Significant Overview of Japan Tourism: Muslim Friendly Destination and Social Media

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Abstract— **Muslim friendly destination has been emerging rapidly in majority Muslim countries, as well as in minority Muslim countries. Interestingly, many minority Muslim countries have found the Muslim friendly destination as lucrative, as result they pay more serious attention to it. Japan is one of examples of minority Muslim countries where has managed to attract more Muslim visitors coming year to year. Currently, Japan is being at top position among countries which boosting Muslim friendly destination. Meanwhile, in the light of information technology breakthrough, it is becoming extremely difficult to ignore the existance of social media. It is indeed a powerful tools to disseminate information by tourism and hospitality practitioners, at the same time for travellers to find more specific information before going for trip. The evolution of social media is providing opportunity yet challenging also to hospitality and tourism industry. Moreover, the findings show that Japan has catched up to be Muslim friendly destination. Consequently, providing accurate information through social media on Muslim friendly destination in Japan is significantly important. Then, the recommendations are suggested in the manner of integration of reliable mobile apps, personalization trend, and** *omotenashi* **culture as strategic approach for minority Muslim country like Japan to attract and specifically cater the need of the most potential Muslim market, the Millennials.**

Keywords—omotenashi, information sharing, Muslim friendly destination, social media, and significant overview

I. INTRODUCTION

The past six years, tourism has been seen to surpass tremendously in the global economy. In other words, tourism is one of the growth engine for country's revenue and one of the key drivers for nation building. At the same time, tourism industry is information intense industry. Important to realize that the landscape of tourism industry is dynamic and continuosly emerging. Consequently, recent developments in information technology have heightened the need for advanced and interactive approach notably in marketing and promotion practice for destination. In a word, to fit to this scenario, the tourism industry players need to consider using internet technology.

It is however, important to raise question on what is the paramount information based-tools to convey the message in this age of digital and advance technology then? In this sense, social media is relevant platform to deliver information [1]. These technological developments have greatly increased the growth in information sharing. Thus, paying attention to the content of information sharing through social media, plays crucial role.

Apart from that, one of the most significant current discussions in destination marketing and tourism industry are Islamic friendly tourism and religiously conscious tourists. Muslim friendly tourism has been booming in majority Muslim countries, including in minority Muslim countries as well. Remarkably, Muslim friendly tourism has been found as profitable as many minority Muslim countries attract to engage determinedly on this potential sector.

II. DISCUSSION

A. Muslim Friendly Destination

Discussion on the terminology of Muslim friendly destination always challenged either by academicians or practitioners. Other terms are like halal tourism, Islamic tourism, Muslim tourism, and religious tourism always come interchangeably. Are they the same or different concept? In fact, they efectively carry the same meaning. Indeed, Muslim friendly destination is a form of tourism which cater Muslim who prioritize facilities and activities that comply with Islamic principles for their lifestyle during travelling. It is important to note however, that there is no consensus on the fixed terminology on the subject matter [2].

Despite the fact that the Muslim market is still growing and infancy, this niche market is significantly population of young who are vibrant and longer life spans. By the year of 2030, it is projected that 29 percent of the global young population aged 15 till 29 years old will be Muslim [3]. Likewise, the characteristics of young Muslim segment are

computer literate even always enthusiastic about the advanced of technology, modern, and faith believer. As a matter of fact, Islam has been seen as way to improve themselves. Not to mention, they are loyal towards brands as well as conscious [3]. Under those circumtances, the key players in tourism industry need to understand insighfully the behavior of these young travellers so that they can tailor made their need well through appropriate channel.

Moreover, Muslim market is a large and faster flourishing population. Globally the Muslim market, with usd 151 billion of total expenditure on travel by the year 2015, is in fact the second largest travel source countries after China (usd 168 billion) [3]. Similarly, countries with majority Muslim market are fastest growing economy countries, for instance; Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and so forth. How to capitalize this big market which leads to global opportunity? Since there is a demand for Muslim friendly destination and then obviously there is a need to promote Muslim friendly destination.

Correspondingly, Muslim market is promising market to tap and invest in. Whatmore, the minority Muslim countries have become more popular destination for Muslim travellers from majority Muslim countries since they want to have different travel experience. One of the examples of minority Muslim countries where has managed to attract more Muslim visitors coming year to year is Japan. The tourism industry itself in Japan has become more crucial since Tokyo has won the bid to host Olympic games 2020. The government of Japan has targeted to increase the number of tourists from foreign countries to 20 million by the year of 2020 [4]. As results, this effort has currently made Japan being at top position among countries which boosting Muslim friendly destination. This is in line with Japanese hospitality style, spirit of *omotenashi* which means become more welcome and provide warmth towards guests including Muslims.

TABLE 1: Top 10 Non-OIC Destination Countries in 2016
(www.crescentrating.com)

Rank	GMTI 2016 Rank	Destination	Score
1	8	Singapore	68.4
2	20	Thailand	59.5
3	21	United Kingdom	59.0
4	30	South Africa	53.1
5	31	Hong Kong	53.0
6	31	France	51.6
7	33	Taiwan	50.1
8	34	Japan	49.1
9	35	Sri Lanka	49.0
10	36	United States	48.9

TABLE 2: International Muslim Visitors Arrivals in 2015
(www.crescentrating.com)

Region	No of Visitors	Visitor %
Asia	66.7	56.7%
Europe	35.0	29.7%
Africa	10.4	8.8%
America	5.0	4.3%
Oceania	0.6	0.5%
Total	117.7	100%

Table 1 depicts that Japan is ranked as number eighth of most high-demand minority Muslim contries for Muslim, especially by those from Asia countries, whereby dominated by Indonesians and Malaysians tourists. Then, table 2 presents the percentage of Muslim visitors by region. The highest number of this niche market predominantly come from Asia, with percentage of 56.7, which is more than fifty percent of total Muslim travellers in the world [5]. Number of foreign visitors to Japan alone have started to increase sharply in the last five years, even their amount is doubling within those consecutive years [6]. The current growth of Japan tourism adds subtantially to our understanding of how important this sector and how serious the government of Japan nowadays in more focusing in this sector.

B. Social Media

As we have seen, that the evolution of social media is providing opportunity yet challenging as well to hospitality and tourism industry. Everyone has same power to be online and disseminate the comments, which good comment could benefit the industry while bad one could risk the business [7]. Further, the previous study also highlight that the users could share their thought and experience directly either positive or negative with each other, while at the same time the role of marketing personnel has dead [7]. Social media is not merely the electronic word of mouth, it has become the platform which has changed life style of people in the modern technology era.

But, one of the greatest challenge that needs to be concerned is that in the world of digital and rampant misinformation, either negative or positive news can reach the massive users and widespread quickly. Undeniably, image of a country will greatly influence the tourism development in that country. Not only have become the country's capital importance, but also how significant the influence of image towards tourism has been discussed since 37 years ago [8].

Internet per se is certainly powerful machine for promoting tourism industry in one region. This is in line with finding of research conducted by Nolasco and Cruz, stating that 75% of tourist respondents are motivated to visit the region because of web advertisement, like; websites, social media, and the like. Meanwhile other platforms like brochures and flyers only score 24% and 34% respectively [9]. Indeed, delivering information using social media, do improve the quality of information received, and understood by users. Needless to

say, social media will smooth the process of information sharing and delivering then [10]. In addition, two out of four matters concern in tourism industry are more related to information sharing and delivering [9].

However, there is also, a further point to be considered. It is credibility. For instance, the guidebook published by Japan Tourism Agency entitled Japan Travel Guide Muslim Visitors at www.japanesemuslims.com, unfortunately it contains list of *halal* restaurants which are in fact not *halal*. This is due to the fact that the guidebooks are prepared by organization which might not have any basic knowledge on what *halal* is. This invalid information not only causes trouble to muslim visitors but also ruin the image of Japan as Muslim friendly destination [11].

Regrettably, the inaccurate information being shared on regards to Muslim friendly tourism in Japan, significantly affect the credibility of Japan as friendly destination towards Muslim tourists. Parallel to this, a question that need to be asked, is whether dissemination of Muslim friendly destination information through social media has been accordant to authentication and acknowledgement [12]. Undeniably, Japan tourism with the special tagline of *omotenashi*, a deep-rooted culture of taking care guests wholeheartedly, is in paradox.

Not only the irreliability of the information [13], but on top of that, the information on social media is also congested [13], [14], [15], and as a consequence, need to incorporate specific strategy to attract the customers through social media. To avoid information feature in the social media page from being scatter, Spitadakis and Fostieri suggest that the information should be grouped based on their objectives. Furthermore, the researchers also recommend choosing interactive social media platforms which posses the user-friendly interface [16].

Concurrently, most studies in the field of Muslim friendly tourism have only focused on attributes of destination like *halal* food, space for prayers, *shariah* compliant hotel, and so on so forth. Extensive research has been carried out on tourism destination and social media, however, based on researcher's literature study, up to this there is very rare study which devoting to poor sharing and delivering of Muslim friendly destination information through social media. All the studies reviewed so far, however, suffer from the fact that very little publication on the area of Muslim friendly destination and information technology (IT). Furthermore, study within this specific area that concentrates on minority Muslim countries in this case Japan is also very few.

III. CONCLUSION

Number of Muslim population is increasing. Many tourists especially from majority Muslim countries like Malaysia, have mentioned that they ever visited few minority Muslim countries, like Korea, Japan, Thailand, New Zealand, Singapore, and other countries. According to Crescentrating, Japan is at no. 8 in rank among other minorities muslim countries. Japan is the country where still maintains the traditional value in the sophisticated industry and advance technology landscape. Moreover, both of tourism industry and

government of Japan have worked together to welcome more Muslim tourists to Japan. For this reason, this assumes that the Muslim tourists are more convenient visiting non-Muslim countries like Japan than before.

As highlighted by media, government of Japan has actively engang to campaign on social media that Japan as friendly destination for Muslim. In fact, the tagline of "*omotenashi*" is unique positioning and also spirit of Japan tourism. *Omotenashi* generally emphasizes on providing good quality service to inbound tourists by catering their needs. Tourism is all about culture of service. Interestingly, Japan has culture of service towards people. If people live in the area where rely on revenue from tourism sector, those people have to be into service culture. With spirit of *omotenashi*, a traditional Japanese hospitality, promotion strategy of Muslim friendly destination to attract more Muslim tourists coming to Japan, integrated with social media platform without neglecting the validity of the information content, is easier and fruitful.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

Social media is certainly the source of information especially for travelers in gathering travel-related knowedge, products or services, as well as in making decision. One of the motives of people sharing information through social media platform is they want to prevent other people from receiving the incorrect information. Then question is raised on how to make users trust the existing social media platforms, since once they trust those platforms, they are willingly to share the knowledge, information, and experience through. In the previous study, the researchers have not treated the concept of information sharing in much detail, rather than focusing merely on the motives or factors which influence people to share the information. For this reason, it is suggested that a more comprehensive study should include all the elements of information sharing, either from users and providers [17]. Specifically, the key players in the Muslim friendly tourism industry like *halal* authority bodies, ministry of tourism, and operators should engange in one platform. This platform as a source to provide credible travel-related information to users. For this reason, developing a mobile apps in which incorporated valid Muslim friendly destination attributes, is a solution. Not only this apps is user-friendly, handy, compact, and easy to access, but users can also rely on its credibility. In this manner, through this mobile apps, the three significant entities of operators, halal authority, and government tourism body could provide authentic information and clarify any mislead information as well towards users.

Furthermore, equally important to note that one of the current trends in travel technology is personalisation [18]. In information sharing, personalisation is indeed to reduce the burden of information for user. As a matter of fact, it is crucial to deliver such a personalised content through social media in sharing information which specifically tailored to the target audience's interest. Majority of social media users are Millenials group who are social media and internet savvy, like to explore something different and look for unique experience when they travel [19]. Personalisation touch from *omotenashi*

perspective, coupled with rich media content like video, pictures, video blogging, augmented reality, and virtual reality, integrated with valid content on Muslim friendly destination, will be a good strategy to approach the Muslim Millennials travellers who are heavily consuming technology, also as the important key driver in shaping the future landscape of travel industry, especially the Muslim friendly tourism sector.

Acknowledgment

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