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Mosque Tourism Satisfaction: A Comparative Study of Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia

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Abstract: Islamic tourism encompasses the exploration of Islamic history, culture, and religion. One form of Islamic travel is mosque tourism, which involves visiting mosques to appreciate their beauty, history, and culture. Mosque tourism can facilitate cultural exchange, economic growth, historical preservation, and promote respect and understanding between civilizations, leading to a higher level of mosque tourism satisfaction. Understanding the historical, aesthetic, architectural, religious, and cultural significance of a mosque, as well as its accessibility and tourist amenities, are essential components of mosque tourism. This type of tourism encourages intercultural harmony by offering individuals from diverse backgrounds the opportunity to comprehend and respect each other's cultures and religious beliefs. Nonetheless, the growing number of Muslim tourists also poses challenges to the travel industry's efforts to promote mosque tourism, which are explored in this comparative study of Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia. These nations have made significant efforts to promote mosque tourism.

Keywords: *Islamic tourism, mosque tourism, mosque tourism satisfaction.*

1. Introduction and Background

In today's globalized world where seeking experience has made traveling a part and parcel of everyday life, tourism has become a broad industry for many countries. Globally, Muslims were the second largest religious group with 1.8 billion or 24% of the world population, followed by other religions such as Hindus (15%) and Buddhists (7%) (Ketter, 2017). The greatest growth in number was experienced by Muslims among all other religious groups including Christians. In Islam, the mosque is not just the main place for Muslims to perform their religious activities, but also an institution for social gatherings. In Malaysia, the development of mosques in any district has increased from time to time which represents the socio-culture of Muslims in Malaysia. The mosque functions as a place for religious and learning activities as well as an education center. Mosque tourism can satisfy tourists through the experience of travelling far from hectic life.

In the Islamic tourism industry, the mosque becomes a 'concrete symbol' of Islam and significantly turns out to be a role model and symbol in promoting Islam to other nations and races. Until today, the mosque still stands up as a focal institution for the Muslim community, but the role of a large-built mosque is not fully exploited and maximally used to attract new and revisit tourists, and even local people (Aziz, Ibrahim, Jahnkassim & Abdullah, 2016). Moreover, the mosque only appeared as the symbol of 'architectural pride' of Muslim society and did not function to create an understanding of Islam (Aziz et al., 2016). If we notice, we can find that many mosques in Malaysia have forms and structures that are similar; most of them have the outer structure of big domes with minarets, the inner decorations, and other similar features, for instance, the design of Masjid Putra in Putrajaya (Othman, Yazid, Yunos & Ismail, 2015).

This scenario shows that mosque institutions in Malaysia are used for tourism purposes only and to receive foreign interest. Thus, this research aims to investigate the significant relationship between destination attributes and tourists' satisfaction with mosque destinations. The demand for Shariah-compliant goods and services has increased over the past 20 years, fueling the growth of the Islamic lifestyle sector. Many participants in the tourism industry have begun offering unique goods and services that were created and constructed in line with Islamic principles. This is to cater needs and desires of these tourists as Muslim tourism has grown in popularity and as well as awareness. Nevertheless, Islamic tourism is still a relatively new idea in both theory and practice. Islamic tourism and mosque tourism are related but distinct concepts. Islamic tourism refers to travel that is specifically focused on experiencing and learning about Islamic culture,

history, and faith.

It includes visiting Islamic historical sites, such as mosques, madrasahs, and tombs of Islamic scholars and holy figures, as well as experiencing Islamic customs and traditions, such as Ramadhan and Eid al-Fitr, and learning about Islamic art, calligraphy, and architecture. Mosque tourism, on the other hand, is a subset of Islamic tourism that specifically focuses on visiting and experiencing the beauty, history, and culture of the mosque. It includes visiting the mosque as a place of worship, to learn about architectural style and history, and to gain a deeper understanding of the Islamic faith. The rationale behind the practice of mosque tourism is multifaceted. The main reasons are to promote cultural understanding and awareness of Islamic culture, history, and faith. Through mosque tourism, visitors can gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Islamic culture and its rich history, as well as the architectural and artistic beauty of the mosque.

Another reason is to promote economic development in local communities. Mosque tourism can also bring in a significant amount of revenue from tourism-related activities, such as accommodation, transportation, and souvenir sales, creating jobs and income for residents. Additionally, mosque tourism can also play a role in preserving and conserving historical and cultural sites. As more people visit the mosque, it can help raise awareness and funding for their preservation maintenance. A mosque tourism framework refers to a set of guidelines and strategies for promoting and managing the tourism potential of a mosque. This can include developing tour packages and visitor information, promoting the cultural and historical significance of the mosque, and ensuring the preservation of the mosque's heritage. Furthermore, it may include measures to enhance the visitor experience, such as providing audio guides, interpretive displays, or guided tours.

Additionally, it may include measures to manage the impact of tourism on the mosque, such as controlling visitor numbers, managing access to certain areas, and providing appropriate facilities for tourists. Involvement and collaboration with local communities, tour operators and other stakeholders to ensure that the mosque’s heritage is preserved and promoted sustainably.

2. Literature Review

Nowadays, Islam is the world’s fastest-growing religion, and mosques have been built more than any other place of worship. Large, iconic, and architectural mosques serve as a hub for spiritual and religious activities for communities. Moreover, heritage features and designs, unique characteristics and accessibility make them a push and pull factor for a large scale of tourist visits (Toyib, 2009). The mosque is generally known as Masjid in the Arabic language, which is used in the Quran, and it means a place of prostration. In the 622 Century, the Prophet's Mosque in Medina was built after the immigration of Muslims from Mecca to Medina. Prophet Muhammad SAW himself had actively participated in the construction of the mosque which was called as Nabawi Mosque. From that moment, the mosque became the center of Islamic city and civilization as well as for political, religious, cultural, and social activities. However, when Muslim tourists travel for more than three consecutive days, the mosque is the place for them to perform their prayers.

This is clearly mentioned in the Quran: "O you who believed, when the adhan is called for the prayer on the day of Jumu'ah (Friday), then proceed to the remembrance of Allah and leave the trade. That is better for you if you only knew" [Al Jumu'ah, 62:9]. Apart from functioning as a place for worship, the mosque is a central event of the community, and it needs to follow certain criteria in terms of site planning and design. The ideal location of the mosque should be within a residential area that can be easily accessible by public transportation, its entrance needs to be visible from the street, have wide parking facilities and most importantly, it can be accessible by visitors or tourists. A great example of a 21st-century mosque in Arab countries that blends tradition with modernity is Sultan Ahmed Mosque popularly known as Blue Mosque in Istanbul, Turkey which was opened in 1616 and established as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985. This mosque is open to Muslims and non-Muslims who want to pay a visit and are amazed by the architectural view of Blue Mosque.

It allows Muslims to pray, offers seminars and lectures on religious topics as well and permits tourists to visit the mosque outside the prayer time. Tourists are also welcome to talk with the mosque tour guide on topics related to the mosque and Islam. Henderson (2003) suggested that a unique mosque with different values

could be considered a tourist attraction. A mosque or 'masjid' implied a vital function in Muslim societies from the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and served as a multifunctional institution for different (political, non-political, and social) reasons, including learning, maintaining justice, settling conflicts, rehabilitating prisoners, and performing marriages and leisure activities (Omer, 2010). In this vein, mosques were inextricably linked to the global advent of Islamic society, culture, and civilization, including Malaysia. Locally, mosques could be located in almost every town and district in each state. Following the current data from the Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) website (JAKIM, 2021), the total number of mosques in Malaysia is approximately 6,506.

In 2019, the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi recorded approximately 6.6 million tourists and worshippers (879,049 from India, 704,680 from China, 234,849 from Russia, and 193,234 from Germany). On another note, the Al Azar Mosque, Kutubiya, Suleiman Mosque, and Selimiye Mosque became salient examples of historical attractions and spiritual houses that appealed to multiple visitors. Although Malaysia has recently strived to be acknowledged as an Islamic and halal hub, most research on the local Islamic context was confined to halal food and hospitality in hotels. Hence, an examination of the Islamic offerings in Malaysia proved necessary to comprehend self-branding potential as an Islamic destination for Muslims. Many tangible and intangible Islamic aspects in Malaysia, including mosque and prayer facilities, halal food, Islamic stability, and national safety (Shafaie F., 2015) potentially induced Muslim tourists to visit the country. Essentially, mosques denoted sustainable constructions that were developed to serve Muslim and non-Muslim communities and residents.

As mosques implied sources of information and shelter for Muslim and non-Muslim individuals, promoting mosques while acknowledging the Quranic role facilitated non-Muslims to visit the symbolic buildings and comprehend Islam, Islamic rituals, and the followers of Islam (to eliminate the misinterpretation of Islam and Islamophobia). In this regard, mosque tourism is a strategic and valuable instrument to sustain Islamic tourism (Kessler, 2015). Malaysia encompasses many old and newly established and picturesque mosques nationwide with some listed as UNESCO World Heritage sites. The local architectural styles of Malaysian mosques reflected diversity following inspiration from magnificent mosques worldwide, traditional Malay architecture, and local cultures and patterns. Additionally, unique architectural influences symbolized architectural pride (some of the influences were oriental, colonial, colloquial, and Moorish). The National Heritage Department (NHD) under the Ministry of Tourism and Culture has executed substantial preservation work on specific historical mosques, such as Ihsaniah Iskandariah (Perak), Mulong (Kelantan), and Machap Lama (Melaka).

Notably, every mosque reflected distinct attributes that could be catalyzed to encourage mosque tourism under spiritual or religious tourism (Abdul Aziz, 2016). Presently, the local mosques encouraging mosque tourism witnessed an influx of visitors from various Western and Eastern countries. For example, recently established mosques, including Putra (Putrajaya) and Jamek (Kuala Lumpur) have recorded many tourists from South Korea and China who were inclined to discover the cultural heritage and take vacation selfies (to be posted on social media platforms). The influx reflected the potential for mosque tourism to establish a sound comprehension of Islam and Islamic culture by welcoming non-Muslims to visit mosques (Moghavemi S, 2020). Mosque tourism also demonstrated a novel tourism trend and a potential source of revenue. For example, mosque tourism could provide employment and induce goods and services demands (food and beverage, accommodation, transportation, entertainment, shopping, and tour guides).

Subsequently, the requirements would increase tourist expenses in Malaysia and benefit the local economy. In this vein, policymakers and stakeholders should emphasize the mosque tourism market. (Moghavemi S, 2020). As mosque tourism offered a possibility for mosques and the surrounding local communities to depict moderate and tolerant Islamic teachings practiced by Malaysian Muslims, the tourism might indicate a means of minimizing Islamophobia among non-Muslims for enhanced interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims. As such, Malaysian Muslims were required to conserve their culture and sustain and promote self-identities (Moghavemi S., 2020). The increasing number of Muslim tourists in Malaysia induced an assessment of local branding and marketing approaches as a favored Islamic destination. Although Malaysia portrayed the attributes of a worthy destination given the multicultural context, cuisine, and heritage, further improvement in Islamic tourism proved necessary (Shafaie F., 2015).

The criteria of historical mosque tourism refer to the standards and guidelines used to determine the historical significance of a mosque for tourism purposes. These are eight criteria which include factors such as [1] Age, [2] Architectural significance, [3] Cultural significance, [4] Religious significance, [5] Connection to important historical figures or events, [6] Uniqueness, [7] Preservation and [8] Authenticity.

[1] A historical mosque is often those have been in existence for a significant period, such as those that date back to the early days of Islam or those that were built during a particular historical period. [2] Mosques with unique architectural features or that are considered examples of traditional Islamic architecture may be considered historically significant. [3] Mosques that are closely tied to the cultural heritage of a particular community or region can be considered historically significant. [4] Mosques that have played an important role in the religious history of a particular community may be considered historically significant. [5] Mosques that have a connection to important historical figures or events that may be considered historically significant. [6] Mosques that have unique features or architectural design or is one of a kind regions. [7] Mosques that have been well-preserved and maintained over time can considered historically significant for tourism. And [8] mosques that retain original features and have minimal modern modifications which considered historically significant. The listed criteria are used to identify which mosques have the potential to be significant tourist destinations and prioritize the preservation and promotion of these historic sites.

The Necessity of Satisfying Tourists: Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world. Tourist satisfaction is very important for tourism businesses. This is because unsatisfied tourists are unlikely to return to visit. Since the rise of tourism websites and apps like TripAdvisor, Traveloka and others, it is easier for tourists to share their experience at their destination by giving feedback and ratings (Verain, 2015). These might influence the motivation of other tourists. If other tourists read about the experiences of unsatisfied tourists, it could affect and stop them from coming to that destination. Tourists' satisfaction is vital to successful destination marketing because it influences the choice of the destination, the purchasing of goods and services and the decision to revisit (Gok & Sayin, 2015). In the marketing literature, the satisfaction level is considered a key concept that guides the decisions of marketers, customers, and consumers. According to Devesa et al. (2010), significant tourist satisfaction can make marketing successful with education.

Therefore, tourism businesses need to fulfill the needs and desires of tourists. In addition, pull motivation is an important factor in predicting tourist behavior and destination choice (Chiang et al., 2015). Furthermore, research conducted by Hanifah (2018) regarding tourist satisfaction shows the results of the analysis that pull motivation can affect tourist satisfaction, but there are differences in the results of the analysis in Kalebos research (2016) which shows that natural tourist attraction factors have no significant and negative effect on satisfaction. Satisfaction is considered one of the main indicators of loyalty because satisfied people tend to revisit or buy back (Brandano et al., 2019). On the other hand, tourist motivation can affect their satisfaction (Alrawadieh et al., 2019). According to Shahijan et al. (2014), customer satisfaction is a customer response to the evaluation of the mismatch that is assumed between previous expectations and the actual performance of the product that is perceived after use.

According to Awan and Azhar (2014), customer satisfaction is the level of a person's feelings after comparing the performance that they sense compared to their expectations. Satisfaction is a psychological result of a process that occurs with the introduction of needs and ends with the consumer's experience with a product or service (Amin et al., 2014). Abror et al. (2019) explained that tourist satisfaction is a comparison between tourists' expectations regarding the destination and the results of the experience, which is only the result of a comparison between the previous image of the previous destination and what they saw, felt, and achieved in the destination. Yeo et al. (2016) assumed that satisfaction is not only cognitive but also emotional. This shows that tourists probably enjoy the trip if their expectations match the post-trip experience. If tourists feel that their expectations do not match reality, they will feel dissatisfied (Chookaew et al., 2015). Muslim tourists are tourists who obey the guidance of Almighty ALLAH and the Prophet Muhammad PBUH (Peace Be Upon Him) in traveling (Zawawi et al., 2017).

Primarily, Muslim tourists possibly consider determining tourist destinations that have facilities for worship and the ease of finding halal food while staying in tourist destinations (Bogan and Sarıısık, 2019). Several tourist attractions provide little mosques and prayer rooms for tourists. Not a few tourist attractions serve

non-halal food, such as containing pork and dogs also provide alcohol (Khan and Callanan, 2017). Many different definitions of satisfaction are used by different researchers. According to Ryan, (2016), satisfaction is seen as an analogy of need and performance. Moreover, tourists' satisfaction is related to the tourists' mental, and psychology compared to their physical state. Tourists can show their satisfaction when they visit their favorite destinations (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Pizam and his friend claimed that the satisfaction of each attribute in a tourism destination must be identified to investigate the satisfaction of the tourism destination. Many attributes could affect the tourist' satisfaction related to the destination such as transportation, accommodation, food and beverages services, entertainment services, the quality and price of the services, communication with the local community and tour operator.

This statement was supported by Voon & Lee, (2009) who highlighted that tourists' satisfaction with destination was determined by the following criteria: travel services, facilities, access, cleanliness, safety, and experience. Islamic attributes are one of the crucial factors in meeting the needs of Muslim tourists who travel to tourist attractions (Jia and Chaozhi, 2020). Furthermore, In Islam, Islamic tourists must visit various locations to praise the beauty, greatness and creation of Allah SWT based on the guidelines of the practice of the Quran, Islamic tourists must be friendly and generous toward tourists (Oktadiana et al., 2016). On the other hand, Najmaei et al. (2017) explained that Islamic attributes are factors that include Muslim needs such as providing halal food and beverages, complete worship facilities and other supporting facilities. Moreover, tourists who have relished Islamic attributes possibly feel satisfied and want to revisit these tourist attractions (Hassani and Moghavvemi, 2019).

Al-Ansi and Han (2019) emphasized that Muslim tourists are required to follow Islamic teachings which directly or indirectly have an impact on their decisions regarding the importance and opportunities of tourism. Furthermore, it can be assumed that religion affects the tourist destinations of Muslim tourists. Moreover, it is important to ensure that Islamic provisions in tourism services are fulfilled because this can deliver satisfaction for tourists. Battour (2018) revealed that Islamic Norm Practice, namely, religious facilities and halal food, does not have a significant effect on the satisfaction of Muslim tourists. Furthermore, Wingett and Turnbull (2017) explained that Islamic facilities and the availability of a room for prayer are essential facilities that must be available to establish the needs of Muslim tourists because they can worship while enjoying their vacation.

Kedah's Historical Mosque: Islam is believed to have been first introduced to the Kedah region by Arab and Indian traders in the 7th century. Over time, it gradually replaced the previous religious practices and became the dominant religion in the area. The first mosque in Kedah, Masjid Alor Malai, was built in the 14th century, in the city of Alor Setar. Alor Setar is the capital city of Kedah state, located in the northwest region of Peninsular Malaysia. The town has a rich history and is believed to have been founded in the early 18th century. Originally a small fishing village, and yet grew in importance as a trading center due to its strategic location on the banks of the Kedah River. With a population of around 600,000 people and is known for its history and culture. The town is an important center for agriculture, and it is also home to several historical and cultural sites such as Masjid Zahir and Balai Besar. Masjid Zahir also known as the Alor Setar Royal Mosque, was built in 1912 by the late Sultan Alauddin Sulaiman Shah and was officially opened in 1915. It is an important historical and cultural landmark in the state of Kedah.

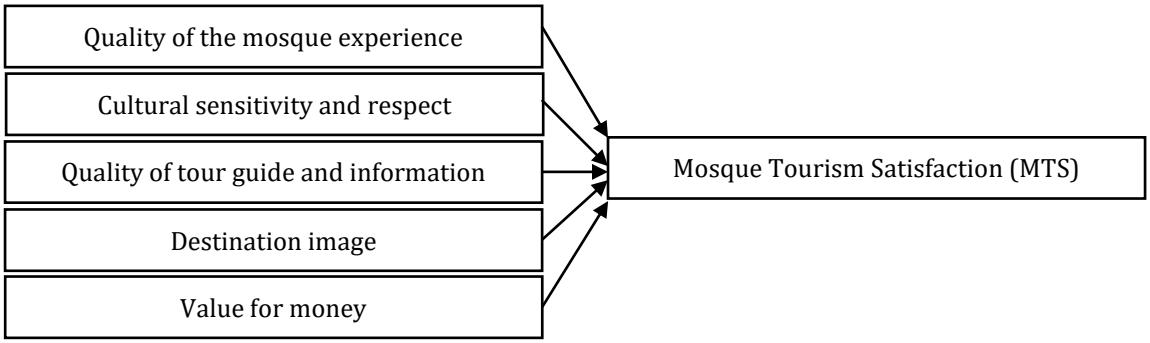
It is known for its unique architecture which combines elements of traditional Malay and Islamic design with Victorian Edwardian styles. The mosque is also known for its five main domes and two minarets and is considered one of the most beautiful mosques in Malaysia. Masjid Zahir potentially attracts visitors to the area, which can lead to increased revenue for local businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and transportation services. Besides that, Egresi et al. (2018) discovered that although locals generally welcome tourists visiting their mosque, the degree of support may vary depending on the residents' racial and ethnic background as well as the volume of visitors who are there. Additionally, it can also benefit the local community by providing jobs and income for guides, tour operators, and other service providers. Promoting cultural understanding and appreciation can be done through offering educational tours and cultural programs that allow visitors to learn about the history, architecture, and religious significance of the mosque. As well as the customs and traditions of the local community.

This can foster greater understanding and respect between different cultures and religions. According to a study by Abror et al. (2020), religion is a strong predictor of Muslim-friendly travel, customer involvement, and visitor pleasure. Hence, Maltio et al. (2019) assert that Islamic tourism and marketing strategy has a big impact on how satisfied and loyal visitors are. Furthermore, research findings by Bagri et al. (2015) also showed that while basic amenities like lodging, transportation, tourism infrastructure, and hygienic conditions at the destination are significant in evaluating satisfaction, attributes related to tourism products of a spiritual and cultural nature, atmosphere and climate, a variety of tourist activities, hospitality, and safety are significant factors in determining tourist satisfaction. Nonetheless, the Bazazo et al. (2017) study in Aqaba City in Jordan will aid in improving Islamic tourism management given that the coefficient of determination (R^2) for the study's endogenous components for visitor happiness and loyalty to their destination was 0.41 and 0.18, respectively.

The results of the Neal et al. (2008) study showed that the degree of joy or dissatisfaction experienced by travelers during various travel-related stages affects their overall satisfaction with travel and tourism services. In addition, the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) plays a role in teaching current internal tour guides or coordinators, so they have a complete understanding of mosque tourism in Malaysia. Besides that, ITC also works to promote Islamic tourism through education, capacity building, research, industry development, branding, and technical and soft skills training in narrative and digital technologies.

3. The Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual of Mosque Tourism Satisfaction (MTS)



The measurement of mosque tourism satisfaction (MTS) by local or international tourists can be done through various methods such as surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, or interviews. Some specific factors that can be considered when measuring mosque tourism satisfaction by tourists include:

The quality of the mosque experience can be covered into seven criteria. This can include the cleanliness, safety, and accessibility of the mosque, as well as the quality of the educational and cultural program offered. It can be described in several factors such as [1] the cleanliness and maintenance such as upkeep of the mosque, including the interior and exterior spaces, as well as the availability of restrooms and amenities. [2] Safety and accessibility, this may include the safety of the mosque and surrounding area, as well as the ease of access for visitors, including those with disabilities. [3] A cultural and educational program that includes the quality and relevance of educational and cultural programs offered to visitors, such as guided tours, exhibitions, and cultural events.

[4] Historical and architectural significance, this includes the historical and architectural significance of the mosque and its impact on the local community and culture. [5] Respect for cultural and religious norms covers the extent to which visitors felt that the mosque and its staff respected their culture and religion, and the level of understanding they gained about the local community and its traditions through their visit to the mosque. [6] The availability of information and resources, it is includes the availability of the information and resources, such as brochures, maps, and guides, as well as the quality of the information provided about the mosque and its history. The last aspect is [7] customer service, which includes the quality of customer service provided by mosque staff, including the friendliness, helpfulness, and professionalism of the staff.

Cultural sensitivity and respect are the extent to which tourist felt that the mosque and its staff respected their culture and religion, and the level of understanding they gained about the local community and its traditions through their visit to the mosque. Furthermore, it can be measured through [1] understanding and appreciation of cultural norms [2] sensitive handling of religious artifacts and practices with respect and sensitivity including the handling of religious books, clothing, and other items. [3] Appropriate attire and behavior that includes the extent to which tourists felt that they were able to dress appropriately and observe the cultural and religious norms of the local community while visiting the mosque. [4] Support for cultural and religious events, this includes the support provided by the mosque and its staff for cultural and religious events, such as religious holidays and cultural festivals and finally, [5] inclusiveness and diversity that includes the inclusiveness and diversity of the mosque and its staff, including the welcoming and respectful treatment of visitors from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds.

Quality of tour guides and information focuses on [1] knowledge and professionalism of tour guides on level of knowledge and professionalism of tour guides, including their ability to answer questions and provide insights into the history, culture, and traditions of the local community and the mosque. The [2] relevance and accuracy of information, includes the relevance and accuracy of the information provided by the tour guides, including the historical and cultural significance of the mosque and its artifacts as well as the cultural and religious practices of the local community. [3] Availability of resources such as brochures, maps, and guides, to enhance the tourist experience and provide additional information about the mosque and its history. [4] Personalization of the tour includes the level of personalization of the tour, including the ability of the tour guide to tailor the experience to the interests and needs of the tourist group. [5] Effective communication skills include the ability to engage and connect with the tourist, answer questions, and provide a comprehensive and engaging tour experience.

Destination image can be described as the mental representation that individuals have of a specific tourist destination, which is influenced by a variety of factors such as past experiences, media exposure, word of mouth, and marketing efforts. In the context of mosque tourism, destination image can be described in five main ways including [1] the perceived safety and security of the mosque and its surrounding area, as well as the level of trust in local authorities and their ability to provide a secure environment for tourists. [2] cultural and historical significance of the mosque and its impact on the local community and culture, as well as the extent to which tourist feel that they have gained an understanding and appreciation of the local culture and traditions through their visit to the mosque. [3] The level of accessibility and infrastructure of the mosque and its surrounding area, including the ease of transport, the availability of accommodation and amenities, and the overall quality of the tourist experience.

[4] Marketing and promotion efforts of the mosque and its surrounding area, including the availability of information about the mosque and its history, as well as the quality and relevance of the marketing material and resources. [5] Word of mouth and the reputation of the mosque and its surrounding area is based on the experience and opinions of previous tourists and the local community, as well as the extent to which word of mouth and online reviews have impacted the overall destination image. Overall, this will create a positive and appealing image of the mosque as a tourist destination, which can help to attract more visitors and enhance the overall mosque tourism experience.

Value for money is the state of mosque tourism and its financial value can undoubtedly impact how happy visitors are. Some possible connections between the two elements, when evaluating the value for money of their mosque tourism experience, visitors may consider elements like entry prices, tour fees, accessibility, and the quality of services (such as guides, audio tours, etc.). Furthermore, satisfaction depends on personal expectations, past knowledge, interests, and personal preferences, tourists may express varying degrees of satisfaction. Aspects such as cleanliness, maintenance, security, historical relevance, architectural characteristics, and cultural authenticity may also impact mosque tourists' happiness. On the effect of the interaction, there may be a complex relationship between satisfaction and value for the money.

For instance, visitors who feel they are getting less for their money may be less satisfied, whereas visitors who feel they are getting more for their money may be more satisfied. Tourists with high expectations, however, could feel less content even if they think they are getting a lot for their money, whereas those with

low expectations might feel happier even if they think they are getting little for their money. To identify areas for improvement, such as providing more affordable options, enhancing the quality of services, facilitating better access to information, and preserving the authenticity and cultural significance of the mosque, mosque tourism operators and policymakers may use data on tourists' perceptions of value for money and satisfaction. Overall, the state of mosque tourism and its financial worth might influence how satisfied mosque tourists are, but the relationship between these aspects can change based on personal and environmental circumstances.

4. MTS in Malaysia vs. Indonesia and Thailand

Information on Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia's mosque tourism in general, the majority-Muslim nations of Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia all have a rich cultural and architectural history that includes stunning mosques (Adriani et al., 2022). In these nations, mosque tourism has grown in popularity and is drawing tourists from all over the world. The famous Masjid Putra, Masjid Jamek, and Masjid Sultan Abu Bakar are just a few of Malaysia's exquisite mosques. One of the largest Islamic art museums in Southeast Asia, the Islamic Arts Museum is near the National Mosque Malaysia. The mosque tourism sector in Malaysia has been actively promoted, and travelers have generally expressed high levels of pleasure with their visits.

Figure 2: Famous Mosque in Malaysia

Masjid Putra

Masjid Jamek

Masjid Sultan Abu Bakar

Moreover, Thailand has a long Islamic history and is home to numerous gorgeous mosques, such as the Masjid Yala, Masjid Nurul Iman, and Masjid Darulmakmur. The mosque tourist sector in Thailand is less developed than it is in Malaysia, therefore there may be fewer options for travellers to choose from. Yet, tourists who come to Thailand to see its mosques typically express a high level of pleasure with their trips. The largest Muslim population in the world resides in Indonesia, where tourists may find a wide variety of mosques. The Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta, which has space for up to 200,000 worshippers, is the most well-known mosque in Indonesia (Galuh, 2021).

Figure 3: Gorgeous Mosque in Thailand

Masjid Yala

Other well-known mosques in the nation include Masjid Agung Demak, Masjid Raya Medan, and Masjid Agung Semarang. Due to Indonesia's poor transportation and infrastructure, visitors to its mosques may face greater difficulties. Visitors who have visited Indonesia's mosques, however, typically express a high level of satisfaction with their trips. In conclusion, although each nation has its special charms and difficulties,

travellers who visit mosques in Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia often express high levels of satisfaction with their experiences (Understanding Muslim-friendly Tourism, 2021).

Figure 4: Well-known Mosque in Indonesia

Masjid Agung Demak

Masjid Raya Medan

Masjid Agung Semarang

Research Discussion: A total of 4,332,722 tourist arrivals were locally recorded in 2020 (www.tourism.gov.my). Notably, Asian nations were ranked as the top contributors to tourist arrivals in Malaysia with 2,868,359 visitors (67.8%). In this vein, mosques proved to be attractive tourist destinations (although the travel purpose did not involve religion), hence affirming the Malaysian mosque appeal and attractiveness and the need to promote halal tourism. Given the financial downturn caused by COVID-19, mosque tourism denoted a novel trend that potentially created work opportunities. For example, the advent of mosque tourism could induce goods and service-oriented demands (food and beverage, lodging, transportation, entertainment, shopping, and tour guides) that increased tourists' local expenses and significantly benefitted the Malaysian economy. Essentially, mosque tourism encompassed Muslim and non-Muslim tourists who visited picturesque and historical mosques with exquisite architecture as tourist attractions while travelling (al Muhsin & Ahmad, 2020). As such, it was deemed crucial for policymakers and stakeholders to emphasize the mosque tourism market. As mosque tourism encompassed halal tourism (one of the nationally supported products), mosque tourism development perceivably corresponded to government initiatives.

In this vein, halal or Muslim-friendly tourism denoted a novel notion in tourism that facilitated novel and exciting possibilities for improved financial advancement. Specifically, 'halal' implied shariah compliance and human well-being. With mosque tourism as one of the most pertinent areas under halal tourism, the rising number of tourists in Muslim-majority populated nations depicted an emerging trend. Defining and outlining the mosque tourism concept (one of the most famous tourist activities central to Islamic tourism) should emphasize the sustainable advancement of novel tourist patterns. Additionally, identifying shariah and legal concerns under mosque tourism for optimal roles and functions as a Malaysian tourism destination and tourists' requirements and satisfaction with mosque conditions and management proved essential. As such, it was deemed crucial to identify the appropriateness of the laws governing mosque management and tourists. A clear and absolute legal tool proved necessary to safeguard stakeholders' rights in mosque tourism.

5. Research Suggestion

Following the COVID-19 epidemic, it is urgently necessary to look into and improve mosque tourism in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand to guarantee visitor happiness and promote sustainability using virtual reality (VR) technology. Future research ideas after COVID-19 includes, [1] Assess the changing expectations and levels of satisfaction of visitors visiting mosques in the post-COVID-19 era while considering safety concerns and shifting travel habits (Akhtar et al., 2021), [2] Examine how virtual reality (VR) technology may be integrated with mosque tourism to improve visitor experiences and give them immersive, secure options for exploring (Akhtar et al., 2021), [3] Examine how mosque tourism might help achieve SDG-13 by lowering carbon footprints through environmentally friendly actions and transportation choices (Gökbulut Özdemir & Özdemir, 2023), [4] Analysis of mosque tourism's contribution to KEGA-12's support of local economies, the promotion of sustainable practices, and the promotion of socioeconomic development in the area (Gökbulut

Özdemir & Özdemir, 2023), [5] Explore methods to integrate mosque tourism with SDG-13 and KEGA-12 by preserving cultural traditions, indigenous ways of life, and environmental protection initiatives (Trupp & Dolezal, 2020).

It is crucial to conduct research on mosque tourism, visitor satisfaction, and the post-COVID-19 era in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand with an emphasis on virtual reality experiences and their compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-13: Climate Action and KEGA-12: Green Economy). Future thorough research must focus on the [1] Assessment of Post-COVID-19 impact, [2] Virtual Reality integration, [3] Carbon Footprint reduction, [4] Green Economy initiatives, [5] Tourist satisfaction, [6] Cultural preservation, [7] Local Community engagement, [8] Technology adoption, [9] Policy frameworks, and [10] Cross-country Comparative studies.

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