

Savor The Halal Experience: Hospitality Meets Concept Restaurant Dining

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Abstract

This study investigates concept Restaurant intentions among urban Muslim millennials. Customers are enthusiastic about Halal Concept Restaurant and expect it to enhance their dining experience.

Purpose: They are drawn to concept restaurants because they find it to be hype and enjoyable. This study provides insight for Muslim Friendly Tourism Hospitality (MFTH) in dining experiences at concept restaurants that are compatible with their beliefs in religion.

Design/methodology/approach: Statistical Software Suite (SPSS) is used to quantitatively examine predictors of intention based on an extended Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Data for the survey were collected from 130 local travelers from Malaysia who are among the urban Muslim millennial in urban areas in Klang Valley.

Findings: Results show positive relationship between the predictors of intention which are spiritual intelligence ($t\text{-value}=0.015$), spiritual congruence ($t\text{-value}=0.029$) and perceived price ($t\text{-value}=0.00$) towards visit intention to concept restaurant outlet. While predictors of Halal food and beverages and facilities and physical environment show negative relationship with the $t\text{-value} > 0.05$.

Research limitations/implications: The study is limited to a specific demographic: urban Muslim millennials in Klang Valley, Malaysia. This restricts the generalizability of the findings to other regions, age groups, or religious backgrounds.

Practical implications: Restaurant operators and tourism stakeholders can tailor their offerings to better align with the spiritual and pricing expectations of urban Muslim millennials.

Originality/value: It bridges the gap between religious values and modern lifestyle preferences, offering a unique perspective on how faith and trendiness intersect consumer decision making.

Keywords: Concept Restaurant, Millennial, Dining Experience, Visit Intention, Tourism and Hospitality

Introduction

The rapid growth of concept restaurants, particularly in urban hubs like Klang Valley, is caused by a mix of cultural, economic, and generational changes. The rise of concept restaurants is being driven by the demand of millennials, which are no longer just about the menu but also about the restaurant's identity. These generations seek out experiential dining, not just food. Restaurants become viral destinations due to Instagrammable dishes and TikTok-worthy interiors (Che mohd hashim, 2024). The use of aesthetic appeal is now a marketing strategy. Additionally, Malaysia's multicultural background encourages the creation of edgy culinary

combinations, such as nasi lemak tacos or matcha tiramisu with maneki neko flair Lee (2017). Urban diners are increasingly seeking meaningful experiences. Personal values, such as halal integrity, sustainability, or spiritual wellness, are reflected in concepts that resonate deeply.

Various factors are responsible for the rapid growth of concept restaurants in urban areas such as Klang Valley, Malaysia. Customers are drawn to themed restaurants by their unique concepts and decor, which offer new dining experiences, but the sustainability of these establishments is challenged by financial, marketing, and operational issues (Farah et al., 2021). According to Latif (2020), Malaysian restaurants' diverse workforce, including foreign workers, has an impact on teamwork performance and requires effective management of cultural diversity. The importance of customer satisfaction in revisiting intentions, attachment, and word-of-mouth for new restaurants across different segments can be attributed to its importance (Sanghyeop et al., 2020). Raja & Isa (2020) find that Malay restaurants face long-term challenges in the industry despite their status as a majority ethnic group. Restaurants have the chance to capitalize on Malaysia's unique multi-ethnic culinary offerings due to the growth of gastronomy tourism. Meaning most of the restaurants in today's market in Malaysia are owned by non-Muslims. Most Malaysian citizens are Malays, who are also Muslim. Are they individuals aware of halal food ingredients? Malaysia's majority Muslim population has expressed concerns about halal issues due to the rapid growth of concept restaurants in urban areas, such as Klang Valley.

The multicultural mix of Malaysian food culture often leads to food choices that are influenced by ethnic, cultural, and spiritual considerations (Tan & Tan, 2023; Raymond & Lee, 2017). According to research, halal principles and their significance in food selection are becoming more widely known by both Muslim and non-Muslim consumers in Malaysia (Muharis et al., 2021; Rezai et al., 2010). Halal-certified restaurants and authentic heritage food experiences are highly preferred by Muslim tourists (Siti et al., 2014). The findings indicate that halal considerations have a significant impact on the choice of restaurants for local Muslim consumers in Malaysia's diverse culinary landscape.

Background of study

Numerous Muslims view dining not just as a physical act, but as a reflection of their values, identity, and connection to God because of their spirituality (Renard, 2023). The most immediate concern is whether the food is allowed to be eaten in accordance with Islamic law. It is not solely about ingredients, but also about ethical sourcing, humane treatment of animals, and proper preparation. When dining is aligned with divine guidelines, it becomes an act of worship. Muslims commonly begin their meals with "Bismillah" and end them with "Alhamdulillah" to acknowledge Allah's praise. Selecting a restaurant that upholds these practices through its ambiance, menu, or services can enhance spiritual mindfulness (Che Mohd Hashim et al., 2024). It is a sacred tradition to share meals. Eating together was considered a source of blessings and unity by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Restaurants that encourage communal dining or family-friendly settings are more appealing to Muslim diners. Besides, our surroundings can have a profound effect on how we feel, think, and behave, and environmental psychology beautifully illustrates this (Fungladda, 2025). Sensory cues like ambient lighting, background noise, temperature, scent, and spatial layout are not just details; they are powerful forces. Thus, this study is to test two factors of spiritual values which are spiritual intelligence and spiritual congruence.

Literature Review

The literature, based on social psychology theories associated with the customer's intention to visit Halal restaurant, has been critically reviewed as it acts as an initial frame of reference leading towards the development of a conceptual model and a working hypothesis as the foundation for the construction of this study.

The study focuses on the development of Halal tourism worldwide, with a particular emphasis on countries with Muslim populations like Malaysia. The enhancement of Muslim-friendly travel environments has been achieved in Muslim-majority countries by increasing Halal-certified restaurants and Shariah-compliant hotels (Singgalen, 2024). There has been a rise in awareness and concern for the needs of local Muslim tourists with a focus on achieving sustainability in mutually beneficial ways (Aman et al., 2019).

Spiritual Intelligence

There are many Muslims who are looking for restaurants that reflect their personal values, modesty, sustainability, or spiritual wellness. It can be more meaningful to have a restaurant concept that encourages gratitude, ethical consumption, or even spiritual aesthetics (like Quranic calligraphy or calming design). Muslims are wary of cross-contamination, hidden ingredients, and even the vibe of the place, aside from pork and alcohol. Spiritually conscious diners may steer clear of places that feel indulgent, excessive, or disconnected from their faith (Che Mohd Hashim, 2024). Eating is connected to spiritual intelligence states. A dining experience that is spiritually aligned, calm, respectful, and clean can be elevated to one of reflection and gratitude. The connection between eating behaviors and spiritual well-being has been suggested by research. The correlation between lower levels of spiritual well-being and higher levels of emotional eating in college women has been found in studies (Hawks et al., 2003). According to Kristeller and Jordan (2018) mindfulness-based eating awareness training can enhance spiritual well-being, improve eating regulation, and increase mindfulness.

Spiritual congruence

Being present and connected with food can be a spiritual practice that nourishes both body and soul (Santana et al., 2025). According to Sodhi (2016), spirituality has been linked to lower stress levels, better health outcomes, and improved psychological and physical functioning. Integrating spiritual and emotional aspects into eating practices could lead to more holistic approaches to nutrition and overall well-being, potentially offering new strategies for addressing issues like obesity and eating disorders, as suggested by these findings.

Halal Food and beverages

Halal dining in Malaysia is more than just food; it involves telling a story through cuisine. Halal food and beverages are items that are allowed for consumption in Islamic law, as stated in the Quran and Hadith. The term halal itself means 'lawful' or 'permitted' in Arabic. Only when slaughtered according to Islamic guidelines (known as dhabihah) is it permissible to include meat from animals such as cows, chickens, and sheep. Plant-based foods, grains, fruits, vegetables, and dairy are acceptable if they are not contaminated with haram (forbidden) substances. Halal certified kitchens frequently have separate tools and prep areas. The preparation and handling should not involve the contamination of utensils and surfaces by harmful items. Halal certification is a necessity for Muslim diners, not just a preference. The products labeled as halal must be verified by recognized halal certification bodies. Compliance with sourcing, processing, and hygiene standards is guaranteed through certification.

Facilities and physical environment

Some studies (Xiong & Chia, 2024; Kamal, 2020; Yan et al., 2017) the study explores the evolution of Halal tourism, which includes the establishment of Halal-certified restaurants, hotels, and prayer facilities in Muslim-majority nations. The purpose is to explore the advancement of Halal tourism globally, highlighting developments in Muslim nations, and aims to spur more research to enhance the comprehensiveness of Halal tourism worldwide.

Perceived price

The price perceived is the sum customers feel they are paying for a product or service, which can be different from the actual cost. Based on their income, past experiences, or brand associations, customers can perceive a price as cheap, fair, or expensive. Consumer decision making is greatly influenced by the perceived price. Customers are more likely to purchase if they believe they are getting good value even at a higher price. The perceived price can have a significant impact on an individual's decision to dine at a particular restaurant, particularly when it is linked to their expectations of value, fairness, and experience. Diners are more inclined to dine in when they perceive that the price reflects the quality of food, ambience, and service. This is particularly true for concept restaurants where the experience is more important than the meal.

Visit intention

The intention to visit a halal restaurant refers to a consumer's conscious plan or willingness to dine at a restaurant that complies with Islamic dietary laws. Consumer psychology and tourism studies frequently use behavioral constructs to predict actual dining behavior. Internal factors such as spiritual values, perceived benefits, and personal beliefs can influence the person's motivational drive. Determines how likely a person is to follow their intention, like choosing a halal-certified restaurant over others. For Muslim consumers, visiting is often rooted in the need to fulfill religious obligations. Confidence and intention are strengthened by the presence of credible halal certification. Emotional connection and intention are increased when the restaurant's offerings align with a diner's spiritual identity.

Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) developed by Ajzen has been modified in this study (1991). This study examines the theory of planned behavior models in concept restaurant outlets, which explains the factors that determine the customer's intention to visit intention to concept restaurant outlet. The model TPB can be used as a general model to explain customers' intentions when choosing to dine in to the concept restaurant outlet.

This study adds a level of knowledge or awareness and spiritual factors, price, Halal food and facilities to the theory of planned behavior model. Figure 1 shows the framework of TPB. Below is the presentation of the theoretical framework used in this study.

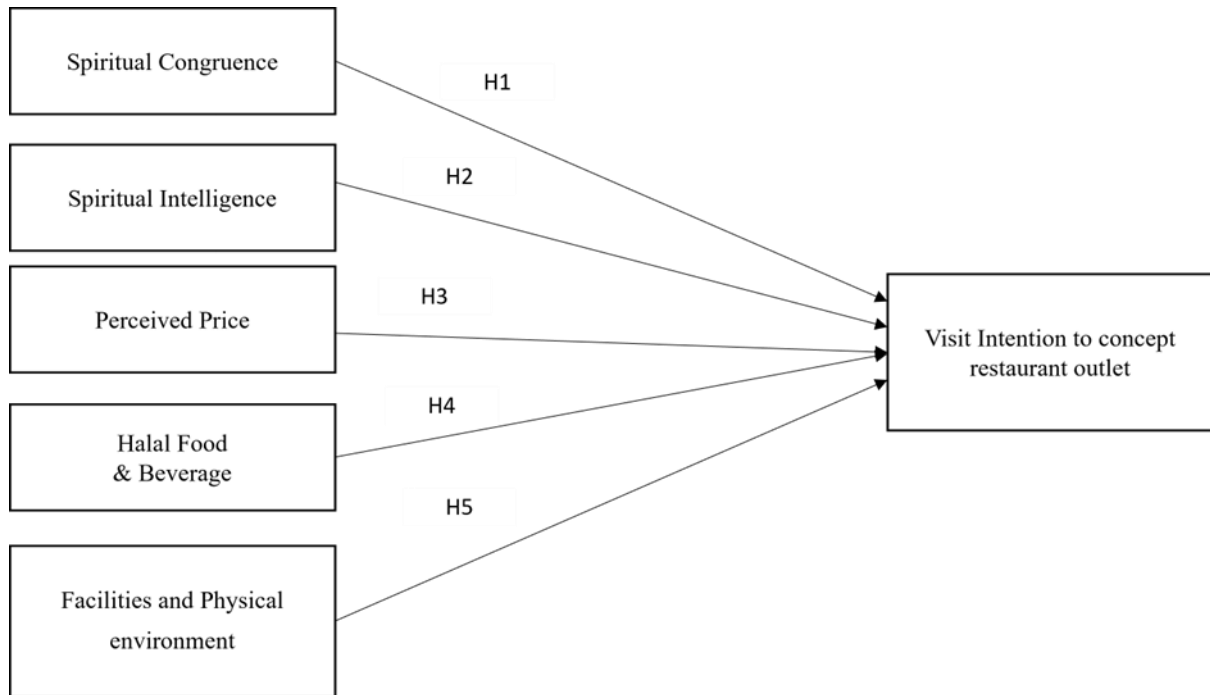


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

This study employed a literature review and a theoretical framework to develop the following hypothesis.

H1: There is a positive relationship between SQ towards visit's intention in choosing a concept restaurant outlet to dine in.

H2: There is a positive relationship between SC towards visit's intention in choosing a concept restaurant outlet to dine in.

H3: There is a positive relationship between PP towards visit's intention in choosing a concept restaurant outlet to dine in.

H4: There is a positive relationship between HFB towards visit's intention in choosing a concept restaurant outlet to dine in.

H5: There is a positive relationship between FPE towards visit's intention in choosing a concept restaurant outlet to dine in.

H6: There is a positive relationship predictor of intention (SQ, SC, PP, HFB, FPE) towards visit's intention to concept restaurant outlet to dine in.

Method

The Urban Muslim millennials have been identified as the research population for this research. Therefore, this research aims to target the primary target population of local tourists in the Klang Valley area, which may include those who are now working and those who are self-employed. Non-probability sampling (convenience sampling) was employed by researchers in this study, which is appropriate for studies with large populations. Additionally, this approach is suitable for rapidly and efficiently analysing data. In addition, the convenience sampling enables researchers to obtain samples more easily and select respondents from the sample set without bias. Therefore, for this research, based on Boas et al. (2020) the researcher has developed online questionnaires using Google Forms that have been distributed on social media and other internet tools to the respective respondents.

The dependent variable in this study is visitors' intention to choose a concept restaurant outlet. Spiritual intelligence, spiritual congruence, perceived price, Halal food and beverages, and finally, the restaurant's facilities and physical environment are the independent variables. The authors have validated the variables that were adopted from previous research. Furthermore, the questionnaires contain seven variables. There are two variables adopted by one author, Jihan & Musa (2017), which are spiritual intelligence and spiritual congruence. Meanwhile, the questionnaire for perceived price was adopted by Eid & El-Gohary (2015) and Ryu & Han (2010). Followed by the halal food & beverages adopted from Albattat et al., (2018), lastly, predictor of facilities and physical environment was adopted from Battour et al., (2014, 2017); Eid & El-Gohary (2015) and Oh (1999). The operational definition encompasses the questions used in the survey. Previous validated instruments were used to determine measurement variables in this study.

Data Analysis

Several statistical tools will be used to analyze the raw data obtained in this study. Quantitative data analysis involves using SPSS software version 18.0 to utilize statistical tools and interpret the results. The aim is to evaluate the impact of independent variables on the local tourists to decide to dine in to the concept restaurant outlet. To analyse collected data, descriptive statistical analysis methods, reliability tests, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis were employed in this study. The data was later analysed, and the hypothesis was tested. Descriptive statistical transformation is the process of transforming data into a format that facilitates researchers' understanding and interpretation. The variable was organized, summarized, and presented in a common way (Zikmund, 2003). To summarize the information about the population or sample in this study, descriptive analysis was conducted. Raw data was converted into information that describes various factors in a situation. The mean score and standard deviation of the collected data were presented through descriptive analysis. The standard deviation can be used to explain the spread or variability of the sample values from the mean (Hair et al., 2006). If the average value is small, a sample distribution of numbers will be very close to the mean.

While Cronbach's Alpha is the most used measure of scale reliability. The reliability coefficient and the correlation between items are indicated (Sekaran, 2003). The correlation coefficient for Cronbach's Alpha can be described as the range of 0 to 1. Additionally, according to Sekaran (2003) the closer the coefficient is to 1, the more favorable the outcomes. For exploratory studies (Nunnally, 1978), reliability levels between 0.50 and 0.60 are sufficient, while those above 0.80 are good (Sekaran, 2003). Having Cronbach's Alpha values closer to 1 can lead to improved internal consistency and reliability. The strength and relationships between variables are measured by Pearson correlation, which is an important statistical method (Hair et al., 2009). The purpose of correlation analysis in this research is to identify the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

Furthermore, this analysis is employed to test Hypothesis H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 that were examined in this study. Veal (2005) states that if the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) is above 1.0, there is a positive correlation between the two variables. The negative (-) value being 1.0 indicates that there is a negative correlation between the two variables. Despite the correlation coefficient indicating zero, there is no correlation between two variables. If the correlation coefficient is between 0 and 1.0, there are some correlation coefficients that show a negative relationship between two variables. The effect of independent variables on dependent variables

was determined through multiple regression analyses. Furthermore, this analysis assists in comprehending the extent to which the independent variables are responsible for explaining the variance in the dependent variable.

Findings

The reliability test for each construct in this study is shown in Table 1. The results for all constructs in this study fall within the range of 0.747 and 0.873. This study's results are considered good and acceptable. The reliability test involved five constructs, SQ, SC, PP, HFB, FPE, and intention. Good results are considered, with those in the range of 0.70 acceptable, and those below 0.60 considered poor (Cavana et al., 2001).

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

| Variables | Items | Crobach's Alpha |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-----------------|
| Spiritual intelligence | 10 | .873 |
| Spiritual congruence | 8 | .853 |
| Facilities and physical environment | 11 | .774 |
| Halal Food & Beverages | 6 | .792 |
| Perceived Price | 5 | .747 |
| Visit Intention | 5 | .865 |

Table 2: Multiple Regressions Analysis

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|-------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | .919 | .469 | | 1.958 | .052 |
| | Spiritual intelligence | .417 | .088 | .415 | 4.742 | .000 |
| | Spiritual congruence | .189 | .086 | .206 | 2.207 | .029 |
| | Facilities and physical environment | -.095 | .107 | -.081 | -.890 | .375 |
| | Halal food & beverages | .041 | .101 | .035 | .407 | .068 |
| | Perceived Price | .234 | .095 | .197 | 2.471 | .015 |

01(significant), $R^2 = 0.422$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.398$, F statistic = 18.087, Sig. = 0.000

This study used multiple regression analysis to examine the factors that influenced urban Muslim millennials' intention to go to a concept restaurant outlet and to prove Hypothesis H6. The results of the analysis of multiple regressions are presented in Table 2. Multiple regression revealed that R square was 0.422, adjusted R square was 0.398, and F-ratio was 18.087. The R square in this result indicates that the variation in the independent variables accounts for 32.9% of the variance in the dependent variable. The variables of spiritual intelligence, spiritual congruence, perceived price, halal food and beverages, facilities, and physical environment were significant in explaining 42.2% of the variance in visit intention behavior on restaurant outlets. However, another 57.8% can be explained by other variables. The regression model reaches statistical significance when the p value is less than 0.01. The analysis revealed that spiritual variables like SQ ($b=0.415$, $p=0.001$) and SC ($b=0.206$, $p=0.001$) play a significant role in local tourists' intent to go to a concept restaurant outlet.

Besides, the results also show a significant effect between Halal food and beverages on local tourists' intention to go to a concept restaurant outlet ($b=0.035$, $p<0.01$). The same result was observed with perceived price, which showed a significant effect ($b=0.149$, $p<0.01$). In contrast, there is no significant effect on the intention of local tourists to choose a concept restaurant based on facilities and physical environment ($b=-0.081$, $p=0.375$). The coefficients that were standard in this study were 0.415(SQ), 0.206(SC), 0.035(HFB), 0.149(PP), and -0.081(FPE). The findings indicate that SQ had the highest beta value among the five independent variables at 0.415. Spiritual intelligence is the most influential factor that affects local tourists' intention to go to concept restaurant outlets in this study.

Table 3: Pearson Correlations

| | | Spiritual.i n score | Spiritual.co ng Score | Facilities_ Score | HalalFood Score | Perceived Price_Sco re | VisitInteni on Score |
|---|-----------------|------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Spiritual Intelligence | Pearson | 1 | .433** | .358** | .340** | .376** | .425** |
| | Correlation | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 |
| Spiritual congruence | Pearson | .433** | 1 | .450** | .206* | .578** | .502** |
| | Correlation | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | | .000 | .019 | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 |
| Facilities and Physical environment | Pearson | .358** | .450** | 1 | .563** | .334** | .240** |
| | Correlation | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | | .000 | .000 | .006 |
| | N | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 |
| Halal F&B | Pearson | .340** | .206* | .563** | 1 | .334** | .238** |
| | Correlation | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .019 | .000 | | .000 | .006 |
| | N | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 |
| Perceived Price | Pearson | .376** | .578** | .334** | .334** | 1 | .593** |
| | Correlation | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | | .000 |
| | N | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 |
| Visit intention | Pearson | .425** | .502** | .240** | .238** | .593** | 1 |
| | Correlation | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .006 | .006 | .000 | |
| | N | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 | 130 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

To assess the relationships between two variables, correlation analysis was employed. Table 3 shows the Pearson correlations analysis which to determine whether to accept or reject the hypothesis, this analysis is used to test it. Researchers will conduct a Pearson correlation analysis to evaluate the hypothesis's correlation with the dependent variable, which is the intent of local tourists to visit a concept restaurant or not. The results in the present study showed that the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) has a positive and significant relationship between independent variables of SQ, SC, PP, HFB and FPE and the dependent variable, visit intention to concept restaurant outlet. At the confidence level of 99% ($*p < 0.01$), the star (*) sign indicates a significant relationship.

Discussion and Conclusion

Spiritual intelligence is becoming a key driver of visit intentions to concept restaurants in Malaysia. We can tap into this insight to create more meaningful and value-aligned experiences. Academics and practitioners will gain valuable benefits and implications when spiritual intelligence becomes the most influential factor when visiting restaurants in Malaysia. The manager of the restaurant has the ability to use practical strategies to blend hospitality with spiritual depth by providing menu items that are in line with toyyiban (wholesome) principles. The dining experience can be elevated not only by halal, but also by nourishing and ethical ways. By creating training programs that emphasize empathy, mindfulness, and ethical service will encourage the staff to see their work as a means of ibadah (worship through service) that is purposeful. Make the restaurant an area for meaningful dining, not just for being viral on social media platforms. Finally, create loyalty programs that reward actions that align with values, such as donating meals by partnering with NGOs or religious organizations to reach out to people and achieve CSR.

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