

Module 1

Muslim Hospitality



Marketing to Muslim Travellers

Defining positioning

When it comes to marketing of Muslim friendly destinations, first, the hotels should identify their target customer and determine how you will cater for their travel needs.

Are Muslims your core customer group, or are you trying to also attract other customers?

There are shariah-compliant hotels in predominantly Muslim countries that seek primarily to target Muslims. Sofyan Hotel Group in Indonesia is an example of a fully shariah-compliant hotel. They display their Shariah certificate prominently on the front desk, prayer calls are broadcast from speakers in the hotel rooms, and congregational prayers are held in a dedicated prayer hall at the hotel.

However, there are also an increasing number of Western and dedicated hotel chains seeking to attract both Muslim and non-Muslim guests with an emphasis on core, common values.

JW Marriott's Grosvenor House in London, for instance, positions itself as a luxury hotel that accommodates the religious and cultural needs of wealthy GCC guests, among many other customer segments. The hotel's suites include majlis-style lounge rooms that are gender separated. Their menu includes Middle Eastern dishes, and they have Lebanese and Egyptian chefs. Furthermore, there are Arabic speaking staff in most areas.

Assuming you're trying to reach both Muslim and non-Muslim customer groups, use appropriate terminology for each. The wording you use to describe your services will determine the reaction you will get by both Muslim travellers as well as other market segments. Some players are avoiding alienating non-Muslims by not using the words halal, Muslim or Islamic in any of their marketing material.

The messaging of Shaza Hotels, a luxury hotel operator with hotels in the Middle East, is that its brand offers Arabian hospitality in a modern luxurious setting. When using mainstream communication channels, Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority refers to its destination as "family friendly", thereby being inclusive of both Muslims and non-Muslims; whereas it uses the term "halal" when addressing Muslims in the West through targeted channels.

Putting it all together. After determining all of the above, develop messaging that conveys your positioning to your target audience and communicates what makes you unique from your competitors and what is it that you're offering that addresses your customers pain points. As an example, this is part of the website messaging on Al Jawhara Gardens Hotel: "Al Jawhara Gardens Hotel respects traditional style while embracing modern comfort. We offer traditional Emirates hospitality, a family atmosphere and professional service".



Islam's influence on marketing

Although the degree of influence religions have on the lifestyles of their followers is yet to be conclusively defined, it can be said with a bit of certainty that Islam, compared to other mainstream religions, has a stronger influence and impact on the lifestyles of its followers. Islam's influence on marketing has always been felt in different ways, and is most commonly expressed in Muslim consumer markets in terms of food items being halal or not. In fact, halal, has been the underpinning link between Islam, product development and marketing.

Recently, with marketing practices becoming more diversified and mature in Islamic markets, the influence of Islam has gone beyond the traditionally assumed areas of its application.

Furthermore, although over the course of the last few decades a reasonable understanding of Islam's influence on marketing and consumers has developed in terms of knowledge and practice, with the recent emergence of Islamic marketing as a discipline, new perspectives and dimensions are being revealed. In fact, there is a concerted effort by different circles to grasp the influence of Islam on Muslim consumer behaviour, including Oxford's Saïd Business School, Ogilvy Noor and the Journal of Islamic Marketing.

In the emerging arena of Islamic marketing, a key area of focus revolves around understanding Muslim consumers. In hard core segmentation theory, segments are defined as groups of consumers who tend to act in a similar manner. If this approach is applied and consumers are segmented by religion, Muslim consumers can be identified in any society. However, at the same time it should be observed that their purchasing behaviour is quite diverse. For instance, in Pakistan (a market of more than 170 million Muslims), there are no homogenous consumer patterns anchored in Islam. Other segmentation variables such as, for example, age, economic class and education play a greater role in consumer behaviour. This observation holds true for any market in the world regardless of whether Muslims are in a majority or not. Thus, labelling a consumer class as 'Muslim consumer' has to be done more insightfully.

In a recent article in the Journal of Islamic Marketing, researchers explored the link of new product adoption and religiosity. The latter refers to the extent to which individuals follow religious tenets and indoctrination. Efforts like these are now helping shape the characteristics of Muslim consumers and will go a long way in making marketing activities in Islamic markets more effective.

When choosing a halal holiday (one that allows Muslim tourists to go on a holiday while remaining true to their religion), Muslim's travel destinations are based on a combination of 'consumption' values (associated with accommodation, airline, entertainment), 'personal' values (fun, enjoyment, security) and Islamic religious values, such as Iman (faith).

Islamic values, related to aspects such as halal food, segregated facilities for men and women, prayer facilities and avoiding haram play a significant role for Muslim's in their expectations of a halal holiday.

Female Muslim Traveller

In the Muslim community, it's not yet common or considered 'normal' for a woman to go travelling on her own and is often frowned upon especially from the older generation.

With most of Muslim travellers being young and married with families the decision process on where to holiday will be made by all the members in the family.



The comfort level of the women and the facilities available to them will play an important role in deciding the holiday destination of these Muslim families. With more women travelling and working, Masjids (Arabic word for a mosque) need to have a separate area for these women to take wudhu (ritual washing performed by Muslims before prayer) and pray as well.

Other special needs of Muslim women that should be considered are, providing separate recreational and leisure facilities in hotels and other recreation areas. As Muslim women need to adhere to the Islamic teachings and dress appropriately as well as not socialise with anyone unrelated from the opposite sex, certain aspects of a holiday are not possible for them. Swimming in a mixed swimming pool, visiting a mixed spa facility or other social activities where they might not be able to dress in accordance to the teachings of the religion is not allowed.

In the past, most Muslim women missed out on many fun and relaxing activities but now with some countries catering to the demands of this growing segment of travellers, Muslim women are able to enjoy quite a few of these activities too. Some hotels have separate swimming pools for men and women, while others have separate timings for women to use the swimming pool. They also have separate spa facilities where women and men are able to enjoy a relaxing massage in the privacy of an enclosed area. Even a beach holiday can now be enjoyed by Muslim women as there are beaches which are completely secluded and are for women only.

In the past women were happy just sitting on the sidelines while their husbands and kids took part in all the activities. However in more recent times women too want to enjoy all that their husbands, brothers, fathers and sons enjoy.

These women are educated and adventurous and demand better facilities and are finally getting what they deserve as travel related businesses are finally realising that in order to capture the growing Muslim travel segment they need to make women happy as well, and this can be accomplished only by providing better facilities for them and making sure their needs have been considered when creating and marketing holiday packages.

According to the recent shifts, women in Saudi Arabia will no longer need the permission of a male guardian to travel, according to laws published in August 2019 in a key step towards dismantling controls that have made women second-class citizens in their own country.

Lots of hotels are starting to offer female only floors in order to attract solo muslim female travellers. Although some (and even a legal ruling in Copenhagen) find the concept discriminatory towards men and others see it as a step backwards for equal treatment, proponents simply see spaces dedicated to women as a way to enhance a woman's travel experience should she choose.

What words to use for Marketing?

While consumer trends are quickly evolving, within the Muslim-friendly travel industry itself, professionals are still debating the best terminology to use to identify or describe the sector to reach different stakeholders.

Some refer to it as Muslim-friendly travel, others call it 'halal travel' or 'family-friendly travel', while others prefer not to use any specific labels. Many use the terms interchangeably. In the travel sector, 'halal' and 'Muslim-friendly' are accepted from an industry point of view, but from a consumer perspective, it's largely demographically-driven.

Halal term means 'permissible' according to Islamic teaching (Sharia law). However, the term 'Islamic' is precisely applied only to that which relates directly to the faith and its doctrines (such as Islamic law/Shariah, Islamic values, principles and beliefs, Islamic worship). It is therefore closer to the Arabic term 'Mu'minoon'. This is because Islam indicates the faith as an ideal based on the core Islamic sources which are the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. It therefore follows that Muslim men, women, country may not necessarily be Islamic and that 'Islamic men' and 'Muslim men' have different meanings. Based on the above argument, using the terms 'Islamic' and 'Halal' as if they have similar meaning is inappropriate. It would

be better to use ‘Halal’ as brand name rather ‘Islamic’ for any related product and service in tourism industry.



Brands should ideally use what their customers are comfortable with; however, the industry still needs a label. Your guests need to understand what you’re talking about, whether it’s halal or halal-friendly.

When you are talking to your guests, they need to know that those values or facilities or services are available, but they don’t want to see that branding in their face everywhere. So, you have to take a cultural or wellness approach to things.