

Muslim-Friendly Hotels and Hospitality Practices: A Comprehensive Review of Global Trends and Challenges

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Abstract

This study reviews global practices and challenges in implementing Muslim-friendly and Shariah-compliant hotels (SCHs), which have become an emerging focus in the hospitality sector. Guided by two research questions, it examines how these hotels are managed worldwide and the barriers that limit their development. A systematic review of studies published between 2011 and 2025 reveals that their practices extend beyond halal-certified food to include prayer facilities, gender-sensitive amenities, Islamic financial systems, and service delivery grounded in Shariah principles. Despite these advances, four key challenges remain, which are inconsistent standards, operational complexity, differing market

expectations, and limited stakeholder awareness. The reviewed studies reflect a gradual but steady academic engagement with this topic over time, underscoring its growing importance within the global tourism landscape. This paper contributes by consolidating fragmented evidence and clarifying the dual role of these hotels in fulfilling faith-based needs while being appealing to wider audiences. Sustaining growth in this sector requires coherent certification, skilled workforce development, and stronger collaboration between policymakers and industry practitioners.

Keywords: Muslim-Friendly Hotels, Shariah-Compliant Hospitality, Halal Tourism Practices, Hospitality Management, Systematic Literature Review (PRISMA)

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing global industries, with the Muslim travel market emerging as a vital segment due to increasing demand for services that respect Islamic values. According to UN Tourism (2024), international arrivals reached almost 1.4 billion in 2024, representing 99% of pre-pandemic levels, driven by strong demand, expanded air connectivity, and the recovery of the Asia-Pacific region. Within this recovery, halal tourism has gained momentum, reflecting the lifestyle needs of nearly one-quarter of the global population that identifies as Muslim. Before the pandemic, Muslim tourist arrivals grew from 108 million in 2014 to 160 million in 2019. Although arrivals dropped to 42 million in 2020, the sector has since rebounded strongly. The Islamic Tourism Centre (2024) has projected that Muslim travel spending could reach USD225 billion by 2028, while the Global Muslim Travel Index 2025 has reported 176 million arrivals in 2024 and forecasted 245 million by 2030, with expenditure expected to exceed USD230 billion (Mastercard-CrescentRating, 2025). These trends have highlighted both the resilience of the Muslim travel market and the growing demand for services that accommodate faith-based preferences.

In response, many hotels have introduced Muslim-friendly hotel (MFH) practices that blend conventional hospitality with services tailored to Muslim guests. Typical offerings include halal-certified food, prayer facilities, qibla-direction indicators, alcohol-free dining options, and family-oriented services. Increasingly, digital tools that help travellers locate halal amenities have also become part of service delivery (Musa et al., 2019; Karim et al., 2022). A stricter variation of this concept is found in Shariah-Compliant Hotels (SCHs), which extend beyond basic adjustments to embed Islamic principles across the multiple dimensions of hospitality management, including financial operations, staffing policies, entertainment, and architectural design (Hasim et al., 2019; Sulaiman et al., 2023). In practice, SCHs can be viewed as a subset of MFHs, representing the highest level of adherence to Islamic law (Ithnan & Ariffin, 2020).

Despite these advances, several challenges have hindered the consistent implementation of Muslim-friendly hospitality. Standardisation, for instance, has remained a major barrier, as halal certification frameworks, branding, and terminology have varied across regions, leading to confusion among industry practitioners and travellers (Hanafiah et al., 2022; Abbasian et al., 2023). Besides, operational practices have also presented difficulties, including limited availability of halal-certified supply chains, inadequate staff training, and slow adoption of digital innovation (Karim et al., 2022; Sulaiman et al., 2023). Furthermore, market segmentation has also complicated service delivery, since Muslim and non-Muslim guests often have differing expectations, while even within the Muslim community, preferences have ranged from strict observance to more flexible interpretations (Abbasian et al., 2023; Yen et al., 2022). Apart from that, awareness gaps among policymakers, operators, and travellers have further weakened the credibility and effectiveness of implementation (Ma'asor et al., 2023).

Although scholarly interest in MFH and SCH practices has increased, the research has still remained fragmented, often limited to specific countries, isolated practices, or narrow operational dimensions (Musa et al., 2019; Hasim et al., 2019). This fragmentation has created

inconsistencies in how Muslim-friendly hospitality is defined, assessed, and applied globally. As a result, the field has lacked a unified framework that can guide hoteliers, policymakers, and scholars in designing consistent, scalable, and culturally sensitive strategies.

To address this gap, the present study has conducted a systematic literature review to consolidate the global practices and challenges in the MFH and SCH implementation. Specifically, it has aimed to answer two research questions, as follows:

RQ1: What are the key practices adopted by hotels in implementing Muslim-friendly and Shariah-compliant hospitality?

RQ2: What are the main challenges faced by the hotels in sustaining these practices globally?

By integrating insights across regions and contexts, this review has contributed in two important ways. First, it has offered a structured understanding of how MFH and SCH are currently practised, helping to clarify overlaps, distinctions, and inconsistencies in their application. Second, it has highlighted critical operational and policy challenges, providing direction for future research while offering practical implications for hoteliers, tourism boards, and certification bodies. In doing so, the study has strengthened the theoretical and practical foundation of Muslim-friendly hospitality and positioned it as a credible and competitive segment within the broader global tourism industry.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study has adopted a systematic literature review (SLR) guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for the Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework (Page et al., 2021). The PRISMA approach has been selected to ensure transparency, rigor, and replicability in identifying, screening, and analysing existing research on the Muslim-friendly hotel (MFH) and Shariah-compliant hotel (SCH) practices and challenges.

2.2 Identification

An extensive review has been conducted by using Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), which have been recognised as the most reputable and authoritative databases, for retrieving relevant articles to address the research questions. As a part of the data-collection process, both databases were systematically searched on 12 October 2025. The search process has been commenced with an identification phase, wherein synonyms, related terms, and variations of the main keywords for the study, namely, Muslim-friendly hotel, Shariah-compliant hotel, Islamic hotel, halal hotel, industry challenge, and market trend, have been searched. The objective has been to expand the options available to the selected databases and retrieve more related articles. The authors have enriched the existing keywords and formulated a comprehensive search string, utilising Boolean operators, phrase searching, truncation, wild card, and field code functions, across the two primary databases, namely, Scopus and Web of Science (Table 1). This is because the Scopus and Web of Science databases are considered the leading databases in systematic literature reviews due to their numerous advantages, such as advanced searching functions, comprehensive indexing of over

5,000 publishers, control of article quality, and multidisciplinary focus, including environmental-management-related studies (Shaffril et al., 2020). Multiple keywords have been employed to locate pertinent literature associating Muslim-friendly hotels and hospitality practices with global trends and challenges. The terms have been searched in the titles, abstracts, and keywords of each of the documents. To ensure rigor and transparency, the search strategy, which is using a set of search strings, has also been utilised, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Search strings applied in the review

Database	Search Strings
Scopus	((("Muslim-friendly hotel*" OR "Shariah-compliant hotel*" OR "Islamic hotel*" OR "halal hotel*" OR "Shariah hotel*") AND ("implementation" OR "certification" OR "awareness" OR "market potential" OR "policy development" OR "standardization" OR "digital transformation" OR "innovation" OR "industry challenge*" OR "market trend*")))
Web of Science	TS= ((("Muslim-friendly hotel*" OR "Shariah-compliant hotel*" OR "Islamic hotel*" OR "halal hotel*" OR "Shariah hotel*") AND ("implementation" OR "certification" OR "awareness" OR "market potential" OR "policy development" OR "standardization" OR "digital transformation" OR "innovation" OR "industry challenge*" OR "market trend*")))

Note. Date of Access: October 2025.

2.3 Screening

The initial phase of the screening process has involved the identification and exclusion of any duplicate items from consideration. A total of 36 articles have been generated by the keyword search, with Scopus yielding 24 articles and WoS providing access to 12 papers. The Microsoft Excel software has been utilised to identify and sort out a total of 7 overlapping articles that has emerged in both databases. The selection criteria for this study have been aligned with those proposed by Kitchenham and Charters (2007). Given the vast array of the published works available on this subject matter, the researchers should determine an appropriate time frame within which they can conduct their review. However, Higgins and Green (2011) have advised that restricting publication timelines should only be implemented if it is known that relevant studies could only have been reported during a specific period. Consequently, based on these selected criteria, the outline below the screening procedures has been adopted for the study.

First, only journal papers in a form of studies have been considered for inclusion in the process, with publications consisting of articles, book chapters, reviews, journals, books, and book series included. Second, only articles written in English and Malay have been incorporated in the review to avoid confusion in understanding. Third, during a short period between 2011 and 2025. A 14-year timeframe has been chosen to balance breadth and recency, enabling the review to capture both foundational contributions and more contemporary developments in

Muslim-friendly and Shariah-compliant hospitality. Prior methodological guidance has suggested that a 10-to-15-year horizon is appropriate for systematic reviews in hospitality and management, as it allows for historical grounding without diluting current perspectives (Snyder, 2019; Paul & Criado, 2020). Following the screening procedure, only 28 papers have been accepted and 5 excluded because they have not met the criteria.

2.4 Eligibility

The eligibility stage has involved manual monitoring by the authors to ensure that all the remaining articles, after the screening process, have met the established criteria. This has been achieved through a thorough review of the article titles and abstracts to select more specific articles that would help to answer the research questions outlined in Table 3. A total number of articles has been prepared for this stage, and each title and key content has been meticulously reviewed to ensure that the inclusion requirements were met and aligned with the current research aims. Following filtration, 1 irrelevant article has been removed, leaving a final count of 23 eligible articles for further review.

2.5 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure relevance and quality, the strict inclusion and exclusion criteria have been applied. Table 2 below summarises the conditions guiding study selection.

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria applied in the review

Criteria	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
• Timeline	• 2011-2025	• <2011
• Document type	• Articles, book chapters, reviews, journals, books, and conference proceedings	• Book series
• Language	• Publications available in full-text English and Malay	• Non-English and Non-Malay
• Industry	• Hospitality and Tourism industry	• Non-Hospitality and Tourism industry

2.6 Screening Process and Selection Process

The search process has followed the four PRISMA stages, which are identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The initial database search has produced 36 results using the combination of the search strings and the 15-year timeframe. After removing 7 duplicates, 29 studies have remained for title and abstract screening. Of these, 5 studies have been excluded as they have not aligned with the review's focus (e.g., general halal tourism, Islamic finance, or non-hospitality sectors). The full texts of 24 articles have then been assessed for eligibility against the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table 2 above. Following this step, 1 study has been excluded due to insufficient methodological rigor, lack of focus on hotels, or limited relevance. Ultimately, 23 studies have been included in the final synthesis. This process is summarised in the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram below (Figure 1).

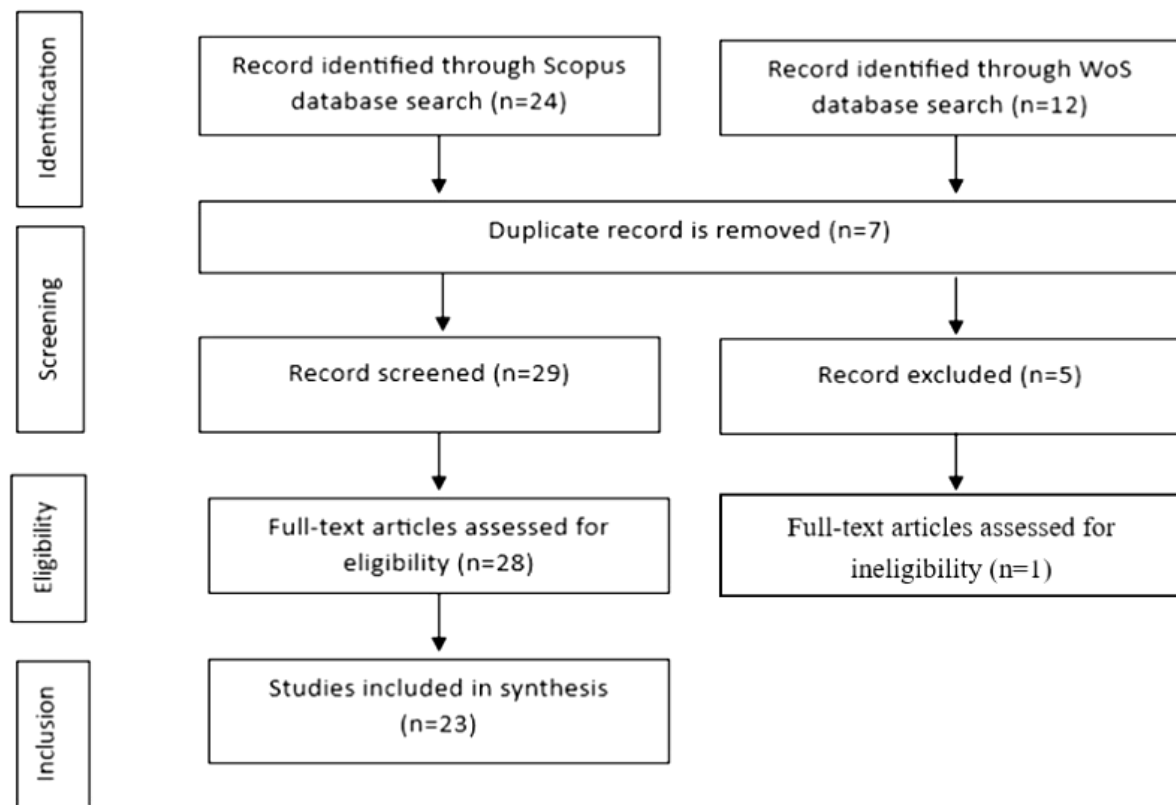


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram of the study selection process

2.7 Data Extraction and Analysis

Data from the selected studies have been systematically extracted into a structured coding sheet capturing key attributes, such as authorship, publication year, identified trends and practices, and reported challenges. A thematic analysis approach has then been applied to synthesise findings. This method has enabled the consolidation of fragmented evidence and highlighted global patterns, offering a clearer understanding of how the MFH and SCH concepts are applied across different contexts. The themes have been organised into two broad categories, which are:

- 1) Muslim-friendly practices (e.g., halal-certified food, prayer facilities, qibla indicators, alcohol-free dining, family-friendly amenities, and digital halal services).
- 2) Implementation challenges (e.g., standardisation issues, operational practices, market segmentation, and awareness).

3. Findings and Discussion

An interesting trend has emerged from the archived articles focusing on the Shariah-compliant hotel practices and challenges surrounding their global implementation. The reviewed studies have spanned from 2011 to 2025, reflecting sustained academic interest

in Muslim-friendly and Shariah-compliant hospitality over time. This trend has highlighted the gradual evolution of research in this field and its increasing relevance within the global hospitality context. A detailed summary of the reviewed works is provided in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Synopsis of studies selected for systematic review

Author(s), Year	Muslim-Friendly Hotel (MFH)/Shariah-Compliant Hotel (SCH) trends and practices	Challenges in Implementation			
		Standardization Issues	Operational Practices	Market Segmentation	Awareness
Zailani et al., (2011)	Halal tourism is a rapidly expanding global market, driven by Muslim travellers seeking high-quality, safe, and Shariah-compliant services. Providing halal food and hygienic accommodations gives hotels a strong competitive edge, attracting discerning tourists from the Middle East and other Islamic regions.		✓	✓	✓
Razalli et al., (2013)	The growing demand for halal food and Islamic-oriented hotels has positioned Malaysia as a key destination for both Muslim and non-Muslim travellers. This trend strengthens tourism, supports economic sustainability, creates local employment, and promotes adherence to halal certification standards.		✓		
Zafir, (2015)	The global halal movement has increased demand for certified halal products and Islamic-based hospitality. SCHs exemplify this shift, offering faith-based yet professional services and expanding beyond the Middle East to both Muslim and non-Muslim countries across Asia.	✓	✓		✓
Ibrahim & Jamal (2016)	The rise in global Muslim travel has increased demand for SCHs, especially in Malaysia, Turkey, and Egypt. These hotels integrate Islamic principles across all operations, promoting healthy, quality services for all guests. However, broader awareness, particularly among non-Muslims remains essential for wider acceptance and growth.		✓	✓	✓
Samori et al, (2017)	The rise in the global Muslim population has boosted demand for Muslim-friendly hotels offering halal food and Shariah-compliant facilities. This concept is growing worldwide, especially in the Middle East and Asia, with Malaysia emerging as a preferred destination for Muslim travellers seeking safety, halal assurance, and cultural familiarity	✓			✓
Sobari et al., (2017)	Hotels guided by Islamic values ensure full Shariah compliance in operations, food, facilities, and finance. They offer halal-certified dining, prayer amenities, gender-segregated recreational areas, and interest-free financial practices, reflecting the growing global demand for faith-based hospitality.		✓	✓	✓
Razalli, (2018)	Halal products and services attract both Muslim and non-Muslim consumers due to their high standards of hygiene, safety, and quality. The surge in Muslim tourists to Malaysia has strengthened the halal market, encouraging hotels to adopt Islamic practices for greater economic benefits.		✓		✓
Uansa-ard & Binprathan (2018)	The rise in Muslim tourists, particularly from the Middle East, has boosted demand for halal food and Muslim-friendly services. In Thailand, the growth was driven by ASEAN liberalisation and the country's natural appeal, attracting family-oriented Muslim travellers		✓		
Karia & Fauzi (2019)	Islamic-oriented hotels are a growing strategic trend in global hospitality, combining Shariah principles with modern service excellence. Emphasizing hygiene, ethics, and trust, these hotels enhance competitiveness, attract Muslim travellers, and contribute to economic growth particularly in Malaysia's thriving halal tourism sector.	✓	✓		✓
Marzuki et al., (2019)	De Palma Hotel Ampang pioneered the Shariah-compliant hotel concept in Malaysia, proving that Islamic-based operations can achieve strong occupancy and		✓		

	profitability. Its success highlights growing global demand for quality, faith-based hospitality and positions the Shariah model for wider expansion.				
Muharam & Asutay (2019)	Halal tourism is rapidly expanding with the rise of a mobile Muslim middle class. Halal-friendly hotels enhance this market by offering Shariah-compliant services, such as halal food, prayer facilities, modest accommodations, and ethical operations, all adapted to meet the needs of Muslim guests in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries.	✓			✓
Musa et al. (2019)	Muslim-Friendly Hotels are a rising trend worldwide, offering Shariah-compliant services that extend beyond halal food to include prayer facilities, modest practices, ethical finance, and inclusive hospitality for all guests.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Shnyrkova & Predvoditeleva (2019)	SCHs integrate Islamic principles across all operations, from halal-certified food and gender-segregated facilities to ethical finance and modest staff conduct. Features like prayer amenities, privacy-focused design, and zakat contributions reflect holistic Islamic hospitality, with certification enhancing trust and global competitiveness.		✓		
Yahaya et al., (2020)	Muslim-friendly hotels in Malaysia are increasingly incorporating facilities that support religious practices, especially during Ramadan. They ensure halal food availability, provide informative content, and create value-based environments that promote guests' spiritual well-being.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Qurtubi et al., (2021)	With an estimated 230 million Muslim travellers by 2026 and USD 180 billion in spending, halal tourism is driving hotels to adopt Shariah-compliant practices. These hotels integrate Islamic principles in operations, design, and finance, positioning themselves for global competitiveness through quality and value-driven services.		✓	✓	✓
Sulaiman et al., (2021)	Hotels fully aligned with Islamic principles covering management, branding, halal services, and Shariah-based finance are increasingly preferred by Muslim travellers. Strict avoidance of non-permissible activities and strong Shariah compliance enhance guest trust, loyalty, and the overall appeal of halal tourism packages.		✓	✓	✓
Karim et al. (2022)	Shariah-Compliant Hotels (SCHs) are expanding globally, offering halal-certified products, facilities, and services aligned with Islamic principles. They ensure halal sourcing, staff conduct, and marketing compliance, appealing to Muslim travellers through affordable, faith-based hospitality.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nasir et al., (2022).	Hotels adopting Shariah or halal branding are gaining stronger market performance and reputation. The rise of SCHs, especially in Muslim-majority countries, emphasizes halal certification, Islamic staff conduct, gender-segregated facilities, and comprehensive religious amenities to enhance Muslim guest experiences.	✓	✓		✓
Rachmiate et al., (2022)	Muslim-friendly hotels operate based on Islamic principles, offering services and management systems aligned with Shariah law. The concept extends beyond halal food to all hotel operations, with varying levels of compliance across establishments labeled as Halal, Muslim-friendly, or Shariah-compliant hotels.	✓	✓		✓
Ruzulan et al., (2022)	Terms like Shariah-compliant, Muslim-friendly, and Halal are used to attract Muslim travellers by ensuring services align with Islamic law. Certification enhances trust, while growing religious awareness boosts demand. In Malaysia, 3–4-star hotels actively adopt these practices, though some 5-star hotels remain cautious due to higher costs and revenue concerns.		✓	✓	✓
Sulaiman et al. (2023)	Shariah-Compliant Hotels (SCHs) are rapidly growing, especially in the Middle East, attracting Muslim travellers worldwide through their emphasis on cleanliness, quality, safety, and Shariah compliance. Guest satisfaction, service quality, and religious features strongly influence revisit intentions.		✓	✓	✓
Thudam, (2025)	Shariah-compliant hotels operate fully under Islamic principles, covering finance, services, staff conduct, and design. They prohibit alcohol, gambling, and non-Islamic entertainment, ensure halal food, modest dress, Qibla-oriented layouts, and gender-segregated facilities, reflecting a holistic Islamic hospitality model.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Yusof et al., (2025)	The Muslim-friendly hotel concept caters to Muslim travelers by offering amenities aligned with Islamic principles, including halal food, prayer facilities, non-alcoholic environments, and gender-segregated recreational areas.		✓		✓

3.1 Global Practices of Muslim-Friendly and Shariah-Compliant Hotels

3.1.1 Emergence of Shariah-Compliant Hotels

Shariah-Compliant Hotels (SCHs) represent a rapidly emerging trend in the global hospitality industry, offering innovative and specialised services tailored for Muslim travellers (Musa et al., 2019). These hotels have gone beyond merely providing halal food and beverages, integrating Islamic principles across operations, finance, management, and guest services (Ibrahim & Jamal, 2016; Rachmiatie et al., 2022). The concept has evolved due to multiple factors, including the rise of halal tourism, growing awareness of faith-based consumption, and the increasing global Muslim population (Zafir, 2015; Samori et al., 2017). Halal tourism, in particular, has become a rapidly expanding market, attracting travellers who seek experiences aligned with Shariah principles, including food, accommodation, leisure, and entertainment (Musa et al., 2019; Zailani et al., 2011). Governments in countries like Malaysia have supported this sector by introducing certification frameworks and regulatory standards to enhance credibility, encourage consistent compliance, and ensure the trust of consumers in SCH operations (Razalli et al., 2013). Consequently, SCHs have now served not only as faith-based hospitality options but also as profitable, sustainable, and inclusive business models capable of attracting a global clientele (Karia & Fauzi, 2019).

Key features of SCHs include halal-certified kitchens, prayer facilities, gender-segregated amenities, Islamic-inspired interior décor, and services designed to support religious practices, such as fasting, Friday prayers, and modest dress codes for staff (Musa et al., 2019; Karim et al., 2022). Moreover, the adoption of SCH practices reflects a broader response to ethical and faith-based tourism trends, which emphasise hygiene, safety, environmental responsibility, and economic benefits for all guests, irrespective of religion or cultural background (Musa et al., 2019; Sulaiman et al., 2023). As such, SCHs have transformed from a niche concept into a significant segment of the global hospitality market, providing both functional accommodation services and a spiritual, ethically grounded experience.

3.1.2 Regional Developments

The development and expansion of SCHs have shown strong regional variations, reflecting local cultural, regulatory, and market contexts. In Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia and Indonesia, hotels align closely with national halal certification standards, such as JAKIM's Halal standards and MS 2610:2015, providing structured benchmarks for Muslim-friendly operations (Nasir et al., 2022; Ruzulan et al., 2022). For instance, De Palma Hotel in Malaysia serves as a pioneering example of full Shariah compliance, integrating Islamic principles across operations and facilities while successfully balancing operational costs with profitability and guest satisfaction (Marzuki et al., 2019). This demonstrates that the early adoption of SCH principles can yield both financial and reputational advantages, thereby encouraging other operators to follow suit.

In the Middle East, SCHs have become major competitive tourism assets, particularly in destinations, such as Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Saudi Arabia, where the cultural and religious familiarity of the environment naturally enhances their appeal (Sulaiman et al., 2023). These

hotels cater primarily to Muslim travellers from the Middle East, Southeast Asia, the Far East, Africa, and the Indian subcontinent, reflecting the global demand for Shariah-aligned hospitality services (Sulaiman et al., 2023). Beyond Muslim-majority countries, SCHs have also gained acceptance in non-Muslim nations, such as Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines, and China, where hotels emphasise halal dining, prayer facilities, and modest service designs to attract Middle-Eastern and Muslim tourists (Uansa-ard & Binprathan, 2018; Muharam & Asutay, 2019). Such expansion illustrates the adaptability and cross-cultural appeal of SCHs, which are increasingly recognised as a global hospitality model capable of serving both Muslim and non-Muslim clientele.

In Malaysia, the government's support of halal tourism has had significant economic and cultural impacts. The rise of Islamic-oriented hotels has contributed to employment opportunities, economic sustainability, and enhanced international recognition of Malaysia as a Halal-friendly destination (Razalli et al., 2013). Similarly, other Asian countries have leveraged the SCH concepts to attract Muslim travellers who prioritise halal food, religious observance, and cultural comfort (Samori et al., 2017; Uansa-ard & Binprathan, 2018). These regional developments highlight how SCHs have evolved from niche offerings into mainstream hospitality solutions that strategically align with both religious and market demands.

3.1.3 Operational and Management Dimensions

Operationally, SCHs incorporate comprehensive Shariah-compliant practices that encompass food preparation, guest services, facility management, and staff conduct. Halal-certified kitchens are essential to ensuring compliance with Islamic dietary laws, while gender-segregated facilities, dedicated prayer rooms, and Islamic-inspired décor maintain religious and cultural integrity (Shnyrkova & Predvoditeleva, 2019; Thudam, 2025). In the meantime, staff policies emphasise modest dress codes, Islamic greetings, and training on Shariah-compliant service delivery to provide a culturally sensitive and spiritually aware hospitality experience (Yusof et al., 2025; Karia & Fauzi, 2019).

Apart from that, hotels are also expected to adjust operations in line with Islamic observances, such as providing sahur and iftar meals during Ramadan, allocating time for Friday prayers, and maintaining a spiritual ambiance through Qur'an recitation and educational media rather than purely entertainment-based content (Yahaya et al., 2020; Sobari et al., 2017). Staff management presents unique challenges, including high turnover rates, continuous training requirements, and ensuring that both operational staff and management consistently adhere to halal standards (Karia & Fauzi, 2019; Thudam, 2025). Managers must also balance compliance with certification standards while maintaining competitive service quality, which is particularly challenging when competing with conventional hotels (Razalli et al., 2013; Ruzulan et al., 2022).

However, the presence of multiple certification agencies with varying standards, such as Malaysia's Salam Standard, Singapore's CrescentRating, and Mastercard's Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), has complicated strategic decision-making for hotel operators (Yahaya et al., 2020). Therefore, ensuring reliable and standardised Shariah-compliant services requires

robust management oversight and continuous innovation in operations, including introducing prayer alarms, gender-specific facilities, and digital marketing strategies (Thudam, 2025; Sobari et al., 2017; Sulaiman et al., 2021). Overall, operational excellence in SCHs demands meticulous attention to detail, staff training, and consistent implementation of religiously grounded service standards.

3.1.4 Financial and Design Practices

Financially, SCHs adopt Islamic finance principles, including profit-sharing models, zakat contributions, and avoidance of interest-based transactions, reinforcing ethical accountability and community welfare (Thudam, 2025; Sulaiman et al., 2021; Sobari et al., 2017). By integrating Shariah-compliant financial operations into their business models, these hotels can align economic performance with ethical and religious principles, enhancing their credibility and appeal to Muslim consumers.

From a design perspective, SCHs focus on modesty, privacy, and spiritual comfort. Bathrooms are oriented away from the qibla direction, decorative motifs are non-figurative, and gender-segregated recreational areas, such as pools, gyms, and spas, are provided (Othman et al., 2015; Shnyrkova & Predvoditeleva, 2019; Nasir et al., 2022). Rooms are equipped with prayer mats, Qur'ans, qibla indicators, and other religious amenities to facilitate worship and reflection (Shnyrkova & Predvoditeleva, 2019). These design elements, coupled with ethical financial practices, create a holistic Shariah-compliant experience that reinforces both market competitiveness and religious integrity.

3.1.5 Appeal to Muslim and Non-Muslim Guests

While SCHs primarily target Muslim travellers, non-Muslim guests also perceive halal-certified hotels positively due to enhanced hygiene, safety, and service quality standards (Razalli, 2018; Ibrahim & Jamal, 2016). This inclusive approach ensures that all guests benefit from high-quality services without being required to follow religious practices, thereby expanding the market base globally (Musa et al., 2019; Karia & Fauzi, 2019).

For Muslim guests, the acceptance and patronage of SCHs depend on trust in Shariah adherence, religious knowledge of staff, and comprehensive service offerings, which include halal food, prayer facilities, gender-segregated amenities, and ethical financial practices (Sulaiman et al., 2021; Thudam, 2025). Non-Muslim guests are increasingly attracted to these hotels due to their family-friendly environment, clean facilities, and ethical service standards, demonstrating that SCHs can successfully appeal to a diverse clientele (Razalli, 2018; Ibrahim & Jamal, 2016). The dual appeal of SCHs underscores their potential as globally competitive hospitality offerings that harmonise religious compliance with universal service excellence.

3.1.6 Summary of Global Practices

Despite the growth and appeal of SCHs, the industry has faced multiple challenges. High staff turnover, costly continuous training, and the need for strong managerial oversight are critical operational issues (Karia & Fauzi, 2019; Thudam, 2025). Inconsistencies among certification bodies, complex compliance requirements, and the absence of mandatory standards have

created challenges for operational uniformity and strategic decision-making (Ruzulan et al., 2022; Yahaya et al., 2020). Hotels must, therefore, innovate to remain competitive, integrating Shariah principles with modern marketing, technological solutions, and customer experience strategies (Thudam, 2025; Sobari et al., 2017; Sulaiman et al., 2021).

Strategic location, cultivating loyal customer bases, and balancing operational costs with revenue generation are essential for long-term sustainability (Yusof et al., 2025). Collaborative efforts among hotel operators, certification bodies, tourism authorities, and cross-regional stakeholders will further strengthen the credibility, standardisation, and global recognition of SCHs (Ibrahim & Jamal, 2016; Yusof et al., 2025). Ultimately, SCHs demonstrate that Islamic values can harmoniously coexist with contemporary tourism trends, fostering ethical, inclusive, and sustainable hospitality practices worldwide.

3.2 Challenges in Implementing Muslim-Friendly Hospitality

3.2.1 Standardisation Issues

The standardisation of Muslim-friendly and Shariah-compliant hospitality has remained a global challenge due to fragmented certification systems and inconsistent implementation across regions. While the concept of SCHs is gaining popularity, certification standards have often been viewed as impractical, particularly in operational areas like food and beverage, leading many hotels to use ‘Shariah-compliant’ as a marketing term rather than a reflection of embedded Islamic values (Zafir, 2015). This misapplication has distorted the essence of Islamic hospitality and contributed to widespread inconsistency in service delivery. It has also been discovered that many hotels operate without formal halal certification, raising questions about credibility and eroding consumer trust (Rachmiatie et al., 2022).

The complexity of developing unified standards has stemmed from the need to accommodate various sectors, including accommodation, travel, and tour operations (Karia & Fauzi, 2019). Current frameworks have often borrowed from models in Islamic finance or manufacturing, which do not fully align with the service-oriented nature of hospitality (Karia & Fauzi, 2019). Furthermore, there has been no single universal benchmark for measuring Shariah compliance in this context. While Malaysia’s MS 2610:2015 has provided a national reference, global alternatives like Salam Standard and CrescentRating have adopted different criteria, further confusing hotel operators and travellers (Yahaya et al., 2020). This has led to inconsistent application of Muslim-friendly practices and difficulty in evaluating hotel performance across markets.

On top of that, the absence of comprehensive and clearly defined criteria has also made it difficult to determine what constitutes a truly Shariah-compliant hotel (Samori et al., 2017). In Malaysia, for example, certification efforts have mostly focused on food and beverage outlets, with little regulation over full-property compliance including accommodation and service delivery (Karim et al., 2022). This regulatory gap has contributed to uncertainty among industry players and inconsistency in the integration of Islamic principles within hotel operations. Therefore, while Muslim-friendly hospitality has continued to gain traction globally, its long-term credibility and sustainability have depended on the development of

harmonised, industry-specific guidelines that balance religious integrity with practical operational requirements.

3.2.2 Operational Practices

Implementing Muslim-friendly hospitality in hotel operations has presented several challenges, particularly in areas, such as halal assurance, service delivery, and workforce preparedness. Many establishments have still lacked complete halal communication systems and digital platforms tailored for Muslim travellers, which limit effective promotion and service visibility (Uansa-ard & Binprathan, 2018; Sulaiman et al., 2023). Hotels have also struggled with an unprepared workforce, as staff often lack training in Islamic hospitality principles and gender-sensitive service delivery (Uansa-ard & Binprathan, 2018; Thudam, 2025). Furthermore, service providers have frequently demonstrated limited awareness of Shariah requirements across core areas, such as food, accommodation, entertainment, and transportation (Uansa-ard & Binprathan, 2018). This operational gap has further been exacerbated by the voluntary nature of halal certification in some regions, leading to inconsistent application of standards like MS 1500, MS 1900, and MS 2610 (Ruzulan et al., 2022).

Halal certification per se is a complex and often discouraging process due to strict ingredient-sourcing requirements, long approval timelines, and vulnerability to rejection for minor non-compliance (Karia & Fauzi, 2019; Zafir, 2015). Most international hotels have only applied certification to their kitchens, while bars, entertainment spaces, and other non-compliant areas have remained uncertified (Karia & Fauzi, 2019). Operationally, hotels must manage halal-compliant facilities, pest control, and waste handling while ensuring internal systems, such as procurement and staff training, align with Islamic principles (Razalli et al., 2013; Rachmiate et al., 2022). Maintaining gender-segregated amenities, prayer facilities, worship alarm systems, and ensuring regular maintenance have added further complexity (Nasir et al., 2022; Thudam, 2025). Despite success stories, such as De Palma Hotel Ampang, an early Shariah-compliant hotel in Malaysia that has balanced higher operational costs with profitability and guest satisfaction, most hotels have still faced difficulties in sustaining service quality and compliance (Marzuki et al., 2019).

Moreover, inconsistencies in service levels across hotels, from basic to fully Shariah-compliant, have reduced customer trust and satisfaction (Ibrahim & Jamal, 2016; Rachmiate et al., 2022). While some hotels have promoted visible compliance, such as halal food or prayer rooms, they have often overlooked systemic factors like staff conduct, procurement, and monitoring (Rachmiate et al., 2022; Qurtubi et al., 2021). Non-Muslim hotel operators might also lack religious knowledge, making full compliance challenging (Razalli et al., 2013). Regulatory enforcement has remained fragmented, with state-level councils overseeing halal compliance, allowing some operators to bypass certification altogether (Musa et al., 2019). Additionally, limited access to halal-certified materials and Islamic financial services has also constrained the ability of hotels to implement comprehensive Shariah-compliant hospitality (Karim et al., 2022). Without clear guidelines, consistent standards, and adequate investment in technology and training, operational practices in Muslim-friendly hospitality have remained inconsistent

and underdeveloped.

3.2.3 Market Segmentation

The Muslim-friendly hospitality sector has continued to face significant market segmentation challenges that hinder its global growth (Zailani et al., 2011). As Zailani et al. (2011) have noted, most halal-related research has historically emphasised consumer acceptance and satisfaction, while neglecting upstream factors like system implementation and manufacturer readiness. This has created a persistent imbalance where consumer demand outpaces the industry's ability to deliver consistent, Shariah-compliant services (Zailani et al., 2011). In non-Muslim-majority countries, the situation has been further complicated by issues, such as Islamophobia and traveller safety concerns, which undermine Muslim tourists' confidence (Yahaya et al., 2020). At the same time, emerging trends in ethical and socially responsible travel have introduced new market niches, yet SCHs have struggled to compete with conventional hotels that often provide similar service quality at lower costs (Yahaya et al., 2020; Qurtubi et al., 2021).

Balancing the needs of both Muslim and non-Muslim guests has also presented another challenge. Muslim travellers vary in their expectations, for instance, some seek fully Shariah-compliant environments, while others are satisfied with basic offerings like halal food and prayer facilities (Thudam, 2025). Meanwhile, non-Muslim guests have often lacked awareness of Islamic hospitality principles, leading to misconceptions or discomfort (Ibrahim & Jamal, 2016). This dual market position has made it difficult for SCHs to design inclusive services without compromising religious values. Compounding this has been external barriers, such as high room rates, inconvenient locations, and limited brand recognition, which continue to drive potential guests towards mainstream hotels that are perceived to offer better value (Thudam, 2025; Sulaiman et al., 2021).

Furthermore, inconsistency in certification and commitment has equally weakened the credibility of the sector. Some operators have pursued halal certification primarily as a marketing strategy, resulting in partial compliance and varied standards across the industry (Ruzulan et al., 2022). As a result, customer loyalty in the Muslim-friendly hospitality market has relied heavily on the authenticity and consistency of service experiences. When expectations around Shariah compliance have not been met, Muslim travellers often return to conventional alternatives (Sobari et al., 2017). Research also has shown that factors like authenticity and service quality influence Muslim tourist decisions more strongly than traditional marketing elements, such as promotion or location (Sobari et al., 2017), underscoring the importance of genuine, value-driven hospitality offerings.

3.2.4 Awareness

Muslim-friendly hospitality has continued to face persistent awareness challenges that undermine its global credibility and consistency. While the concept of SCHs is increasingly acknowledged, many stakeholders, including hotel operators, staff, and travellers, have still lacked a clear understanding of its full scope (Karia & Fauzi, 2019; Thudam, 2025). This confusion has been largely driven by inconsistent standards, minimal promotion, and differing

interpretations of Shariah principles within the industry (Karia & Fauzi, 2019). In many cases, hotels have misused the ‘Shariah-compliant’ label as a marketing tactic, often reducing it to the exclusion of alcohol rather than implementing a holistic integration of Islamic values throughout all operations (Zafir, 2015; Samori et al., 2017). As a result, Muslim-friendly hospitality has often been applied superficially, lacking alignment with core principles, such as ethical management, hygiene, and Islamic service etiquette (Samori et al., 2017). Even among hotel managers, there has often been confusion between the terms ‘halal’, ‘Muslim-friendly’, and ‘Shariah-compliant’, which reflects a limited understanding of the different levels of compliance and certification (Rachmiatie et al., 2022).

At the operational level, awareness among staff has remained inconsistent, particularly in areas like hygiene, food safety, and Shariah-compliant service delivery pointing to a strong need for continuous training and internal motivation (Razalli et al., 2013; Qurtubi et al., 2021). Similarly, local manufacturers and suppliers have often lacked knowledge about international halal standards, limiting their ability to support hotels aiming for global Muslim-friendly certification (Zailani et al., 2011). Meanwhile, weak communication strategies and limited promotional efforts have further reduced public understanding and confidence. Many travellers, be they Muslims and non-Muslims, have remained unclear about what differentiates a Shariah-compliant hotel from a typical halal-certified establishment, often mistaking the former for the latter (Thudam, 2025; Ibrahim & Jamal, 2016). Additionally, inadequate online representation and poor visibility of certification details have also contributed to higher perceived risks among digital users, ultimately discouraging bookings (Sulaiman et al., 2021).

In the Malaysian context, much of the awareness has been spread through uncoordinated online platforms rather than through formal campaigns or structured educational efforts. Fragmented certification systems, including JAKIM, Salam Standard, and CrescentRating, have further confused hotel operators, who remain unsure about which standards to follow or prioritise (Ruzulan et al., 2022). Although JAKIM has begun improving its procedures by engaging with industry stakeholders, awareness among frontline hospitality staff and the general public has still remained limited (Zafir, 2015; Karim et al., 2022). Additionally, political sensitivities surrounding the proposed Halal Act have complicated enforcement and slowed broader industry acceptance (Musa et al., 2019). Overall, the lack of standardised knowledge, effective training, and coherent branding has continued to weaken the authenticity and visibility of Muslim-friendly hospitality. To address this, stronger education programmes, unified branding, and cohesive promotional strategies are essential for building global awareness and genuine appreciation of Shariah-compliant hospitality practices.

3.3 Visualising Global Research on Shariah-Compliant Hotels and Hospitality Practices

3.3.1 Publication Trend on Muslim-Friendly Hotels and Hospitality Practices

The publication trend on Muslim-friendly hotels and hospitality practices, as presented in Figure 2 below, revealed a gradual yet notable increase in scholarly attention over the past decade, spanning from 2011 to 2025. Between 2011 and 2016, research output in this field remained minimal, fluctuating between zero and one publication per year, reflecting the early stage of academic exploration in this domain. A modest rise was first observed in 2017 and

2018, with two publications each year, indicating emerging interest among scholars.

A significant growth occurred in 2019, with a peak of five publications marking a pivotal year for academic engagement in Muslim-friendly hospitality studies. However, the momentum slightly declined between 2020 and 2021, with one and two publications respectively, before rebounding in 2022 with four publications, suggesting renewed focus and diversification of research themes in this area.

In contrast, 2023 witnessed a decrease to one publication, followed by no recorded publications in 2024. This temporary drop could be due to shifts in research priorities or publication cycles. Nevertheless, 2025 recorded two publications, indicating a rebound and the sustained relevance of Muslim-friendly hospitality research within the broader tourism and hospitality discourse. Overall, while the trend has exhibited fluctuations, the long-term trajectory has remained positive, signalling steady scholarly engagement and continuous opportunities for further exploration of emerging trends and challenges in this evolving field.

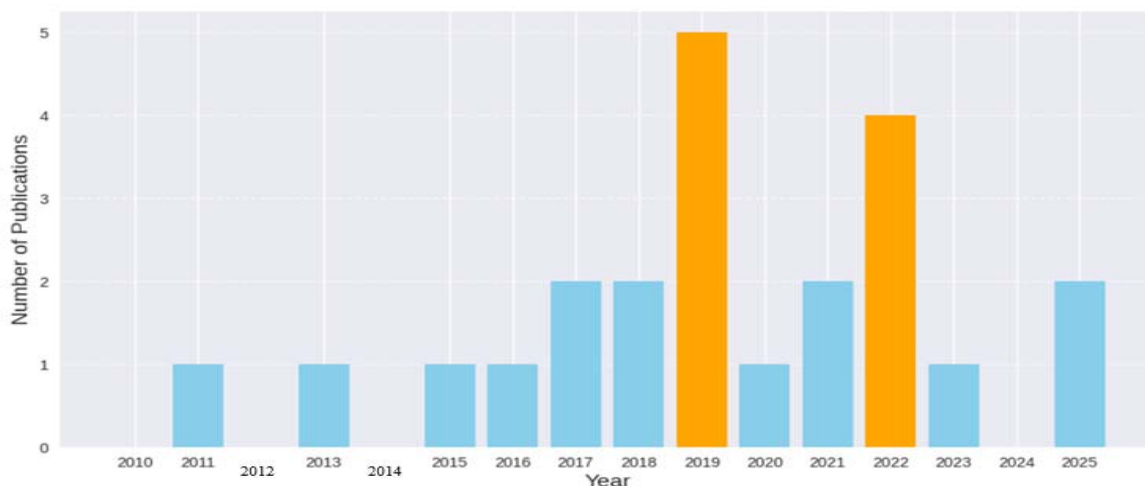


Figure 2. Number of Muslim-friendly hotels and hospitality practices research publications by year (2011-2025)

3.3.2 Core Sources Based on Bradford's Law

To identify the key publication outlets contributing to the discourse on the Muslim-friendly hotels and hospitality practices, the present review has employed Bradford's Law of Scattering using the Bibliometrix package in RStudio. This analysis has categorised journals into three zones according to their publication productivity, thereby revealing the core sources that have shaped the intellectual foundation of the field.

As shown in Figure 3 below, Zone 1 (the core zone) comprises 4 journals that have together contributed 8 publications. *The Journal of Islamic Marketing* has been found to be the most dominant and influential outlet, publishing 4 articles, followed by *Halal Hospitality and Islamic Tourism* (2 articles), *WSEAS Transactions on Business and Economics* (2 articles), and *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam* (1 article). The prominence of these journals, particularly those emphasising Islamic marketing, tourism, and business perspectives, has

highlighted the central role of marketing and tourism management scholarship in driving discussions about Muslim-friendly hotel practices.

In contrast, Zones 2 and 3 each have contained 8 journals, reflecting a more scattered yet expanding research landscape. These zones have included journals, such as *International Journal of Tourism Policy*, *Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism*, and *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, each contributing a single publication. The dispersion of studies across these multidisciplinary journals has suggested an emerging trend of diversification, where the concept of Muslim-friendly hospitality has been increasingly examined from various perspectives, such as sustainable tourism, consumer behaviour, economic management, and social responsibility. From a broader perspective, this distribution pattern has reflected both the global trends and challenges inherent in the Muslim-friendly hospitality research. The concentration of publications within a few specialised journals has indicated that the field is still in a consolidation stage, dominated by specific academic outlets that provide a focused platform for discourse on halal tourism and Islamic consumerism. However, the growing inclusion of diverse journals across Zones 2 and 3 has demonstrated an evolution towards interdisciplinarity, aligning with global shifts that recognise Muslim-friendly hospitality not merely as a religious concept but as a strategic and inclusive business model responding to international tourism demands.

Thus, Bradford's Law analysis has reinforced that research on Muslim-friendly hotels and hospitality practices has developed a core scholarly base anchored in Islamic marketing and halal tourism, while simultaneously broadening to address cross-disciplinary challenges, such as sustainability, service quality, and market competitiveness, within the global hospitality industry.

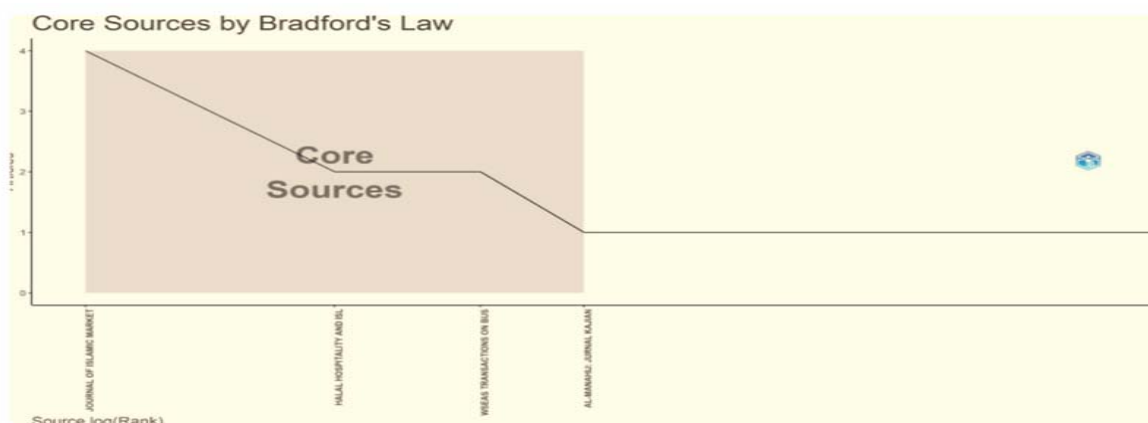


Figure 3. Distribution of core journals in Muslim-friendly hotels and hospitality practices based on Bradford's Law

3.3.3 Key Contributors and Authorship Trends in Muslim-Friendly Hotels and Hospitality Practices

The analysis of the most relevant authors has provided valuable insight into the main contributors shaping the discourse on the Muslim-friendly hotels and hospitality practices. As presented in Figure 4 below, Sulaiman Y. has emerged as the most prolific author, contributing 3 publications with a fractionalised value of 0.83, indicating active engagement in multiple collaborative studies. Other notable contributors include Hidayat A., Rahman M.A., and Razalli M.R., each publishing 2 articles. Among them, Razalli M. R., has demonstrated the highest fractionalised contribution (1.33), suggesting a significant individual involvement and leadership within co-authored works. Meanwhile, authors, such as Adel A. M., Ahmad K., Ahmad R., Ali F. M., Arif A., and Ariffin N. A. M., each has contributed 1 article, reflecting a more distributed but growing scholarly interest in this domain.

These results have highlighted that, while a few authors have consistently contributed to the academic development of Muslim-friendly hospitality, the field has still remained relatively fragmented, with a diverse range of scholars from various backgrounds contributing to its evolution. This pattern has suggested that the topic is gaining wider recognition, particularly among the researchers exploring Islamic tourism, Shariah-compliant services, and sustainable Muslim travel practices.

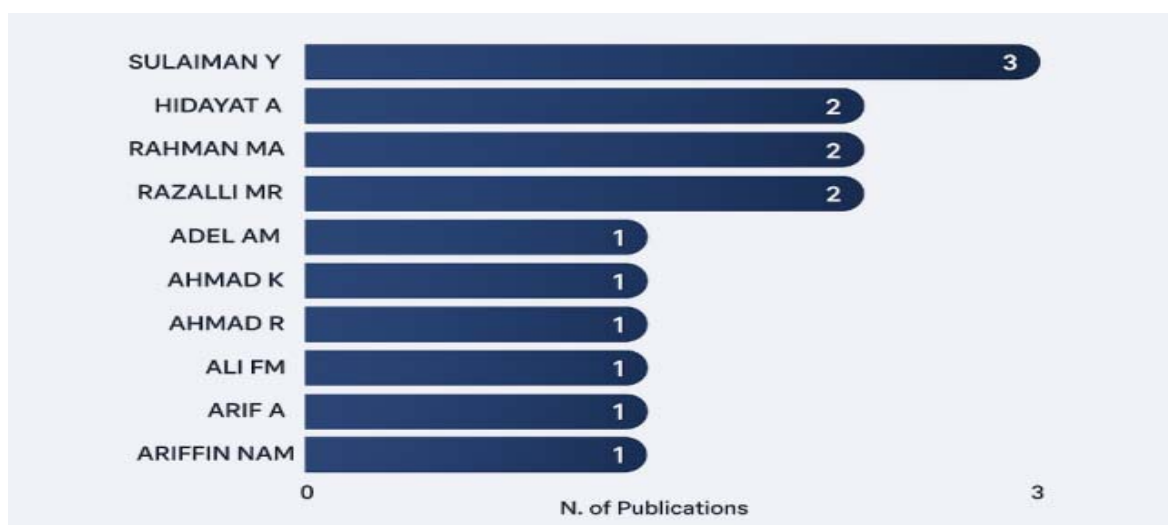


Figure 4. Most relevant authors in Muslim-friendly hotels and hospitality research (2011-2025)

3.3.4 Geographical Distribution and Country Productivity in Muslim-Friendly Hospitality Research

Figure 5 below shows that an examination of scientific production by country has revealed a significant concentration of research output in Malaysia, which dominates the field with 42 publications, far surpassing all other contributing nations. This finding has aligned with

Malaysia's position as a global leader in promoting Muslim-friendly tourism and establishing Islamic hospitality standards, supported by government initiatives and academic interest in the Halal tourism development.

Indonesia has followed as the second most productive contributor with 16 publications, reflecting its growing efforts to enhance Shariah-compliant hospitality practices and position itself as a Muslim-friendly destination within Southeast Asia. Other countries, such as India (5 publications) and China (3 publications), have also shown emerging scholarly interest, possibly due to the increasing recognition of Muslim travellers as an important market segment.

Meanwhile, contributions from Turkey, Thailand, Egypt, Sweden, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom have remained limited (1–3 publications respectively), suggesting that, while these countries have engaged in the discourse, their research efforts have been comparatively modest. This geographical pattern has highlighted that scholarly engagement with Muslim-friendly hotels and hospitality practices is largely concentrated in Southeast Asia, particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia, where Muslim-majority populations and tourism development policies provide strong contextual relevance for such studies.



Figure 5. Country contribution to Muslim-Friendly hospitality research

3.3.5 Keyword Analysis of Muslim-Friendly Hotels and Hospitality Practices

In order to better understand the structure and focus of research in Muslim-Friendly Hotels and Hospitality, network visualisations have been employed to analyse author keywords, titles, and abstracts. Figure 6 below presents a network visualisation of the author keywords, each appearing at least five times. Mansour et al. (2021) have explained that a connection between two topics is established when the corresponding keywords co-occur in the same publication. The keyword analysis has been conducted by examining features, such as colour, circle size, font size, and the thickness of connecting lines, which indicate the strength of relationships between the keywords (Wahid et al., 2020). The analysis has identified eight clusters

In addition, VOSviewer has been used to examine the titles and abstracts of the collected documents to determine the frequency and patterns of the co-occurring terms. Specifically, the study has constructed a co-occurrence network using the binary-counting method. Figure 7 below illustrates the network of the terms that has co-occurred in the titles and abstracts, including only those appearing at least five times. In the network, the size of each node represents the importance of the corresponding terms, while the thickness of the connecting lines indicates the strength of the relationships between the terms. The terms displayed in the same colour suggest a higher likelihood of appearing together (Mansour et al., 2021). The keywords, such as ‘certification’, ‘association’, ‘case’, ‘classification’, ‘difficulties’, ‘government’, ‘Indonesia’, ‘Islamic value’, ‘majority’, ‘Muslim customers’, and ‘Thailand’, highlighted in yellow are strongly interconnected and frequently co-occur. Using VOSviewer, there are six distinct clusters comprising 85 terms identified from the titles and abstracts, with each cluster represented by a different colour.

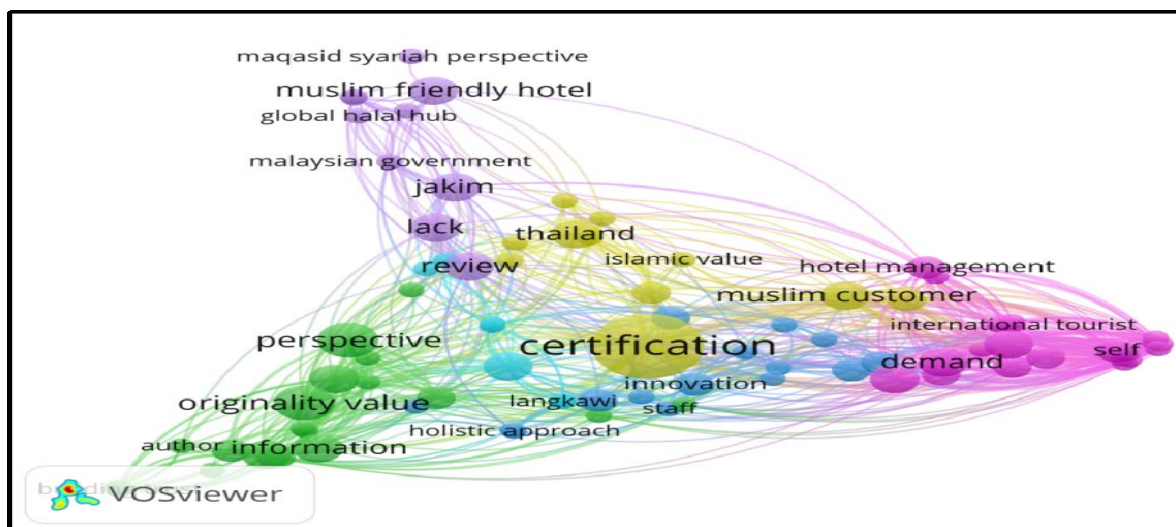


Figure 7. Title and abstract fields keywords of Muslim-Friendly Hotels and Hospitality Practices

4. Conclusion

This review has examined the global practices and challenges in implementing Muslim-friendly and Shariah-compliant hospitality, focusing on two key research questions. The findings have revealed that hotels adopting the Muslim-friendly and Shariah-compliant practices have integrated Islamic values beyond halal food offerings, extending to financial ethics, service delivery, and design elements that promote modesty, privacy, and inclusiveness. Across regions, especially in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Middle East, Shariah-compliant hotels (SCHs) have matured into a structured model of faith-based hospitality that aligns religious obligations with commercial viability. The core practices include halal-certified kitchens, gender-segregated amenities, prayer facilities, and adherence to ethical finance. These practices not only meet Muslim travellers' spiritual needs but also appeal to non-Muslim guests who appreciate the emphasis on cleanliness, safety, and ethical conduct.

However, sustaining these practices globally has remained challenging. The review has highlighted four recurring barriers, which are the lack of standardised certification, operational complexities, market segmentation, and limited awareness. The fragmented certification systems, such as JAKIM, CrescentRating, and Salam Standard, have created inconsistencies that affect credibility and trust. Operationally, many hotels have struggled to balance compliance costs, workforce readiness, and quality service delivery. Besides, market segmentation has also added further strain, as operators must meet diverse expectations from Muslim and non-Muslim guests without compromising religious values. Limited stakeholder understanding and inconsistent branding have also weakened the authenticity and visibility of Muslim-friendly hospitality.

The findings have suggested that achieving sustainable growth in this sector requires a coordinated global effort. Developing unified standards tailored to hospitality services,

strengthening staff training, and enhancing communication strategies are critical steps forward. Governments and certification agencies must work together to harmonise guidelines, while hotel operators should emphasise authenticity over symbolic compliance. By embedding Shariah principles within the modern hospitality management, Muslim-friendly hotels can serve as the models of ethical and inclusive tourism.

Ultimately, Muslim-friendly and Shariah-compliant hospitality represents more than a religious niche. It embodies a universal approach to responsible service grounded in respect, transparency, and community well-being. As the global awareness of ethical tourism grows, these values will continue to shape the future of the hospitality industry, bridging faith-based integrity with global competitiveness.

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