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The transparency of Islamic hotels: "Nice Islam" and the "self-orientalizing" of Muslims?

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Abstract

The Crescent Ranking (CR) is a service benefiting both the supply-side ("halal-friendly" hotels) and the demand-side (Muslims wanting to have a guest experience consistent with their way of living) within the tourism market. "Halal" is a technical term in the Arabic language usually translated as "permissible from the perspective of Islamic law (sharia'ah)." This study examines the transparency of the top and bottom 10 hotels listed on the CR site. First, we compared the hotel profile as per the CR listing with the hotel's own website. Next, we examined guest reviews on a word-of-mouth proxy site (booking.com), paying particular attention to the feedback of non-Muslim guests. Following this analysis, self-styled "Islamic" hotel managers were interviewed to triangulate the data. We found "Islamic" hotels to be intransparent to their guests seeking an Islamically compliant holiday and also to those seeking a conventional hotel experience. We suggest several reasons hotels misrepresent themselves—"self-orientalization", a necessity to present "nice Islam", an "ethics gap", and/or a poor understanding of marketing and market positioning. We consider regulation of the "Islamic" hotel industry to be a mechanism policy makers, and managers could, adopt to become transparent and to protect demand-side (guests) rights. Regulation would also differentiate hotels operating an Islamic business model and those merely offering a few simple services appreciated by Muslim travellers.

KEYWORDS

business models, guest reviews, hotel ranking, Islamic hotel, transparency, values

1 | INTRODUCTION

The representation of Islam and Muslims in the Western canon has changed very markedly between the medieval period and today (Kahf, 1999). Where once the balance of world power was in the hands of Muslims rulers, today the situation is much altered, leading to Muslim countries potentially depicting themselves in misleading ways, consistent with the current dominant Western narrative (Feighery, 2012). This presentation of Islam and Muslims shapes the beliefs about, and attitudes towards, it/them, as is well represented in the literature (Said, 1997) and affects research methodologies and frameworks (Alserhan, Althawadi, & Boulanouar, 2016; Boulanouar, Aitken, Boulanouar, & Todd, 2017; Elmessiri, 2006; Mukherji, 2004). Berg's (2012) concept of "nice Islam" (a "normative, interior, congenial and essentialised Islam" (p. 337) in concert with Feighery's (2012) contention that Muslim

countries and companies react to real or imagined "Occidental authority in dominant global power relations" (p. 269) describe an environment where "Islamic" hotels can act as a metaphor. Investigation into the self-presentation of so-called "Islamic" hotels can provide interesting insights into the cultural "self-concept" of the Muslim world in general.

Hotels operating with an Islamic business model enter a crowded hotel environment where hotels run on a conventional profit-maximization model are both dominant and prevalent. Islamic hotels enter this market with a different organizational ethos or "personality." A hotel badging itself as "Islamic" claims a market position that requires compliance with Islamic law. Similarly, "Halal-friendly" invokes compliance with the requirements of Islamic law. As Islamic law is clearly codified, these claims communicate clearly that at a minimum dedicated prayer space and halal food would be available and that no pork or alcohol derivatives would be on site.

This paper examines the self-presentation of Islamic hotels on the Crescent Rating (CR), a reference point for Muslim travellers interested in pursuing a hotel experience compatible with their personal beliefs and observant way of life, and compares this presentation to that on their own websites. The CR differentiates hotels across areas of practice for Muslim travellers—halal food, prayer facilities, Ramadan service provision, and also nonhalal activities on site such as gambling, nightclubs, licenced restaurants, and bars—up to a maximum rating of 7. Following the comparison of the listings in these two online fora, guest feedback, also online though the word-of-mouth proxy Booking.com, is reviewed. Clarifying these insights is in-depth interviews with hotel managers, which allowed triangulation and verification of the interpretation of the data collected.

Islamic hotels are in their infancy and have commonly utilized the standard language of the conventional hotel marketplace—for example, many Islamic hotels refer to a room "minibar" (but offer one that has no alcohol). This opacity can cause some misgivings from guests. Muslim travellers often prefer to stay in sharia'ah-compliant hotels [hotels operated in accordance with Islamic Law], arguing that traditional hotels contradict the moral and ethical norms of Islam (Alserhan, 2015). Conversely, non-Muslim guests, looking for a conventional hotel (e.g., where one may expect bacon to be available at breakfast), are not being informed of the values framework in place in Islamic hotels prior to their stay and may express disappointment as a result. A growing level of anecdotal evidence suggests that hotels would be prudent to communicate their values significantly more transparently to their guests. This is particularly the case when guests are looking for a specific hotel experience, whether Islamic or conventional.

2 | ISLAMIC HOSPITALITY, ISLAMIC BUSINESS MODELS, AND HOTELS

Hospitality is an openness to the other (Kuokkanen, 2003, quoted in Sobh, Belk, & Wilson, 2013: 128) that allows a temporary inclusion within the sphere of the family. Hospitality is an integral part of the teachings of Islam and an important reflection of both a person's belief and their practice of Islam (Alserhan, 2015; Sobh et al., 2013). The concept of hospitality in Islamic teaching is a simple one. A stranger has a right to both shelter and sustenance for 3 days without expectation of reciprocity or even requiring him to identify himself (Alserhan, 2015). This openness to strangers, originating in a time when travel (and potentially, travellers) was very dangerous is noteworthy, especially when considering the Islamic emphasis on the centrality and privacy of family life.

Numerous authors have emphasized the tradition of hospitality Muslims display over time and the consistency of it (e.g., Fraser, 1911). Torstrick and Faier (2009) note that "the act of providing is considered honourable unto itself" (p. 134). Some have mentioned that this hospitality is emphasized or exacerbated by the geographical environment the Gulf Arabs inhabit (Sobh & Belk, 2011), although the representation of Muslims as Bedouin Arabs (8%) has been criticized as an orientalist bias (Morsy, 1986), and the extension of Islamic hospitality from non-Arab Muslims exists in a comparable format.

The performance of Islamic hospitality in the different Muslim cultures varies, but the "heart" of the offer of hospitality by Muslims remains consistent. The commercialization of this hospitality in the Arab Gulf and beyond replicates the traditional hospitality but in a form palatable to the selected target segments and consistent with the modern cultural model of Islamic hospitality that can include a representation of generosity but also lavishness (Sobh & Belk, 2011). Jafari and Scott (2014: 14) note that hospitality "may have" a different meaning in the Muslim world to that in a Western context, but that due to the discourses of tourism being oriented to Western values, a hegemony in terms assumes universalism of Western definitions, terms, and understandings and requires tourism operators to thoroughly educate their staff.

Stephenson, Russell, and Edgar (2010) notes that the performance of "Islamic hospitality" by hotels under the Islamic hotel banner, particularly in the Gulf countries, is actually delivered by non-locals or even non-Muslims, so the commercial offering of the Islamic tradition does differ from an authentic and personally offered example, as can be expected, but the ways in which it differs and the communication of these differences is what is considered here.

An Islamic service provider does not differentiate between business and religion (ibadah); thus, an Islamic service may differ significantly from a non-Islamic service, but not necessarily. Primarily, this is because the service is not provided solely for profit but to fulfil the obligation of "fardhu kifayah" (collective duty; Alserhan, 2015). In other words, although profit as a motive is acceptable, a service should not be conducted only for a financial gain. Instead, an Islamic world view sees the way in which a business is conducted as more important than profit; the question of the process is the success measure and that which makes it "halal," rather than the profit generated—that is, the end cannot justify the means in an Islamic business model.

As Islamic hotels draw their justification from the Islamic Law, their business model is guided in terms of what kind of offering, behaviour, or hospitality is required, and they are also alerted to those things, which they are forbidden to provide. Muslim travellers increasingly consult the CR website when booking a holiday or business trip (Zulkharnain & Jamal, 2012), using this listing as a trusted brand shorthand.

However, an observable increase in demand for Islamic hotels has not been followed by a larger number of hotels being marketed as such. Despite a continuous rise in the number of Muslim travellers (Stephenson et al., 2010), acknowledgement that Muslim travellers justify their own target market (Anonymous, 2014) both by number and by spend, the fact that the Middle East as a destination is growing at a rate of 10% a year (Moussly, 2011) and that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) travellers spend is so much higher on average per vacation than European travellers (Aziz, 2001; GulfBusiness, 2014; Roeding, 2008; Statistica, 2015), as well as the fact that the number of Muslim shoppers is forecasted to grow by 35% by 2030 (Economist, 2013), hotels can still be reluctant to position themselves as "Islamic" or as catering to Muslim tastes. This is a surprising response by business, because standard consumer behaviour research confirms as a population becomes wealthier and has more disposable income, they more and more strongly consume in a manner consistent with their culture (De Mooij, 2010)—in this case, the Islamic culture.

Two main styles of hotel are described within the literature, and both are based on distinct social norms: "conventional" and "Islamic" shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1   Basic comparison of conventional and Islamic hotel attributes

	Conventional hotels	Islamic hotels
Establishment dates (approximate)	Historically well-established. In the current format, the first hotel is thought to have been founded in Exeter in 1768. Over the following 200 years, hotels sprang up around the world, with a luxury segment expanding in the 19th century.	Contemporary concept. The commercialization of traditional hospitality. The first recorded hotel with the description Islamic was the "Aljouhara," which opened in Dubai in 1979.
Utilities	Standardized	Standardized + Islamic
Experience	Maximization based on standardized utilities	Maximization on standardized utilities + diversity created by faith
Symbolic	Meaning based on image of luxury, practicality, or economy	Meaning based on faith associations
Number of hotels	All hotels prior to the 1980	A small number at present but growing rapidly. Dubai provides an indicator of this growth, although it is difficult to obtain accurate statistics. There are 401 Islamic hotel establishments in Dubai, accounting for 40% of the total number of rooms.

Conventional hotels strive to maximize the experience of guests through an enhanced offer—friendlier staff, faster internet, cheaper service, and so on. The capacity of these means to enhance value to consumers is, however, finite, and hotels today find themselves embroiled in a "maximization trap." It is difficult for conventional management models to look "outside the box" and explore alternative methods of enhancing the experience of guests.

Islamic hotels, on the other hand, although able to capitalize on their unique method of enhancing the experience of their guests, do not compromise on the standardized conventional guest package. Instead, they rely on the diversity factor, whereby they present an entirely different experience to their guests. This diversity factor allows Islamic hotels to offer a unique selling point (traditional Islamic hospitality), and thus, they create a competitive advantage within their respective market segments by replicating this commercially.

The success of a hotel can often be measured through the satisfaction expressed by its patrons, and the viability of a hotel depends upon its ability to conduct profitable business activities (Guilding, 2014). Western-styled hotels excel in the implementation of the conventional hotel model—a model organically suited to Western values and norms—and thus, it is unlikely to be possible for Islamic hotels to compete successfully with them using this same model. Not only have Western-styled hotels achieved a significant head start over a long evolutionary period, but the incompatibility of Islamic values with some parts of the conventional business model is problematic. For example, Western hotels draw a large proportion of their revenue from the sale of alcohol. In fact, the hotel associations (AHA, 2009, p. 5) regard their core business to be the "selling [of] alcoholic beverages [which] remain the primary revenue source for the industry. As a result, a hotel is defined as a business that generates income predominantly from the provision of alcoholic beverages for consumption on premise." Other services provided by conventional hotels that are incompatible with Islamic values include the provisions of various unsegregated venues such as swimming pools, gyms and spas, and services such as on-site nightclubs and casinos.

In certain instances, conflicts can emerge between business models and the ethical norms expected within a society. Specifically, in terms of alcohol, involvement in the chain of transmission of alcohol to an end consumer (not only its consumption) is prohibited in Islam.

As such, revenue gained from participation in any part of the supply of alcohol cannot be part of an Islamic business model. However, "Islamic" hotels still face the problem that alcohol is a traditional driver for room occupancy. An alternative available to Islamic hotels is to seek profitability based on room revenue in the place of alcohol provision and to encourage increased local population use of dining and conferencing facilities, with Muslim families more likely to bring their children to an unlicensed restaurant than a licenced one (Zulkharnain & Jamal, 2012). However, to offset the compounded impact of the loss of alcohol revenue, Islamic hotels needed to focus on maximizing their competitive advantage over alcohol-based hotels.

3 | ISLAMIC HOTELS AND TRANSPARENCY

Islamic hotels have been criticized anecdotally for a lack of transparency in their business model. Transparency for Islamic hotels is different to conventional hotels, in that it should be both consistent with Islamic law (sharia'ah) by being lawful (halal) and pure (tayibb; Alserhan, 2015). This means beyond being lawful in Islamic Law; the operation should be pure (tayibb)—that is, reflecting a halal process from people > products > practice. This requirement is far more comprehensive than a simple legally compliant, profit maximization business model. Because the behaviours, social norms, values, roles, habits, and attitudes of a person are affected by their religion, firms claiming to be founded on Islamic principles should declare their corporate values to customers transparently. The effects of religion can be seen in one's work life in terms of relationships as, and with, employees and managers, as well as in decisions, actions, initiatives, and approaches (Shafique, Ahmad, Khurshid, & Ahmad, 2015). Ali and Weir (2005) describe the Islamic work-related values discerned in the Qur'an and the Prophet's sayings and practices (the Sunna) as including equality, accountability, hard work, justice, consultation, trust, self-discipline, persistence, and cooperation (Forster & Fenwick, 2015, p. 145). Tayeb (1997) cites the work of Latifi (1997) and Endot (1995) in which they explored the Islamic work-related values of loyalty, honesty, responsibility, equality, and cooperation (Tayeb, 1997). Issues of transparency can relate to the tangible halal service provision at hotels claiming halal or Islamic status, but a hotel claiming

Islamic status or sharia'ah compliance can go beyond simple and superficial service provision. In fact, Zulkharnain and Jamal (2012) point out that sharia'ah compliance should cover not only compliance with basic halal rules but also should instead regard the entire hotel operation as needing to be halal. In that respect, intangible aspects of halal service provision must be addressed at a management level. These are highlighted in Table 2 and can include contributions of a certain percentage of earnings as zakat (alms/charity), ensuring a halal supply chain and appropriate recruitment and training. It can also extend to marketing engagement such as advertising and promotion (Stephenson, 2014).

Based on these Islamic principles, various processes of accreditation have emerged in which a hotel can be certified in relation to its adherence to different aspects of Islamic norms. Razalli, Yusoff, and Roslan (2013) examined halal certification practices for the hotel industry in Malaysia and found that from a list of 12 potential areas including halal documentation, management responsibility, raw material, location, exterior area, premises, tools and equipment, staff characteristics, pest control, and waste management, only facilities and staff policy appeared to have significant effects on hotel performance. This would suggest that although certification can help police compliance, there needs to be at least a very clear understanding of what constitutes sharia'ah compliance, and how something would be considered compliant or not. In point of fact, of course, in the Islamic teaching "very little is actually banned" (Economist, 2013), and considerations are more likely to orbit around consumer preferences. After all, "sharia'ah is a mercy and is intended for the interests of people in both life and the hereafter. It is neither harsh nor strangling" (Stephenson, 2014).

Often, there is a conflict between the social norms of guests and the hotel, compounded by a lack of transparency in what hotels have communicated. Some hotels, in contexts where Muslims could expect halal services to be offered, have been accused of falsely claiming to provide halal food. This has been a significant issue during important Muslim occasions such as Ramadan, particularly with hotel buffets in Malaysia and Singapore (Salama, 2012). Further, the principle of Sunnah requires a "full disclosure" policy, one in which any weak points or defects of the product are disclosed (Arham, 2010), as well as the strengths and benefits of the offering. Given the representation of Islam, Muslims and particularly Arabs in the English language mass-media (a telling summation is provided by Shaheen, 2012), Islamic hotels or hotels partially offering Islamic hospitality services may instead promote themselves as "family friendly" or as a "dry environment," concerned with product safety, social civility, and health consciousness (Stephenson, 2014). In fact, some hotels identified as "Islamic" have been at pains to deemphasize the interpretation of their "Muslim-friendly" services as Islamic, particularly if the majority of their guests are not Muslim. A good example of this phenomenon is the Coral International Hotel in South Africa (Economist, 2013).

The potential for a "gap" in the Islamic ethics and the practice of Muslim businesses or Islamic badged businesses have been raised in the literature (Abuznaid, 2009; Rice, 1999). The "gap" referred to is that of the teaching of Islam and the behaviour of the Muslim followers of Islam, and how this failure to follow the teaching by Muslims results in the development of various unethical and unwanted business practices in the Muslim world. The examination of whether such a gap exists in the Islamic hotel market is a consideration here.

TABLE 2 The processes that Islamic hotels should consider (adapted from Stephenson, 2014)

Area	Description
Human resources	• Traditional uniforms for hotel staff • Dress code for all staff • Prayer time provision for Muslim employees • Reformatted working hours for Muslim staff during Ramadan • Staff (and guest) adherence to moral codes of conduct • Guest-centric strategies underpinning service delivery
Private rooms (bedrooms and bathrooms)	• Separate floors with rooms allocated to women and families • Markers (i.e., Qibla stickers) indicating the direction of Mecca • Prayer mats and copies of the Qur'an • Conservative television channels • Geometric and nonfigurative patterns of decoration (e.g., calligraphy) • Beds and toilets positioned away from facing Mecca • Toilets fitted with a bidet shower or health faucet • Halal-friendly complementary toiletries
Dining and banqueting facilities	• Halal food with no pork on site • Soft beverages only (i.e., no provision or consumption of alcohol) • Additional separate dining quarter provision for women and families • Art that does not depict human and animal form • No music expressing seductive or controversial messages
Other public facilities	• No casino or gambling machines • Separate leisure facilities (including swimming pools and spas) for both sexes • Female and male prayer rooms equipped with the Qur'an (also available at the front desk) • Built-in ablution facilities located outside prayer rooms • Toilets facing away from Mecca • Art that does not depict human and animal form
Business operation	• Islamically ethical marketing and promotion • Corporate social responsibility strategies and philanthropic donations • Transactions and investments in accordance with principles and practices associated with Islamic banking, accounting, and finance

4 | WESTERN PERCEPTION OF ISLAM AND MUSLIMS

Non-Muslim travellers have, in general, a rather skewed view of most things "Islamic." Islam and Muslims have been extensively negatively represented in media (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004; Said, 1997), film (Shaheen, 2001, 2012), literature (Kahf, 1999), history (Sardar, Nandy, & Davies, 1993), anthropology (Davies, 1988), and other academic fields influencing research frameworks and interpretations (Elmessiri, 2006; Mukherji, 2004; Sardar, 1998). In addition, there are works representing themselves as academic, when they are simply racist (see Morsy, 1986). The widespread view of Islam in the English language literature portrays it as monolith, consisting of an undifferentiated community (ummah) of believers. This representation is used

> to explain a variety of developments in the Middle East through an historical representation which identifies religion as a threating force, without regard to the special material conditions and ideological developments underlying the religious expression of political dissent … such historical developments expose biased presentations of international issues, thereby promoting contradictions within public consciousness. (Morsy, 1986: 24, 27)

In fact, Islam is neither monolithic nor cultural—it is practiced in a variety of ways by different Muslims (Elmessiri, 1997; Jafari & Scott, 2014). In addition, the scope of Islamic law is far greater than Western people conceive of law to be (Jafari & Scott, 2014).

The negative perception of Islam and Muslims was not always dominant. Across 1,400+ years of Islamic history to date, the representation of Islam and Muslims has, for the majority of the time span, represented Muslims in quite the opposite way. Kahf (1999) shows how, at first, Muslim women are represented in medieval literature as people of almost superhuman strength, but the image came full circle, in the 18th and 19th centuries in concert with Western colonization, or when the "Orient was Orientalized" (Kahf, 1999: 8).

As the discourse on Islam grew, the Muslim woman character came to be an important strand of that discourse. "Paradoxically, her figure simultaneously shrinks in subjectivity and exuberance" (Kahf, 1999: 8), until she is represented in "the recurrent drama of incipient colonisation, that of a heroic male conquest of a feminised Oriental land, is played out in literature upon the inert body of the Muslim woman" (Bryce, MacLaren, & O'Gorman, 2013; Kahf, 1999: 8). This Orientalism of the Muslim world was used from as early as the 1870s by Thomas Cook, taking Western visitors in the Ottoman Empire (Nance, 2007).

Bryce et al. (2013) extensively investigate both the construction of the "Orient" by the colonial West and the recreation of this image by the formerly colonized. For example, "newly built 'souks' in cities such as Amman and Dubai to evoke the historic bazaars of Istanbul, Cairo and Damascus," to recreate the "genuine" Orient and allow it to be "discovered" in modernized/Westernized areas such as Dubai, Tunisia, Egypt, and Turkey (Bryce, 2007; Bryce et al., 2013: 50).

These destinations participate in their recreating of the exotic Orient for the Western market (Feighery, 2012) as Western-based promotions do (Bryce, 2007) that "suggests that a familiar archive of Orientalist images are used by the commercial sector and readily received by consumers" (Bryce et al., 2013: 50; Sardar, 1998). Feighery's (2012) analysis of Oman Tourism's promotional video "Welcome To My Country" examines the idea of a self-orientalism perspective in order to reflect the view of a tourist target market—Western travellers—in order to attract them to a destination.

An understanding of the Western view of Islam and Muslims means that the view "that Islam does not exert any significant influence on the operation of tourism-related activities" and/or that religion is equated with culture is promoted in order to downplay its importance (Jafari & Scott, 2014: 9). Al Mahadin and Burns (2007) agree that the Arab Muslim world is portrayed in a post-Orientalist frame by the travel trade itself. This "self-orientalization" (Feighery, 2012) or packaging of Muslim destinations themselves as places where "nice Islam" (Berg, 2012) resides, effects both approaches to transparency, and those to guests.

5 | ISLAMIC HOTELS AND GUESTS

Guests will have different reasons for choosing an Islamic hotel over a conventional one. Islamic hotels must recognize that a guest seeking a cultural experience differs from one seeking a stay consistent with their religious requirements. Similarly, conventional hotels must necessarily understand the markets with which they are engaging, but in general, the hospitality sector displays a poor level of understanding of Islamic norms and the reasoning behind them. In order for Muslims and non-Muslim guests (as well as hotel operators) to maximize their interests, there is first a need to understand each other.

Jafari and Scott (2014) feel that Islamic tourism can be defined as "the encouragement of tourists likely to meet the requirement of Islamic (sharia'ah) law," and they assume, "respectful engagement" with local communities is "what Islamic tourism seeks to encourage" (p. 13).

One type of guest to which an Islamic hotel has particular appeal is anyone seeking a form of "ethnic tourism" in that they can represent "the other; or the quest for the ethnically exotic, untouched, and pristine" (Hitchcock, 1999, p. 8). An alternative ethnic experience can be lived by such guests through the authentic and nonstaged activities that take place in these hotels, such as the style of hospitality, the furniture choices and arrangements, and also in faith activities that amount to ethnic features for a cultural traveller. In an Islamic hotel, guests are confronted with a whole set of different features that fall within the definition of an ethnic experience, such as clothes, language, and customs. Specific features might include differentiated male and female body-covering uniforms, female staff covering their hair, a generally quiet ambiance (rather than one punctuated by music), complete privacy for guests through dedicated gender-separated facilities such as swimming pools and gymnasiums, the absence of on premises night clubs, and the fact that no alcohol is available inside the hotel. Moreover, guests can often listen to the call to prayer, described by Liam Neeson in December 2014 as "just get[ting] into your spirit, and it's the most beautiful, beautiful thing." Guests can also

observe the five daily prayers following the call, either in the hotel or in a nearby mosque, and they may be able to observe the two major annual prayers (Eid), or the weekly congregational prayer held on Fridays (Jummah). In addition to such experiences, they can dine with fasting Muslims when they break their fast at sunset following a dawn to sunset abstinence from food and drinks during the month of Ramadan (the ninth month of the Islamic calendar).

Moreover, according to Battour, Battor, and Bhatti (2014), the Islamic attributes of destinations (IDAs) represent "the availability of Islamic norms and practices which are relevant to tourism at the destination" (p. 556). Their study, having defined the IDAs, utilized both qualitative and quantitative data to investigate the relationship between tourist satisfaction and 22 IDAs. Ultimately, it was found that just four IDAs are key. These are worship facilities, Halalness, freedom from alcohol and gambling, and Islamic morality. The IDAs that form the religious requirements for Muslims are seen from a completely different perspective by non-Muslim guests. Muslim guests care about the worship aspect, whereas non-Muslims focus on these due to their desire for an experience of the "different other," which becomes a form of entertainment.

Predominantly, two types of guests frequent Islamic hotels, those who actively seek the experience and those who have inadvertently booked a Muslim hotel. The former group includes Muslim guests, who are seeking what they require in terms of a faith compliant environment and whose expectations are therefore met by the parameters of an Islamic business model. Travellers looking for a family-friendly atmosphere and who have chosen an Islamic hotel for precisely that reason are also likely to find their expectations being met (Batrawy, 2015; Moussly, 2011). Often, guests looking for a "cultural" experience from an Islamic hotel find that they can co-create value. This can be achieved through a combination of suspension of disbelief and "new game(s) of old images" (Bryce et al., 2013; Sardar, 1998). This last refers to Western travellers utilizing an Orientalist mindset, which sees the East as "feminine" (overcome, surrendering) and the West as "masculine" (regardless of the gender of the traveller) and so, dominant and superior (Bryce, 2007; Said, 1978). This mindset may explain the "suspension of disbelief" Stephenson et al. (2010) refer to regarding the fact that Eastern hospitality is often delivered by non-locals. In fact, Bryce regards this suspension of disbelief as essential. Given the preceding, the original culture of an "Islamic" hotel should encourage and support both tangible and intangible aspects of Islamic hospitality to guests, regardless of its commercial nature. In fact, Sobh et al. (2013)

claim that commercial hospitality serves to further authenticate the hospitality experience for guests at Islamic hotels over that of guests in private homes. The other category of patron, the "accidental" customer, often books the hotel without realizing that the hotel is Islamic. This type of guest presents a significant dilemma for management (and an intriguing research opportunity), particularly when Islamic values are not communicated via marketing material and the guest leaves unsatisfied.

5.1 | Key measurements

Secondary data were initially used to gauge the transparency of the hotels using the CR website and a number of key measurements. Characteristics were selected that are readily observable to guests, whether they are looking for them or not. For example, an alcohol ban on hotel premises is very noticeable to a non-Muslim guest, whereas a small Qibla [prayer direction] sign placed on the wall or the ceiling is not. In this study, we concentrate on only the most observable characteristics of Islamic hotels. As these values are widely accepted as representing an Islamic hotel experience, it is expected that these hotels clearly communicate them to prospective clients. These are highlighted in Table 3.

5.2 | Sample

The sample of Islamic hotels was drawn from the CR hotel ranking service for Islamic hotels. The CR website is well known and used as a reference by many Muslim travellers. It provided a list of hotels that could be ranked based on their accreditation. The Top and Bottom 10 were selected, the Top 10 as they were highly likely to be examples of Islamic hotels doing things correctly in the eyes of consumers, and the Bottom 10 because of their potential to be "sitting on the fence" between the Islamic and conventional models. The sample is shown in Table 4.

5.3 | Data collection and analysis

Data were collected from the individual hotel websites and from a third party review website (booking.com). The ratings of the Top 10 and Bottom 10 Islamic hotels according to CR were reported. Second, the websites underwent content analysis in order to check for identification variables that provided information on their Islamic nature. Finally, non-Muslim guests' reviews were reported from booking.com

TABLE 3 Key measurements used in this research

Name	Description	Measure
Islamic rating	The crescent rating system is used to measure the level to which a hotel adheres to Islamic principles.	This external body ranks hotels based on key criteria and awards an Islamic compliance level, which ranges from 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest).
Islamic indicators	The Islamic indicators used in this research are considered more tangible, as they represent the touch points of the service delivery (as opposed to, e.g., whether the salary paid to staff is considered "fair," which is extremely subjective).	1. Prayer direction 2. Halal restaurant 3. Halal food near hotel 4. Mosque nearby or prayer room 5. No alcohol 6. Water-friendly washroom 7. No adult TV 8. No nightclub 9. Not part of a gambling resort

TABLE 4 Top 10 and Bottom 10 hotels on the Crescent Rating list

Group	CR rank	Hotel name	Country
Highest ranked (10)	7	Al Jawhara Gardens Hotel	United Arab Emirates
	7	Grand BlueWave Hotel Shah Alam	Malaysia
	7	PNB Darby Park Executive Suites	Malaysia
	6	Mövenpick Makkah Hajar Tower	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
	6	Al Salam Holiday Inn Jeddah	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
	6	Sofyan Hotel Betawi	Indonesia
	5	City Seasons Suites	United Arab Emirates
	5	Royal Plaza on Scotts	Singapore
	5	Seri Pacific Hotel Kuala Lumpur	Malaysia
	5	Sonesta Hotel El Olivar Lima	Peru
Lowest ranked (10)	5	Ayla Hotel	United Arab Emirates
	5	Dorsett Grand Subang	Malaysia
	4	La Villa Hotel	State of Qatar
	4	City Boutique Hotel Sarajevo	Bosnia and Herzegovina
	4	Farah Hotel	Kingdom of Jordan
	3	Hotel Hilltop	Sri Lanka
	4	Tayih Landis Hotel Tainan	Taiwan
	3	Ambassador Hotel Bangkok	Thailand
	3	Chaaya Tranz Hikkaduwa	Sri Lanka
	2	Vier Jahreszeiten Kempinski München	Germany

to gauge concerns as to customer experience while staying at the hotel. Lastly, interviews were undertaken with "Islamic" hotel managers from a range of hotels across the Top and Bottom 10 of the CR list (please see Table 4 above).

The classification of guests into Muslim and non-Muslim was subjective in all cases except where the customer identified him/herself in one category or another or made it clear through their comment—for example, where dissatisfaction was expressed that bacon was not on the menu. All Muslim names were excluded, but the names of any reviewers who appeared to be non-Muslim were retained.

Following this analysis, in-depth interviews with "Islamic" hotel managers were undertaken, translated, and analysed. The following section (please see Table 5 below) brings these data streams together for discussion.

5.4 | Interpretation and discussion

First, with regard to the clear communication of Islamic values, only two hotels (the Aljawhara Gardens Hotel in the United Arab Emirates and Royal Plaza on Scotts in Singapore—both in the Top 10) clearly announced that they comply with at least some of the 10 most common characteristics. Aljawhara mentioned two, whereas Royal Plaza mentioned three but neither mentioned the remaining characteristics. None of the other hotels advertised any of the 10 characteristics. Grand Blue Wave Hotel Shah Alam in Malaysia, although holding a ranking of seven (the highest possible ranking in the CR system) actually advertises that it serves alcohol, all the while claiming two Islamic certificates. Some of the other hotels in the Top 10 list also have bars or mini bars. If we compare the information that appears on these hotels' websites and the information they supplied for consideration for the CRs, the findings are also perplexing. Table 6 shows the rankings of these hotels and appears to indicate that almost all are 100% compliant with the terms required to be classified as Islamic hotels. For example, seven of the hotels in the CR list appear to be alcohol free.

It is therefore difficult to escape the clear contradictions between the information that appears for the purpose of CR and the

information on the hotel website. This suggests an issue of transparency concerning compliant "Islamic" hotels, as they do not clearly proclaim themselves as Islamic and thereby confuse their guests. Table 6 totals 100 cells (made up of 10 characteristics and 10 hotels). Of these, only five cells have "✓es" registered. In other words, if each of the 100 cells represents a value or characteristic by which Islamic hotels are run and if we use the number of cells that are ticked as an indicator of transparency, 95% of the values these hotels are run by are not made obvious on their websites.

Second, when considering alcohol as a driver of business, it is noteworthy that only three of the hotels examined actually declare that they serve alcohol. The AHA (2009) has suggested that hotels use sales of alcohol as a key driver of profits, and given that some customers would likely be put off by the absence of alcohol, it is perhaps unsurprising that its lack of availability is often passed over in silence. Some of the hotels appear in the CR ratings as "alcohol free," and on their own websites, they either mention nothing about this fact or contradict it outright and announce that they serve alcohol in one way or another. For example, the Grand Blue Wave, Malaysia (which is 100% compliant according to the 10 characteristics of Islamic hotels) appears alcohol free in the CR list but states on its own website that it serves alcohol. The Sofyan Hotel Betawi, Indonesia, also appears as 100% compliant, yet on its own website, it states that both a bar and minibar are available to guests.

Third, when considering the impact on guests, it is clear that Islamic hotels currently risk losing repeat business from some non-Muslim clients who did not know that they were staying in an Islamic hotel. Because Islamic hotels have not specified that they do not serve alcoholic beverages, guests will assume that these are served or available because they were not given any reason to think otherwise. Once checked in and asking for alcoholic beverages, they will be dissatisfied knowing that they cannot get them. In fact, a review of all the comments made by non-Muslim guests about these 10 hotels in booking.com confirmed this conclusion.

When we consider the responses from our interviews, we find that the hotels are well-prepared for situations where guests are caught off-guard at what they find on site, and they attempt to

TABLE 5 Reviews and comments related to the Islamic nature of the hotel by non-Muslim guests

Hotel	Notes from website	Related comments
Al Jawhara Gardens Hotel	On the managing group page, it says "The brand is deeply rooted in Islamic values, catering to the privacy and family-oriented needs of society."	Expressing disappointment at not knowing the conditions of their stay. Benedikt writes, "I categorically do not like the fact that restrictions arising from the hotel's Sharia'ah compliance, such as the prohibition on bringing food or unmarried partners, is not clearly mentioned on the hotel page." Saloni writes, "I had no idea it was an "Islamic" hotel. No alcohol and so forth, and a friend was asked for her i.d. and questioned for coming up to my room as we were getting dressed for a night out." Eva wrote "They do not allow accommodation of unmarried couples in one room." Nicola also writes "no visitors, it is not "a mini bar" it is a drinks fridge," sentiment shared by many of the reviewers with some also mentioning "swimming pool restrictions."
Grand BlueWave Hotel Shah Alam	Serves alcohol. Shows two different Islamic certificates	--------
PNB Darby Park Executive Suites	No indication that it is an Islamic hotel	"No biggie—no wine glasses in room" Rod's disappointment is clear, "the hotel or bookings.com don't advise people booking the hotel only caters for Middle Eastern and Muslim people, the breakfast was terrible again only catering for Middle Eastern people."
Mövenpick Makkah Hajar Tower	No indication that it is an Islamic hotel	--------
Al Salam Holiday Inn Jeddah	No indication that it is an Islamic hotel	--------
Sofyan Hotel Betawi	Bar/pub, minibar. It has "halal certification," and the hotel is managed in compliance with "Islamic Sharia'ah principles"	--------
City Seasons Suites	Mini bar with soft drinks	--------
Royal Plaza on Scotts	Minibar. It has "Muslim-friendly amenities." All rooms come with Qur'ans and Qiblah direction signs. Prayer times and prayer mats are also available upon request. Food at buffet restaurant, carousel and artisan cupcakes by gourmet carousel are prepared in halal-certified kitchens. Guests are asked to approach the concierge for directions to the nearest mosque, although there is also a prayer room within the hotel	John wrote, "What was an outdoor terraced bar is now a halal restaurant. It was always empty. What a waste. Sack the manager". Brian wrote "This is a Muslim hotel, so no pork (bacon)." Colin, Anthony, Brian, Mathew, and many others wrote "no bar," whereas Eli wrote "no bacon at breakfast." Gary was a little more expansive, "no longer a beer can in the fridge. We all need to be tolerant, not just non-Muslims, note I am married to one and respect all." Paul, on the other hand, was clearly disappointed, "I was really disappointed with the Royal Plaza. After spending 30+ days in the Middle East, the last thing I needed was a dry hotel and halal food. If they want to dictate how people live their lives, then they should at least give some indication, for example, the Abdullah Hotel. I really feel I deserve a refund." Stephen wrote, "the hotel is run under Muslim guidelines there was no bar. At breakfast, it was impossible to obtain any bacon. This information is not shown anywhere on the hotel website." Bernadette was also "surprised no bacon on the menu for breakfast." Another reviewer, no name, expressed how he/she was "disappointed that this place is strictly halal including the non-available breakfast bacon; my bedroom was halal, too. A Koran in the drawer (before, you would place a bible there)."
Seri Pacific Hotel Kuala Lumpur	Minibar. No indication that it is an Islamic hotel	For example, reviewers for the, Pamela writes, As for the City Seasons Suites, Phillip writes "No alcohol served on the premises—had to go to the next door hotel to get a beer. Good place to stay if you don't drink alcohol" whereas no name wrote, "Couldn't get a beer."
Sonesta Hotel El Olivar Lima	Minibar, bar. No indication that it is an Islamic hotel	--------
Ayla Hotel, United Arab Emirates (UAE)	No indication that it caters to Muslims or that justify its rating on a halal ranking list	Christine, UAE. "They are just too strict in using the pool area compared to other hotels I've been in

TABLE 5 (Continued)

Hotel	Notes from website	Related comments
		al Ain." Iain, UK. "Very near to mosque so woken by 5 a.m. prayer calls." Chetan, UAE. "Pool not open for male members till 1:00 p.m. in afternoon." Aleianne, UAE. "My husband was not able to join us for swimming since it is ladies time from 11 to 1 p.m." Anonymous, UAE. "A female friend tried to visit me, but at the hotel, they addressed her with bad attitude, telling her this is respectful hotel. Then she get angry and left the hotel. So don't ask your girlfriend there for your sake!"
Dorsett Grand Subang, Malaysia	No indication that it caters to Muslims or that justify its rating on a halal ranking list	--------
La Villa Hotel, Qatar	No indication that it caters to Muslims or that justify its rating on a halal ranking list	--------
City Boutique Hotel Sarajevo, Bosnia	Non-alcoholic hotel	Australian, Australia. "No alcohol in minibar. Didn't even think to check this, but understandable in country with large Muslim population."
Farah Hotel, Jordan	No indication that it caters to Muslims or that justify its rating on a halal ranking list	--------
Hotel Hilltop, Sri Lanka	No indication that it caters to Muslims or that justify its rating on a halal ranking list	Nuwan, Srilanka. "Drink prices." Anonymous, Netherlands. "The sound of the mosque."
Tayih Landis Hotel Tainan, Taiwan	No indication that it caters to Muslims or that justify its rating on a halal ranking list	--------
Ambassador Hotel Bangkok, Thailand	No indication that it caters to Muslims or that justify its rating on a halal ranking list	Only the first 400 guest reviews in English were reviewed for this paper. In guest reviews, it says good Arab/Muslim hotel, hair salon for Arab ladies (Muslim women) and private room for Muslim ladies, the area has lots of halal restaurants." Andreas Marti 1964, Switzerland. "Hotel for Indian and Arab people, no Western standard." Aprilgibb, UK. "The drinks and menus inside the hotel were pricier than nearby establishments." Anthony, UK. "Myself and my wife had rice soup with pork for breakfast." Florent, Switzerland. "A lot of Muslim and Indian." Emma, UK. "Prostitute allowed into the hotel."
Chaaya Tranz Hikkaduwa, Sri Lanka	No indication that it caters to Muslims or that justify its rating on a halal ranking list	Michelle, UK. "the price they charged for drinks"
Vier Jahreszeiten Kempinski München, Germany	No indication that it caters to Muslims or that justify its rating on a halal ranking list	Roslyn, UK. "The hotel bar is lovely but drinks eye-wateringly expensive." Michelle, UK. "Shame they have little nightlife other than foyer and bar."

improve their uninformed customers' satisfaction in ways that add to their experience. For example, they try to compensate conventional guests by surpassing expectations in service areas, the manager of one Emirati-based hotel stated, nearly 80% of guests are repeat customers, including non-Muslims who do not seem to be deterred by their alcohol-free status: "We target traditional customers through economy prices and 5-star service for the price of 4-star." At the same time, the manager of one "Islamic" hotel clearly stated that "we have someone who shows customers where they can drink alcohol and we have a car that takes them there and brings them back." In addition to that, "we tell them where to go to a night club in order to keep them satisfied." Moreover, some of the rules on the consumption of alcohol at the hotel might be overlooked. For example, when asked about the possibility of customers bringing drinks with them to their rooms, one hotel manager agreed that guests might bring their own drinks with them, saying: "We don't inspect guests' luggage." He asked that his candour here not be associated with his hotel's name.

There are other ways in which "Islamic" hotels void their stated core business model. For example, one hotel manager said that their Islamic hotel chain is opening a new hotel in a new country. However, "because we believe that all people there drink and will not go to a dry hotel, we will open an area with a bar for rent. Thus, the guest reserves a room and goes to drink at the bar." The bar will not be operated by the hotel, but it is convenient for guests looking for a drink.

This compromised side of the operations of some Islamic hotels is emblematic of the mythology of the Orient, where activities considered normal in other places, such as having a drink, become shrouded in mystery, and exoticism. This side of the traveller's stay, recreating a personalized version of the mystic One Thousand and One Nights, is an enhancement of their experience. It is something to tell and something to remember. In this way, the hotels seek to gain the benefit of two very divergent segments for travel, and despite considering their business model Islamic, they self-orientalize in order to meet non-Muslim expectations of "the Orient," while essentially attempting to "be all things" to all segments.

TABLE 6 Analysis of hotels by Crescent Rating criterion (CR) and website statements (W)

Crescent Rating (CR). Note: Most hotels here have similar services and facilities yet they hold different rankings. We focused only on the final ranking without examining the ranking procedure followed by CR.	1 Prayer direction		2 Halal food		3 Halal food near hotel		4 Mosque near hotel		5 No alcohol		6 Bidet in washroom		7 No adult TV		8 No discotheque		9 Not part of a gambling resort	
	CR	W	CR	W	CR	W	CR	W	CR	W	CR	W	CR	W	CR	W	CR	W
Al Jawhara Gardens Hotel	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
Grand BlueWave Hotel Shah Alam	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
PNB Darby Park Executive Suites	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
Mövenpick Makkah Hajar Tower	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
Al Salam Holiday Inn Jeddah	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
Sofyan Hotel Betawi	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
City Seasons Suites	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
Royal Plaza on Scotts	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
Seri Pacific Hotel Kuala Lumpur	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	✓	X
Sonesta Hotel El Olivar Lima	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	✓	X
Ayla Hotel	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
Dorsett Grand Subang	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
La Villa Hotel	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
City Boutique Hotel Sarajevo	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
Farah Hotel	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
Hotel Hilltop	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
Tayih Landis Hotel Tainan	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
Ambassador Hotel Bangkok	✓	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X
Chaaya Tranz Hikkaduwa	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
Vier Jahreszeiten Kempinski München	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	X

Other hotels are very careful to be consistent with the Islamic business model and its requirement for transparency, as the manager of an Islamic hotel in Jordan said,

> Non-Muslim customers who come to our hotel already know that we are a dry hotel and that they should abide by our principles. Seeing that they are treated equally, the same as Muslim guests, increases positive perceptions towards Islam and towards us as a hotel management. We have many repeat customers who are non-Muslim.

In our interviews, we observed that these hotels emphasize that customers who drink outside and come back to sleep at the hotel are treated respectfully. The issue, for hotels following an Islamic business model, is that the hotel itself transparently provides services consistent with Islamic teaching. All of their services are transparent to guests seeking an "Islamic" or conventional experience. The issue observed here, is that some of the hotels badging themselves as "Islamic" are actually following a standard/expediency business model, because they are actively involved in facilitating activities that directly contradict the Islamic business model and, as such, are intransparent to all of their guests. Should this become public, their largest segment, Muslim travellers, may indeed be negatively affected.

6 | CONCLUSION

Following Phase 1 of our data collection, we had thought that some reasons for the intransparency we found may be explained by a feeling of inferiority due to colonization or globalization described by Ibn Khaldoon (Bennabi, 1999; Ibn-Khaldun, 1377/1958) as "the incarnation of *colonisibility*, the typical visage of the colonial era, whom the coloniser makes perform the role of the *indigene* and who could accept all the roles" (Bennabi, 1999: 14). This feeling could result in hotels feeling they must make Islamic practices palatable to others, perhaps feeling an emphasis on the hospitality aspects of the culture override strict adherence to the Islamic rules. Another possible explanation was the "glaring" ethics gap that Abuznaid (2009) refers to in the Muslim business world in general. A situation where Muslims know what the Islamic business model requires and are able to perform using it, but do not. A third explanation, is that the hotels simply do not have a marketing focus, they see room nights as simply "sales," and this failure to integrate a more sophisticated approach to customers results in contradictory information being released.

However, the triangulated data support the notion that few hotels are operating an Islamic business model, which emphasizes Islamic values throughout their operation, and do this honestly and transparently. Many hotels badged as "Islamic" are branding themselves in this way with a rather Machiavellian outlook, as they superficially supply what their Muslim customers like in terms of service provision and surreptitiously provide services that are in direct conflict with the Islamic business model, in an effort to retain two streams of consumers with potentially divergent requirements. This certainly supports the contention that the hotels are suffering from an "ethics gap." It disproves the contention that these hotels are uncomprehending about marketing—the interviews with the hotel managers would support an idea that exactly the opposite was true. The hotels are

intransparent primarily to their largest guest segment, those seeking a sharia'ah compliant hotel experience, whilst meeting other guests' requests in secrecy. The Islamic sharia'ah, on which the Islamic business model is founded, requires complete transparency in operations and service provision to all guests. Our interviews suggest that that requirement is, to a very large extent, not being met.

In the context of Zarqa's (2003) framework, this study is a descriptive one, which considered the normative frameworks in Islam and reported on the behaviour of businesses claiming to operate under an Islamic banner. The study has raised a number of important issues for the Islamic/halal hotel industry and for Muslim tourism in general. One of them is the way terms are used. These terms are not randomly selected, they are clearly defined and codified in a legal system all Muslims are familiar with. This research suggests that there are elements of self-orientalization in the behaviour of so-called Islamic hotels with regard to their guests. The difficulty of being consistent and transparent across the requirements of a halal holiday experience may be more sharply juxtaposed at the four- and five-star hotel end of the market, because the lower starred hotels usually do not have restaurants, nightclubs, spas, and other high-cost added-value features on site nor do they have the required fees for liquor licences and the like. This makes it easier for them to stay within the confines of the Islamic business model, even if they are not really trying to. In the case of the hotels whose main target segment are the GCC or other wealthier Muslims, then the four- and five-star hotels do face problems delivering on an Islamic business model and keep both segments satisfied.

This study has indicated that a mechanism to regulate what the hotels should provide if they are going to badge themselves in this way, which will stop hotels badging themselves as Islamic if they are not going to conform to the codified meaning of the terms and that will protect the rights of the Muslim travellers, which are the largest segment for these hotels, is advisable. However, much deeper examination of this issue is necessary, because what is presented here does not prove that the hotels' behaviour is self-orientalization or due to an ethics gap or an inferiority complex or because they are simply expedient in terms of marketing and are using this as a vehicle for sales, but it does reflect elements of these things. An in-depth follow up study in which a battery of interviews is conducted to separate the complex strands presented here is necessary.

7 | MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Islamic hotels currently have a niche advantage within the hospitality sector. There is a danger, however, that this niche advantage could quickly diminish, as it did with Islamic banks. When Islamic banking was first offered, it had the advantage of a unique market position, in that it was able to provide truly sharia'ah compliant banking services. However, a few decades later, almost all international conventional banks have set up their own operations badged as "Islamic banking." Such operations now run through HSBC, Standard Chartered Bank, BNP Paribas, Deutsche Bank, and others that are (purportedly) offering sharia'ah-compliant finance. Unfortunately, for Islamic hoteliers, the same development is now being replicated within the Islamic

hospitality sector, albeit currently to a lesser degree. Some international hotel chains are now explicitly seeking to cater to the Islamic market, including high-end brands such as the Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten Kempinski in Munich, The Grand Hotel Kempinski Geneva, and the Marriott International's Ritz-Carlton. For example, "among the services for Muslim guests at the chain's Grand Hotel des Bains in St. Moritz, Switzerland, is a special women's spa and gender-segregated exercise sessions. And Kempinski offers identical services at other properties in Berlin, Bangkok and Budapest, Hungary" (Jones, 2013).

The threat to Islamic hotels generated by traditional hotels becoming increasingly sharia'ah-compliant and beginning to cater to some of the needs of Muslim travellers cannot be exaggerated. Changing or "Islamizing" some of their operations to attract Muslims is much easier for conventional hotels than is the "Islamization" of financial operations in order to comply with a full Islamic business model. As with so-called "Islamic finance," customers are often not aware that the hotels are no more than "Islamic" styled offerings within a non-compliant overall business model. Given that the dominant business model is that of profit maximization, the fact that the whole hotel operation is not run according to Islamic guidance is not an issue to many established hotel brands seeking the "Muslim travel dollar." Armed with a long history of service excellence, world-class reputation and a substantial customer base, many Western hotels could easily turn the tables on relatively newly established authentically Islamic hotels.

Although Islamic hoteliers still have the upper hand when it comes to the concept and delivery of Islamic hotel services, it must be acknowledged that whatever window of opportunity they still have is narrowing fast. Western hoteliers, driven into the niche by the massive size of the Muslim travel market, are quickly catching up.

This study has shown how hotels risk losing business from Muslim travellers because the Islamic status of the hotels is not known. Taking into consideration the fact that the Muslim travel market is worth 137 billion USD, it is clear that these losses could be substantial.

The issue of transparency related to how sharia'ah-compliant an Islamic hotel has so far fallen outside of governmental and professional jurisdictions, because no regulations exist. There are no unions or institutions that Islamic hotels join, and the hotel business is largely deregulated. Therefore, whether a hotel is authentically sharia'ah-compliant or not is something that needs to be urgently addressed. The industry will greatly benefit from a professional governing body and a set of rules and regulations similar to those enforced for halal food or halal pharmaceuticals.

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