



**Research Abstract Form**  
3<sup>rd</sup> Women in Research Forum  
“Quwa: Women Empowerment for Global Impact”

Research Project Title: <i>Service quality, customer delight and theme park loyalty of tourists visiting the UAE: the moderating role of Islamic religiosity</i>
عنوان البحث باللغة العربية:

**1. Research Project Overview**

The aim of this study was three-fold: first, to examine the effect of theme park service quality dimension on customer delight; second, to investigate the effect of delight on customers’ loyalty to theme parks; and, third, to examine the moderating effect of Islamic religiosity on the relationship between customers’ delight and loyalty from an Islamic perspective. The proposed model was tested using cross-sectional data collected from 506 theme park tourists . The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling to test the proposed hypotheses. The study findings suggest that all service quality dimensions except for “consumables quality” are positively related to customer delight. Further, customer delight is positively associated with customer loyalty. In addition to this, religiosity positively moderated the association of customer delight and loyalty. This study adds to the current knowledge that service quality is based on integrated dimensions that are responsive to culture and religion. This study will help managers of theme parks to develop a market-oriented service strategy to improve service and customer delight, and therefore increase customer loyalty. The study extends existing service quality models in the tourism and hospitality literature by confirming the role of religiosity on tourists’ perceptions.

**2. Research Project Objectives [should relate to Community Impact, Innovation or Industry Partnership]**

Theme parks have become an important part of the tourist offering in cities and regions and attract millions of visitors to locations (Ali *et al.*, 2018; Başarangil, 2018). Theme parks are defined as “entertainment facilities where a specific theme such as the world of future, science, science fiction, history, culture, tradition and accumulations, world

geography, etc. is introduced through an international visual and auditory technology and offered for watching” (Başarangil, 2018, p. 415). They may include sports facilities (e.g. swimming pools), souvenir shops/outlets and food and beverages facilities, all of which fit the general theme (Başarangil, 2018). Milman *et al.* (2010) suggested that theme parks contribute to the sustainability of destinations through investments in infrastructure, creating jobs, generating revenue, and social support. The UAE is a well-known example of a destination that has spent millions of dollars building and attracting world-class theme parks to operate within the country.

Theme parks in the UAE are modern tourism destinations that aim to delight and satisfy visitors’ leisure and entertainment needs through an experiential atmosphere. UAE have demonstrated major growth in recent years in theme park industry. Existing and new generation theme parks were expected to attract more than 19 million visitors by 2020 (emirates247, 2016). The UAE is a major theme park market in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and the fastest growing region for theme park visitor spending (The First Group, 2017). Visitors’ spending was expected to grow six-fold from \$105 million in 2016 to \$637 million by 2020 (The First Group, 2017). Well-designed and managed parks contribute to the sustainability of destinations (Milman *et al.*, 2010), catalyzed by high service quality.

Service quality is an essential element of service marketing (Grönroos, 1984), and a way to attract new customers. There are several problems in existing studies on theme park service quality (Chen *et al.*, 2011; Tsang *et al.*, 2012; Wu *et al.*, 2018). First, most of the substantial studies on theme park service quality (Chen *et al.*, 2011; Tsang *et al.*, 2012; Wu *et al.*, 2018) during the last decade have focused on general dimensions such as physical environment quality. However, there is growing evidence that religion and religious identities play an important role in shaping and influencing consumer experiences (Eid and El-Gohary 2015). Researchers around the world have acknowledged that the impact of religion and culture on service quality has been neglected (Gayatri and Chew, 2013). A review of the literature showed that the existing instruments for measuring theme park service quality (e.g. THEMEQUAL, developed by Tsang *et al.*, 2012) have not adequately incorporated cultural and religious elements such as Islamic elements (e.g. availability of halal food and prayer rooms). Gayatri and Chew (2013) developed an Islamic service quality scale and recommended that it should be tested in other Muslim countries and other sectors or industries such as banking, and theme parks. This potential gap provides opportunities for research on the influence of culture and religion on service quality in theme parks.

A high level of service quality is an antecedent of a high level of customer delight (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017; Ali *et al.*, 2018). It therefore plays an essential role in successful customer retention (Slåtten *et al.*, 2011). The relationship between service quality, customer delight and customer loyalty has previously been explored in different parts of the tourism and hospitality sector (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017) including theme parks (Ali *et al.*, 2018; Jin *et al.*, 2016; Slåtten *et al.*, 2011). However, most of the studies on the relationship between service quality, customer delight and customer loyalty have been in a Western context (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017). No previous studies have explored service quality in an Islamic context or its effect on customer delight. Lari *et al.* (2019) developed a conceptual framework that includes general and Islamic service quality dimensions that may influence customers’ delight and loyalty toward theme parks and called for empirical test of proposed framework.

Previous studies have tried to examine links between delight and loyalty. Researchers have examined this relationship in tourism industry (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017; Ali *et al.*, 2016; Ali *et al.*, 2018). There are, however, few studies comparing the strength of the delight–loyalty relationship by gender (Torres *et al.*, 2014a). This study therefore aims to develop a conceptual model that includes the potential moderating role of gender.

To narrow down the gaps in the literature, and provide solutions to the identified problems, this study proposed three research objectives:

- To examine the effect of theme park service quality (general and Islamic) on customer delight.
- To investigate the effect of delight on customers’ loyalty to theme parks.
- To examine the moderating effect of Islamic religiosity on visitors’ delight and loyalty.

### 3. Literature Review

#### *Service Quality and religion in theme parks-definitions and previous studies*

Theme park service quality has been investigated by several researchers. Some have used SERVQUAL (O’Neill and Palmer, 2003), and others have tried to develop service quality models to cover the specific characteristics of theme parks. For example, Tsang *et al.* (2012) modified the SERVQUAL model to create THEMEQUAL. Chen *et al.* (2011) and Wu *et al.* (2018) adapted a hierarchical model from Brady and Cronin’s (2001) service quality model (Table I).

**Table I.** Theme park service quality dimension

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>
Tsang <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Tangibles Reliability Responsiveness and access Assurance Empathy Courtesy
Chen <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Personal interaction quality Physical environment quality Technical quality Access quality
Wu <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Interaction quality Physical environment quality Outcome quality Access quality

None of previous studies included any consideration of satisfying Muslim customers' needs related to Islamic values. This is surprising because Eid (2015) and Gayatri and Chew (2013) all showed that service quality and perceived value are influenced by the Islamic values of Muslim customers. Gayatri and Chew (2013) suggested that service quality models for Muslim customers should include both general service quality dimensions (e.g. ambiance, design, layout, accessibility) and Islamic service quality dimensions (e.g. availability of halal food and prayer rooms). Theme parks operating in Islamic countries, and the international theme parks that attract thousands of Muslim customers every year, should therefore consider both general and Islamic service quality dimensions.

#### *Development of theme park service quality scale*

The hierarchical service quality model introduced by Brady and Cronin (2001) shows a comprehensive and integrated understanding of service quality. Brady and Cronin (2001) suggested that a service quality model should cover three main elements, outcome (e.g. result of service provided), environment (e.g. the servicescape where the service is provided) and interaction (e.g. service delivery). The scale developed by Brady and Cronin (2001) has been supported empirically by researchers in different parts of the tourism and hospitality industry (Wu and Ai, 2016; Wu and Li, 2017) including theme parks (Chen *et al.*, 2011; Wu *et al.*, 2018). According to Lari *et al.* (2019, 2020) and Gayatri and Chew (2013), service quality measurement is influenced by customers' cultural and religion values (e.g. Islamic values). These authors suggest that Muslim customers view service quality from two aspects, general and Islamic. The scale proposed by Brady and Cronin (2001) therefore cannot be applied directly in this study, because neither the original study nor any follow-up studies (Chen *et al.*, 2011; Wu *et al.*, 2018) considered the religious and cultural aspects of service quality.

Spending by Muslim travelers is expected to rise to US\$220 billion by 2020, with the number of Muslim tourists growing to 156 million from 121 million in 2016 (Belopilskaya, 2020). Research on Islamic service quality in the tourism industry has therefore rapidly expanded in response to the significant need for marketers and practitioners to understand Muslim customers' needs and requirements. Developing a specific measurement for theme park Islamic service quality will help to reflect theme park marketing and research trends.

#### *Hypothesis Development*

Several researchers have suggested that dimensional structures need to be investigated for each research setting because customer delight and service quality are culturally sensitive (Gayatri and Chew, 2013; Lari *et al.*, 2019, 2020). The proposed set of service quality dimensions in this study (physical environment quality, Islamic facilities quality, consumables quality, employee interaction quality and access quality) were therefore specifically identified from the literature to fit the theme park sector in an Islamic context, the UAE.

#### *Physical environment quality*

Customers use physical environment in service settings as a basis for judgments (Ladhari *et al.*, 2017). Various studies have demonstrated that physical environment can elicit positive emotions and satisfaction in customers (Ali *et al.*, 2016; Ali *et al.*, 2018). The physical environment in a service setting contains multiple elements, including ambient conditions, functionality, cleanliness, spatial layout and facility aesthetics (Slåtten *et al.*, 2011). These factors are related, and work together to holistically influence consumers' delight and behavior (Ladhari *et al.*, 2017). Empirical studies have therefore established that there is a significant relationship between physical environment and delight

(Ali *et al.*, 2016). Ali *et al.* (2018) and Slåtten *et al.* (2011) found that physical environment is also an important factor in customer delight in theme parks. Therefore, it is proposed that:

**H1:** Theme park physical environment quality has a significant positive impact on customer delight in an Islamic context.

#### *Islamic facilities quality*

Various measures of customer perceptions of service quality (e.g. physical environment quality, employee interaction quality, souvenir quality, and access quality) are positively correlated with delight (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017; Başarangil, 2018; Slåtten *et al.*, 2011). However, none of these measures included items related to Islamic dimensions of quality. For example, Han *et al.* (2019) identified five halal-friendly destination attributes in South Korea. Han *et al.* (2019) noted that almost 60% of tourists reported that halal-friendly tourism services and products were extremely important when they selected a destination. Battour *et al.* (2014), Gayatri and Chew (2013) and Han *et al.* (2019) found that Islamic attributes had a significant impact on Muslim customers' satisfaction. A key question is therefore whether Muslim customers' perception of these Islamic dimensions (e.g. Islamic facilities quality) leads directly to delight. The study therefore hypothesized:

**H2:** Islamic facilities quality has a significant positive impact on customer delight in an Islamic context.

#### *Consumables quality*

Very few studies on delight have discussed food quality and how it may influence customers' emotional commitment and overall experience (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017; Yoon *et al.*, 2010). Ahrholdt *et al.* (2017) proposed that perceptions of food and beverages services among visitors to sporting events may influence their emotions and satisfaction. There is therefore a need to examine the relationship between customer perceptions of food quality on specific emotions, such as delight, in the context of theme parks in Islamic context such as the UAE. This study expects customers' perceptions of food quality to provoke delight.

Another aspect related to Islamic attributes of service quality that has significant influence on customers' perception of service quality in the tourism and hospitality industry is the availability and quality of halal food and beverages. According to Lari *et al.* (2020), availability of halal food and beverages was the most important subdimension of food quality in theme parks in the UAE. Battour *et al.* (2014), Gayatri and Chew (2013) and Han *et al.* (2019) all found that availability of halal food had a strong impact on satisfaction of Muslim tourists. The study therefore hypothesized:

**H3:** Theme park consumables quality has a significant positive impact on customer delight in an Islamic context.

#### *Employee interaction quality*

The interaction between customers and staff members has attracted the attention of many scholars (Ali *et al.*, 2018; Ladhari *et al.*, 2017) because of its influence on customers' emotional commitment, satisfaction and overall experience. Ali *et al.* (2018) and Slåtten *et al.* (2011) confirmed the effect of interaction with staff on customers' delight in the context of theme parks. According to Ali *et al.* (2018), employees have an important role in creating positive emotions and evaluations. Details such as smiling, a pleasant voice, and solving customers problems could all influence customers' emotions and perceptions of the experience (Ali *et al.*, 2018; Ladhari *et al.*, 2017). The study therefore hypothesized:

**H4:** Theme park employee interaction quality has a significant positive impact on customer delight in an Islamic context. *Access quality*

Several researchers have noted that few studies have examined the effect of access quality on customer delight (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017). Access quality is an important element in the tourism and hospitality industry (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017; Wu *et al.*, 2018). Ahrholdt *et al.* (2017), however, found that it did not have a positive effect on customer delight at sporting events. To understand whether access quality influences customer delight in theme parks in an Islamic context, the study hypothesized:

**H5:** Theme park access quality has a significant positive impact on customer delight in an Islamic context.

*Customer delight and customer loyalty*

In the theme park industry, Ali *et al.* (2018), and Jin *et al.* (2016) used a variety of methods to explore the relationship between customer delight and loyalty. The two studies provided empirical support for a positive and significant relationship between customer delight and customer loyalty in theme parks. This robust positive relationship between delight and loyalty has also been found in other service-oriented businesses. For example, Ladhari *et al.* (2017) studied an optometry clinic and found that positive delight leads to high recommendation, patronage intention, and likelihood to purchase. All these findings suggest that there is a positive and significant relationship between customer delight and customer loyalty, regardless of the type of service industry. This study hypothesized:

**H6:** Customer delight has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty in theme parks in an Islamic context.

### ***Moderating role of Islamic Religiosity***

Religion and religiosity play an important role in shaping consumption experiences. Eid and El-Gohary (2015) make a distinction between religion and religiosity. While religion defines the ideas for life, religiosity is reflected in the values and attitudes of societies and individuals (Fam, Waller, & Erdogan, 2004). Such values and attitudes shape the behaviour and practices of both consumers and institutions such as theme parks (Zamani-Farahani and Musa 2012). Evidence suggests that religiosity is one of the most important cultural forces and a key influence on consumer behaviour (Delener, 1994; Essoo and Dibb, 2004; Sood and Nasu, 1995). For example, it is a religious compulsion for all Muslims to observe Shari'ah principles, because religious deeds are not acceptable if they are not conducted appropriately (Eid and El-Gohary (2015). Shari'ah principles prohibit adultery, gambling, the consumption of pork and other Haram (forbidden) types of food, the selling or drinking of liquor and inappropriate dress (ZamaniFarahani and Henderson 2010).

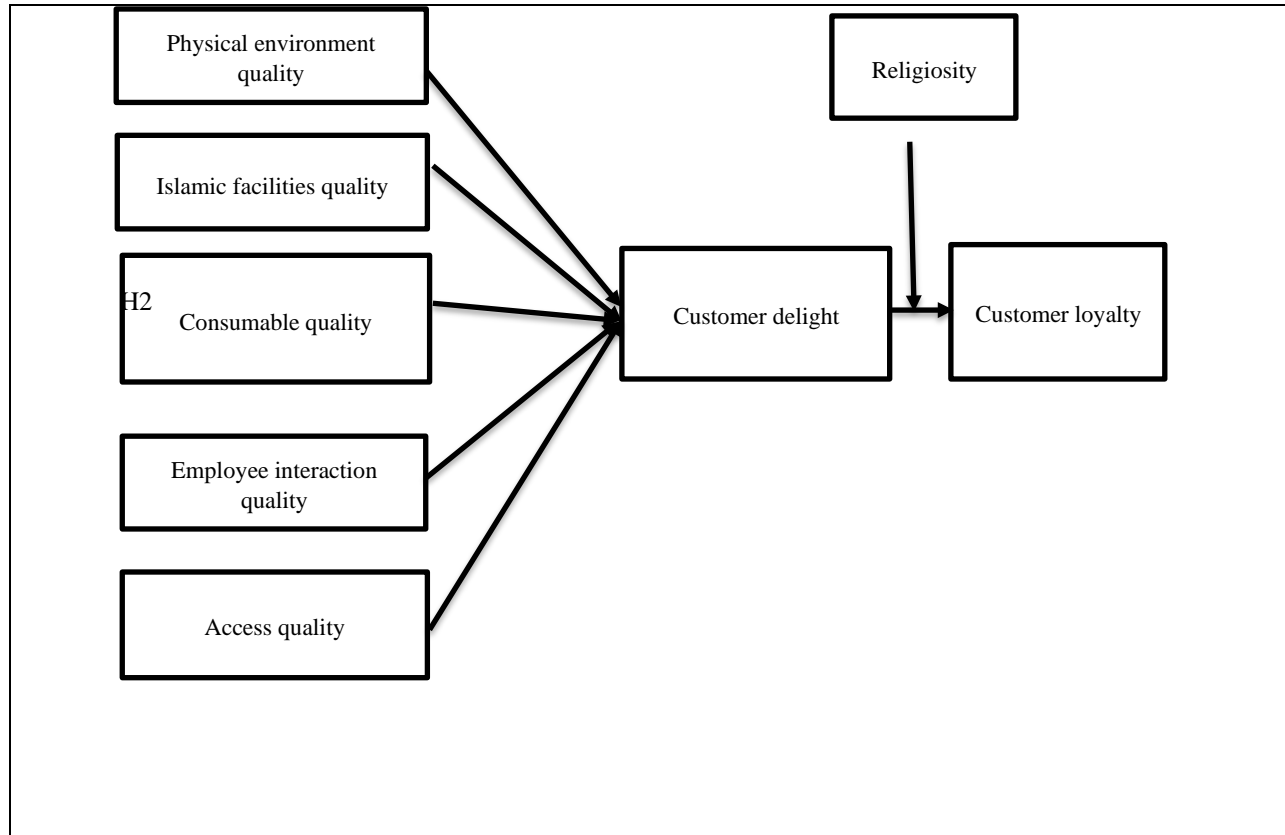
Although religiosity has been acknowledged as an important social force that influences consumer behavior, its influence on consumer behavior appears to be underestimated (Eid and El-Gohary (2015). Although a number of studies have examined the moderating role of religiosity on satisfaction (see Laith *et al.* 2020; Abror *et al.* 2019), there is little attempt so far to examine the influence of religiosity, Islamic religiosity in particular on customer loyalty.

This study, therefore, hypothesized:

**H7:** Islamic Religiosity moderates the effect of customer delight on customer loyalty in theme parks.

### Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 set out the proposed conceptual framework for this study, drawing on four research streams: theme park generic service quality (Ali *et al.*, 2018; Chen *et al.*, 2011; Jin *et al.*, 2016), theme park service quality from an Islamic perspective (Lari *et al.*, 2020), customer delight (Torres *et al.*, 2014b) and customer loyalty (Hwang *et al.*, 2019).



**Figure 1.** Research framework

## 4. Detailed Methodology

### Methods

#### *Study context-UAE and theme parks*

UAE is a well-known global tourist destination. Islam is the predominant religion in the UAE, and the country has been classified as the third most popular destination country for Muslim tourist (Battour, 2017). In 2014–15, it had 2,143,000 Muslim tourists according to the Global Islamic Economy Summit (GIES) report (Battour, 2017). The UAE was named as a destination of choice for Muslim travellers due to several key factors including its competitive business environment, wide variety of travel and tourism activities, advanced ICT readiness and world-class airport infrastructure (Arabian Business, 2018). This suggests that theme parks, like any other tourism and hospitality providers in the UAE, should develop and market their products and services using Islamic teachings and principles. Previous theme park service quality studies have focused on European countries such as Norway (Slåtten *et al.*, 2009,

2011) and Far East Asian countries such as Malaysia (Ali *et al.*, 2018), and Taiwan (Chen *et al.*, 2011; Wu *et al.*, 2018), with few studies in countries closer to the Middle East such as Turkey (Başarangil, 2018). The UAE is a well-known theme park destination in the Middle East region because of its world-class theme parks such as Ferrari World Abu Dhabi. However, only a few studies on theme parks in the UAE have been conducted (Lari *et al.*, 2019, 2020).

#### *Survey instrument*

Items for the five dimensions of service quality were adapted from previous studies. “Physical environment quality” (Dong and Siu ,2013) and “Islamic facilities quality” (Gayatri and Chew ,2013) were operationalized using twelve and six items, respectively. Seven items depicted “Consumable quality” (Han *et al.* ,2019; Yoon *et al.* ,2010) and eight items captured “Employee interaction quality” (Meng and Choi ,2017). “Access quality” (Martín-Ruiz *et al.*, 2010) were operationalized using four items. Delight was measured using three items adapted from Ali *et al.* (2018) study and loyalty was captured using 5 items (Hwang *et al.* ,2019). Islamic religiosity was measured using a 12-item scale adopted from Eid and Al-Gohary (2015). All items were measured on a five-point scale where 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree. Visitors demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education level, marital status, and monthly average income were also captured.

The questionnaire was developed in English. To ensure the validity of the instrument, two theme park marketing heads, and two academic experts were invited to a focus group discussion. They were asked to comment on the meaningfulness, relevance, and clarity of the survey instrument. All focus group members agreed that the content and construct of the survey instrument were valid and relevant to the theme park industry.

#### *Sampling and data collection*

A representative selection of Muslim tourists was made from a database of Muslim tourists. Several tourism organizations located in Abu Dhabi, UAE were requested to give us access to their database. A database (N=8000) of Muslim tourists was then made for data collection purposes. The inclusion criteria for choosing Muslim tourists to participate in this study were simple. First, tourists should be Muslim. Second, tourists should have visited to travel to any GCC countries within the past three years. Third, tourists should have visited theme parks at least twice during their entire travel.

From the database, 1500 tourists were randomly contacted via email stating the purpose of research and a short survey to enquire about their religion, confirmation of their visit to GCC countries and theme park was solicited. Out of 1500 respondents, only 900 respondents fulfil the inclusion criteria. Hence, the online questionnaire was administered and send via email to those respondents (n=900) who have met the above-mentioned criteria along with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and noting that participation in the survey was voluntary. Of the 900 questionnaires, 658 were returned. Of these, 152 questionnaires were not suitable for analysis because they were incomplete, or the respondents had given contradictory answers. This left with total of 506 valid responses to be retained for further analysis.

#### *Data analysis*

Descriptive statistics were used to consolidate data to determine the mean and standard deviation of the attributes of service quality, customer delight and customer loyalty. A frequency analysis was used to examine the distribution of respondents’ demographic information such as age and gender. Inferential statistics provided answers to the research



objectives and helped to test the hypotheses. This study used exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), structural equation modeling (SEM) and multigroup analysis to test the study hypotheses by developing statistical techniques using *Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS)* version 25 and *Analysis of a Moment Structures (AMOS)* version 25.

## 5. Experiments Set up & Results

### *Characteristics of respondents*

Table II shows the demographic characteristics of respondents in the main survey ( $n = 506$ ). The frequency analysis indicated that 77.7% of the respondents were male and 22.3% were female. Most respondents were under 45 years old (87.0%), 49.6% were single, 44.5% were married, 5.3% divorced and 0.6% widowed. Approximately 25.3% of the respondents had only high school or equivalent degree, 3.2% had a diploma degree, 55.5% had a bachelor's degree and 16.0% a postgraduate degree.

**Table II.** Demographic characteristics of respondents

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b><i>Gender</i></b>		
Female	113	22.3
Male	393	77.7
<b><i>Age</i></b>		
18–24 years	133	26.3
25–34 years	197	38.9
35–44 years	110	21.7
45–54 years	56	11.1
55–64 years	9	1.8
65+ years	1	0.2
<b><i>Marital Status</i></b>		
Single	251	49.6
Married	225	44.5
Divorced	27	5.3
Widowed	3	0.6
<b><i>Education Level</i></b>		
High school or equivalent Diploma	16	3.2
Bachelor's Degree	281	55.5
Master's Degree	66	13.0
Doctoral Degree	15	3.0

*Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)*

The EFA for service quality dimensions, delight and loyalty value used the principal component method with varimax rotation to determine the dimensions of the scale (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Items with factor loading less than 0.5 and items that cross-loaded on one or more factors were removed, as recommended by Hair *et al.* (2018) and Malhotra (2019). Factors with eigenvalues of less than 1.0 were not selected. Seven items were removed from physical environment quality, two from employee interaction quality, one from access quality and one from loyalty as a result. Table III shows the findings of the factor analysis of items associated with service quality dimensions (27 items), delight (3 items), and loyalty (4 items). It generated five underlying domains for service quality, one for delight and one for loyalty. The factor model explained 71.71% of the variance. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sample adequacy was 0.938, and the results of Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was  $\chi^2 = 15,506.33$  (df = 561, p = 0.000), which indicates that at least one factor existed in the factor structure. The reliability values (Cronbach’s alpha) for all domains were within the range of 0.722 to 0.927. These values were higher than the 0.7 criterion recommended by Hair *et al.* (2018).

**Table III.** EFA Analysis Results

<b>Construct/ Measurement item</b>	<b>Factor loading</b>	<b>Cronbach’s alpha (<math>\alpha</math>)</b>
<b>Physical Environment Quality (PEQ)</b>		0.824
<b>PEQ5:</b> The theme park has up-to-date facilities	0.673	
<b>PEQ6:</b> The architecture was attractive	0.795	
<b>PEQ8:</b> The layout makes the facilities easy to use	0.601	
<b>PEQ9:</b> The color scheme was attractive	0.717	
<b>PEQ11:</b> The facilities were maintained well	0.635	
<b>Islamic Facilities Quality (IFQ)</b>		0.927
<b>IFQ1:</b> The theme park provides a clear place for saying prayers	0.822 0.855	
<b>IFQ2:</b> The theme park provides purifying (Wudhu before prayer) facilities	0.820 0.805	
<b>IFQ3:</b> The theme park provides Sajahah/Mukena for praying tools	0.823	
<b>IFQ4:</b> The theme park provides the direction of Qibla/Mecca	0.662	
<b>IFQ5:</b> The theme park provides a proper prayer facility		
<b>IFQ6:</b> The theme park understands that accommodating Islamic religious activities is important for me		

<b>Consumables Quality (CQ)</b>		0.840
<b>CQ1:</b> Food and beverages were varied in the theme park	0.816	0.763
<b>CQ2:</b> Food and beverages tasted good in the theme park	0.713	
<b>CQ3:</b> Food and beverages prices were reasonable in the theme park	0.782	
<b>CQ4:</b> Halal food outlets/restaurants in the theme park clearly display a halal logo	0.691	
<b>CQ5:</b> Halal food and beverage offered in the theme park were clean, safe, and hygienic.	0.796	
<b>CQ6:</b> Halal food providers in the theme park are accredited with halal certification.	0.736	
<b>CQ7:</b> Availability of halal food attracted me to visit the theme park		
<b>Employee Interaction Quality (EIQ)</b>		0.882
<b>EIQ1:</b> The employees are willing to help	0.612	0.734
<b>EIQ3:</b> The employees give customers personal attention.	0.782	
<b>EIQ4:</b> The employees are passionate	0.716	
<b>EIQ5:</b> The employees provided relief and comfort to me when I felt bored because of the long queues.	0.658	
<b>EIQ6:</b> The employees are neat and nicely dressed	0.634	
<b>EIQ7:</b> The employees look attractive		
<b>Delight</b>		0.926
<b>Delight1:</b> I felt delighted at some time during my visit to the theme park	0.779	0.813
<b>Delight2:</b> I felt gleeful at some time during my visit to the theme park	0.801	
<b>Delight3:</b> I felt elated at some time during my visit to the theme park		
<b>Loyalty</b>		0.892
<b>Loyalty1:</b> I say positive things about the theme park to other people. <b>Loyalty2:</b> I would recommend the theme park to someone who seeks my advice.	0.685	0.769
<b>Loyalty3:</b> I encourage my friends and relatives to visit the theme park	0.735	
<b>Loyalty5:</b> I intend to visit the theme park more often in the future	0.637	

#### *Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)*

SEM includes two basic components: (1) measurement model (CFA) and (2) structural/path model (SEM). Hair *et al.* (2018) stated that the measurement model is an integration of several indicators for a variable. In this study, the measurement model was analyzed using CFA before carrying out the path analysis of the structural model. CFA was applied to the data set ( $n = 506$ ) to confirm the underlying dimensions and items extracted, and guide the model specification (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). One item in the consumable's quality dimension (**CQ1:** Food and beverages were varied in the theme park) had a very low standardized loading, below the acceptable value of 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2018). It was therefore removed from the analysis. The standardized factor loading of the CFA model is shown in Table IV.

The model fit in CFA must be examined to identify how well the proposed measurement model fits the data (Kline, 2015). The chi-squared ( $\chi^2 = \text{CMIN}/df$ ) statistic, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and incremental fit index (IFI) were used to examine the model fit (Hair *et al.*, 2018; Malhotra, 2019).

The CFA model goodness-of-fit results are shown in Table V. Table V therefore shows the fit of the complete model (n = 506), and the models based on gender (female, male).

**Table IV.** CFA analysis standardized factor loadings

<b><u>Construct/ Measurement item</u></b>	<b><u>Standardized factor loadings</u></b>
<b>Physical Environment Quality (PEQ)</b>	
<b>PEQ5:</b> The theme park has up-to-date facilities	0.621 0.719
<b>PEQ6:</b> The architecture was attractive	0.661 0.784
<b>PEQ8:</b> The layout makes the facilities easy to use	0.703
<b>PEQ9:</b> The color scheme was attractive	
<b>PEQ11:</b> The facilities were maintained well	
<b>Islamic Facilities Quality (IFQ)</b>	
<b>IFQ1:</b> The theme park provides a clear place for saying prayers	0.803
<b>IFQ2:</b> The theme park provides purifying (Wudhu before prayer) facilities	0.843
<b>IFQ3:</b> The theme park provides Sajahah/Mukena for praying tools	
<b>IFQ4:</b> The theme park provides the direction of Qibla/Mecca	0.823 0.819
<b>IFQ5:</b> The theme park provides proper prayer facilities	0.888
<b>IFQ6:</b> The theme park understands that accommodating Islamic religious activities is important for me	0.742
<b>Consumable Quality (CQ)</b>	
<b>CQ2:</b> Food and beverages tasted good in the theme park	0.568 0.500
<b>CQ3:</b> Food and beverages prices were reasonable in the theme park	0.688
<b>CQ4:</b> Halal food outlets/restaurants in the theme park clearly display a halal logo	
<b>CQ5:</b> Halal food and beverage offered in the theme park were clean, safe, and hygienic	0.732 0.833
<b>CQ6:</b> Halal food providers in the theme park are accredited with halal certification	0.750
<b>CQ7:</b> Availability of halal food attracted me to visit the theme park	
<b>Employee Interaction Quality (EIQ)</b>	
<b>EIQ1:</b> The employees are willing to help	0.755 0.810
<b>EIQ3:</b> The employees give customers personal attention.	0.829 0.681
<b>EIQ4:</b> The employees are passionate	
<b>EIQ5:</b> The employees provided relief and comfort to me when I felt bored because of the long queues.	0.732 0.703
<b>EIQ6:</b> The employees are neat and nicely dressed	
<b>EIQ7:</b> The employees look attractive	
<b>Access Quality (AQ)</b>	
<b>AQ1:</b> In general, it was easy to find and reach the theme park	0.722
<b>AQ3:</b> It took little time to enter the theme park	0.700
<b>AQ4:</b> The opening hours of the theme park are convenient for my needs	0.657
<b>Delight</b>	
<b>Delight1:</b> I felt delighted at some time during my visit to the theme park	0.849 0.935
<b>Delight2:</b> I felt gleeful at some time during my visit to the theme park	0.922
<b>Delight3:</b> I felt elated at some time during my visit to the theme park	

<b>Loyalty</b>	
<b>Loyalty1:</b> I say positive things about the theme park to other people	0.847 0.917
<b>Loyalty2:</b> I would recommend the theme park to someone who seeks my advice.	0.908
<b>Loyalty3:</b> I encourage my friends and relatives to visit the theme park	0.727
<b>Loyalty5:</b> I intend to visit the theme park more often in the future	

**Table V.** CFA goodness-of-fit results on study constructs based on religiosity and gender

Model (all hypothesized seven-factor models)	$\chi^2$	df	p value (<0.001)	CMIN/df	CFI	IFI	RMSEA
Full sample model (n = 506)	961.079	456	0.000	2.108	0.954	0.954	0.047
Female model (n = 393)	958.997	456	0.000	2.103	0.944	0.945	0.053
Male model (n = 113)	814.369	456	0.000	1.786	0.849	0.853	0.084
Islamic model (n = 374)	881.720	456	0.000	1.934	0.949	0.949	0.050
Non-Islamic model (n = 132)	771.903	456	0.000	1.693	0.892	0.895	0.793
				-5.0	≥ 0.90	≥ 0.90	≤ 0.08

Acceptable level and source of this assessment

1.0

Hair <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Malhotra (2019)	Hair <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Malhotra (2019)
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*Validity and reliability of measurement model*

Construct validity is the “extent to which a set of measured variables actually represent the theoretical latent construct they are designed to measure” (Hair *et al.*, 2018, p. 606). Convergent validity is the “extent to which indicators of a specific construct converge or share a high proportion of variance in common” (Hair *et al.*, 2018, p. 606). Convergent validity was checked in three ways according to Hair *et al.* (2018):

- (1) Standardized factor loading should exceed 0.5.
- (2) Average variance extracted (AVE) should exceed 0.5; and
- (3) Composite reliability (CR) should exceed 0.7.

Hair *et al.* (2018, p. 606) defined discriminant validity as the “extent to which a construct is truly distinct from other constructs both in terms of how much it correlates with other constructs and how distinctly measured variables represent only this single construct”. Discriminant validity is confirmed when the estimated AVE for each construct is greater than the highest squared multiple correlation coefficients for corresponding construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table VI shows the correlations among constructs, AVE , composite reliability (CR), means and standard deviations. All standardized factor loadings (Table IV) for the observed variables were above the threshold of 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2018). The AVE values exceeded the critical value of 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2018). This suggests the presence of convergent validity. The results also confirmed the presence of discriminant validity for all constructs. Table VI shows that the composite reliability of each variable is greater than 0.7 (Hair *et al.*, 2018), which confirms the reliability of the measurement model.



**Table VI.** Correlations, Composite Reliability, Descriptive, Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity statistics

Variable	PEQ	IFQ	CQ	EIQ	AQ	Delight	Loyalty	CR	AVE	Square Root of AVE	Mean	SD	
<b>PEQ</b>	1.000							0.827	0.698	0.835	0.905	4.267	0.736
<b>IFQ</b>	0.505***	1.000						0.925	0.820	0.823	0.867	3.965	0.979
<b>CQ</b>	0.471***	0.522***	1.000					0.839	0.678	0.725	0.950	3.401	0.989
<b>EIQ</b>	0.631***	0.506***	0.630***	1.000				0.887	0.752	0.922		3.918	0.818
<b>AQ</b>	0.645***	0.516***	0.573***	0.697***	1.000			0.554	0.526			3.984	0.890
<b>Delight</b>	0.549***	0.497***	0.452***	0.580***	0.589***	1.000		0.930	0.902			4.198	0.750
<b>Loyalty</b>	0.660***	0.472***	0.513***	0.647***	0.699***	0.711***	1.000	0.914	0.850			4.157	0.773

**Note:**

**PEQ** = physical environment quality; **IFQ** = Islamic facilities quality; **CQ** = consumables quality; **EIQ** = employee interaction quality; **AQ** = access quality

**CR** = composite reliability; **AVE** = average variance extracted; **SD** = standard deviation

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$





CFA therefore established that there was a secure measurement model in terms of model fit, reliability and validity. SEM was then used to test the main conceptual model covering the six main study hypotheses. A maximum likelihood estimation method was used to check whether the hypothesized model was consistent with the data collected. The model’s goodness-of-fit was assessed before testing the hypotheses (Table VII).

**Table. VII** SEM goodness-of-fit results on study construct based on religiosity and gender

Model (hypothesized seven-factor model)	$\chi^2$	df	<i>p</i> value (< 0.001)	CMIN/df	CFI	IFI	RMSEA
Full sample model ( <i>n</i> = 506)	964.769	460	0.000	2.097	0.954	0.954	0.047
Female model ( <i>n</i> = 393)	967.358	460	0.000	2.103	0.944	0.944	0.053
Male model ( <i>n</i> = 113)	844.532	460	0.000	1.832	0.838	0.843	0.086
Islamic model ( <i>n</i> = 374)	1000.449	460	0.000	2.170	0.935	0.936	0.056
Non-Islamic model ( <i>n</i> = 132)	791.007	460	0.000	1.716	0.887	0.890	0.074

-5.0      ≥ 0.90      ≥ 0.90      ≤ 0.08      Acceptable level

and source  
of this assessment

1.0
Hair <i>et al.</i> (2018)      Malhotra (2019)      Hair <i>et al.</i> (2018)      Malhotra (2019)

*Hypothesis testing*

Six direct relationships between paths were investigated. Multi-group analysis was then used to examine the moderating effect of religiosity. The results are shown in Table VIII. Five of the six estimated path coefficients were statistically significant at either the 0.05 or 0.001 level.

**Table VIII.** Result of hypothesis testing for the direct paths in the structural model

Hypothesis Path	Path Coefficient	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	Test
<b>H1</b> PEQ → Delight	0.277 0.066	4.463 2.346	***	Supported
<b>H2</b> IFQ → Delight	0.027 0.210	0.762 3.277	0.019*	Supported
<b>H3</b> CQ → Delight	0.320	4.556	0.446	Not Supported
<b>H4</b> EIQ → Delight	1.185	13.898	0.001**	Supported
<b>H5</b> AQ → Delight			***	Supported
<b>H6</b> Delight → Loyalty			***	Supported

**Note:** PEQ = physical environment quality; IFQ = Islamic facilities quality; CQ = consumables quality; EIQ = employee interaction quality; AQ = access quality

\*\*\* *p* < 0.001, \*\* *p* < 0.01, \* *p* < 0.05

The path coefficient between physical environment and delight ( $\beta = 0.277, t = 4.463, p < 0.001$ ) was statistically significant, thus supporting **H1**. **H2** proposes a positive relationship between Islamic facilities quality and delight. The path coefficient ( $\beta = 0.066, t = 2.346, p = 0.019 < 0.05$ ) is significant, thus supporting **H2**. Contrary to our theoretical predictions, the path coefficient between consumable quality and delight ( $\beta = 0.027, t = 0.762, p = 0.446$ ) was not significant, thus rejecting **H3**. Results also confirm the hypotheses (**H4** and **H5**) linking employee interaction quality ( $\beta = 0.210, t = 3.277, p = 0.001 < 0.01$ ) and access quality ( $\beta = 0.320, t = 4.556, p < 0.001$ ) to delight. finally, as hypothesized (**H6**), the parameter estimate between customer delight and customer loyalty is positive and significant ( $\beta = 1.185, t = 13.898, p < 0.001$ ).

*Multigroup analysis (MGA)*

MGA in SEM was used to examine the moderating role of religiosity on the relationship between customer delight and customer loyalty. MGA evaluates the whole model across different samples and compares the structural relationship across these samples. The pairwise parameter comparison technique was used in this study.

**H7:** Religiosity does not moderate the effect of customer delight on customer loyalty to theme parks in the UAE.

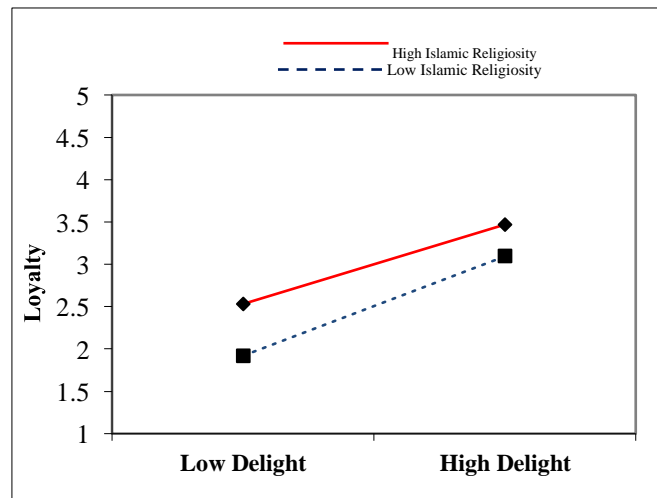
The acceptance or rejection of the study hypotheses (**H7**), will depend on the status of the null hypothesis. If the critical ratio of difference of the null hypothesis is between the threshold value of  $-1.96$  to  $1.96$  (Hair *et al.*, 2018), then the null hypothesis will be accepted, which means there is no moderating effect. If not, the null hypothesis will be rejected, and the study will conclude that there is a moderating effect.

Table VIX shows the critical ratio of differences for religiosity. For the null hypothesis, the critical ratio of differences value is  $-2.151$ , which is not between the threshold of  $-1.96$  to  $1.96$  (Hair *et al.*, 2018). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected, which mean there is a significant difference between high religious groups and low religious groups on the path between customer delight and customer loyalty. Figure II confirm the moderating effect of religiosity on the path between customer delight and customer loyalty. These findings support Hypothesis 7.

**Table IX.** Moderating effect of Religiosity

	Path	Significance	Critical Path	$\Delta x^2$	df	$\Delta x^2/df$	Ratio of	Test
	<b>Differences</b>							
Delight $\rightarrow$ Loyalty	1672.5	920	1.818	-2.151				Supported

**Figure II.** Moderating effect of religiosity on customer delight–customer loyalty relationship



**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to empirically test a model proposed by Lari *et al.* (2019) linking service quality dimensions (e.g. general and Islamic) and delight in theme parks of the UAE. The study also investigates the moderating effect of religiosity on the relationship between delight and loyalty. The strong relationship between customer delight and customer

loyalty (**H6**) is consistent with previous studies in theme parks context (Ali *et al.*, 2018; Jin *et al.*, 2016; Slåtten *et al.* 2009) and other contexts such as sporting events (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2017). A possible explanation for the finding is that the experiences offered in the theme park are pleasure-driven or hedonic. They therefore induce a range of emotional responses (Ali *et al.*, 2018). Theme parks involve a lot of interaction between visitors and employees, which in turn creates either positive or negative emotions. This will form attitudinal and emotional commitments (Slåtten *et al.*, 2011).

Physical environment had a significant positive impact on delight. This result is consistent with previous studies (Ali *et al.*, 2018; Barnes *et al.*, 2016). Barnes *et al.* (2016) found that tangibles (e.g. layout, cleanliness) had a significant impact on joy and surprise in the context of grocery stores. Ali *et al.* (2018) indicated that ambient elements (e.g. lighting, cleanliness, temperature, and color scheme) of the physical environment have a significant impact on customer delight and satisfaction with theme parks. Also, Slåtten *et al.* (2011) and Chen *et al.* (2011) found that physical environment had an influence on outcomes including customer satisfaction, emotion, perceived value and loyalty in the context of theme parks.

The role of Islamic facilities (e.g. prayer rooms) on customers' satisfaction and loyalty in the tourism and hospitality industry has been demonstrated by previous studies (Battour *et al.*, 2011, 2014; Eid, 2015; Gayatri and Chew, 2013; Han *et al.*, 2019). Availability of religious services and provisions in service industries may attract new customers and increase the loyalty of existing customers (Eid, 2015). This study showed that facilities related to Islamic norms and values, such as prayer rooms, are important for Muslim customers visiting theme parks.

Consumable quality relationship with customer delight was not supported. This result is different from previous studies which found that food quality is a significant predictor of delight and satisfaction (Yoon *et al.*, 2010). However, the unique setting of theme parks offers some plausible explanations. In general, the purpose of visiting theme parks is entertainment and leisure. Food and beverages are therefore ancillary services, and not crucial to achieving visitors' objectives. Also, a number of previous studies have shown that halal food is important for Muslim customers in the tourism and hospitality industry (Battour *et al.*, 2014; Lari *et al.*, 2020). Lari *et al.* (2020) found that availability of halal food was the most important service quality attribute for Muslim customers in the context of theme parks in the UAE. The non-significant relationship between consumables quality and delight can be attributed to the country and study participants. In the UAE, all foods and beverages sold must be recognized by the Emirates Authority for Standardization and Metrology (ESMA) as meeting the standards of the Accreditation Body for the UAE halal certification scheme (jas-anz, 2020). This may explain the non-significant relationship, because visitors are confident that the food is halal. Another plausible explanation relates to the study sample, which included non-Muslims, for whom halal food is not vital.

The study findings are consistent with previous studies that found that employee interaction quality is an important factor in the tourism and hospitality sector because it contributes to consumers' satisfaction, emotions and behavioral intentions (Ali *et al.*, 2018; Slåtten *et al.*, 2011; Wu *et al.*, 2018). The current study supports Shonk and Chelladurai's (2008) views on the importance of access quality in evaluating service quality. It is also in line with previous studies in the theme park context. Chen *et al.* (2011) found a positive significant relationship between access quality and customer satisfaction, and Wu *et al.* (2018) found that access quality was the fourth most important dimension of experiential quality.

Religiosity moderated the relationship between delight and loyalty in the context of them parks. The study findings suggest that theme park managers and operators in the UAE have addressed the needs of their multinational visitors. This finding is consistent with previous marketing studies (Promsivapallop and Jarumaneerat, 2018; Diallo *et al.*, 2018). Understanding the differences allows managers to allocate resources more efficiently by providing appropriate services and facilities for visitors from different backgrounds. Visitor satisfaction with a service that meets their cultural and religious needs will increase their delight, and in turn have a significant effect on their loyalty toward the theme park.

### *Theoretical and practical implications*

This study aims to provide both theoretical contributions and practical insights for researchers and practitioners in the field of theme park service quality. The first theoretical contribution of this study is that it aims to expand the range of studies that suggest that religious and cultural background can affect customers' evaluation of service quality. Muslim customers are more likely to use service providers that are sensitive to their religion. Previous research has focused on service quality from an Islamic perspective in destinations (Battour *et al.*, 2014; Han *et al.*, 2019), and retail and hotels (Gayatri and Chew, 2013). This study tested Muslim customers' perception of service quality in theme parks in the UAE.

The second significant contribution of this study is that it examines the moderating effect of religiosity in the relationship between customer delight and loyalty to theme parks using multigroup analysis. It is hoped that this will encourage other scholars to compare the significance of the path in structural equation modelling in Islamic service quality research.

Finally, this study expands knowledge on the effect of demographic characteristics, especially gender, on the relationship between customer delight and customer loyalty, by adapting the moderating concept to the theme park context. It therefore adds to the few studies (Torres *et al.*, 2014a) that have empirically suggested that gender moderates the relationship between customer delight and customer loyalty.

The results of this study have several practical implications. Theme park operators and managers will need to consider Islamic values when developing services for Muslim customers. By adopting a strategy that integrates religious awareness, theme park operators will improve customers' perceptions of service quality and therefore probably long-term loyalty. For example, Muslim theme park customers would prefer to consume foods that are halal certified. Muslims are bound by fixed and obligatory religious activities such as praying, so would appreciate theme park operators that cater to their spiritual needs. High levels of customer delight achieved by using appropriate marketing strategies should increase customers' loyalty.

### **Conclusion**

This study has addressed its four research objectives. It has examined the relationships between service quality dimensions (both general and Islamic), customer delight and loyalty to theme parks in an Islamic context. All the service quality dimensions except consumables quality had a positive effect on visitors' delight in theme parks. This, in turn, positively affected visitors' loyalty to the theme parks. These findings may help theme park managers to improve their marketing to specific segments. This study recommends further consideration of consumables quality, particularly halal food quality, among Muslim customers.

This study extends the literature about perceptions of service quality from an Islamic perspective in the international tourism and hospitality industry. It therefore provides both an academic contribution and useful information and recommendations for practitioners in service marketing. Finally, this study paves the way for future research in the field of Islamic service quality in other sectors of the tourism and hospitality industry. It should therefore be considered as an initial step towards enhancing knowledge on this topic.

### **Study limitation and direction for future research**

This study contributes to understanding of service quality from an Islamic perspective in the tourism and hospitality industry. However, the study had several limitations, which provide potentially interesting avenues for further research.

First, the study was limited by its sampling frame. The data used to test the study hypotheses were collected from people identified from the database of visitors to three theme parks in Abu Dhabi city, UAE. The study was exploratory, and designed

to test a theory, so convenience sampling was considered suitable as a basis for further research. Future studies should consider using a more systematic approach such as probability sampling to better represent the target sample. Second, the effectiveness of Islamic service quality dimensions should be studied in other Muslim countries (e.g. Malaysia, Indonesia) and non-Muslim countries (e.g. South Korea, France) to establish how to improve the emotional and behavioral intention of Muslim visitors. Perception of Islamic service quality dimensions may vary in other Muslim and non-Muslim countries because of the influence of other conditions (e.g., culture, environment). Further quantitative studies may therefore be useful for the generalization of results about the importance of Islamic dimensions of service quality. Third, the moderating effect of religion was not examined. This may, however, have a significant impact on consumer behaviors, especially in multi-religion countries. An assessment of the perceptions of service quality (e.g., general and Islamic dimensions) in other sectors (such as healthcare, hotels, and museums) could also add to knowledge about service marketing. Finally, future studies might investigate the role of Islamic service quality dimensions in various outcomes that are important to marketers, such as customer loyalty and repeat purchase.

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