EXPLORING BRUNEI'S TOURISM POLICIES FOR ATTRACTING MUSLIM TOURISTS FROM THE US AND AUSTRALIAN MARKETS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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| **ABSTRACT** |
| The field of Halal tourism is experiencing burgeoning growth and is expected to reach a market value of $300 billion by 2026. In this context, the tourism policies implemented by Brunei play a crucial role in shaping the perceptions and experiences of tourists, while also exerting a substantial impact on the country's economic development. As Brunei aims to diversify its economy and reduce its dependence on oil exports, the Halal tourism market presents a promising opportunity for the nation's Islamic travel industry. Particularly, Muslim tourists from the United States (US) and Australia emerge as potential target markets for Brunei. Given Brunei's predominantly Islamic character, the country possesses inherent advantages as a Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) destination for US and Australian Muslim tourists. These advantages embrace shared religious values, a safe environment (Darussalam – Abode of Peace), and common use of the English language. This paper aims to assess the potential of these target markets by considering their Purchasing Power Parity, consumer needs, and demand for Halal food and accommodations. This paper adopts qualitative research methods, focusing on netnography to gain insight into the digital experiences of potential Muslim tourists/consumers. Extensive datasets drawn from eHalal.io, a reputable provider of quality management systems for Halal products and services, will be analysed to gather valuable information. Through this study, we hope to shed light on the viability and attractiveness of the US and Australian Muslim tourist markets for Brunei's Halal tourism industry. The findings presented in this study suggest valuable insights for policymakers in Brunei's tourism industry, in regard to target markets of the US and Australian Muslim tourists. |
| **Keywords:**  *Australia, Halal ERP Management Systems, Halal Tourism, Muslim Tourists, United States* |

# Introduction

The concept of Halal encompasses various sectors and industries, including food, cosmetics, fragrances, leather crafts, pharmaceuticals, banking, entertainment, supply chain management, and tourism, providing permissible and lawful options for the Muslim population (Rahim & Shahwan, 2013). Its growth is driven by increased awareness among Muslims and their expanding population (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Battour et al., 2010; Markham & Buchanan, 2012; Mastercard and Crescent Rating, 2020; Rahim & Shahwan, 2013). The expansion of the Halal market is driven not only by the growing Muslim population, but also by non-Muslim individuals who seek Halal-certified products due to reasons including health concerns, ethical considerations, and a preference for transparent processes. Currently, the increased development of Halal tourism is reflected in the considerable influence of religious beliefs in the tourism sector (Haddad et al., 2019).

Halal tourism revenues are projected to rise from US$58 billion to US$102 billion in 2021, with a compound annual growth rate of 16.5%, to reach US$189 billion by 2025 (Standard Dinar, 2020). The Global Muslim Travel Index 2022 by Mastercard and Crescent Rating (2020) forecasts there will be an increase in Muslim tourists to 140 million in 2023, returning to pre-Covid levels of 160 million in 2024, attracting the attention of both practitioners and researchers in the tourism industry (Battour & Ismail, 2016).

It is important to understand the Islamic requirements associated with tourism. This is essential for marketers and policymakers, as it enables them to develop suitable alternatives, infrastructure, and facilitate Halal travel activities. Moreover, it is pertinent to understand the Islamic requirements associated with tourism, as it is crucial for marketers and policymakers to develop suitable alternatives, infrastructure, and facilitate Halal travel activities (Battour & Ismail, 2016). An important aspect for Brunei, a small oil-rich nation, is to actively diversify its economy by positioning itself as a hub for Halal products and Islamic tourism (Fox, 2022). This, in turn, will serve as a catalyst for the growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), fostering economic development and contributing to the overall prosperity of the country.in turn will stimulate micro small and medium enterprises (MSME) and increase the country’s economy(Chin et al., 2023).

# Background of Study

Halal tourism has emerged as a significant phenomenon within the tourism sector, driven by the increasing recognition of religious beliefs and practices among Muslim travellers, where the concept of Halal extends beyond dietary restrictions and encompasses various sectors, including tourism, where adherence to Islamic principles and values is sought after (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Battour et al., 2010; Markham & Buchanan, 2012); Mastercard and Crescent Rating (2020); (Rahim & Shahwan, 2013). This burgeoning market segment has witnessed remarkable growth due to the expanding Muslim population and heightened awareness of Halal practices among Muslim communities (Standard Dinar, 2020).

Projections indicate a substantial rise in the revenues of Halal tourism, with estimates ranging from US$58 billion to US$102 billion in 2021, demonstrating a compound annual growth rate of 16.5%. By 2025, the market is expected to reach a staggering value of US$189 billion (Standard Dinar, 2020). Additionally, industry reports, such as the Global Muslim Travel Index 2022 published by Mastercard and Crescent Rating (2020), anticipate a steady increase in the number of Muslim tourists, with projections reaching 140 million in 2023 and returning to pre-pandemic levels of 160 million by 2024.

In response to this growing market, it is imperative for stakeholders in the tourism industry, including policymakers and marketers, to understand and address the unique needs and preferences of Muslim travellers. By catering to these requirements, destinations and businesses can tap into a highly lucrative niche market, enhance their competitiveness, and foster sustainable tourism development.

Brunei, a small nation with a rich oil-based economy, has recognized the economic potential of Halal tourism and actively positioned itself as a leading destination for Islamic tourism and Halal products (Ahmad, 2014). Leveraging its Islamic heritage, shared religious values, and supportive infrastructure, Brunei seeks to diversify its economy and reduce its dependence on oil exports (Fox, 2022). However, to fully capitalize on the opportunities presented by the Halal tourism market, it is crucial for Brunei to identify and target specific market segments that align with its unique offerings.

This study aims to contribute to the scholarly understanding of the Islamic travel industry, with a specific focus on the United States and Australia as source markets. By examining the market size and popular travel destinations within these countries, the research seeks to provide empirical insights into the preferences and behaviours of Muslim travellers. Furthermore, the study aims to assess Brunei's competitive positioning within these markets and offer strategic recommendations for the nation to establish itself as a preferred destination for Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT), particularly targeting high-net-worth individual Muslims from the US and Australia. The findings from this study will enhance the academic discourse on Halal tourism and provide practical implications for policymakers and industry practitioners to effectively engage with this burgeoning market segment.

# Literature Review

**3.1 Halal Tourism**

Halal tourism caters to Muslim travellers by providing accommodations, transportation, food, and entertainment options that adhere to Islamic principles and values, where it is still in its early stages but growing in popularity. Halal tourism has emerged as a significant market segment that caters to the leisure and entertainment activities of Muslims in tourist destinations (Doğan, 2011). Whilst Islamic tourism primarily revolves around religious and pilgrimage travel, such as the Hajj to Mecca, Halal tourism encompasses a broader range of recreational and leisure travel experiences undertaken by Muslims to explore diverse cultures and appreciate the world's wonders n accordance with their faith (Ryan, 2018). This distinction between Halal or approved purposes of travel and haram activities, which are practices not endorsed by the Islamic faith, plays a crucial role in defining the scope of Halal tourism (Mohsin et al., 2016).

The implementation of Halal concepts in travel management, known as Halal travel or tourism, is guided by Islamic principles, thereby providing Muslim travellers with tourism offerings that align with their religious beliefs and legal frameworks (Junaidi, 2020). Halal tourism involves Muslims utilising various tourism services while adhering to Islamic beliefs, such as dietary restrictions, modesty in accommodations, and access to Islamic services and products (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Boğan & Sarıışık, 2019).

However, the recognition of a promising market segment of Halal tourism by the global hospitality industry stems from its ability to meet the needs of the travelling Muslim community while adhering to the Sharia laws of Islam, as described in the Qur'an (Mohsin et al., 2016). In order to ensure Muslim consumer protection in Halal tourism, it needs the acquisition of Halal certification from authorised local associations or governmental entities from reliable sources. Both the United States and Australia have reliable sources for Halal certification (Mastercard and Crescent Rating, 2020).

**3.2 United States of America (US)**

Recent evidence suggests that the United States Muslim population is estimated to be around 3.45 million, accounting for approximately 1.1% of the total population (Pew Research Center, 2018). However, alternative sources suggest a potentially higher number of 4.4 million Muslims in the country as of 2015. The Muslim community in the US is known for its diversity and growth, with a significant representation of immigrants and their descendants ((Mohamed, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2018).

According to the Pew Research Center (2018), American Muslims have educational levels similar to the general population, with approximately 31% holding university degrees and 11% having postgraduate degrees. Financially, they are comparable to the general population in terms of having a household income of over $100,000. A significant proportion of Muslim Americans are born in the United States (42%), while the remaining 58% are immigrants, with more than half of them having moved to the US in the last two decades. Furthermore, 18% of Muslim American adults are second-generation, and 24% are third-generation or later (Pew Research Center, 2018). Muslims constitute the youngest faith group in the United States, with one-third of them being under 30 years of age (Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017).

The Islamic Services of America serves as the central authority responsible for granting Halal certifications to compliant services and products in the United States (Mastercard and Crescent Rating, 2020). Muslim American consumers exhibit a preference for Muslim-majority countries, such as Malaysia and Turkey, as popular choices for Halal tourism due to their close relationship with the state and religion, which creates favourable conditions for the market (Mohsin et al., 2016). When travelling, American Muslim tourists tend to seek Muslim-friendly services and amenities that cater specifically to their needs, including access to Halal food, accommodations designed to meet their requirements, and the availability of Islamic services and products (Battour, 2018).

**3.3 Australia**

In retrospect, the Muslim population in Australia has been experiencing steady growth, leading to an increased demand for Halal products and services. This growth reflects the evolving needs and preferences of the Muslim community in Australia, as well as the broader recognition and acceptance of Halal practices.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017), the 2016 Census conducted in Australia estimates the Muslim population to be approximately 650,000 individuals, accounting for around 2.6% of the total Australian population. The majority of Muslims in Australia are concentrated in the states of New South Wales and Victoria, with smaller Muslim communities found in other states and territories Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021). This demographic distribution indicates the potential market size for Halal products and services in specific regions of the country.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the demand for Halal-certified products in Australia, not only among the Muslim population but also among non-Muslim consumers. Non-Muslim consumers may choose to consume Halal-certified products without necessarily being aware of their certification status (eHalal.io Token (HAL), 2022). This growing demand indicates a broader trend of increased awareness and acceptance of Halal practices in the Australian market, which presents opportunities for businesses to cater to the diverse needs of Muslim consumers.

When examining income trends in Australia, it is important to note that the average weekly ordinary-time earnings for full-time adults in the country have experienced an increase of 3.4% to $1,807.70 annually as of November 2022. However, these figures provide a general overview of income trends among full-time workers in Australia and do not specifically pertain to the Muslim population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Further research is necessary to explore the income levels and financial capabilities of Muslim consumers in Australia, as this information can assist businesses in understanding the purchasing power and consumption patterns of this market segment.

Halal certification agencies in Australia play a crucial role in ensuring that food products and services comply with Islamic law. Each state or territory typically has its own compliance authority responsible for overseeing Halal certifications. These agencies work in collaboration with businesses to certify their products as Halal, providing assurance to Muslim consumers and facilitating access to Halal options in the market. The presence of reliable and recognized Halal certification agencies is essential for building trust and confidence among Muslim consumers and supporting the growth of the Halal tourism industry in Australia.

Finally, the Muslim population in Australia is growing, leading to an increased demand for Halal products and services. The awareness and acceptance of Halal practices are on the rise in the Australian market, creating opportunities for businesses to cater to the needs of Muslim consumers. Understanding the income trends and financial capabilities of the Muslim population, as well as ensuring reliable Halal certification processes, are key factors for businesses and policymakers to consider when serving the Halal tourism market effectively better in Australia. Further research and collaboration among stakeholders are needed to fully explore the potential of Halal tourism in the country.

**3.4 Brunei Tourism Policy**

The Tourism Development Department (TDD) of Brunei Darussalam, operating under the auspicious of the Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism, plays a crucial role in promoting Brunei as a desirable tourist destination. Established in 2005, the formation of the TDD reflects the government's recognition of the immense potential of the tourism industry in driving economic growth, employment opportunities, and the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) within the country. The tourism sector's contribution to the Gross National Product (GDP) in 2015, accounting for approximately 2%, further emphasizes its significance as a key driver of Brunei's economy.

The primary function of the TDD is to strengthen and diversify tourism attractions and products while improving the facilities and quality of services offered to tourists. The department's overarching mission is to enhance the overall tourism experience in Brunei, encompassing attractions, products, and services, which is “*Strengthening and diversifying tourism attractions and products as well as improving the facilities and quality of their services*”.

Their vision relates to “*Increased in tourist arrivals that contribute significantly to the growth of the tourism-related economic activities*”, which is centred around achieving a substantial increase in tourist arrivals, which will significantly contribute to the growth of tourism-related economic activities.

To accomplish these objectives, the TDD has established their strategic goals in these six key areas, as follows:

1. *Increasing the target number of tourist arrivals by air from 158,000 to 174,000 by the year 2022*: This objective focuses on expanding air travel connectivity to attract a larger volume of tourists to Brunei. It involves collaborating with airlines, travel agencies, and stakeholders to enhance accessibility and convenience for visitors.
2. *Increasing the market share of the high-growth market*: This objective involves identifying and targeting high-growth markets with a strong potential for tourism in Brunei. By conducting market research and developing tailored marketing strategies, TDD aims to increase Brunei's market share in these regions and attract more tourists from them.
3. *Developing and strengthening sustainable, responsible, and inclusive tourism products*: This objective highlights TDD's commitment to promoting sustainable practices within the tourism industry. It involves developing tourism products and experiences that respect and preserve Brunei's natural and cultural heritage while ensuring inclusivity for all visitors.
4. *Attracting foreign and local investment to develop tourism products and services*: This objective aims to attract investment in the tourism sector to facilitate the development of new and improved products and services. The TDD actively seeks partnerships and collaborations with investors, both foreign and local, to enhance the overall tourism infrastructure and offerings in Brunei.
5. *Enhancing the capacity and competency of manpower resources in the tourism industry and related services:* This objective emphasizes the importance of human resources in delivering high-quality services to tourists. The TDD focuses on training and capacity-building programs for individuals working in the tourism sector, ensuring they possess the necessary skills and knowledge to provide exceptional experiences for visitors.
6. *Enhancing the standard of tourism facilities and ensuring cleanliness, comfort, and safety of tourists:* This objective centres around the provision of top-notch facilities and services for tourists. The TDD aims to maintain cleanliness, improve comfort levels, and ensure the safety of visitors by implementing and enforcing stringent quality standards within the tourism industry.

The TDD fulfils several key roles within the travel and tourism sector. These include formulating national policies and strategies, planning and promoting Brunei as a tourist destination, providing advisory services to the Minister, enhancing the economic contribution of the sector, coordinating marketing activities, making recommendations for development and promotion, identifying resources, reporting to His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan, and undertaking additional functions directed by the Minister. Through these diverse responsibilities, the TDD plays a vital role in guiding and shaping the growth and development of Brunei's tourism industry (Ministry of Finance and Economy, n.d.).

**3.5 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Brunei Tourism Policy**

Brunei's tourism policy boasts several strengths that contribute to its appeal as a tourist destination. One notable strength lies in the country's infrastructure development. Brunei has made significant investments in creating well-maintained transportation networks, including roads, airports, and seaports. These efforts ensure convenient access for tourists, facilitating smooth travel experiences within the country. The presence of modern infrastructure enhances the overall visitor experience and showcases Brunei's commitment to providing quality tourism services (Chen et al., 2013).

Another strength of Brunei's tourism policy is its abundant natural beauty. The country is blessed with pristine rainforests, picturesque beaches, and diverse wildlife, making it an attractive destination for nature enthusiasts and eco-tourists. The preservation of natural landscapes and the promotion of sustainable tourism practices allow visitors to immerse themselves in Brunei's unique natural environment. Such attractions not only draw tourists seeking tranquillity and adventure but also contribute to the conservation of Brunei's ecological treasures (Ahmad, 2015b; Hamdan & Low, 2014; Idris et al., 2019).

The rich cultural heritage of Brunei is also a notable strength. The country's historical landmarks, architectural wonders, museums, and traditional arts and crafts showcase its vibrant cultural tapestry. Tourists could explore magnificent sites like the Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque and engage with Brunei's cultural traditions through activities such as water village visits and cultural performances. The promotion and preservation of cultural heritage enable visitors to gain insights into Brunei's history, customs, and way of life, offering an enriching and authentic experience (Lopes et al., 2019).

Additionally, Brunei's status as a Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) destination is a significant strength. As a predominantly Muslim country, Brunei caters to the needs and preferences of Muslim travellers. The Halal food industry in Brunei offers a wide range of Halal-certified dining options, ensuring that Muslim visitors can enjoy culinary experiences in accordance with their dietary requirements and religious beliefs. This aspect sets Brunei apart as an ideal destination for Muslim travellers seeking a seamless and culturally sensitive experience (Sutikno et al., 2023).

Despite these strengths, Brunei's tourism policy also exhibits certain weaknesses that need attention and improvement. One weakness is the underutilization of cultural and religious heritage. Although Brunei possesses a rich cultural and religious legacy, there is a need to effectively showcase and promote these assets to tourists. Enhancing the availability of guided tours, interpretive materials, and immersive experiences related to Brunei's cultural and religious heritage would help attract and engage tourists, allowing them to delve deeper into Brunei's unique traditions and customs.

Another weakness lies in limited marketing efforts. Brunei faces challenges in creating awareness about its tourism offerings, particularly in key markets such as the United States. Strengthening marketing campaigns through comprehensive strategies, including targeted advertising, digital marketing, and collaboration with travel agencies and online platforms, would contribute to raising Brunei's profile as an attractive destination. By enhancing visibility and effectively communicating Brunei's unique selling points, the country can increase its appeal and draw more tourists from around the world.

Furthermore, Brunei experiences limited flight connectivity, which poses a challenge in attracting tourists from distant regions. Expanding air travel routes and establishing partnerships with airlines to increase the number of direct flights to Brunei would improve accessibility and convenience for potential visitors. Strengthening flight connections with major hubs and exploring new markets would contribute to overcoming this weakness and expanding Brunei's reach to a wider audience (Ahmad, 2015a; Oxford Business Group, 2013).

To improve the tourism policy, Brunei should focus on comprehensive marketing and advertising strategies that highlight the country's strengths. Targeting key markets, such as the United States and Australia, through tailored campaigns that emphasize Brunei's cultural and natural attractions would be beneficial. Leveraging digital platforms and social media to engage with potential visitors and travel influencers can also generate interest and create a buzz around Brunei as a must-visit destination. Finally, enhancing flight connectivity by forging partnerships with airlines and exploring international markets/partnerships.

**3.6 Brunei Investment Agency (BIA)**

The Brunei Investment Agency (BIA), functioning under the Ministry of Finance and Economy, can play a significant role in the development of the Brunei tourism industry. With its portfolio of prestigious hotel properties, the BIA could integrate these establishments into the country's tourism plan, positioning Brunei as a preferred destination for affluent Muslim individuals from Western and Middle Eastern countries seeking a luxurious and culturally accommodating travel experience. This strategic approach aligns to attract high-net-worth Muslim individuals while considering their religious requirements (Hamid & Karim, n.d.).

The BIA owns several renowned hotels globally, including The Dorchester in London, The Beverly Hills Hotel in Beverly Hills, Plaza Athénée and Le Meurice in Paris, Principe di Savoia in Milan, Hotel Bel-Air in Los Angeles, Coworth Park in Ascot, 45 Park Lane in London, and Hotel Eden in Rome. These properties can serve as valuable assets in promoting Brunei as a desirable destination for Muslim travellers. One key advantage is that these hotels already offer a range of amenities tailored to Muslim guests. This includes providing Halal food options and prayer mats for guests and showcasing a commitment to meeting the religious requirements and preferences of Muslim travellers (Ministry of Finance and Economy, n.d.).

To effectively leverage these hotel properties, the BIA should strategically market and promote them as integral components of Brunei's tourism plan. Emphasizing their exclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and dedication to providing exceptional experiences for Muslim guests will enable the BIA to attract high-net-worth individuals and differentiate Brunei as a unique and appealing destination. Collaborating with relevant tourism authorities and stakeholders is crucial to developing targeted marketing campaigns that highlight Brunei's Islamic heritage, natural beauty, and hospitality offerings, reinforcing its appeal to the intended audience.

By showcasing the luxurious amenities, world-class services, and cultural sensitivity offered by these BIA-owned hotel properties, the agency can position Brunei as an ideal destination for high-net-worth Muslim individuals. The marketing and promotional efforts should effectively communicate the cultural sensitivity, luxury amenities, and religious accommodations available, highlighting Brunei's commitment to providing a high-quality and immersive travel experience. This approach will help attract affluent Muslim travellers’ who value both luxury and adherence to their religious practices.

Integrating the BIA-owned hotel properties into Brunei's tourism plan requires a comprehensive marketing and promotional strategy. This strategy should leverage the unique attributes of these establishments to target and attract affluent Muslim travellers’ seeking a luxurious and culturally accommodating experience. By showcasing Brunei's Islamic heritage, natural beauty, and world-class hospitality, the BIA can contribute to enhancing the country's tourism industry, attracting high-net-worth individuals, and driving overall economic growth.

**3.7 Halal ERP – Enterprise Resource Planning Systems**

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems, as defined by Klaus et al. (2000), are comprehensive software solutions that integrate various business processes and functions within an organization. These systems provide a unified view of the organization, streamlining operations, improving efficiency, and enhancing decision-making capabilities. By centralizing data and automating key processes, ERP systems eliminate data silos, promote collaboration, and contribute to increased productivity and cost savings. They serve as a solution for businesses, enabling process integration and data consolidation while improving operational efficiency.

eHalal.io is a well-recognized e-commerce platform that specializes in providing Halal-certified products and services. The platform has collected valuable data on the average revenue of Muslim consumers in different cities worldwide, contributing to the understanding of consumer behaviour and market trends. Furthermore, eHalal.io operates as both a Business-to-Business (B2B) platform for its customers and a Business-to-Consumer (B2C) platform for end-users, offering a comprehensive marketplace for Halal products and services (Amini & Abukari, 2020).

ERP systems play a crucial role in integrating data across functional units and supporting major organizational processes (Ganesh et al., 2014). In the case of the Halal industry, ERP systems can leverage the datasets provided by eHalal.io, a prominent Halal food portal (eHalal.io, 2023). By integrating this data into the ERP system, businesses operating in the Halal industry can gain valuable insights into consumer preferences, market demands, and supply chain dynamics. This integration facilitates efficient inventory management, order processing, and customer relationship management, ultimately improving the overall operational efficiency and effectiveness of Halal businesses.

The integration of eHalal.io datasets into ERP systems allows for better data-driven decision-making, enabling businesses to identify trends, forecast demand, and optimize their operations accordingly. For example, the ERP system can analyse the purchasing patterns of Muslim consumers in different cities as provided by eHalal.io, enabling businesses to tailor their product offerings, marketing strategies, and supply chain logistics to meet the specific needs and preferences of their target markets. This integration also supports the traceability and transparency of Halal products, ensuring compliance with Halal certification standards and enhancing consumer trust.

In sum, ERP systems play a vital role in integrating and managing data across different functions within an organization. When combined with datasets from e-commerce platforms like eHalal.io, ERP systems offer valuable insights and facilitate efficient operations in the Halal industry. The integration of eHalal.io data into ERP systems enables businesses to make data-driven decisions, optimize processes, and deliver tailored products and services to meet the demands of Muslim consumers globally. This integration contributes to the growth and development of the Halal industry, enhancing its operational efficiency and market competitiveness.

# Methodology

This research paper employs a case study methodology to investigate the eHalal.io Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software (eHalal.io, 2023). The case study approach is chosen to provide a comprehensive analysis of the social and epistemological context surrounding the topic (Denzin, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Additionally, the study utilizes 'Big data' analysis techniques to extract insights from large datasets obtained from the Halal ERP system, aiming to uncover novel information and patterns (Kubick, 2012; Russom, 2011). Churchman (1971) defines 'Big data' as inquiry systems encompassing methods, procedures, and techniques for describing and explaining behaviour, testing hypotheses, assessing causality, and establishing new truths. It also recognizes that 'Big data' can consist of unstructured data, such as text with social sentiments, audio and video files, clickstreams, and website log files. Such data can flow in real-time streams, enabling businesses to make near-real-time decisions and maximize their business value (Chang et al., 2014). Moreover, the field has witnessed the emergence of computational social science and e-social science, indicating further developments in related areas (Dutton & Meyer, 2009; Lazer et al., 2009).

The study adopts Netnography as a research method to explore the eHalal.io blockchain system. Netnography allows for an in-depth understanding of individual experiences within the digital network space (Kozinets, 2010, 2015; Kozinets, 1997, 2002; Kozinets & Gretzel, 2022). It employs an ethnographic approach to examine social changes, online community dynamics, and cultural aspects within the digital realm. The research takes an observational and non-participatory stance, observing online communities across diverse participants in the online arena (Costello et al., 2017). Ethical guidelines outlined by the Association of Internet Researchers are strictly followed throughout the study, ensuring ethical conduct in the research process (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). As Kozinets (2015, p. 97) aptly states, the research emphasizes the participatory, reflective, interactive, and active nature of engaging with social media and the internet.

Furthermore, the study acknowledges that Halal online communities exhibit shared values, customs, and beliefs that manifest in specific consumer behaviours, reflecting the unique traits of the community (Kozinets, 2010, p. 12).

# Results and Discussion

The internet, specifically the World Wide Web (WWW), has revolutionized the way US Muslim tourists access information and arrange their travel plans. Reports from eHalal.io (2023) indicate that a significant majority of Muslim users in the US, approximately 80%, who visit eHalal.io websites are below the age of 45. Additionally, about 70% of these users own an iPhone. These statistics highlight the tech-savvy nature of US Muslim tourists and their reliance on technology, particularly smartphones, for trip planning purposes.

**5.1 US**

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the socioeconomic status and educational attainment of Muslim households in the United States. It was discovered that more than 50% of US Muslim households have an average income exceeding $50,000, with a substantial 25% earning over $100,000. This indicates that a significant proportion of the Muslim population in the US enjoys a relatively high level of affluence (Lipka, 2017). Moreover, the study revealed that 66% of US Muslims hold a university degree, which surpasses the national average of 36% for all Americans. This data highlights the impressive educational background of US Muslims, underscoring their intellectual prowess and capacity for higher education.

The economic significance of the US Muslim market becomes evident when considering the collective spending power of the entire population. With a combined spending power exceeding $170 billion, US Muslims make a lucrative consumer market for Halal products and Islamic tourism (Bukhari et al., 2020; Rahayu, 2018). This figure demonstrates the potential economic opportunities available for businesses catering to the specific needs and preferences of US Muslim consumers.

In today's digital age, the internet has revolutionized the way people access information and make travel arrangements. US Muslim tourists have significantly benefited from this advancement, enabling them to conveniently plan their trips and explore various destinations. Online reports from eHalal.io (2023) reveal that nearly 80% of Muslim users in the US, who visit eHalal.io websites, are below the age of 45. This indicates a tech-savvy and digitally active demographic among US Muslim tourists. Furthermore, approximately 70% of these users own an iPhone, further emphasizing their reliance on technology and mobile devices for trip planning and information gathering. The online platform eHalal.io serves as a testament to the increasing significance of technology and its integration into the travel experiences of US Muslim tourists.

It is important to note that the availability of the US market on eHalal.io was not accessible during the preparation of this research paper. However, the findings of the study provide valuable insights into the broader trends and characteristics of US Muslim tourists, indicating their affinity for technology and online platforms.

Overall, these findings shed light on the economic potential and technological preferences of US Muslim consumers. Businesses operating in the Halal products and Islamic tourism sectors can leverage this information to tailor their offerings and marketing strategies to effectively engage with this affluent and educated demographic. By recognizing the importance of digital platforms and technology in reaching US Muslim tourists, businesses can capitalize on this market segment's needs and preferences, thereby fostering growth and success in their respective industries.

(*Please note that the US market was not available on e.Halal.io during the preparation of this paper*.)

**5.2 Australia**

According to the data collected by eHalal.io (2023), an online platform catering to Muslim consumers, detailed information about Muslim consumers in Australia has been gathered. The dataset includes information from various regions in Australia, such as New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania, and the Australian Capital Territory. In New South Wales, there are 53,222 Muslims, accounting for 44.35% of the dataset, followed by 36,476 Muslims in Victoria (30.40%), 11,880 Muslims in Queensland (9.90%), 9,271 Muslims in Western Australia (7.73%), 6,149 Muslims in South Australia, 1,385 Muslims in Tasmania (1.15%), and 1,202 Muslims in the Australian Capital Territory (1.00%).

It is interesting to note that approximately 5.9% of the datasets are associated with searches for Halal products on prominent retail platforms like Woolworths, Coles, and 7-Eleven (major supermarkets and convenience stores). This information holds significant potential for businesses wishing to engage with the Muslim consumer market in Australia, as it can furnish valuable insights to customize their marketing approaches and effectively address the preferences and requirements of this demographic.

When it comes to Muslim tourists visiting Australia, the top five source countries are Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, and Pakistan. These countries collectively account for over 60% of the total Muslim visitors to Australia. Their contribution to the Muslim tourism sector in Australia highlights the importance of catering to the needs and preferences of these tourists.

Moreover, the majority (78%) of Australian Muslim consumers on eHalal.io are below the age of 45, indicating a preference for the platform among younger demographics. This suggests that younger Australian Muslims are tech-savvy and rely on technology platforms like eHalal.io for their consumer needs.

During the last three months (since May 2023), eHalal.io has observed the following trends in Muslim consumer cities worldwide, with a specific focus on Australia:

1. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: With 88,940 web visitors, Kuala Lumpur ranks first, representing 5.44% of all orders on eHalal.io. This city is renowned for its highly developed Muslim consumer market, offering a wide range of Halal-certified products. The average revenue per order in Kuala Lumpur is USD 8.65 or MYR 39.93.
2. London, UK: Securing the second position, London recorded 62,859 web visitors, accounting for 3.85% of total web visitors on eHalal.io. The city's significant Muslim population contributes to its strong presence on the platform. The average revenue per order in London is USD 157.50 or GBP 122.96, reflecting higher purchasing power.
3. Singapore: Ranked third, Singapore attracted 43,378 web visitors, making up 2.65% of total web visitors on eHalal.io. The city-state's diverse Muslim community actively engages with the platform. The average revenue per order in Singapore is USD 29.50 or SGD 29.50
4. Sydney, Australia: Holding the fourth spot, Sydney recorded 34,273 web visitors, constituting 2.10% of total web visitors on eHalal.io. The city's thriving Muslim community contributes to its strong presence on the platform. The average revenue per order in Sydney is USD65.00 or A$ 94.54, indicating a relatively higher average order value.
5. Tashkent, Uzbekistan: Securing the fifth position, Tashkent attracted 27,731 web visitors, representing 1.70% of total web visitors on eHalal.io. This indicates a growing presence of Muslim consumers in Tashkent who utilize the platform for their Halal needs. The average revenue per order in Tashkent is USD7.50 or UZS 85,895.67, reflecting lower-priced orders.

When it comes to travel preferences, Australian Muslim travellers show a strong inclination towards beach destinations. Based on travel records, Fiji, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Bali, Cook Islands, Samoa, and the Amalfi Coast emerge as the most popular beach destinations for Australian Muslims. These destinations cater to the specific needs of Muslim travellers by offering a variety of Muslim-friendly facilities, including pre-arranged Halal food, prayer facilities, and suitable accommodations.

This section has reviewed the comprehensive data presented in this study and offers valuable insights into the geographic distribution, consumer preferences, and purchasing behaviours of Australian Muslim consumers. These insights provide businesses with a better understanding of this significant consumer segment and enable them to customise their marketing strategies accordingly. By effectively engaging with Australian Muslim consumers, businesses and policymakers can enhance customer satisfaction and drive business growth in the Australian market.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has explored Brunei's tourism policies aimed at attracting Muslim tourists from the US and Australia. These findings provide valuable insights that can inform the following recommendations for enhancing their policies, as follows:

1. The growth of the Halal tourism industry is driven by increased awareness among Muslims and their growing population (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Battour et al., 2010; Bourlakis et al., 2012; Kamran & Omran, 2018; Markham, 2014; Rahim & Shahwan, 2013).
2. Islamic requirements related to tourism are crucial for marketers and policymakers involved in Halal issues, enabling them to select appropriate Halal alternatives, develop Halal tourism infrastructure, facilitate Halal travel packages, and organize Halal travel activities (Battour & Ismail, 2016).
3. The 'Muslim Gen Z: The Next Generation of Travelers' report by Mastercard and Crescent Rating (2020) highlights the strong interest of Muslim Gen Z individuals in travel, with 69% planning two or more trips within the next 12 months and 32% desiring stays of one to two weeks at their chosen destinations.
4. Cultural immersion is a priority for two-thirds of Muslim Gen Z travellers, indicating their inclination to experience the local culture, traditions, and heritage of the places they visit. Nature excursions are also highly valued alongside traditional leisure activities (Mastercard and Crescent Rating, 2020).
5. Financially, Muslim Gen Z travellers exhibit increasing independence, with 32% funding their trips using their resources and 16% relying solely on parental support. This reflects their growing financial autonomy (Mastercard and Crescent Rating, 2020).
6. Muslim consumers demonstrate digital literacy and a preference for online shopping, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. This trend is expected to continue, emphasizing the importance of e-commerce platforms and the availability of Halal-certified products online (Sim & Shah, 2022).
7. Brunei's tourism policies could focus on initiatives that cater specifically to the needs and preferences of US and Australian Muslim tourists, based on the findings of this study (Hidayat et al., 2021; Yahaya et al., 2020).
8. The study acknowledges the limitation of lacking information on the US market from eHalal.io and suggests further research to investigate the US Muslim market and gain additional insights into the needs of Brunei's Halal Tourism (Hidayat et al., 2021; Yahaya et al., 2020).
9. Enhancing landing rights policies can address limited aviation connectivity and infrastructure issues in Brunei (Oxford Business Group, 2013).
10. Further research can also investigate other developed nations, such as the European Union countries, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom,

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