

Spiritual Turn of Islamic Tourism: The Islamic Way to Experience Economy Beyond the Halal Certification System

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Abstract

This study examines the development of an ‘Islamic way of experience economy’ by analysing Muslim travel writers in the Islamic tourism market. As the Islamic tourism market has been struggling with the commoditisation of tourism products and services based on the halal certification system, some stakeholders have been collaborating with individual travel writers who actively promote a new Islamic way of travel and lifestyle for Muslim individuals. Stakeholders in the Islamic tourism market focus on the experience economy to enhance the added value of tourism activities. In this context, the narratives of Muslim travel writers reflect the moral accountability of Muslim individuals, grounded in the concept of *ihsān*. This study employed the qualitative analysis of these narratives that encourage Muslim individuals to develop ethical subjectivity by promoting an Islamic approach to the experiential economy through spiritual, physical, and social productivity. The results reveal that developing the experience economy in the Islamic tourism market can foster an Islamic model of ‘ethical productivity,’ enhancing economic value and spiritual, physical, and social achievements for self-improvement and self-actualisation in daily life and across life stages.

I. Introduction

In recent years, both Islamic and non-Islamic countries have experienced an increase in tourism rooted in Islamic values and religious norms. These activities are described as ‘Islamic tourism,’ which includes ‘halal tourism,’ ‘Muslim-friendly tourism,’ and ‘Islamic hospitality’ [Jafari and Scott 2014; Stephenson 2014; Hall et al. 2019; Prayag 2020]. Tourism products, services, and facilities targeting Muslim tourists have significantly expanded in the global tourism market, capturing a notable share of society despite the stagnation caused by COVID-19, as highlighted by the CrescentRating and Mastercard’s annual *Global Muslim Travel Index 2024* and other industrial reports [CrescentRating and Mastercard 2024]. Stakeholders in the Islamic tourism market have focused on tourism practices based on Islamic values by creating products, services, and facilities according to Muslim tourists’

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halal preferences, demands, and satisfaction. In this market environment, halal certification institutions have gained massive support from Muslim consumers [Hall et al. 2019].

Various academic studies have been published consistent with the international development of the Islamic tourism market [Temporal 2011; Jafari and Scott 2014; Stephenson 2014; Shirazi 2016; Alserhan 2017 (2011); Battour 2018; Hall et al. 2019; Sandıkcı 2020, 2021]. These studies emphasise the importance of shariah (*sharī'a*) compliance and emerging consumer demand and satisfaction of 'halalness' through market analysis. The analysis is based on consumer behaviour by designing and developing market environments related to the halal consciousness of Muslim tourists [Temporal 2011; Alserhan 2017 (2011); Sandıkcı 2020, 2021]. Many researchers focus on the halal environment in the tourism industry to enhance halal products, services, and infrastructures to develop a Muslim-friendly environment. In this respect, Islamic tourism research overlaps with arguments developed in Islamic marketing and branding research, treating the halal industry as a case study. These studies indicate that market stakeholders in Islamic tourism achieve accountability towards consumers by developing halal-based market norms and environments [Hall et al. 2019]. Indeed, disseminating tourism products, services, and facilities that satisfy halal standards and guidelines can significantly spread Islamic morality in the marketplace.

However, the spread of tourism activities based on the halal certification system has been facing limitations at both practical and academic levels [Eid and el-Gohary 2015a, 2015b; el-Gohary 2016; Yasuda 2021, 2022]. Practically, developing a market environment that solely addresses the personal needs of Muslim tourists regarding halal preferences based on the halal certification system inevitably entails market commoditisation, leading to obsolete market products and services and competition based on low prices. Many stakeholders in the Islamic tourism market have seriously suffered from commoditisation and low-price competition for its products and services, especially in non-Islamic countries [Yasuda 2017]. Although start-up ventures and SMEs are actively involved in developing a halal environment in the tourism industry, their management is unstable in the medium to long run, as tourism researchers and consultants have mentioned.

As the halal environment in the international tourism market develops, halal products and services are becoming commoditised, indicating a decline in value at a certain point and shifting to an unprofitable market structure. Therefore, stakeholders in the Islamic tourism market are increasingly undertaking various initiatives to add market value. One approach involves developing strategies to expand and enhance the consumer base for halal environments by increasing the promotion of female Muslim tourists and upgrading and upscaling tourism facilities [CrescentRating 2019, CrescentRating and Mastercard 2024]. The adopted business strategies rely heavily on conventional consumer behaviour theory and marketing analysis to enrich market content consistent with industry guidelines and standards

established by the halal certification system.

Recently, some stakeholders have initiated movements to establish Islamic value norms for individuals and society with an Islamic lifestyle and outlook on life while adding value to experiences in the Islamic tourism market by generating and distributing Islamic experiential values and entrepreneurship. This movement itself can be seen as a response towards an ‘experience economy’ in an increasingly commoditised market economy, not just in Muslim societies [Pine and Gilmore 2011 (1999)]. According to Pine and Gilmore’s classic study, this trend represents a business strategy and marketplace, offering experiences as economic value to consumers and fostering business development. Consequently, the experience economy develops sales and other strategies that engage emotions and sensibilities and reach consumers’ hearts and minds. In the international tourism market, more emphasis is being placed on enriching and expanding the content of tourism activities and programmes to enhance the tourism experience value rather than developing the facilities-related environment [El-Gohary 2016; Khan and Callanan 2017; Yasuda 2022].

From an academic point of view, some researchers indicate that Muslim tourists as consumers facilitate the experience economy by deepening their faith and piety through their moral accountability practices within the marketplace [Deeb 2006; Fischer 2008, 2015; Deeb and Harb 2013]. As Lara Deeb, Mona Harb, and other researchers note, Muslims in contemporary society are earnestly seeking an appropriate way of Islamic consumption, constantly debating Islamically correct practices in the marketplace and the significance these experiences can bring to their lives and lifestyles through the concept and practice of moral accountability [Deeb 2006; Fischer 2008; Deeb and Harb 2013]. In this environment, Muslim tourists promote subjectivity based on ethical norms in the Islamic context like the concept of *ihsān* as well as shariah compliance and halalness [Akhir 2010; Rahman and Laderlah 2018].

In the debate over moral accountability and ethical subjectivity in the Islamic tourism market, the activities of ‘Muslim travel writers’ have garnered particular attention in recent years [Ratthinan and Selamat 2018; Oktadiana et al. 2020; CrescentRating 2024c; CrescentRating and Mastercard 2024; HalalTrip 2024; ITC 2024]. These Muslim travel writers publish numerous travel articles, testimonials, interviews, and travelogues in the tourism media. Market stakeholders often view their contributions as the advancement for Muslim tourists and the Islamic tourism market. They have also gained recognition and popularity in the Islamic tourism market by becoming lecturers and panellists at conferences, exhibitions, and symposiums, increasing their exposure and influence. The presence of Muslim travel writers in the Islamic tourism market presents a different marketing picture from that based on halal certification bodies, which can be described as an ‘Islamic way of experience economy.’

Thus, this study examines the development of an Islamic way of experience economy in the Islamic tourism market by analysing Muslim travel writers. It explores the characteristics

of the narratives and activities of Muslim travel writers in tourism media. Moreover, the study focuses on the emerging market norms and order based on the moral accountability of Muslim travel writers in the Islamic tourism market by exploring the concept of *ihsān*. An empirical qualitative case study approach was used as a study methodology [Yin 2009], considering the narratives and activities of Muslim travel writers and other stakeholders in the Islamic tourism market. The study will focus on some famous Muslim travel writers who have been featured in relevant tourism media such as travel magazines and market journals as one of the pioneering Islamic entrepreneurs in Islamic tourism, and been represented at industrial seminars and conferences in the market [CrescentRating 2024a; HalalTrip 2024].

II. Muslim Travel Writers in the Islamic Tourism Market

(1) Muslim Travel Writer and their Characteristics

Muslim travel writers are professionals in the Islamic tourism market who share their travel experiences with the tourism media and its users. These individuals act as ‘Islamic entrepreneurs’ or ‘Islamic enterprises,’ often launching start-up ventures and small and middle enterprises (SMEs) within the Islamic lifestyle market to further explore its potential and possibilities [Kayed and Hassan 2013]. They contribute to various magazine articles, testimonials, interviews, and travelogues to tourism media and also share their experiences through other channels, including blogs, social networking services (SNS) and personal media. In addition, they work as travel writers, travel guides, tourism company managers, consultants, influencers, artists, photographers, content creators, and other related professions, promoting Islamic tourism. Therefore, they have a strong entrepreneurial aspect even if they primarily identify as content creators, bloggers and influencers. Indeed, many Muslim travel writers often portray themselves not only as travel writers and bloggers but also as Islamic entrepreneurs to improve the Islamic way of life in contemporary societies [Ratthanan and Selamat 2018; Oktadiana et al. 2020; Yosuf 2022].

Table 1: Major Muslim Travel Writers in Islamic Tourism Market

Name	Location	Blog / Company (Instagram account)
Abdul Maalik Tailor	UK	Halal Travel Britain (@muslimhistorytours)
Abdul and Sumaya	USA	Game of Points (@game_of_points)
Amira	UK	Amira the Wanderlust (@amira_thewanderlust)
Amanda	Morocco	MorocMama (@marocmama)
Annum Munir	USA	Annummunir (@annummunir)
Ayah Adventurer	USA	Ayah Adventurer / Travel Noire (@ayahadventurer)
Bang Anca	Indonesia	Bang Anca (@anca.id)
Elena Nikolova	UK	Muslim Travel Girl (@muslimtravelgirl)

Ellie Quinn	UK	The Wandering Quinn (@_equinn)
Esra Alhamal	UK / UAE	Arabian Wanderess (@arabianwanderess)
Fatima AlMattar	Kuwait / UAE	Hello 965 (@hello965)
Farah	UK	Travel Unravelled (@travel_unravelled)
Haroon Mota	UK	Muslim Hikers (@haroonmota)
Hümeýra aka Hummi	Germany	Linnisa (@linnisa_official)
Ikuto Hongu	Japan	Navito Halal (@navito_halal)
Nada al-Nahdi	Saudi Arabia	Nada al-Nahdi (@nadaalnahdi)
Nazaya Zulaikha (Aya)	Japan	Halal Media Japan (@nazayazulaikha)
Nazirul Hakim	Malaysia	Kampung Boy (@iamnazirul)
Nurul Mimsy	Malaysia / Singapore	Explore to Makan (@exploretomakan)
Rasha Yousif	Bahrain	Qafih (@rshrsho)
Saki Safwa	Japan	Lifestyle and Food with Saki (@saki.safwa)
Sally	USA	Passport & Plates (@passportandplates)
Soumaya Hamdi	UK	Halal Travel Guide (@soumaya.tidjanihamdi)
Sukaina Rajabali	UAE	She Travel Modestly (@shetravelsmodestly)
Yui Halal	Japan	Yui Halal (@yuihalal)

Source: [CrescentRating 2024c; HalalTrip 2024] and websites and SNS of Muslim travel writers

Muslim travel writers are expanding their engagement into the Islamic tourism market (Table 1). In addition to travel articles and interviews in Islamic tourism-related media, they frequently appear as lecturers and panellists at industry-related events, symposiums, and exhibitions. Various entities in the Islamic tourism market are organising workshops and seminars to train Muslim travel writers. For instance, the Islamic Tourism Centre in Malaysia held the Islamic Tourism Writers Workshop (ITWW) in 2022 and 2024 to encourage travel writers to manage the Islamic tourism market [ITC 2024]. Moreover, CrescentRating in Singapore frequently corroborates with travel writers to enhance new tourism experiences and lifestyles for Muslim customers [CrescentRating 2024b; 2024c]. Some Muslim travel writers are also described as the new stakeholders in expanding the potential and possibilities for Islamic tourism [CrescentRating 2024c; ITC 2024], and awarded such as CrescentRating's 'Halal in Travel (HIT) Awards' from 2021, HalalTrip's 'HalalTrip 40: Celebrating inspiring Muslim Figures' from 2021, and other related prize [CrescentRating 2024c; HalalTrip 2024].

Muslim travel writers worldwide are increasingly being invited to speak at seminars, not simply as writers and guides but as actors offering advanced tourism experiences in the Islamic tourism market. Notable figures such as Esra Alhamal, Soumaya Hamdi, Elena Nikolova and Abdul Maalik Tailor have appeared at meetings and seminars in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and other Islamic-related international organisations [ITC 2024;

SMIIC 2024], as well as industrial seminars, conferences, and travel exhibitions, in business meetings and conferences such as Halal in Travel Global Summit and World Halal Summit [CrescentRating 2024c; WHS 2024].

Muslim travel writers are represented as ‘Islamic entrepreneurs’ who exemplify a new lifestyle based on Islamic principles. For instance, Esra Alhamal, a female Muslim travel writer based in the UAE and engaged in the study and practice of interior architecture and Islamic art in the UK, the UAE, and Arab states, has been actively sharing her travel experiences through her blog, *Arabian Wanderess*, since 2016 [Arabian Wanderess 2024]. In her blog, Esra Alhamal indicates that her tourism experiences as a solo female Muslim traveller played a decisive role in her life, contributing to her self-improvement and self-actualisation (Figure 1). She mentions the following in her blog:

When I was growing up, I never thought I would have this lifestyle that allows me to travel and I never thought of all the countries I would visit. I am very grateful to be able to visit over 32 countries with my Saudi passport. Seeing the world and experiencing different cultures first hand is such a privilege. My travels increased after I started this blog and I am looking forward to sharing more of the world with you, so you can plan your travels with more insight. I focus on Muslim female friendly destinations worldwide because I know that as a Muslim, I travel slightly differently than other religious groups [Arabian Wanderess 2024].



Figure 1: Website of *Arabian Wanderess* and Esra Alhamal
Source: [Arabian Wanderess 2024]

Women in Muslim societies face various obstacles in travel and tourism [Feldbauer and Jeffrey 2021; Tavakoli and Mura 2021]. By sharing these personal travel and life experiences through her blog, Esra Alhamal emphasises the importance of developing Muslim female-friendly destinations worldwide and sharing experiences. Other female Muslim travel writers also highlight the significance of the tourism experience for Muslimah (female Muslims) as well as males by addressing the following:

We [Muslim Solo Travel] understand that Muslim women come from various backgrounds, have diverse voices, and unique solo travel experiences. Your experiences are a guiding light to another Muslimah Solo Traveler. We celebrate solo travel because sometimes, that is the best option that we have when it comes to safeguarding our dignity and faith as Muslim women when traveling this magnificent world [MST 2024].

Esra Alhamal's efforts in *Arabian Wanderess* have significantly enhanced her global networking and life experiences, gaining her international media coverage. After 2020, her marriage, childbirth, and migration to the UAE, as well as the impact of COVID-19 were likely to curtail her activities in *Arabian Wanderess*. However, her tourism experiences and various engagements during different life stages have played a crucial role in her Islamic spiritual productivity and physical success.

Various enterprises provide tourism experiences based on Islamic principles in the travel and hospitality industries, and empower tourism destinations and local communities in Islamic context. For instance, the *Halal Travel Guide* (HTG) (Figure 2), a travel company in the UK established in 2015 and one of the leading Islamic entrepreneurs, offers many tourism programmes and group tours related to Islamic tourism destinations [HTG 2024]. Soumaya T. Hamdi, the founder and director of the *Halal Travel Guide* (HTG), also demonstrates the potential of travel and tourism for Muslims. The HTG programme stresses the significance of sharing tourism experiences with local guides, community members, and other participants [HTG 2024]. Hamdi notes:

Our passion is creating exceptional tours designed with Muslim travellers in mind. We provide unique and immersive experiences that go beyond sightseeing, with a commitment to service at the heart of everything we do. By breaking down barriers and fostering connections, we aim to make travel more accessible, enjoyable, and fulfilling for all [HTG 2024].

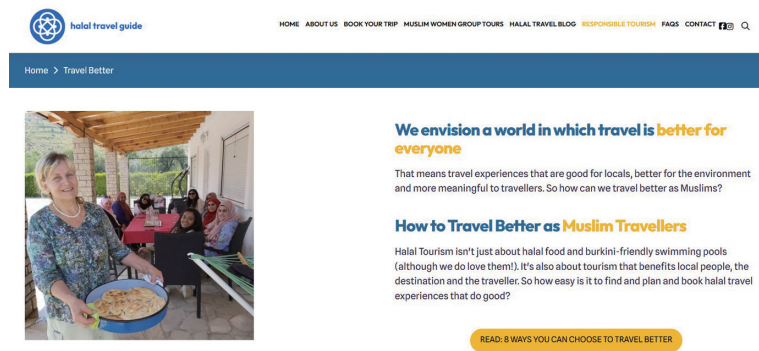


Figure 2: Website of *Halal Travel Guide*

Source: [HTG 2024]

Thus, HTG provides complete guided tours and various local activities, collaborating with local community members and sharing their joy and pleasure. They have been steadily developing community-based and responsible tourism initiatives throughout Muslim communities worldwide to connect local communities with Muslim tourists.

Although the presence of Muslim travel writers extends across digital platforms such as the Internet and SNS, as well as in travel magazines and guidebooks, their activities are limited according to language and cultural barriers and commercial challenges. For instance, Abdul Maalik Tailor, CEO of Halal Tourism Britain and a prominent Muslim tour guide based in London, has actively organised many halal travel tours to London and UK as well as various European, Asian, and Islamic countries [HTB 2024]. He shares his life experiences of tourist destinations with visitors and showcases his daily experiences in London and UK with his customers to reveal more about Muslim culture and heritage in the country, including visiting Muslim heritage sites within and beyond the city. Through these activities, Abdul Maalik Tailor and Halal Tourism Britain have developed Muslim-related tourism experiences and destinations with their customers, which are strongly connected with Muslim community and their heritage in London and UK.

Other Muslim travel writers and their activities also connect with local community they live in their daily life. Soumaya T. Hamdi and HTG are strongly connected with UK Muslim communities, their major customers for tour programmes, and local communities as their tour destinations [HTG 2024]. Other Muslim travel writers also connect with their local communities to promote Islamic tourism. For instance, Muslim travel writers in Japan such as Nazaya Zulaikha, a Muslim travel writer in *Halal Media Japan* (HMJ), Ikuto Hongu, Saki Safwa and Yui Halal, have promoted the Islamic way of travel experiences in Japan in collaboration with tourism stakeholders in the country [HalalTrip 2024; HMJ 2024]. Through their SNS and travel articles, they expand the Islamic way of tourism experience in

non-Islamic countries, realising daily life and travel experiences.

These examples clarify that Muslim travel writers do not simply publish travel articles and contents for their livelihood and professional income, but rather serve as Islamic lifestyle role models for Muslim consumers to promote good Islamic conduct. In this sense, Muslim travel writers are also active to commit social affairs such as community-based tourism and responsible tourism to empower local communities they visit through Islamic way of tourism activities [MTG 2024; Qafih 2024], as well as the satisfaction of their personal needs.

(2) Characteristics of Muslim Travel Writers' Narratives

Travel writers' narratives reflect their sincere desire to utilise tourism to enrich their lives in Islamic ways, as reviewed in their travel articles and travelogues. These narratives offer different perspectives from the market environment depicted by previous Islamic tourism stakeholders and research based on the halal certification system. The travel writers focus intensely on the specificity of 'my own tourism experience as a Muslim traveller,' rather than following provided halal standards and guidelines. Their narratives describe halal or Islamic tourism experiences and those based on the assumption that their experiences are fundamentally meaningful to their Islamic way of life. Nurul Mimsy in Explore to Makan notes:

We [Explore to Makan] aim to only share honest information and will only recommend products or services that we personally trust. We hope that our content reaches other Muslims from all around the globe, so that they can learn from our experiences, make use of our itineraries and explore Allah's beautiful world too [Explore to Makan 2024].

Consequently, their narratives are not only filled with a discourse of the halal or Islamic jurisprudential permissibility of individual tourism experiences or an explanation of the Islamic legal norms. Instead, emphasis is placed on a selective and carefully chosen state of spiritual experience in their travels grounded in an Islamic context.

Thus, the narratives of Muslim travel writers in the Islamic tourism market focus on the internal and spiritual aspects of the experience and share their meaning and significance with others. These topics are evident from the recurring emphasis that the narratives place on the spiritual (*rūḥī*), internal (*bāṭin*), and beautification/excellence (*iḥsān*) aspects [Akhir 2010; Rahman and Laderlah 2018; Khan 2019]. Some Muslim travel writers highlight the role of travel and tourism as 'to experience different cultures and way of life' and 'to visit every country and witness the truth about them with complete disregard of the media speculation with very little budget' [Nada al-Nahdi 2024]. They further express, 'our [Muslims'] purpose here is to navigate ourselves through the exploration of what Allah (swt) has given us; in the beautiful sceneries that He has placed us and in the chaotic surroundings and life events

that shape us' [Sahih 2020]. Moreover, HalalTrip, a leading Islamic tourism media based on Singapore, notes that significance of travel and tourism to enhance spiritual achievements for Allah's path [HalalTrip 2023]. Therefore, their emphasis is less on the specificity of individual tourism destinations and practices and more on the spiritual achievements and lessons learned through travel experiences.

The narratives focus on the tourism experience as a means of self-improvement and self-actualisation to realise one's Islamic lifestyle and life stages. Rather than viewing each travel experience as a source of individual joy and pleasure, they present it as a pathway to spiritual and inner fulfilment and well-being for self-improvement and self-realisation in an Islamic way.

III. Spiritual Turn of Islamic Tourism: Ethical Productivity of *Ihsān*

(1) The Concept of *Ihsān* and the Social Meaning of Tourism

The narratives of Muslim travel writers promote self-improvement and self-actualisation by enhancing the spiritual and inner fulfilment and well-being of Muslim individuals. In this case, moral accountability, or the concept *ihsān*, is directed towards the individual in Islamic context.

Ihsān is originally regarded as 'the act of doing good or performing one's duties or any lawful/productive task in the best possible way, with excellence and perfection.' Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and other Islamic writers mention this definition in the *Revival of Religious Science* (*Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*), especially in the context of Sufism¹ [Khan 2019; Vishanoff 2020]. In the hadith of Angel Jibrīl (Gabriel) and Prophet Muḥammad, *ihsān* is defined as 'to worship Allah as if you see Him; if you can't see Him, surely He sees you' [Khan 2019: 3]. Thus, the Islamic way of accountability is a private affair between the individual and God, at least in theory, and 'one's fundamental responsibility and accountability is to God, not to other individuals or society' [Vishanoff 2020: 11]. The purpose of accountability in Islam is basically to ensure that a person makes the necessary preparations to face the hereafter (*al-akhīra*) by engaging one's self with the good deeds that can save him from the torment of Allah [Akhir 2010: 145].

Recent Islamic tourism literature explains the introspective moral accountability expressed by Muslim tourists and Muslim travel writers using the concept of '*muḥāsaba*' or '*muḥāsaba al-naḥs*' as a part of *ihsān* to depict the spiritual significance of tourism practices and experiences [Akhir 2010; Rahman and Laderlah 2018; Aydin 2020; Vishanoff 2020]. Akhir states the importance of travel and leisure consistent with *muḥāsaba* and *ihsān* in Islam, 'whilst taking a vacation and putting one mind's at ease, a person gains time to reflect on his self. The space and free time that are available can be used to evaluate one's behaviour and deeds. This method is directly in line with *muḥāsaba al-naḥs* that is encouraged in Islam' [Akhir

¹ In the case of *taṣawwuf* (Sufism), *ihsān* has eight aspects or elements of the state: (1) *mushāhada* (witnessing); (2) *murāqaba* (vigilance) and *muḥāsaba* (reflection); (3) *maḥabba* (love); (4) *ḥusn* (aesthetics); (5) *raḥma* (mercy) and *ṣadaqa* (forgiveness); (6) *ma'rifa* (epistemology); (7) *fanā* (self-annihilation) [Khan 2019: 125].

2010: 144]. Similarly, Rahman and Laderlah [2018] argue the close relationship between travel and *ihsān* as ‘the traveller who goes for travel may reflect on her or his spirit because of the motivation or self-reflection (*muḥāsaba*). This spiritual reflection is influenced by looking at the historical places or the experiences which touch the feeling or spirit as human beings’ [Rahman and Laderlah 2018: 739]. Other researchers also focus on the concept of *ihsān* to explain the spiritual significance of Islamic economic and tourism practices for Muslim individuals, which improve spiritual empowerment and productivity while adhering to Islamic principles [Tripp 2010; Asutay 2012, 2013; Khan 2019; Aydin 2020; Asutay and Yilmaz 2021; Avdukic and Asutay 2024].

In this sense, the development of Islamic accountability based on *ihsān* promotes spiritual and physical achievements by complying with the Islamic ethical principles in economic practices, referred to as Islamic moral economy. As Mehmet Asutay, Shinsuke Nagaoka, and other researchers conceptualises, Islamic moral economy suggests a model in which the prosperity of the Islamic way of experience economy brings moral values and economic productivity to the market and society through *ihsān* [Asutay 2012, 2013; Asutay and Yilmaz 2021; Nagaoka 2022, 2025; Avdukic and Asutay 2024].

(2) Experience Economy and Islamic Accountability in Muslim Travel Writers

The market trend of *ihsān* in Islamic tourism is a series of movements in developing an ‘experience economy,’ an economic model where businesses focus on selling memorable experiences to customers rather than just products or services, as Figure 3 shows [Pine and Gilmore 2011 (1999)]. As Pine and Gilmore [2011 (1999)] present four realms of experience: entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism to enhance added value based on experience.

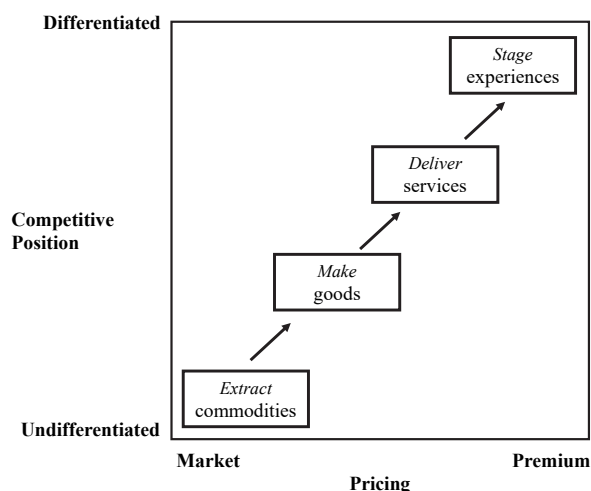


Figure 3: The Progression of Economic Value

Source: [Pine and Gilmore 2011 (1999)]

Through the concept of experience economy in tourism research, researchers reveal that tourists seek unique experiences beyond merely consuming products and services, and require new demand for unique and memorable experiences [Oh et al. 2007; Mehmetoglu and Engen 2011; Loureiro 2014; Hosany et al. 2022; Kim et al. 2022]. In this situation, stakeholders in the tourism market develop value-added provision for products and services that have already achieved a consistent, high level of functional quality through creating a memorable and unique event, called ‘staged experience’ [Oh et al. 2007: 119; Loureiro 2014: 1]. In fact, tourism activities and experiences are at the forefront of experience economy with tourists’ emotion, aesthetics and memory to enhance their life experiences [Oh et al. 2007; Mehmetoglu and Engen 2011; Hosany et al. 2022; Kim et al. 2022].

In the case of Islam, tourism experiences have shifted from being mere commodities used to satisfy personal needs to a movement to add higher value to practices that enhance the trust (*amāna*), honesty (*ṣidq*), and spiritual beautification (*iḥsān*) for individual Muslim tourists, improving communities and society [Khan 2019; Faris 2022; Sthapit et al. 2022; Thimm 2023]. Sthapit et al. [2022] indicate that Islamic tourism is shifting from emphasising environmental development towards an experience economy and higher experience values, which drive economic and spiritual productivity. Studies have also focused on developing experience value to enhance economic value in Islamic entrepreneurship [Kayed and Hassan 2013; Saad et al. 2014; Faris 2022; Thimm 2023; PM 2024].

The narratives regarding the moral accountability of Muslim travel writers in the Islamic tourism market develop an Islamic way of experience economy by acquiring individual ethical subjectivity through self-discipline employing ethical codes of *iḥsān*. It enhances one’s spiritual dimensions by accumulating better Islamic experiences, avoiding bad ones in travel and tourism activities, and promoting spiritual, physical, and social productivity for Muslim individuals and societies [Faris 2022].

Mohammad Faris explores productivity across the spiritual, physical, and social spheres [Faris 2022: 41]. Figure 4 shows that the Islamic view of productivity integrates focus, energy, and time within the spiritual, physical, and social spheres [Faris 2022: 42]. In this conceptual diagram, focus, energy, and time have created productivity through purpose, values, and soul. However, the Islamic way of productivity should balance spiritual, physical, and social productivity and always contain three dimensions in its principle.

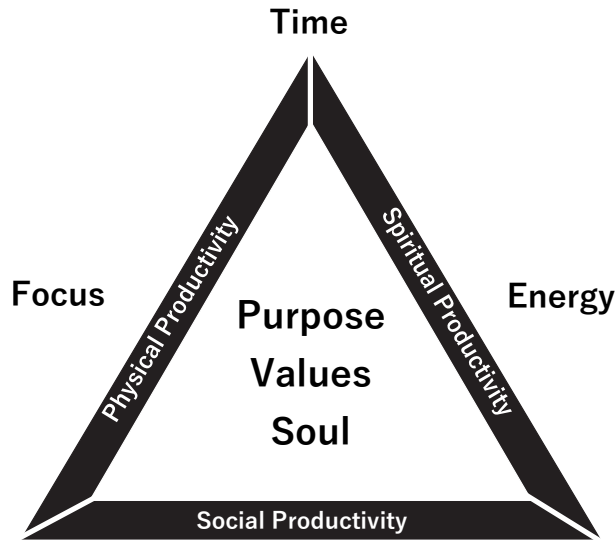


Figure 4: Conceptual Diagram of Islamic View of Productivity

Source: [Faris 2022: 42]

In this environment, some Islamic tourism company provide tourism programmes and projects to enhance Islamic way of productivity in the field. For instance, Singapore's HalalTrip has collaborated with UK's the ProductiveMuslim.com to organise 'Productive Muslim Retreat' project from 2016, to provide personal development journey with the aim of empowering attendees to live healthier and spiritually connected lives [CrescentRating 2016]. Other tour operators provide similar tours programmes to enhance Islamic way of productivity through *ihsān* principles.

As a result, Muslim travel writers and related Islamic entrepreneurs become a symbol of Islamic way of productivity through *ihsān* principles. For instance, Vivy Yusof, a prominent Islamic entrepreneur and the co-founder and creative director of the FashionValet (FV) Group, a Malaysia-based company, strongly connects her physical productivity and success in business and life stages with spiritual piety and social engagement in her autobiography [Yosuf 2022]. She asserts that her economic productivity and success are tied to spiritual achievements, such as the pilgrimage to Makkah, travel experiences, and the experience of studying in the UK. Importantly, several discourses of her tourism experiences are repeatedly discussed as worthy investments in her spiritual, physical, and social productivity. As a consumer, her tourism experience enhances her Islamic norms, spiritual achievement, and confidence, enriching her business and life experiences. Therefore, the tourism experience is a reward for one's past Islamic deeds, an initiative to internalise *ihsān* as an Islamic good deed in the present, and accountability for further success and reward of spiritual, physical, and social productivity.

Ihsān as self-discipline strengthens the moral subjectivity of individuals and societies

and promotes economic productivity through experience economy. Therefore, the Islamic tourism market is viewed as a platform for creating economic value and ethical norms for Muslim individuals and societies by promoting *ihsān*. Some researches depict how spirituality and productivity are linked [Rudnycky 2010; Faris 2022; Thimm 2023; Yasuda 2023]. In particular, Mohammed Faris emphasises that Islamic spiritual productivity is closely linked to physical and social productivity in business and life experiences. In doing so, the importance of adhering to *ihsān* (excellence) in addition to *amāna* (trust) and *ṣidq* (honesty) is also discussed [Faris 2022: 43]. Therefore, *ihsān* and the Islamic way of accountability through the tourism experience are synonymous with fulfilling the spiritual dimension and the Islamic way of productivity.

The development of spiritual and physical productivity is strongly associated with social productivity. In the Islamic way of social productivity, various narratives of Muslim travel writers and other Islamic writings stress the significance of socialising during the journey [Yasuda 2019; Faris 2022: 171–192]. Social activities in Islam, such as conducting *zakāt* and *sadaqa*, daily visits to the mosque, visits of family, relatives, and friends, and other activities to communicate with others are considered significant [Faris 2022: 192].

Consequently, the presence of Muslim travel writers in the Islamic tourism market goes beyond the role of mere writers and travel guides; they serve as role models who link Islamic faith and productivity through Islamic way of accountability in terms of experience economy. They express that the tourism experience is an essential practice for deepening the Islamic way of lifestyle with spiritual, physical, and social productivity in terms of *ihsān* principle. Thus, Islamic tourism is not about satisfying the personal needs of Muslim consumers regarding halal preference, demand, and satisfaction as commodities, but rather about giving Islamic meaning to individual lifestyles and life experiences and achieving spiritual, physical, and social productivity in this life (*al-dunyā*) and salvation in the hereafter (*al-ākhirah*) [Faris 2022: 94]. Developing the experience economy with *ihsān* in Islamic context at its core in the Islamic tourism market will create new values of Islam for contemporary Muslim individuals and society. As a result, the development of experience economy has promoted the creation of ‘ethical productivity,’ which enhance spiritual, physical, and social productivity through ethical self-discipline and moral accountability of *ihsān*.

IV. Conclusion

This study explored the development of an Islamic way of experience economy in the Islamic tourism market by analysing Muslim travel writers. The narratives of Muslim travel writers in the Islamic tourism market can be summarised as a desire for moral accountability, fostering self-improvement and self-actualisation of Muslim individuals through spiritual and internal achievements gained by the tourism experience and the concept of *ihsān*. The emphasis

on spiritual and inner achievements through travel and tourism indicates an indispensable experience in their daily lives and life stages.

The moral accountability Muslim travel writers promote ethical subjectivity based on self-discipline by encouraging good and abhorring bad deeds, known as *ihsān*. The penetration of individual ethical subjectivity has provided opportunities to create market and social norms. Furthermore, this movement reveals how achieving spiritual, physical, and social productivity positions Muslim travel writers as role models to link faith and productivity in Islam and as entities who express the importance of tourism and travel in Islamic lifestyles and life. In this context, Muslim travel writers are the main actors driving the experience economy of Islamic tourism through their tourism experiences.

In conclusion, the emerging experience economy in the Islamic tourism market has encouraged Muslim individuals to acquire 'ethical productivity,' promoting spiritual, physical, and social productivity through ethical self-discipline and moral accountability of *ihsān*. Therefore, tourism experiences in the Islamic tourism market can elicit economic value and spiritual and internal achievements for self-improvement and self-actualisation in daily life and life stages. Muslim travel writers engage strongly in creating ethical productivity in an Islamic way of accountability.

The recent increase in Muslim travel writers in the Islamic tourism market indicates new potential and possibilities for moral accountability and economic development. Through the concept of *ihsān* in the market, Muslims can gain a novel ethical subjectivity fitted to contemporary lifestyles in the globalised world. Simultaneously, new markets and social norms can be established in contemporary Muslim societies beyond the halal certification system.

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