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Religiosity, consumerism and halal tourism: A study of seaside tourism organizations in Turkey

Abstract

This study investigates religious (Muslim) consumers' perception of holiday vacations from the perspective of tourism and theology using qualitative data to evaluate and discuss the perception and transformation of devotees involved in halal tourism practices. The sample for the study consists of one 5-star and three 4-star hotels and one holiday village, based in seaside locations in Turkey. The data gathered from the 50 participants who were interviewed about their halal tourism experience revealed that religious vacationers have a tendency to justify going on holiday, despite the lack of definitive support in the Quran or Sunnah. This finding betrays the influence of capitalist consumer culture on the decision-making of religious consumers and reveals that participants' perception of vacations does not differ from ordinary tourists', which may indicate that religious consumers have embraced a vacation of tourism culture. This finding may indicate that the prevailing popular culture has transformed religious devotees' lifestyles in terms of perceived modern needs whilst another important finding discloses religious vacationer's perception of a holiday as one of the basic needs of our time.

Key words: halal tourism organization; religiosity; perception; consumer; Turkey

Introduction

Nowadays, it is impossible for religious people to isolate themselves from consumer culture, on the contrary, generally they have no qualms about benefiting from (post) modern benefits. This relatively recent change demonstrates the complex intertwining and internalisation of both religiosity and capitalist consumer culture that has occurred in the religious population, which is exemplified in one way by the change in religious consumers' holiday practices while vacationing at halal tourism destinations.

The worldwide tourism sector has only recently woken up to the huge potential of the Islamic tourist market, and with halal labelling becoming more common, Muslim consumers are benefitting from increased opportunities and tourist facilities that cater to their specific needs and are thus able to enjoy the sort of free-time and vacations that are considered an essential part of modern life. Some Asian countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey and the UAE are leading players in the halal tourism industry. According to Crescentrating statistics, in 2014 Malaysia, Turkey and the UAE were among the top Muslim-friendly destinations for religious visitors. Another statistic defined the expenditure of the halal tourism sector as more than $145 billion in 2014 (Crescentrating, 2015).

With the increased purchasing power of Muslims tourists, the fastest growing trends in halal tourism attract many marketers (Battour, Battor & Ismail, 2012). The increasing number of products and services specifically catering to Islamic norms and sensitivities, which are being introduced worldwide, is considered to be a positive trend by many marketers. However, due to the conflict between

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modern tourism practices and religious norms, this study focused on the way Muslims internalize modern consumption practices and their justifications for halal tourism practices in terms of Islam. While a few empirical studies have been conducted on the halal tourism sector (Battour et al., 2012; Bhuiyan, Siwar, Ismail, Islam & Ehsan, 2011; Eid & El-Gohary, 2014; Henderson, 2010; Som et al., 2012; Stephenson, 2014), there has yet to be an investigation into the problematic conjunction of religion and consumption culture. This study seeks to probe the underlying factors, perceptions' and justifications of contemporary halal tourism from the perspective of a Turkish example. How do religious vacationers perceive vacation in an Islamic culture? As religious consumers' wealth increases, is it paralleled by an increase in consumer practices such as tourism? Have the consumer practices of pious people changed in the last 20 to 30 years in terms of leisure activities? These questions directed the researchers in their exploration of the perceptions and opinions of visitors and their justifications for their halal tourism practices.

Some previous studies have investigated the relationship between religion and tourism (e.g. Battour, Ismail & Battor, 2010; Eid & El-Gohary, 2014, 2015; El-Gohary & Eid, 2014; Henderson, 2011; Jafari & Scott, 2014) focusing on satisfaction level, perceived value, loyalty, and the intention to re-visit by mass tourism visitors who are motivated by other than religious motives. However, to date no empirical study has investigated the transformation of religious consumers in terms of their theological and sociological backgrounds. Additionally, religious vacationers' perception of vacation and whether they can be assured about the practise of vacationing in accordance with their Islamic faith must be examined using empirical data. Thus, this study aims to examine the transformation of Turkish Muslim customers of halal tourism facilities. Another objective is to see whether Muslim consumers seek to justify taking a vacation by appealing to some tenet of Islam. The findings will shed light on the apparent transformation of Turkish religious halal tourism consumers within the last few decades. This will enable scholars from sociology and theology to ask probing questions regarding this change, not only within Turkey, but also with an international scope, to discover what similarities and differences exist and thereby better understand the future of this current marketing trend. Additionally, Muslim vacationers will be more conscious by questioning halal facilities and their services before and after their experience.

The study consists of six main parts: The first part includes a review of the existing literature available on the halal tourism concept, religion and marketing, including research questions. The second part outlines the method used to collect data, details of the participants and information about the sampling issue. The third part presents the findings and themes for analyzing the qualitative data. The fourth part discusses the findings in the context of the current theories and discussions. Lastly, in the fifth part the findings and remarkable points are summarized to give the general view of this study.

Literature review

Religion and religiosity

Religion, one of society's most influential institutions, influences people's beliefs, habits, attitudes, values, choices, and behaviour (Mokhlis, 2009). According to Berger, religion is the human attitude towards a sacred order that includes within it all beings, human or otherwise (www.oxfordreference. com). A religious person is someone who internalizes his religious faith, norms, practices and symbols by displaying them through his behaviour (Kurt, 2009). Almost all religions target every aspect of a person's individual and social life. Among all of these social relations, consumerism is also remarkable

for its influence over both societies and individuals. Studies by Hirschman (1983), Delener (1990), Bailey and Sood (1993), Essoo and Dibb (2004), and Mokhlis (2009) reveal that religiosity and religious affiliation have an impact on purchasing behaviour. Also, in the field of tourism, Weidenfeld and Ron (2008) state that religion influences tourist behaviour regarding their choice of destination and preferences. Therefore, religion influences people when choosing certain products and services.

Researchers measure religiosity from different perspectives. Glock and Stark (1965) identify five dimensions of religiosity: experiential, ritualistic, ideological, intellectual and consequential. According to Allport and Ross (1967), extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions are two basic motivations for a believer (Holdcroft, 2006). Considering recent studies, multidimensional features of a religion, such as subjective, cognitive, behavioural, social, and cultural, must necessarily be taken into account for any proper measurement of one's religiosity (Chumler, 1996; Ellision, 1991). According to Marddent (2009), Islamic religiosity could be measured through two perspectives: Islamic Belief (Iman) and Islamic Practice (Amal). Thus, both belief and practical dimensions of experience might provide evidence of one's religious affiliation.

Halal tourism

Halal tourism might be considered as an amalgamation of tourist consumer habits and Islamic lifestyle. According to Battour and Ismail (2016), "Islamic tourism" and "Halal tourism" are used interchangeably by many scholars, stakeholders and consumers. However, this new hybrid tourism practice should be called halal instead of Islamic because it refers to a kind of brand name rather than an actual religious practice. The word "halal" originates from Arabic and means permissible. Combining all similar variations by different scholars (Namin, 2012; Tekin, 2014; WTM, 2007), Battour and Ismail's definition, "any tourism object or action which is permissible according to Islamic teachings to be used or engaged by Muslims in tourism industry" is the most succinct (Battour & Ismail, 2016).

In Islamic culture, travelling should be undertaken for specific purposes, such as worship, education, work, health, pondering the wonders of Allah's creation, and enjoying the beauty of the universe (Din, 1989; Namin 2013). Also, according to Henderson (2003), Islam supports tourism practices, which are rooted in the Quran and the Sunnah (the customs of Prophet Muhammad) giving advice especially on travelling. However, modern day tourism practices emanate from hedonistic intentions, which are not present in the Islamic faith. Since modern day tourism practices originate from the second half of the 20th century, halal tourism practices are very recent transformations whose origin is not authenticated in the Islamic sources. The fact is, modern tourism facilities and practices are Islamized in order to appeal to religious devotees (Battour, Ismail & Battor, 2011; Hamza, Chouhoud & Tantawi, 2012). The realization of this transformation only takes into consideration not exceeding the limits of what is haram (not permissible according to Islamic law).

Halal tourism marketing and recent economic changes

Today, the increase in Muslims' using leisure time pursing tourist activities has given birth to a huge sector. According to data gathered by the Pew Research Centre, Islam is the fastest growing religion globally with more than 1.5 billion believers worldwide. This previously untapped, enormous and defined market is hugely attractive to modern-day entrepreneurs and market leaders who aspire to expand their businesses by selling their products and introducing new services (Battour et al., 2012). Sandıkçı states that the visibility of Muslims as consumers over the last 20 to 30 years has attracted a lot of market players from various sectors such as food, travelling, clothing, decoration and so on. As a

result of neoliberalism and cultural integration, Muslims have begun to benefit from capitalist aspirations and opportunities without abandoning their own beliefs and religious principles (Adas, 2006; Osella & Osella, 2009). As Göle (2013) notes, an increase in wealth combined with political changes encouraged and enabled religiously sensitive consumers, especially during the 1990s, to experience the same modern lifestyle their non-pious contemporaries were enjoying. Therefore, new entrepreneurs entering the business market by producing Muslim-friendly products attracted new customers who hadn't previously indulged in the modern consumer lifestyle. The result was a burgeoning of companies positioned to cater to this new market, an expansion in media and other social institutions to advertise new services, and products developed to create new needs, which had not previously been part of a religious person's life.

In previous times, this new sector had been undiscovered by some segments of society. Just as Veblen's theory posits, mostly wealthy and aristocratic people are able to experience, organize and benefit from extensive travel, festivals and vacations abroad. However, after the 1980's, Turkey witnessed and experienced neoliberalism and the relative increase in income, which transformed consumer choices for almost all people. According to Bell (1978), a cultural justification of capitalism underwent a shift from Weber's protestant ethics and was transformed into hedonism and the pursuit of pleasure. With regard to Bell's (1978) and Bauman's (1987) statement, the protestant ethic has declined whereas a hedonist and anti-puritan consumer culture has been internalized by new members of the post-industrial world. Thus, the new bourgeoisie and new middle-class families have begun to indulge in consumer practices at an ever-increasing rate in the last few decades, and in vacation practices in particular.

Haddorff (2000) proposes three different approaches about the relationship between the consumer market and religion. In the first one, the market changes religion, which results in secularisation. The second approach deals with functionalist viewpoint in which the market becomes sacred. According to the last approach, both realms interact with each other, each of them forcing the other to change over time and staying in an ambiguous relationship. He concludes that the last approach seems more coherent. Einstein argues that the sacred has undergone secular transformation due to the overwhelming influence of commercialization, marketing strategies and processes (Tiitsman, 2008). That is, in the modern world, both production firms and societal demands shape religion in favour of the needs and desires of consumers. In these circumstances, religion does not disappear as was predicted by the theory of secularization (Stark & Iannaccone, 1994), rather, both religion and consumerism coexist in a symbiotic relationship, transforming one another to serve the needs of religiously oriented consumers through free market suppliers (Lever & Miele, 2012). Halal tourism marketing introduces new Islamized products and services, which prohibit practices that are unlawful in Islam, such as nudity and the consumption of alcohol, while at the same time attracting Muslim consumers who once refrained from general tourism practices. In other words, faith brands play a role in integrating modern consumer services with religious norms, so that nothing is out of reach and pious consumers do not miss out on any of the pleasures introduced by modern times, just as Baudrillard (1997) argues.

Previous studies on halal tourism

The first study of halal tourism was conducted by Din (1989) who states that a Muslim traveller has the same primary needs and expectations such as food, accommodation and entertainment as a typical tourist. For a religious person, vacationing involves the same behavioural patterns that everyone else practices, and this culture is transferred to young people through experience, education and the media. However, when a religious person wants to actualise a vacation it can be problematic due to the restrictions and extra duties originating from Islam. This affects their choice of certain products

and practices. The solution is found in hotels that provide guests with halal products and services, "Sharia-Compliant Hotels". When hotels consistently offer a halal service, religious customers will prefer those hotels and will find the opportunity to vacation without forsaking their Islamic values (Razalli, Abdullah, Suzzaini & Hassan, 2012); Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010).

Weidenfeld and Ron (2008) state that religion effects people's choice of destination and tourist product preferences, so satisfying religious needs in the tourism industry is an important requirement in order to be successful in the sector. Furthermore, in a qualitative study, Laderlah, Rahman, Avang, Man and Man (2011) report on the popular destinations and various features of Islamic tourism in Malaysia. Additionally, Stephenson (2014) states that the host-guest relationship is important in the tourism sector and halal tourism facilities should be developed and promoted to cater to non-Muslim visitors as well. To develop opportunities for Islamic hospitality, Islamic cruises, Muslim-friendly camps and campsites, and Islamic motels can be promoted to serve both religious-oriented and family-oriented guests.

The empirical study by Eid and El-Gohary (2014) aimed to investigate the Muslim Tourist Perceived Value (MTPV) and concluded that the decision-making of a Muslim tourist is influenced by Islamic non-physical attributes, positive feelings, Islamic physical attributes, price, social feelings and quality; each of which cannot be explained solely from a rational point of view. Other research, by Bhuiyan et al. (2011), reveals that the East Coast Economic Region of Malaysia has huge opportunities to develop Islamic tourism, given its natural beauties and its cultural and historical heritage. Finally, Battour et al. (2012) investigate the mediating effect of overall Muslim tourist satisfaction between travel motivations and destination loyalty. They found that push and pull motivations influence tourist satisfaction and high tourist satisfaction stemming from Muslim-friendly products and services leads to repeat visitation and recommendation.

Studies on halal tourism in Turkey

In his chapter about the first hala hotel in Turkey, Caprice Palace, Bilici (2000) states that as more religious consumers began to appear in public areas they started to adopt some consumerist practices.

Doğan (2008) provides statistics about the increase in halal tourism and the number of halal tourism organizations in Turkey. He states that recent economic and political developments enabled more sharia-compliant hotels to open in this sector. Prior to 2002, there were only five halal hotels, but this figure increased with the opening of 22 new hotels, mostly located in Antalya and Alanya, providing capacity of approximately 20,000 beds. A more recent, comprehensive study for Tekin (2014) found this number had increased to 152 organizations throughout Turkey, including spas, boutique hotels, and city hotels. In fact, there is no halal standard approved of and controlled by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Some hotel owners do not serve alcohol and thereby define themselves as a "family hotel." Many religious tourists, who prefer not to encounter nudity or people consuming alcohol, choose to spend their vacation in these hotels.

Özdemir and Met (2012) conducted a study of Muslim frequenters of halal tourism destinations. Their findings reveal that religious vacationers have specific needs derived from their religion, such as the prohibition of alcohol, preparation of halal food, and the availability of separate swimming facilities, and these needs are sufficiently significant that it is necessary for hotel owners to fulfil them. Another important finding is that the visitors of halal tourism destinations are not one homogeneous group in terms of their level of religiosity, so that some vacationers do not think that particular practices of these organizations are in line with Islamic norms.

Research questions

In light of the previous studies and research, this study proposed questions to analyse halal tourism visitors' perceptions and opinions. The questions were determined according to the interrelation of theology and the field of tourism. These questions were chosen to analyse halal tourism practices, since this practice is a product of religion meeting consumerism. As social phenomena are complex, both conflict theory and functional theory were used during both the problem and analysis segments, rather than following one type of paradigm. Gilles Lipovetsky (2005) describes the new individual as "hypermodern" who consumes for their own personal pleasure, which is a basic sign of hedonism. As Baudrillard (1997) notes this person is also concerned with his own well-being, and is in constant pursuit of happiness and pleasure without wanting to miss any opportunity for such satisfaction. Embracing this new type of lifestyle risks transforming religious values and practices, which are contrary to some of the modern values of consumer society. This change is also inconsistent with the advice promulgated by religions such as Islam and Christianity's Calvinist and Protestant branches. Weber (1905) argues that the rise of capitalism owes its success to asceticism and the avoidance of any wasteful use of income. Islamic sources also advise living modestly and avoiding extravagance. However, our modern age urges people to satisfy their needs and desires without reference to values or limits. Consequently, a Muslim faces the constant dilemma and social pressure of choosing between a lifestyle in line with religious norms and the attractive practices of modern consumer culture. To investigate this case, our study proposed these questions:

Q1: Is a halal tourism visitors' perception of vacation different from an ordinary tourist's perception?

Q2: How does a religious vacationer perceive "holiday?"

Q3: Do religious vacationers justify going on holiday by appeal to the Quran and hadiths?

Q4: Have religious vacationers recently internalized going on holiday as a cultural norm?

Methodology

Data collection and sampling

The sample for this study consisted of one 5-star and three 4-star hotels and one holiday village, located in seaside locations in Izmir, Balıkesir and Antalya, Turkey. Out of approximately 25 seaside halal tourism organizations which advertise on the Internet and are promoted by travel agents, only five of the leading organisations agreed to participate in our research and were included in the sample.

The researchers conducting the interviews preferred to use a qualitative research methodology because according to Seidman(2013, p. 7), individual consciousness helps to understand complicated social issues, since its basis is in the individual's concrete experiences. Therefore, the niche concept of halal tourism in Turkey was analysed using qualitative data to reach a more credible conclusion. Earlier observations, personal contacts during previous visits to halal hotels and the Internet comments written by visitors led the researchers to select this interview technique to ensure more reliable, diverse and comprehensive data.

According to Teddlie and Yu (2007), qualitative studies mostly utilize a purposive sampling technique by selecting certain units from which to collect significant data in order to answer research questions. Therefore, the researchers followed a homogeneous purposive sampling (Ritchie & Lewis, 2006) which represents our sample of tourism organizations that are run in accordance with Islamic norms. Since our aim is to investigate halal tourism practices in Turkey, mainly regarding tourism for pleasure rather

than for health or religious purposes, the representatives of the second strata included all participants of halal tourism facilities who have a religious sensitivity. Although a heterogeneous religious sensitivity was present among the visitors, all of them preferred these facilities for religious and moral reasons. Deciding on the organization type as seaside facilities and participant group, the visitors during the 2015 summer season were the target group. Lastly, interviewees were selected randomly from a pool of at least 300 domestic overnight Muslim guests. Regardless of their gender, dress code or occupation, 10 participants from each halal hotel were invited to be interviewed for our study, and professional research interviewers interviewed those who agreed. The privacy of the interviewees was assured and female professional interviewers interviewed female participants whereas male interviewers interviewed male participants. Before the actual practice, researchers conducted a model interview training session with the interviewers.

The interview form

Acknowledging that the most common and effective method of collecting data in the social sciences is an in-depth interview focusing on each person's personal perspective (Ritchie & Lewis, 2006), and in consideration of the available literature on halal tourism, our objectives and research questions, the researchers prepared a semi-structured interview, including 13 open-ended questions, in an effort to obtain a more detailed picture of halal tourism participants' opinions and perceptions.

Academics from the fields of Tourism and the Sociology of Religion initially evaluated the interview format and made constructive suggestions about the wording of some questions. In May 2015, five vacationers (three male and two female) took part in the pilot study conducted in a halal hotel near Istanbul. The recorded interviews took around 30-35 minutes and resulted in the removal of two questions and rewording of two others for clarity based on participant feedback. The research ethics committee approved the revised interview format which consisted of 13 open-ended questions to be applied during the 2015 tourism season. A few of the questions were as follows:

What does vacation mean to you?

• Is there a verse in the Quran or a saying in the Sunnah (teachings and practices of Prophet Moham-mad) which advises or restricts vacation as practiced today?

• Was this holiday practice available and on your agenda 20 or 30 years ago?

50 volunteers from 5 halal hotels agreed to take part in the study. During the interviews, which lasted between 20-40 minutes, as new questions or clarifications were needed, the volunteers were encouraged to contribute to the process freely. Content analysis of certain key words and concepts in halal tourism was conducted on the collected data to draw meaningful conclusions about the dimensions of halal tourism and visitor perceptions. Some of the emergent themes were, the aim of taking a vacation, Islamic based justifications for taking vacation, and the relevance of an increase in the wealth of religious customers. Each theme contains key words or codes, such as relaxation, stress relief, escape, changing city or region, Quranic verses, supporting travelling, and haram acts (something not permissible). Before beginning an inductive analysis, these codes led the researchers to draw some conclusions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 264).

Findings

According to the demographic characteristics of the sample shown in the above table, the majority of the participants consisted of male visitors (N=39; 78%) owing to certain reasons, such as an unwillingness of female visitors to take part in the study, females' being busy with their children, and husbands' not giving permission for their wives to participate. 15 self-employed and 13 employees took part in the study, the highest numbers according to profession. Significantly, 10 out of 13 employees originated from European countries, mainly Germany. These are Turkish economic migrants who immigrated for employment purposes during the 1960s and 1970s. They return to Turkey annually in the summer to meet their relatives and take a family holiday.

Table 1
Profile of interview participant characteristics (N=50)

Variables	Descriptions	F	%
Gender	Male	39	78
	Female	11	22
Age	18-30	5	10
	31-45	35	70
	46-60	10	20
Occupation	Academician	2	4
	Employee	13	26
	Self-employed	15	30
	Tradesman	7	14
	Housewife	5	10
	Official	8	16

Themes for the perception of vacation

Two main points warrant mentioning under the heading of vacation: religious vacationers' understanding of the meaning and their perception of vacation. The data was analysed to extract this information. The first question, the meaning of vacation, resulted in thirteen different connotations. In Gitelson and Kerstetter (1990), 26 benefits or reasons for vacation are stated. This study uncovered two new meanings: travelling and doing different things that cannot be done during the year. Our findings reveal participants' understanding of vacation along with the frequency with which each meaning was mentioned, which are as follows: relaxation (27), escape from duties/work (10), spending time with family members (10), stress relief (10), changing location (9), experiencing solitude (9), peace (6), having privacy (5), travelling (5), doing nothing (4), recharging (3), and doing things that cannot be done during the year. Some noteworthy quotes are as follows:

"Vacation is an activity to get rid of annual exhaustion and to be relaxed by spending money and leisure time." (Manisa, academician, 51)

"Getting rid of a little stress, a little rest, that is, to change something in life for a short time." (Izmir, tradesman, 42)

"Vacation was visiting our parents and grandparents in their houses mostly in villages. There was no holiday concept before. We and especially our parents had a hard time and their daily life was not easy. Turkey has experienced a great economic change in the last twenty years. Some people prefer to stay in these luxurious hotels after they visit their family members and relatives. Vacation has become a chance for us to escape from tiring job duties and our crowded city for a limited time." (Istanbul, administrator, 35)

The second pertinent point of this theme was that 23 participants perceived vacation as a basic need. Most of the participants agreed on the idea that modern working life and also women's household duties contribute to individuals' stress and exhaustion. As a result, a vacation is perceived as an opportunity to get away from everything for a short period of time.

Themes for recent economic changes in the lives of religious people

To understand the transformation of religious people's habits the study asked: What changed in a religious person's life and why did they begin to engage in tourism practices? After converting the responses to numerical data, 7 different themes emerged. The results presented below range from the highest frequency to the lowest': an increase in economic wealth (21), lack of these facilities in previous years (14), lack of holiday culture among devotees (12), habit of visiting older relatives in villages in the past (7), lack of widespread use of mass media (6), changing values (4), and different style of vacationing (2). A few noteworthy quotes are as follows:

"20 or 30 years ago, religious people also wanted to have a holiday, but facilities or organizations, unlike today, did not exist. Because of this, religious people had to rent either apartments, hotels, or summer houses. At the same time, their income was not as high as it is today." (Germany, 52, self-employed).

"20-30 years ago, vacation as an idea was in their mind, but this is a supply and demand issue. First, people should ask for something and later a kind of supply will be provided. Our society is going through a transformation process and especially after the 1980s, there has been a change in many people's lifestyle. … In those years, people did not have a chance to go on a vacation. Only economic elite could have a vacation. However, nowadays there is more demand among religious people, too, which led to the establishment of these institutions." (Izmir, lawyer, 42).

"Firstly, about 30 years ago, the financial status of Muslims was not so good as it is today. As the wealth increased, their financial power rose, too. There is more capital now. Correspondingly, vacation culture has arisen from this wealth and media has begun to affect many people." (Manisa, academician, 51).

"Religious people have recently become involved in the modern lifestyle. When I was young, vacation was not thought to be necessary. People at that time did not have as chaotic of a work life as people have today. Secondly, Muslims thought this kind of holiday practice as inconsistent with their religious values, so they avoided this practice." (Kocaeli, doctor, 50).

Themes for vacation in religion

This study investigated whether devotees present evidence from the Quran or hadith to support or forbid vacation. The responses to this question were classified under three main themes: those with no idea about the evaluation of shariah regarding vacation (27), those who argue that Islam is in favour of vacation (3), and those who think that Islam does not allow the wasting of leisure-time (3). On the other hand, a considerable number of visitors try to justify vacations for the following three reasons: 1. If it is conducted within the halal limits it might be acceptable and incur no punishment; 2. The Quran advises relaxation and as both physical and spiritual relaxation are possible on vacation it should not be considered haram; 3. The Quran and hadiths encourage travel, and as during a vacation we travel and change accommodation it can be considered in this category and therefore permissible. The following are noteworthy comments from this theme:

"I cannot bring evidence and I don't think that there is any evidence, but my opinion is this: Anything that is not forbidden by sharia is "halal." The more important thing is not disobeying Islamic jurisprudence and not being in places where "harams" are committed." (Izmir, lawyer, 42).

"Sometimes there are issues to be interpreted in our religion. Everything is not black or white. I think vacation is one of those. It depends on your interpretation, such as wasting time by doing nothing or relaxing to be more energetic and less stressed." (Istanbul, engineer, 33).

Discussion and implications

According to Edginton, Jordan, DeGraaf and Edginton (1995), leisure provides relaxation, self-improvement, family interaction, escape, novelty and excitement for people. Hibbins (1996) argues that these are modernist connotations of leisure. Crompton (1979) emphasizes the effect of push and pull motives on a tourist's behaviour. Push motives stem from an individual's inner desires; such as relaxation, escape and novelty seeking; whereas pull motives are mostly related to tourism destinations which attract visitors (Uysal & Jurowski, 1993). For a halal tourism visitor, all these factors and connotations are the same and the most common way of defining vacation is characterized by relaxation (Stebbins, 2014). In this case, vacation has the same connotations for everyone regardless of religion. Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry and Ritzer's McDonaldazation concept might be linked together to argue that mass media recreates consumers and producers by the standardization of goods and services, and worldwide homogenization of cultures. Religious consumers are part of the modern world and modernity, urbanisation and education have transformed their traditional values into the postmodern values of pleasure, relaxation, utility and freedom. Consequently, our finding, the desire for relaxation, indicates that a religious devotee also experiences the same burdens of modern life: a stressful work environment and a hectic life, making a vacation become a basic need for the Muslim tourist.

According to the 21 interviewees, the financial position of Turkish citizens is stronger today than it was 20 or 30 years ago. TUIK statistics show that whereas GDP per capita in currency was at $8,567 in 1998, it increased to $19,610 in 2014 (www.tuik.gov.tr). This clearly indicates a considerable increase in personal wealth over the last twenty years. Turkey witnessed a growing middle class and a new bourgeoisie who indulge in more consumer practices compared to the past years, such as purchasing designer headscarves, luxurious villas and branded SUVs (Yankaya, 2014). Included in these new practices is vacationing at high-class halal or Islamic hotels where they relax and spend money for pleasure. Also, Demir et al. (2004) state that the increasing Anatolian capital began to invest in conservative types of business for religious consumers who in turn became more visible by benefitting from summer resorts, fitness centers and entertainment facilities. The increase in the economic, political and cultural power of Muslims has led them to strike a balance between their Islamic values and the global consumer ethos (Alserhan, 2011, Sandıkçı, 2011). The findings showing the increase of wealth in Turkey indicate that religiously sensitive people, who were once content with what they already possessed, have begun to indulge more in consumer practices in place of pursuing a modest lifestyle. We may argue that nowadays religious people's sensitivity decreases as their wealth increases, just as Weber argues in Protestant Ethics, and that they begin to consume rather than save or invest their wealth.

Our findings indicate the entry of vacation as a necessity into the considerations of religious people and, given the recently available halal opportunities in the tourism sector, more and more potential consumers are expected to experience this pleasure. Göle (2013) states that sea, sand and sun, and getting tanned, transforms a devotee's lifestyle, which runs counter to the traditional way of experiencing religion. The contradiction is that vacation culture does not impose any restrictions, such as concerning the appropriate attire to be worn while swimming, but Islam does not allow a woman to swim in public without wearing a "hasema (a type of swimsuit for women covering the whole body except the face, the hands and the feet)." Bilici (2013) argues that owing to the increasing visibility of devotees since the 1980s, there is a tendency for companies to produce or market an Islamic version of every

product. Stark (2010) proposes a theory about the mobilization of companies towards the religious consumer. His approach, called supply-side theory, focuses on religious firms rather than on religious consumers. In a highly secularized and pluralistic society, some market operators act to supply religious consumers with their products, which leads to both a new market segmentation and a drive to attract new consumers to increase profit margins. Accordingly, Caprice Hotel, Turkey's first halal hotel, can be seen as a typical manifestation of these interactions and attempts. Some columnists perceive such a facility as a sure sign of the defeat of Muslims by capitalism. They opine that leisure time is not freely used by individuals, but rather it is designed by some actors and institutions to be marketed to religion-oriented masses in order to have them experience new products for the sake of pleasure.

In terms of linking religion to the concept of vacation, some respondents brought evidence from the Quran or hadiths to express their ideas. As modern tourism practices find their roots in Western culture (Din, 1989), it is not easy to find justification from Islamic sources to support or deny tourism in general. Some Quranic verses support travelling, but advises those journeys should be made to take lessons from previous communities and their misbehaviour. In one of the hadiths of Muhammad, it says, "Travel often so that you may become healthy." Referring to these examples, one may argue that travelling is beneficial, not only physically, but also psychologically. However, the modern tourism practices of tourism facilities are not addressed either in the Quran or in the hadiths. Thus, nearly a quarter of this study's participants referred to general principles of Islam, such as what is haram and halal, in their comments: if they do not break the rules of Islam and if something is not clearly forbidden, then there is no problem doing that activity. However, more than half the participants expressed having no idea about the issue and had not researched it. This finding reveals that popular culture affects almost everybody including devotees who do not question whether their actions are in complete compliance with Islam. It is also evident that modern consumer practices are easily adopted and may eventually expand their realm of influence to transform religion itself. Thus, despite the fact that religious considerations to some extent restrict Muslim's participation in the modern consumer lifestyle, as time passes and more Muslim-friendly products are introduced, religion is likely to lose its power and consumer culture will take over its sphere of influence.

Conclusion

This study explored how pious Muslims integrate vacation, as a consumer practice, with religion. In light of the results, it can be stated that religious consumers in Turkey have adopted vacation culture. They do not want to fall behind in experiencing the new and desirable pleasures of consumer culture. Mass media, secularization, urbanization and education have all contributed to the transformation of Muslim consumers in Turkey. Due to pluralism, as Stark (1997) proposes, both modern consumer practices and religious norms change and transform each other resulting both in the availability of Islamic products and in less intensely sensitive religious consumers, which goes against the theory of secularization and its proposed decline of religion in daily life.

Turkey, as a developing country, has witnessed a rise in Islamic capital, which has led to different consumer practices and a burgeoning Islamic consumer market. Halal tourism facilities are just one result of this change and, compared to the past, more and more religious consumers perceive vacation to be a basic necessity, which is felt in everyday life and caused by the stress of the modern lifestyle. The new Islamic bourgeoisie and middle class have satisfied their basic needs, insofar as they are now ready to spend time and money for pleasure activities. Whilst their choice of holiday in halal destinations shows they are still taking their religious norms into consideration, this trend carries the risk of loosening religious norms in the long run.

Turkish Muslim vacationers have not presented any convincing evidence supporting or prohibiting vacation as experienced today from either the Quran or the Hadiths, however they have a tendency to justify vacation as long as products and services exclude what can be considered haram. This finding reveals that when a religious consumer encounters a new product, Islamic norms may not be the leading factor in preventing them from purchasing religiously debatable products or services. In terms of Islam, extravagancy and nudity are prohibited and a certain dress code is valid for all Muslim women. However, Islamic norms are not always possible to observe in some halal tourism organizations. Therefore, the blend of Islam and capitalism brings about hybrid experiences which may not be easily avoided by modern day religious consumers. Providing Muslim-friendly products enables pious people to make rational choices without sacrificing their religious norms and not only religious consumers but also the stakeholders of the halal tourism sector seem to benefit from this new tourism practice.

Limitations

The two leading halal tourism organizations did not allow us to administer the study in their hotels, which made us change our initial hotel list. We could have contacted more homogenous visitors at those organizations since customer profiles may change slightly in terms of wealth and religiosity in some organizations. Secondly, some of the underlying factors and motives, such as concerning the facilities of organizations, were not asked in the interview, so these points could be asked by a well-designed interview form in a future study. Lastly, further research is needed to analyse the different halal tourism experiences and practices within international studies to investigate the issue of standardization.

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