

Antecedents of brand equity on halal tourism destination

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brand equity

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine the antecedents of halal brand equity on destination brand equity (DBE) within the tourism sector. Although much has been done on halal tourism, the issue of halal and brand equity has received little attention in a non-Islamic state context.

Design/methodology/approach – Using the brand equity theory, 312 Muslim tourists were conveniently drawn from the Larabanga tourism site with the use of structural equation modelling technique to analyse the data.

Findings – The study revealed that halal brand awareness and halal value have positive and significant impact on DBE. Also, halal perceived brand quality and halal image had a negative but significant impact on DBE.

Research limitations/implications – This research is on a country-specific halal brand equity tourism destination, which means that the findings cannot be generalized to other geographical areas.

Practical implications – The study provides an insight into halal tourism and destination equity, which is important for marketers, the ministry of tourism and local tourism officials to support halal tourism in a non-Islamic country.

Originality/value – This paper fills a gap by presenting the first comprehensive overview of halal brand equity research that enhances ongoing discussions in the hospitality and tourism field in a non-Islamic context and proposes priorities for future research.

Keywords Image, Perceived value, Perceived quality, Halal brand awareness, Destination equity, Larabanga, Value

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Despite the growing lucrative nature of the halal tourism industry, it has been entangled with a lot of challenges in the delivery of halal brand equity of tourism products and services. Literally, halal means permissible. One of the accepted definitions of halal tourism is given by [Battour and Ismail \(2016\)](#) as any tourism product or service authorized according to Islamic teachings to use or involve Muslims in the tourism industry. These products and services that are available to

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Muslim tourists include halal hotels, foods and restaurants. They possibly create destination value for tourists. Gartner (2014, p. 1) defines brand equity in destination tourism context “as a product’s value from the return generated from a firm’s marketing strategy”. This definition points out the perceived worth of a brand or the value of having a recognized brand. Further, brand equity is a desirable commercial value used in positioning destination branded products or services (Han *et al.*, 2015; Joshi and Yadav, 2017). The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of halal brand equity dimensions (HBEDs) (i.e. halal brand awareness [HBA], halal brand image [HBI], halal brand value [HBV] and halal brand perceived quality [HBPQ]) on halal destination site in a non-Islamic country.

Indeed, this research is of value to the Ghanaian tourism and hospitality sector. Firstly, although Ghana is not an Islamic country, the Larabanga mosque as a tourism destination has been documented by the World Heritage Site for Muslim tourists (Ghanaguardian, 2017). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2018), US\$10bn have been estimated to be spent by Muslim tourists visiting Ghana and Gambia by the end of 2020. Secondly, Global Muslim Travel Index (2019) statistics also showed that the Muslim travel sector is estimated to contribute US\$300bn to the world economy by 2026 with more than 230 million Muslim tourists also expected to travel for local and international travel by the same period. Thus, Ghana has the opportunity to tap into this multibillion-dollar potential. Thirdly, Islam is considered as one of Ghana’s main religions and approximately 20% of the 28 million estimated Ghanaians are documented as Muslims (Religion Facts, 2016). This research strategically recognizes the opportunity to investigate the importance of halal services and facilities to Muslim tourists in a new setting: such as food, the wearing of the hijab and prayer facilities. In this direction, the research would provide findings that have implications for policymakers, service providers, marketers, practitioners and tourism businesses to provide unique services and products at destinations. Then Ghana’s halal tourism would receive support and be placed among world tourism destinations.

Interestingly, many studies on halal tourism (Amadeus, 2019; Battour and Ismail, 2016; Harahsheh *et al.*, 2019; Rahman *et al.*, 2019) have focused on Islamic states only such as Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Egypt and Malaysia. To fill this knowledge gap, more research is needed on different behaviours and needs of Muslim tourists in non-Islamic state. Therefore, this study works with these specific objectives: to examine the impact of halal awareness, halal image, halal quality and value of Muslim tourists on destination brand equity (DBE).

This study contributes to the existing literature in the following ways: firstly, the theory of brand equity has not been adequately used in the halal tourism literature, specifically in a non-Islamic environment. Secondly, the study contributes significantly to the global literature on tourism marketing by examining destination-specific usefulness of brand equity in promoting halal tourism in a non-Muslim country on the African continent. Thirdly, the study addresses the antecedents of brand equity on halal tourism destination in halal marketing, which have been neglected in previous literature. The study proceeds as follows: Section 2 reviews the literature on halal brand equity theory, brand dimensions and DBE. Section 3 presents the methodology and Section 4 provides an analysis of data and a discussion of results. While, the last section offers conclusions, implications and indications for further studies.

Literature review

Halal tourism

The significance of halal is continuously flourishing through the labelling and certification of items (Wilson, 2014). This makes it possible for the concept to move and be tested within the tourism sector (Amadeus, 2019; Battour and Ismail, 2016; Harahsheh *et al.*, 2019; Rahman *et al.*, 2019). The provision of tourism products and services that adhere to Islamic

values is what categorize halal tourism (Mohsin *et al.*, 2016). Until recently, Islamic and halal tourism were used interchangeably (Battour and Ismail, 2016; Khan and Callanan, 2017). Scholars (Vargas-Sánchez and Moral-Moral, 2019, p. 387) have differentiated between these two concepts, of which Islamic tourism is defined “as trips for religious and pilgrimage purposes associated with the acts of faith”, and halal tourism “as travel undertaken for recreational, leisure, and social purposes”.

Although motivations for travelling are not necessarily spiritual, there is a desire to behave in a manner deemed permissible, or halal, in accordance with Islamic teachings (Vargas-Sánchez and Moral-Moral, 2019, p. 387). In recent times, Muslim tourists demand for halal products and services has become enormous (Battour and Ismail, 2016). This has pushed some non-Islamic countries such as Japan (Battour and Ismail, 2016) and Ghana (Preko *et al.*, 2020) to create prayer facilities in their airports, as well as the provision of halal products on sale for Muslim travellers. To sum up, this study conceptualizes halal tourism as a value chain process that includes all services and products from home to the destination and back to home, adopting the Islamic way of consuming products and services. These services include opting for prayer facilities, segregation of washrooms, halal food and hotels for Muslim tourists.

Theory of brand equity

This research is grounded on Aaker's (1991) and Keller's (1993) consumer-based brand equity theory to understand Muslim tourists in Ghana. Frequently, brand equity is defined “as differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand” (Keller, 1993, p. 1). Earlier, Aaker's theory was elucidated as creating value for consumers and organizations (Aaker, 1991). In the halal tourism context, the theory was applied as Islamic brand equity to destination research. It was assessed from Muslim tourists' perception of tourism sites (Ali *et al.*, 2018; Battour *et al.*, 2019; Shafaei and Mohamed, 2015). In Islamic brand theory, Muslims are viewed as a brand and general halal principles of Islam being the norm, of which haram is the exclusion (Wilson and Liu, 2011). Extant literature (Boo *et al.*, 2009; Bianchi *et al.*, 2014; Konecnik, 2006; Konecnik and Gartner, 2007; Shafaei and Mohamed, 2015) used five key dominant brand equity dimensions, namely, awareness, value, image, loyalty and perceived quality to investigate tourists' brand equity. Battour *et al.* (2019), for example, used survey data on non-Muslims in Malaysia, and identified that trip quality, trip value and trip loyalty were significant to explain satisfaction of halal tourism products and services. This study explores four brand equity dimensions such as halal awareness, quality, value and image as the building blocks of DBE from Ghanaian Muslim tourists' view.

This research assumes that the purpose of halal destination branding is to create a favourable image, awareness and quality that lead to Muslim tourists' value for a destination. This study presents the theory within context, by measuring the activities of brand equity dimensions after the tourists have encountered all the halal services and products at the destination. Undeniably, this approach of using the theory has been validated in similar research (Ali *et al.*, 2018; Battour *et al.*, 2019; Shafaei and Mohamed, 2015), where HBED activities were measured after tourists encountered their halal products and service. In this regard, brand equity theory could be applied in context to explore the understanding of halal DBE of Muslim tourists.

Halal brand awareness and destination brand equity

Brand awareness is regarded as the first component for building the brand equity of a product (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2001). According to Shafaei (2017), HBA is a brand presence in the minds of target tourists. Importantly, halal awareness contributes to Muslim tourists' decision in selecting a destination site, which enhances impact on DBE (Rahman *et al.*, 2019).

In other words, HBA plays an important role in the destination choice for Muslim tourists. For the purpose of this research, HBA signifies a Muslim's extent of understanding details about the features of halal destination. Gartner (2014) found that destination brand was actually different from product brand. There are a lot of characteristics to a destination for branding, which includes the economic, social, cultural, political and technological issues related to a destination as a product (Kashif *et al.*, 2015; Yousaf *et al.*, 2017). Earlier studies have shown that brand awareness and destination value have a positive impact on DBE (Ferns and Walls, 2012; Gartner and Ruzzier, 2011). Further, in the study of Yousaf *et al.* (2017) on the conceptualization of tourists-based equity of destinations, they found that brand awareness positively impacts DBE. However, Kashif *et al.*'s (2015) research on brand equity tourism destination showed brand awareness negatively impacts the DBE of tourists visiting Lahore Fort. This showed that the impact of brand awareness on DBE varies with context. Based on the literature reviewed above, this study hypothesizes as follows:

H1. HBA positively impacts Muslim tourists' DBE.

Halal brand image and destination brand equity

Some existing literature indicated a significant impact of brand image on DBE in the tourism context (Ali *et al.*, 2017; Barnes *et al.*, 2014; Rahman *et al.*, 2019; Shafaei and Mohamaed, 2013). Brand image is viewed as the rationale behind consumer perception of a brand (Keller, 2003). Previous studies (Hornig *et al.*, 2012; Yang *et al.*, 2015) considered brand image as the main variable that individuals associate with a particular brand. This study maintains that HBI signifies the emotional halal destination products and services that influence Muslim tourists' perception of quality and satisfaction. Within the halal tourism literature, brand image research measured Muslim visitors' perceptions of destination quality. Tourism products and services such as "halal hotels, restaurants, halal resorts and halal trips" create brand image for Muslim travellers (Rahman *et al.*, 2019). This clearly shows that the branding of a travel destination could be attributed differently in halal tourism context, including halal food, halal toilets, halal Islamic culture, stability and friendly people. Konecnik and Gartner (2007) and Pike (2010) also concluded that brand image is created through the quality of facilities, friendliness of local, historical and cultural attractions. Using data from Chinese tourism context, Ali *et al.* (2017) found that HBI of international Muslim tourists had a positive impact on DBE which significantly explained visitors' brand purchase intentions. In all, the study of Barnes *et al.* (2014) on destination brand experience also showed that destination branding was a powerful marketing strategy in building a positive image of a place and also develop emotional link with tourists leading to the second hypothesis:

H2. HBI positively impacts Muslim tourists' DBE.

Halal brand perceived quality and destination brand equity

Brand quality is noted among the important elements of the dimensions (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Previous studies support the finding that tourist discernment of brand quality can result into a positive attitude, which has positive impact on DBE (Blain *et al.*, 2005; Boo *et al.*, 2009; Shafaei, 2017). According to Aaker (1991), the construct is an important element that makes a firm competitive, and enhances customers' justification for buying the brand. Besides, brand perceived quality described the superiority about the overall product and service excellence (Ferns and Walls, 2012; Yang *et al.*, 2015). The assessment of destination

quality is based on seven criteria, which are: features, performance, serviceability, reliability, durability and conformation quality (Keller, 2003). Of all these items on halal products, performance and serviceability were used in assessing brand perceived quality of a destination. This is because the two instruments served as a yardstick by which tourist sites met Muslim tourists' functional needs.

This research holds that HBPQ signifies the level of performance functionality based on the thought of Muslim tourists in context. Shafaei's (2017) research on halal showed that brand quality positively influenced Malaysia to be considered as one of the Islamic branded destinations, which is seriously establishing a halal hub for tourism products. Battour *et al.* (2019) also found that trip quality significantly impacted on halal tourism destinations. In conclusion, it suggested that brand destinations that offered quality products or services were likely to add values that would meet tourists' needs and desires. Based on the literature review, the study hypothesized that:

H3. HBPQ positively impacts Muslim tourists' DBE.

Halal brand value and destination brand equity

The generally accepted explanation of customer value is missing in the literature (Chi *et al.*, 2019; Boo *et al.*, 2009; Day and Crask, 2000; Parasuraman, 1997). The most popular definition for destination customer value is a price-based definition (Sweeney *et al.*, 1999; Tsai, 2005). Aaker (1991) noted that one of the best ways to measure brand value was to ask customers the extent to which value for money has been achieved through the provision of the good. In this study, HBV is considered as a destination that offers Muslim tourists more tangible benefits than the cost and time spent by the tourists. Extant empirical studies buttress the significant positive impact of brand value and DBE (Dahiya and Batra, 2017; Chi *et al.*, 2019; Kim and Lee, 2018; Tran *et al.*, 2019). Within the Indonesian tourism context, Khoiriati *et al.* (2018) found that halal values and branding played significant roles in enhancing Lombok as a halal tourism destination.

In addition, research in halal tourism found that Islamic values or attributes (halal food, separate prayer facilities, Islamic dress code and place of worship) of a destination were the most significant components that attracted Muslims to a tourism site and added value to the destination, which also served as criteria for their level of loyalty (Eid, 2013; Battour and Ismail, 2016). The aforementioned results are in line with the assertion that brand value plays a significant role in building DBE. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that:

H4. HBV positively impacts Muslim tourists' DBE.

The proposed framework for this study is shown in Figure 1.

Methodology

Research setting and sampling

The site for this research is the Larabanga Mosque situated in the Savannah Region of Ghana. Larabanga is Muslim-dominated community. The Larabanga Mosque is recognized as one of the most famous Islamic destinations and has also been recognized as a World Heritage Site (Ghanaguardian, 2017). The Larabanga Mosque in Ghana, West Africa was built in 1421 by Moorish traders with an "old Sudanese architectural style" (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2017). There is an ancient Quran in the mosque, which is said to have been given to the people in 1650 as a boon to the then Imam, Yidan Barimah, in fulfilment of his prayers (Ghana Museum and Monument Board, 2015). Hence, the destination has

become attractive for many Islamic believers. The target group considered for this study was adult Ghanaian Muslim tourists, who responded to perceptual halal DBE attributes (halal awareness, halal perceived quality, halal image and halal value) on site during the data collection period. As a result, this study used convenience sampling which is a non-probability method, with the help of 8 research assistants to administer 420 self-administered questionnaires during the months of November 2019 to February, 2020. Traveltips' (2018) report showed that tourist visits were high in Ghana during this period and majority of the roads to tourism sites were accessible with little or no rainfall in the country.

In other words, the convenience sampling method was useful in focusing on participants who were willing and ready to complete the self-administered questionnaire on site. This technique has been applied in other halal studies (Vargas-Sanchez *et al.*, 2020; Wardi *et al.*, 2018). However, one of the disadvantages of convenience sampling method is that it cannot be considered as a statistical representation of the target population (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Hence, the findings of this study do not represent the whole population of Muslim tourists in Ghana. Firstly, the research assistants explained the purpose of the research to the tourists, and those who agreed to take part in the investigation were asked to complete the questionnaires. Secondly, the research team attended to each participant separately to avoid the situation where the respondents might discuss the questions among themselves. Thirdly, the team also assisted the participants to clarify some questions where necessary. The sample size was justified based on Hair *et al.*'s (2010) proposal that a minimum sample size of 100 participants for structural equation modelling (SEM) was adequate. Therefore, a practical sample size of 312 was used, which corresponds with a response rate of 74% for 420 questionnaires administered. This response rate was satisfactory as Nulty (2008) emphasized that a response rate of over 70% was free of response errors. Also, the G*Power analysis was used, which shows power of 0.964 above the threshold of 0.88, grounded by a *p*-value of 0.05. This makes the rejection of the null hypotheses possible as the sample power is pleasing. Of course, this technique has been tested in similar halal tourism literature (Rahman *et al.*, 2019).

Data collection tools and analysis

This study used a two-stage data collection approach. In stage one, 30 participants were conveniently sampled for piloting the questionnaires in May 2019 at the selected destination site for this study. The instruments adopted for this study were adapted from the previous studies: six items from Boo *et al.* (2009), Pike *et al.* (2010) and Shafaei (2017); five items from

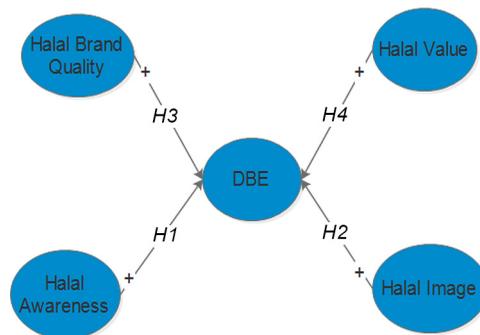


Figure 1.
Hypothesized halal
brand equity model

Chen (2010), Konecnik and Gartner (2007) and Shafaei (2017); four items from Boo *et al.* (2009), Konecnik and Gartner (2007) and Shafaei (2017); six items from Battour *et al.* (2013), Eid (2013) and Shafaei (2017); and four items from Som *et al.* (2012).

The questions were designed in the English language which is the official language in Ghana. However, only one question of HBV “I feel I can practice my halal openly while travelling to Larabanga” was rephrased for clarity. All the 25 items included in the questionnaire were retained. The piloted questionnaires were completed within 32 min on average, as the flow and language of the questions were logical and could be understood by the participants. In stage two, the final questionnaire used for this research consisted of 28 items and measured on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree” and were grouped into two sections: demographic information and the main constructs of the study. This study provided a detailed account of how the constructs were contextualized within the Ghanaian tourism environment. The number of items and their corresponding sources of the adapted instruments are presented in Table 1 above. This research followed the recommended methods within the literature to verify possible issues of normality of the data distribution and multicollinearity. Firstly, it examined whether the distribution of data deviated from normality, and found that all the items of the constructs were above the threshold of 0.05, implying no deviation from normality (Brown, 2006). The correction coefficients presented in Table 3 are not above 0.80, indicating multicollinearity was not an issue (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Next, the data were analysed using SEM, supported by STATA 14. SEM remains a powerful multivariate technique that has the advantage of performing complex analyses such as factor and regression (Bollen, 1989; Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993). In the context of halal tourism, SEM has been applied in previous scholarships (Battour *et al.*, 2019; Rahman *et al.*, 2017); hence, SEM is justifiable in this study.

Demographic results

Detailed demographic findings are shown in Table 2 above. Among the 312 participants sampled, nearly 56% were male tourists, and almost 46% were female. Their age ranges from 18 to 24 years (30%), 25 to 34 years (21%), 35 to 44 years (22%), 45 to 54 years (16%) and 50 years and above (11%). Of the participants (21%) of the tourists were single and 79% were married. Approximately 72% had a first degree and close to 28% were post graduate degree holders. With regards to frequency of visit to Larabanga, 85% reported that it was their first time, followed by those who had visited 2–3 times (10%) and 4–5 times (5%).

Factor analysis

This research used the factor analysis, specifically, the principal factorial axis with varimax rotation approach to establish the underlying factor structure of the main variables (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Results for Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin and Bartlett tests revealed ($KMO = 0.720$, $df = 201$, $p < 0.05$). This shows adequacy of factor analysis (Hair *et al.*, 1998). Again, the study identified five factors which accounted for 68.52% of total variance extracted. Notably, all the 25 items presented in Table 1 met the acceptable thresholds of 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2010), indicating the items were valid for the study. This research follows the measurement and structural model recommendations of Akamavi *et al.* (2015), i.e. root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) ≤ 0.08 , comparative-fit-index (CFI) ≥ 0.90 and Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) ≥ 0.90 .

Constructs	Loadings	Reliability	References
HBA		0.82	
Larabanga has a good name as halal destination	0.85		Boo <i>et al.</i> (2009), Pike <i>et al.</i> (2010), Shafaei (2017)
Larabanga is very famous as halal destination	0.82		
The halal characteristics of Larabanga come to my mind quickly	0.78		
When I am thinking about travelling to halal destination, Larabanga comes to my mind immediately	0.77		
Halal logo triggers my product choose	0.75		
I have seen a lot advertising promoting Larabanga as halal destination	0.74		
HBI		0.91	
Larabanga has halal relaxing atmosphere	0.77		Konecnik and Gartner (2007), Chen (2010), Shafaei (2017)
Larabanga has friendly Muslim people	0.76		
Larabanga has good halal shopping facilities	0.75		
Larabanga as a tourist town has interesting halal culture attraction	0.68		
Larabanga is a good halal town	0.64		
HBPQ		0.83	
Larabanga provides excellent halal experience (products and services)	0.86		Konecnik and Gartner (2007), Boo <i>et al.</i> (2009), Shafaei (2017)
Larabanga provides halal attributes of consistent quality	0.78		
This destination performs better than other similar halal destinations within the country	0.75		
Willing to spend more money at this destination	0.69		
HBV		0.78	
Variety of halal food for tourists	0.60		Battour <i>et al.</i> (2013), Eid (2013), Shafaei (2017)
Entertainment tools are compatible with Sharī'ah rules	0.81		
Destination fulfils my needs for prayer facilities	0.81		
Halal dress or codes are compatible with Sharī'ah rules (hijab)	0.81		
I feel I am in a moral and good halal environment when travelling to Larabanga	0.58		
I feel I can practice my halal openly while travelling to Larabanga	0.64		
DBE		0.82	
I would prefer to visit Larabanga	0.87		Som <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Larabanga is more than a destination to me	0.80		
Given the other similar Halal destinations in Ghana, I think	0.77		
I really enjoy traveling to Halal destination like this	0.75		

Table 1. Contextualization of halal brand equity and DBE

Items	(%)	Antecedents of brand equity
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	54	
Female	46	
<i>Age bracket (years)</i>		
18–24 years	30	
25–34 years	21	
35–44 years	22	
45–54 years	16	
56 and above	11	
<i>Marital status</i>		
Single	21	
Married	79	
<i>Educational level</i>		
College	28	
Graduate	72	
<i>Frequency of visit (times)</i>		
First time	85	
2–3 times	10	
4–5 times	5	

Table 2.
Demographic characteristics of participants

Measurement and structural model

Harman's single factor test was used in anticipating the common method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003; Pugh *et al.*, 2011). The result of the total variance factor is 41% (<50%), which means no serious common method bias exists. This was the result of the measurement model " $\chi^2 = 192.965$, $df = 112$, $p = 0.001$, $RMSEA = 0.10$, $CFI = 0.92$, $TLI = 0.93$, $SMR = 0.06$ ", which indicated a poor fit. The model was refined through modification indices to achieve a good fit for the structural model. The results showed covariation between HBA and HBPG to improve the total goodness of fit. Results of the revised model revealed acceptable values ($\chi^2 = 201.667$, $df = 117$, $p = 0.001$), where $RMSEA = 0.07$, $CFI = 0.97$, $TLI = 0.95$ and standardized root mean residual = 0.001, meaning the structural model fits the data and thresholds (Barrett, 2007; Steiger, 2007). Earlier, the convergent and discriminant validity was established. The average variance extracted (AVE) (Table 3) was used to check the convergent validity, with the cut-off point exceeding 0.50 (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The study also checked for discriminant validity by using the square root of AVE; and should be greater than the inter-correlations between the variables as indicated by Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Constructs	AVE	CR	1	2	3	4	5
HBA	0.76	0.85	[0.87]				
HBI	0.69	0.94	0.03**	[0.83]			
HBPG	0.58	0.91	0.39**	0.17**	[0.76]		
HBV	0.55	0.86	0.38**	0.04**	0.42**	[0.74]	
DBE	0.72	0.88	0.38*	0.24**	0.39*	0.25**	[0.85]
Mean			3.60	3.57	3.83	3.84	4.18
SD			0.73	0.91	0.71	0.70	0.53

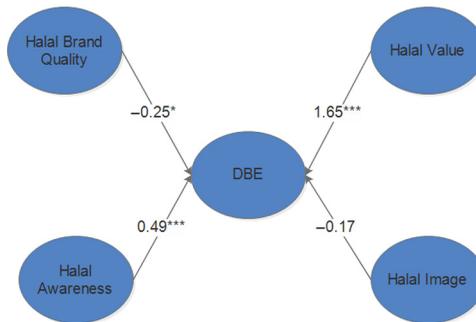
Table 3.
Mean, standard deviation and inter-correlation for all variables

This is to check whether the latent constructs were distinct from one another. The square roots of the AVEs presented in Table 3 are greater than 0.50 signifying that convergent and discriminant validity are established.

Table 3 and Figure 2 show the results of the SEM, which provided support for H1 and H4. It is indicated that HBA has a significant positive effect on DBE ($\beta = 0.487, p < 0.001$) supporting H1; HBV has a significant positive effect on DBE ($\beta = 1.650, p < 0.001$) supporting H4. HBI ($\beta = -0.167, p > 0.05$) and HBPQ ($\beta = -0.245, p < 0.05$) have negative effects on DBE, not supporting H2 and H3. The coefficient of determination showed that HBEDs account for 57.24% variations in DBE (Table 4).

Discussion of results

The objective of this research is to investigate the effects of HBEDs on DBE, which are based on the brand equity theory in the Ghanaian context. Consistent with the theory of brand equity, the results of this study substantiated the assumption that destination awareness and value are pertinent in creating tourists’ brand knowledge of a destination. This was obtained based on the study’s results that reinforced the assertion in the literature that brand awareness and destination value have positive impact on DBE, which is in agreement with earlier studies (Ferns and Walls, 2012; Gartner and Ruzzier, 2011). This buttresses the understanding that tourists who find tourism activities of a destination to be more significant are likely to consistently search for information about that destination’s attributes and values to renew their visit and re-visit decisions. According to Battour et al. (2011) and Shafaei (2017), Islamic facilities or attributes at a destination influence Muslim



Notes: Unstandardized coefficient betas, *** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$,

Figure 2. Tested halal brand equity model

Hypotheses	Paths	Standardized coefficient	t-values	Sig.	Verdict of hypotheses
H1	HBA → DBE	0.49	4.78	0.000	***
H2	HBI → DBE	-0.17	-1.62	0.089	ns
H3	HBPQ → DBE	-0.25	-2.35	0.020	*
H4	HBV → DBE	1.65	5.24	0.000	***

Table 4. Hypotheses testing

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

tourists' selection of a destination. This revelation strengthened the decision to designate the Larabanga Mosque as an Islamic destination by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

It is important within the halal tourism context that Muslim tourists search for information about a destination and whether they can practice and conserve their faith and belief when travelling. This is an indication that the more Larabanga succeeds in developing its halal brand presence in the minds of tourists, the more tourists will be impressed, and will associate superior quality with the halal brand. This might lead to discussions on the "halalness" of the destination by friends about their travel experience. This outcome is consistent with assertions made by [Shafaei \(2017\)](#), which stated that Muslim tourists could transfer information about destination awareness through word-of-mouth evangelism. Therefore, Muslims who are travelling to a destination in fulfilment of their religious needs will search for more information about the halal friendliness of the destination.

Furthermore, the findings revealed the positive and significant impacts of brand value on DBE, supporting the findings of other studies ([Khoiriati et al., 2018](#); [Tran et al., 2019](#)). These studies found halal values to have a significant effect on DBE. This reaffirms the importance of maintaining and developing halal value to Muslim tourists, while developing the overall DBE of Larabanga within a non-Islamic state like Ghana. Considering the location of Larabanga which is dominated by Muslim in the Savannah Region, tourists will find people with similar culture and identities that resonate with them. According to [Eid \(2013\)](#) and [Battour and Ismail \(2016\)](#), Islamic values or attributes of a destination are the significant elements that attract Muslims to tourism. Therefore, halal goods and services such as food, wearing of the hijab and prayer facilities of Larabanga influence the tourists to feel that they could practice their faith and identity without any fear.

As hypothesized, the results of this study found a negative impact of brand image on DBE, not supporting previous studies ([Bianchi and Pike, 2011](#); [Rahman et al., 2019](#); [Shafaei, 2017](#)). However, this negative impact might be because of the neglect of Larabanga over the past years regarding rehabilitation; given the bad roads and the dilapidated nature of the site. It has been grounded in literature that the destination image entails a specific set of characteristics related to perceived brand equity of potential Muslim tourists. Hence, the HBIs of Larabanga are elements that are associated with Islamic values. They include the friendliness of the local population, the ability to communicate with indigenous people and varieties of halal foods are the most important factors that Muslim tourists consider as a brand image of a tourism site.

Additionally, the negative impact of image also has an insignificant effect on DBE. The reason for this might be that though the tourists are somewhere aware of the dilapidated nature of the site, they do not consider brand image as a factor to deter them from visiting the site which symbolizes an ancient pilgrimage route. Moreover, as compared with other halal destinations in the Sub-Saharan Region (e.g. the Great Mosque of Djenne, Sidi Yahaya), Larabanga may not be special and unique enough to differentiate the site from others. Consequently, the tourist image of Larabanga may not be in line with their expectations.

Finally, this investigation did not provide empirical support for the positive impact of halal perceived quality on DBE, as identified in the studies of [Ferns and Walls \(2012\)](#) and [Shafaei \(2017\)](#). These researchers, in their earlier studies, indicated that perceived quality significantly affects Muslim tourists. The negative effect of halal perceived quality on DBE could be explained in context, based on the understanding that the Muslim tourists' overall judgement of the quality of halal products and services (waiting time, tangibles and valence) at the Larabanga mosque do not meet their expectations. Further, the significant result of perceived quality obtained in this study supports the revelations ([Chi et al., 2019](#); [Tran et al., 2019](#)) that

perceived quality is one of the most important dimensions that can build DBE. This presumes that perceived quality is crucial for satisfying tourists, which can also retain their loyalty for future tour intention to the same or similar destination.

This study makes novel contributions to halal tourism literature in establishing the importance of HBA and halal value in promoting DBE in context. Firstly, this research extends the halal literature on the impact of HBEDs on DBE by offering empirical verification of the applicability in a different tourism environment (non-Islamic state). Secondly, it evidenced the significant impact of HBA, halal perceived quality and halal value of Muslim tourists in the context of a non-Islamic developing country. Thirdly, the results of this research go beyond previous research (Battour *et al.*, 2019; Shafaei, 2017; Wardi *et al.*, 2018) to expand the extent of halal tourism literature. Whereas the findings of Shafaei (2017) on Muslim tourists involvement and brand equity revealed that involvement positively influences Islamic awareness, image, quality, value and loyalty. This research found a negative impact of halal perceived quality and halal image on DBE. Again, this study's findings substantiated that halal awareness and halal value significantly impact DBE in the Ghanaian tourism context; this is considered as an additional contribution of this current article. This finding is different from the halal tourism study of Battour *et al.* (2019), where a strong positive relationship was found between the perception of halal tourist products and services; followed by trip quality, word of mouth, satisfaction and trip value. Overall, these research findings suggest that halal tourism is supported within a non-Islamic environment.

Conclusion and implications

This study examined HBEDs and DBE within a non-Islamic context. Based on the review of literature, the study hypothesized to test the impacts of HBEDs on DBE within the Larabanga destination site. Two hypotheses were accepted which found that halal awareness and value have positive significant impacts on tourists' DBE. The strongest impact was found between halal value and DBE. The results of this research contributed to the halal tourism literature by providing insights into Muslim tourists' perceptions of HBEDs of halal destination, especially within the context of Ghanaian tourism. This study also concluded that halal image and halal perceived quality had negative impacts on DBE, which have managerial implications for the Ghanaian tourism sector. In all, the results of this study provide the foundation to understand which of the HBEDs are significant to the tourists.

Theoretical implications

This study has theoretical implications. Firstly, this study contributes to the recognition and the importance of brand equity theory in the context of halal tourism literature in a non-Western country perspective. Secondly, the brand equity theory was successfully used in a non-Islamic state such as Ghana to explain brand in the minds of Muslim travellers and an extension of halal tourism literature on the globe. Thirdly, the brand equity theory in the Ghanaian tourism context was able to confirm Larabanga as a halal destination and also developed a halal brand equity model grounded on the theory, which supports the underlining claim that Larabanga is the most famous Islamic destination, also recognized as a World Heritage Site. The results of this study also provided empirical evidence and advanced the understanding that HBEDs are important antecedents in building DBE. This is considered an additional contribution of this study to the existing literature on halal tourism. Again, one of the main contributions of this research is to close the knowledge gap and provide relevant pointers for a better understanding of the importance of halal awareness and halal value for decision-making for Muslim tourists within context. Given

these results, it is important to align the identified factors that promote DBE to current marketing strategies and policies that could enhance the continuous flow of Muslim tourists to this destination.

Practical implications

Practically, the results of the research have implications for Ghana's Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, local tourism officials, marketers, practitioners, businesses and planners in context. Firstly, this study canvassed a need to improve the negative results of HBI and perceived halal, through tourism stakeholders' collaboration in building the Larabanga Mosque as a halal branded destination. The results derived from this study can also provide an in-depth understanding of the needs of Muslim tourists. Their needs can be solved by apportioning both human and financial resources into building a halal image and quality for the Larabanga destination through the provision of excellent halal experiences for actual and potential customers of this destination site. Secondly, tourism marketers, practitioners and planners can enhance destination image by providing halal products and services that are more economical or affordable to tourists. Enhancement also includes the offering of good Islamic facilities such as washrooms, halal foods, halal tags on food items and segregated services between men and women at destinations. Thirdly, this research can help tourism marketers to sustain perceived brand qualities through the regular provision of quality attributes of halal products and services that would influence tourists to spend more at Larabanga. Moreover, the findings of this study serve as the starting point for tourism stakeholders such as planners of the Larabanga Mosque to brand a successful halal destination in the minds of Muslims tourists. Planners may also adopt different marketing strategies that can be used to promote the destination site among the target audience through effective television channels, travel magazines and electronic advertising. As observed by Haq (2014, p. 259), "stakeholders involved in Islamic spiritual tourism include public and private tourism providers and their agencies, destination managers, media players, transportations and accommodation providers, Islamic institutions, and madrassas". It implies that stakeholders could also encourage tourists to sell the Larabanga Mosque through word-of-mouth programmes.

The result also reveals a significant positive impact of halal value on DBE. It is important to note that, in addition to strengthening halal awareness, an Islamic tourism destination should create impressive and unique value in addition to the faith of tourists. In other words, the present study suggests that tourism-related businesses in Larabanga should implement destination marketing initiatives such as hosting tourism events, building a collaborative local network of suppliers of quality halal products and services that enhance Muslim tourists' beliefs in complying with the Shari'ah law. All these strategies enable managers to evaluate the competitive position of the Larabanga mosque and consider its uniqueness as an Islamic tourism destination.

Limitation and future research directions

The study has contributed to the antecedents of halal DBE among Muslim tourists of non-Islamic context, which had been overlooked in previous research. Although, the research has offered new insight into the relevance of halal DBE of the Larabanga Mosque, there are some limitations. Firstly, the limitation highlights the evidence of not considering the effects of the brand equity dimensions on tourist satisfaction, retention and word of mouth. Further studies should engage the factors that were not tested in this research to broaden the understanding of halal DBE in a similar environment. Secondly, this study only used

questionnaire data from tourists to reflect tourist viewpoint on halal DBE. Tourists' views might not be adequate to succeed in managing destination brands.

Future studies should include the viewpoints of employees of the destination which could generate all-inclusive perspectives. Thirdly, this research focused on only four dimensions (awareness, image, value and perceived quality) of the brand equity to assess halal destination equity. Future research should include brand loyalty to advance the understanding of the impact of brand loyalty in building DBE of a halal destination in similar geographical context. Interestingly, the focus of this study was on Muslim tourist visits to Larabanga in the context of halal tourism; further studies should consider extending halal tourism to non-Muslim tourists in similar context.

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