is forbidden to Muslims. The study object in this study is more focused on culinary in South Korea.

1.1 . Cult Brand

Cult brand can be defined as a product that has a loyal follower. These loyal followers can be described as fanatical followers in which they feel the product is a part of them. People are interested in brand cult because they want to belong to something. Cult followers tend to keep abreast of the brand. For example, *Apple* brand enthusiasts, who always follow the latest mobile phone products though with a very expensive price and must queue long to get it. Followers of the cult can also be seen in followers of a religion, such as Islam. Islam has its own image, so that Islam can be regarded as a brand with its own image. People who cult Islam will tend to obey the Islam's laws. Follow any rules set out anywhere and anytime.

Atkin (2006) on his book mentions cult followers are usually regarded as people who can be manipulated by capitalist group. The cult followers are used to be an easy target market for anything related to their cult products, they will be easy to believe in the products offered. This is also used by South Korean government to promote their halal tourism to the Muslims. South Korea is looking at Muslims as cult followers which if they are offered anything regarding their beliefs, they will believe and are more likely to be interested to consume. Using the symbols on the product displayed, will simplify and speed up the process of finding out whether the product is in accordance with their beliefs. Therefore, one of the strategies that is suitable to use is Islamic branding.

1.1.1. Islamic Branding

Paul Temporal (2011) on his book mentioned some strategies that can be used by non-muslim products to build an Islamic brand.
- *Ride on the reputation and positioning of the global brand*
  Muslims also like global brands just like general consumers, but the difference is that Muslims see the Islamic values that exist in the product. Therefore, the existence of *halal* certification or label becomes important to be displayed on the product, because it is one of the reasons why Muslims buy a product.
- *Develop new, Syariah-compliant products*
  Every brand including a big brand that already has a name requires adjustments to enter into the Muslim market. As performed by HSCB which create a new service product ie Islamic banking "*window*" made in accordance with Islamic *syariah* law.
- *Set up a new Islamic business*
  To convince Muslim consumers, a whole Islamic business is needed. Therefore, a name that corresponds to new products that are Islamic but still carrying the name of a brand that has been known is also important. As can be seen in *Standard Chartered*, they created *Standard Chartered Saadiq* when opening a new business for Muslim consumers.
- *Go for the luxury market*

In every country, there must be a segment that likes luxury goods. This is also applied to Muslim market. Although there are still many poor people in countries with large numbers of Muslims as in India and Indonesia, but the middle-class population tends to increase. This can be one of the gaps to fill, when a large existing brand has not entered it yet

- *Create branded Islamic services*
  To illustrate this point, we can look at what has been done by the communication agency, *Ogilvi & Mather Worldwide*. The brand does not create a new business but create a new name for advertising purposes instead. They make the name *Ogilvy Noor*, where *Noor* is taken from Arabic which means light. The name is made and designed specifically for Muslim consumers, but the marketed product remains relevant for non-Muslim consumers.
- *Add more lifestyle Islamic-oriented products to the portfolio*
  What is meant at this point is to show that the products made are indeed aimed at Muslims in accordance with Islamic lifestyle. For example, as Unilever does with shampoo products for women with hijabs.
- *Use the country origin of the products*
  Some people care about where a product comes from and where the product is made, so does Muslim consumers. If the product is made in the Islamic country it shows a reputation that brings trust in the product to them
- *Stay true to the product value and messaging*
  A product that already has a strong value and position in the eyes of consumers globally, it needs to be maintained and carried on when it goes into the Muslim market. As has been done by big brand, Nike. Nike is now entered into the Muslim market by presenting the veil/*hijab* to exercise.
- *Watch out for new and growing Muslims categories*
  Several product and service categories have become common and widely introduced, like food products and restaurant. But there is still a category of products that have the potential to enter into the Muslim market such as hygiene, beauty and medicine products.
- *Capitalize on technological advantage and over solutions*
  Technology is a good opportunity to enter the Muslim market. With the internet and technology, it can provide solutions and convenience for the Muslim market to be more efficient and effective.

1.2 *Definition of halal food*

Halal means justified, whereas *haram* means forbidden. In Islam, all types of food and beverages are essentially *halal*, only few are forbidden. *Haram* food will become *halal* if in an emergency. Conversely, the *halal* food can be *haram* if consumed beyond the limit

Halal food and beverages can be defined as:

1. *Halal in its substance;* The substance means the source of food or drink itself. Basically, all food and beverages are *halal*, except for some of the following substances; Carcasses, blood and pork are explicitly forbidden in Islam. Furthermore, all the animals that died not through the process of slaughter of Islamic law is *haram*, equated with the carcass. Including animals that died in transport even if only briefly, may not be slaughtered and consumed by Muslims.
2. *Halal in the way to process it:* Food is *halal* but when it is processed in unlawful way, then it becomes *haram*. Unlawfully processing is:
   - An animal slaughter is not done by a Muslim, by not calling on Allah's behalf and not using a sharp knife.
   - Animal slaughter which is clearly intended or dedicated to idols (offerings).
   - Because the blood is forbidden, then in slaughter, the blood of the slaughtered animal must be exhausted, and the neck and respiratory veins must be broken off and should be done in a polite manner, using a sharp knife.
   - When *halal* meat is polluted by *haram* substances will also be *haram*. The definition of polluted here can be through mixed with *haram* ingredients, in the form of raw ingredients, spices or other auxiliary ingredients. It could also because no separate places and tools that is used to process the *halal* and *haram* food.
   - As for the fish both living in freshwater and living in sea are all *halal*, though without slaughter, including all types of animals that live in the water.
3. *Halal in the way of obtaining it:* This refers to how to get food and drink. Whether from deeds that are forbidden in Islam or not.
4. *Haram beverages:* All kinds of intoxicating beverages are forbidden. Including drinks contaminated by intoxicating substances or *haram* ingredients.
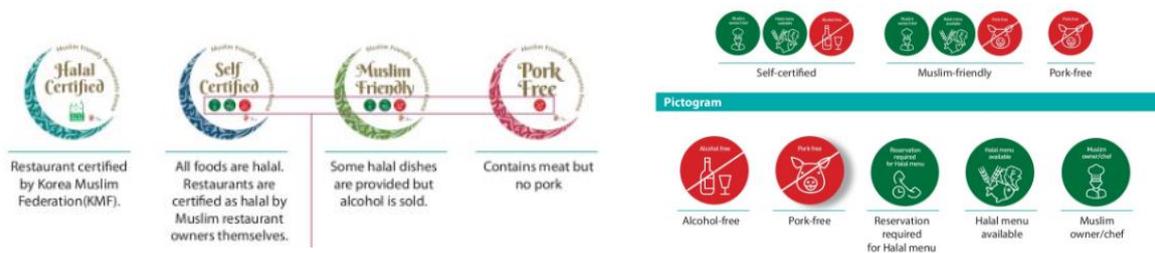
Figure 1. Signs of *halal* restaurant categories

2. Method

This research uses qualitative approach, with document analysis method. This qualitative approach aims to explain the phenomenon, so that qualitative approaches focus more on understanding and descriptive data, such as conversations, personal documents, notes from observations of specific socio-cultural behaviors or processes of society, these data are then analyzed and interpreted, then researcher can draw conclusions. The literature review as the analyzed data is obtained from the official website of the South Korean government, articles, books, journals and videos.

3. Results

In this study, the analysis is based on data obtained from several sources, namely the official website of Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), news, articles and video. The process is to see what kind of communication activities that South Korean government does in order to build an Islamic brand through food products in South Korea in accordance with the strategy expressed by Paul Temporal (2011). But not all strategies are implemented by KTO. One of them is because of the different types of products that are impossible to apply.

3.1. Ride on the reputation and positioning of the global brand

Utilization has done by maintaining South Korea's tourist attraction, one of which is the variety of Korean food but then given Islamic values such as the logo or symbols that indicate that the food can be consumed by Muslim tourists. The symbols are listed on the *halal* restaurant e-book guide in South Korea, released by the official KTO website in 2017.

There are four categories for *halal* guidance for restaurants in South Korea:
● *Halal Certified:* This category means that the restaurant has been *halal* certified by *Korean Muslim Federation* (KMF). KMF is an organization that can provide official certification of halal product in South Korea.
● *Self-Certified:* Restaurants in this category have not been officially certified, but the restaurant provides food that Muslims can consume. Such as, they do not provide pork menu, *halal* food menu, do not sell alcoholic beverages and the owner or chef are Muslims.
● *Muslim Friendly:* This category indicates that the restaurant provides some halal food, but still sells alcoholic beverages.
● *Pork Free:* This category indicates that the restaurant does not provide pork.

3.2. Develop new, Syariah-compliant products

Muslims do all activities in accordance with Islamic *syariah* that comes from Al-Quran and Hadith. As explained, food and drinks that can be consumed by Muslims have several conditions. Related to that, there are now some *halal* hotels in South Korea, which provides *halal* food. In addition, *halal* food and beverages are also widely available in restaurants in South Korea. Even at the end of 2016 for the first time KTO created an event regarding to *halal* restaurant promotion, named *Halal Restaurant Week*. *Halal Restaurant Week* was organized by the South Korean government to accommodate the Muslim traveler's need for *halal* food.

3.3. Set up a new Islamic business

Establishing a new Islamic business by Temporal can be interpreted by creating a new name that corresponds to a product addressed for a Muslim. In this case the South Korean government made a *Muslim Friendly Korea* campaign. The campaign contains *Muslim* words so it appears that the offer is aimed specifically at Muslim travelers, in terms of their *syariah* needs. It has been done as well to event that held by KTO, *Halal Restaurant Week*. *Halal* term is used regarding promote the *halal* tourism in South Korea.

3.4. Go for the luxury market

In the tourism industry, one of the luxury goods is hotel. Currently there are two five-star hotels in South Korea which is claimed as a *halal* hotel, named *Plaza Hotel* and *Lotte Hotel*. Both hotels provide *halal* food cooked by a special chef for *halal* food. In addition, luxury restaurants also begin to have halal certificates. This can be seen from the e-book of *halal* restaurant guidance in South Korea which was released by KTO.

3.5. Add more lifestyle Islamic-oriented products to the portfolio

To build an Islamic brand, appropriate communication is required that describes Islamic values. In this case the KTO made a video about South Korea's Muslim-friendly tour. In the video featuring Muslim tourists who are traveling, then find a place to worship, South Korean food restaurant with halal certification, along with waiters who are serving dishes wearing *hijab*.

Figure 2. *Halal* **sign in Korean restaurant**

Figure 3. A waiter in Korean restaurant wearing *hijab*

3.6. Stay true to the product values and messaging

Maintaining product value is important. Although South Korean government builds a brand for the Muslim market, the values of South Korean tourism remain as the identity of the country. As South Korean food continues to be a major selling point for tourists, but it is customized to provide a *halal* logo as a sign that the restaurant can be for Muslims.

3.7. Capitalize on technological advantage and offer solutions

South Korean government is also using technological developments by releasing a mobile phone application. Through official food agency, South Korean government launched *HalalKorea*. *HalalKorea* provides various information about *halal* food in South Korea. Includes *halal* restaurants and supermarket location. This application also comes with a barcode scanner sensor for food products so that tourists will be able to know whether the product already has halal certificate. In addition, this application can also contain information for Muslim tourists, such as prayer directions and prayer times.

Figure 6. *HalalKorea* **application**

4. Discussion

Based on the findings, South Korean government is doing Islamic branding as a communication strategy for promotion of Muslim-friendly tourism there. This is being done to gain the trust of Muslim tourists that South Korea is a friendly country towards Muslims, where there are plenty of access to Muslims in meeting with their *syariah*-compliant needs.

The highly visible communication promotion carried out by South Korean government through the KTO is using symbols relating to Islam. One of the main ones is the *halal* sign. *Halal* sign is one of the main communication strategies undertaken in building an Islamic branding. *Halal* sign is widely used in South Korea, such as in restaurants, groceries and beauty products. *Halal* sign is a sign for Muslims that the products can be consumed in accordance with Islamic law. But in South Korea there are some *halal* categories for restaurants or food products. Starting from the halal category that is certified by a special institution which means it has been thoroughly reviewed. But there are also some halal categories that are not certified. One of the categories of concern is *Pork Free* which means not providing pork. Not providing pork does not mean the restaurant becomes *halal* for Muslims. Many other factors that make a food become *haram* though not pork. For example, using beef or chicken that is not slaughtered in Islamic way. This indicates that the symbol used only to package the product to make it look Islamic. The symbol is also used as a shortcut for Muslim tourists can directly believe in the products offered.

Other that *halal* signs, other symbols are also being used, such as the attributes that used by actors in the South Korea tourism promotion video. South Korea tourism promotion video shows a waitress at a typical South Korean food restaurant that wears hijab. It is also a strategy to communicate that shows that the South Korean government wants to show that there is a commitment to what they are promoting to match the needs of the Muslim market as it mentioned by Temporal.

4. Conclusion

Conclusions of this research are:

1. *Muslim Friendly Korea* is an Islamic branding activity undertaken by South Korean government through KTO as a communication strategy for South Korean tourism promotion to increase tourist arrivals, especially Muslim tourists to the country.
2. South Korean government builds an Islamic image with more focus on food products. Such as developing *halal* restaurants and held an event, *"Halal Restaurant Week"*. And a mobile phone application was also made that can be used to scan barcode packaging products to show whether the product is *halal* or not.
3. Islamic branding by KTO tends to use Islamic symbols such as *halal* sign and attributes such as hijab in promotional material. These symbols become a shortcut for the KTO to target the Muslim market to believe that what is offered to them is in accordance with the Islam's law.
4. that KTO does not have a good understanding about Islam's law. *Halal* categories were created by South Korean government is seen to be used only as an external display to make the product look Islamic. Because in some categories, like *Muslim friendly* and *Pork Free* only highlight the use of pork and alcohol. As described, not only pork and alcohol alone that makes a food product becomes *haram* for Muslims. There are many other things that make food and beverages forbidden for Muslims.

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