

Unveiling halal luxury hotel service quality: key attributes from online reviews

Nurhafihz Noor 

James Cook University – Singapore Campus, Singapore, Singapore

Zahirah Zainol

Curtin University – Singapore Campus, Singapore, Singapore

Ashley Tong Hui Hui 

The University of Newcastle, Callaghan, Australia, and

K. Thirumaran

James Cook University – Singapore Campus, Singapore, Singapore

Abstract

Purpose – Luxury hotels catering to the needs of halal markets continue to grow in popularity. While there is emerging research on luxury services and attributes valued by Muslim consumers in general, there is a lack of certainty on the factors that matter to consumers in the context of halal luxury hotels. This study aims to identify the key concepts and themes that matter for halal luxury hotel service quality.

Design/methodology/approach – This study analyzed 369 online reviews from Tripadvisor of an award-winning halal luxury hotel brand. Content analysis was done on the reviews using Leximancer.

Findings – Qualitative analysis showed 11 key themes that mattered to consumers of halal luxury hotels. Nine of the themes were related to service quality attributes, while two represented themes associated with the outcomes of halal luxury hotel service quality. Themes related to the attributes of halal luxury hotel service quality exhibited similarities and uniqueness compared to the extant service quality literature.

Research limitations/implications – This study was limited to reviews from three hotels of a single halal luxury hotel brand. Data was also collected from English-language customer reviews from TripAdvisor till July 2024. The study weaves together the site context of halal luxury hotels with findings that are indicative and lead to future research methodology that accommodates *in situ* Muslim guests' experiences.

Originality/value – To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is the first to identify the key themes associated with halal luxury hotel service quality based on online customer reviews. This provides support for further research to empirically transform these themes into service quality dimensions with suitable measure items. Service managers can also use our insights as guidance to design and measure the service quality of their luxury hotels for halal markets.

Keywords Service quality, Luxury branding and strategy, Hotels management, Islamic marketing

Paper type Research paper



1. Introduction

The global Islamic economy witnessed a significant turn in the last century with the recognition of diversity and a stronger multicultural landscape in developed Western regions. Adding to this landscape are the emerging economies of Muslim nations that offer luxurious lifestyle destinations. According to the State of the Global Islamic Economic Report by [DinarStandard \(2023\)](#), the halal tourism economy continues to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.5% and is forecasted to reach US\$174bn in 2027 as compared to US\$133bn in 2022 ([DinarStandard, 2023](#)). Contributing to this rise in halal travel is an increasing number of more affluent travelers with a greater appreciation of cultural diversity ([CrescentRating and Mastercard, 2024](#)). Further encouraging this demand are multiple billion-dollar investments to grow the halal luxury hotel sector across key markets including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates ([DinarStandard, 2023](#)).

Research on luxury in services has continued to grow in tandem despite a lack of consensus on the definition of luxury ([Ko et al., 2019](#)). In response, the seminal paper from [Wirtz et al. \(2020\)](#) compiled over 100 articles in the field of luxury research to provide an overview of the different definitions of luxury. The authors defined luxury services as “extraordinary hedonic experiences that are exclusive,” in which exclusivity can be monetary, social and hedonic while luxuriousness can contain subjective customer perceptions along with objective service features ([Wirtz et al., 2020](#)). Consequently, the consumption and experience of luxury services can be contrasted from luxury goods due to the variability of service quality, psychological ownership, service intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability, emphasis on people, process and physical evidence as well as the stages of the customer journey ([Wirtz et al., 2020](#)). It can also be observed that the majority of the luxury services literature has centered around hospitality services ([Jain et al., 2023](#)) and empirically analyzing consumer behavior and branding perceptions within hospitality settings ([Shin and Jeong, 2022](#)).

In the context of halal luxury, halal is a core tenet, and an Arabic word closely associated with the Islamic faith. Halal, in general, can be translated to permissible or allowed. The concept of halal is essential to every Muslim’s belief, and it serves as a standard for the actions of a Muslim. As for the concept of luxury, according to [Sharif et al. \(2019\)](#), luxury goods can be characterized as *Kamaliyat* (striving for quality-of-life upgrades) and *Tarafiyyat* (excessive extravagance). Therefore, luxury goods can be viewed as halal or haram (impermissible), depending on the intent of the consumption. Luxury goods are considered halal when used to improve the quality of life rather than to show off one’s extravagances. Luxury goods become haram when they are meant to display excessive wealth and inflate self-esteem ([Ahmad Alserhan and Ahmad Alserhan, 2012](#)). Consumers embracing monotheistic religions, like Christianity and Islam, with strong convictions in a divine entity, tend to exhibit weaker luxury purchase intentions, as they believe that the divine entity is in control, hence pursuing lesser worldly desires and personal control ([Mathras et al., 2016](#)).

The Islamic tradition has generally cautioned against living a luxurious and materialistic life as it breeds egotism and arrogance. A hadith (statement) by Prophet Muhammad reads “Do not squander even if you are performing ablution from a flowing river” ([Rehman et al., 2022](#)). As Islam is highly connected to observing a certain way of life, Muslims have amalgamated the art of incorporating insights, aesthetics and sciences as expressions of the Islamic ideal of Ihsan (excellence). Muslims have also modified marketing practices to reflect the functional and symbolic significance of Islam ([Wilson and Grant, 2013](#)). These underscore the importance of consuming luxury in the halal way.

Against these rich complexities of luxury in Islam and the real impetus to grow luxury services to serve affluent halal markets, there is a need for a better understanding of what halal markets would define as excellent halal luxury service. Given the high expenses in developing and managing luxury services and facilities, knowledge of the key attributes of halal luxury service quality would result in clearer strategic investments that can translate to better customer perceptions of service performances as well as increased satisfaction and loyalty (Chen *et al.*, 2022). In addition, changes to the service environment and sector, including the addition of faith-based services, can change consumers' expectations of service quality (Dandis and Wright, 2020; Noor, 2025). Hence, this study aims to answer the following question: What are the key service quality attributes perceived by guests of halal luxury hotels? This study adopts a content analysis approach of online customer reviews of luxury hotels designed mainly to cater to the needs of Muslim travelers. In terms of research implications, this study contributes to the luxury services, as well as the service quality management literature by uncovering the key themes associated with halal luxury service quality. Theoretically, this research advances our understanding of the applicability of extant service quality frameworks in Muslim-friendly tourism and luxury hotels in the context of halal luxury hotels. For practitioners, findings from this study give clearer managerial directions to design luxury hotels that can better cater to the service quality needs of Muslim travelers.

The remaining sections of this paper are as follows. First, we will provide a background on the areas of hospitality and luxury, and luxury services and halal, followed by a discussion on service quality in the context of halal luxury hotels and the relationship between customer reviews and service quality dimensions. Subsequently, this paper will elaborate on the methodology used before presenting the results of our study. The paper will conclude with a discussion of our findings and their implications for research and practice.

2. Literature review

2.1 Hospitality and luxury

Despite the lack of consensus, attempts to define luxury have been numerous (Correia *et al.*, 2022). When defining luxury, many studies articulate the goods focus on intrinsic value and sophistication level in addition to pricing and exclusivity (Wirtz *et al.*, 2020). The goods-centric approach is useful to our study of halal luxury hotels. Still, when combined with a hospitality setting that is of higher quality or fine dining, a service component is necessary.

Wirtz *et al.* (2020) suggest that service be defined as "transfer of performance without ownership" with further contextualization to the pleasure of receiving an experience rather than a physical good. Drawing from extant literature, Wirtz *et al.* (2020) postulate that psychological attachment or consciousness to luxury services has a significant impact on the self-extension of a consumer than does ownership of a physical good. To support this approach, three key impact areas were identified emerging from customer experience. First, is the "hedonic adaptation" with an overarching sensory experience based on receiving a service. Concerning "conspicuous consumption," the reading suggests that it is easier to show and tell with a physical good compared with an experience that is not tangible. Hence, mediation through social media where one could share instantly where one is holidaying in luxury surroundings or receiving exclusive treatment becomes the fit in the absence of a physical good; unlike a branded good that can be carried over time and place visible to others. Finally, Wirtz *et al.* (2020) point out that counterfeiting is simply a hard act in a service context compared to a physical good.

Similarly, in a literature review, Jain *et al.* (2023) emphasize that human interaction when experiencing accommodation, exclusivity and access tagged with price and social circle that are tastefully served with food and beverage forms the linchpin of luxury hospitality. How

these bespoke experiences extend beyond material pleasures into sensory experiences of halal luxury hotel services requires further study. [Wirtz et al. \(2020\)](#) lead on self-extension is an important element that can help us understand halal luxury hospitality. [Zainol et al. \(2024\)](#) assert that the insertion of self, based on religious values, affects the consumption behavior pattern. Hence, halal consumption of hospitality (i.e. fine dining) and the exclusive service received is essentially for individuals' fulfillment rather than an external orientation for presentation or recognition ([Ahmad Alserhan and Ahmad Alserhan, 2012](#)).

While luxury hospitality literature generally emphasizes exclusivity, hedonic pleasure and premium experiential value ([Wirtz et al., 2020](#); [Jain et al., 2023](#)), these expectations may be evaluated differently within faith-based consumption contexts. Muslim consumers may interpret luxury services not only based on hedonic and functional benefits but also based on the extent to which the service experience aligns with Islamic values and halal principles ([Wilson and Grant, 2013](#)). This intersection between luxury consumption and religious compatibility gives rise to the growing concept of halal luxury services, which are embedded within perceptions of service excellence, trust and emotional satisfaction ([Zainol et al., 2024](#)).

2.2 *Luxury services and halal*

Halal luxury services refer to extraordinary and exclusive hedonic experiences that are designed to primarily meet the faith-based needs of Muslims ([Zainol et al., 2024](#)). In the discussion of luxury and halal markets, several scholars mentioned that the concept of “wasatiyyah” or moderation may be practiced by Muslims to curtail excessive luxury spending ([Zainol et al., 2024](#)). However, visiting guests are highly regarded in Islam and should be shown the best hospitality by the hosts as a sign of respect and honor ([Dekhil et al., 2017](#)). [Zainol et al. \(2024\)](#) suggested that self-congruence is a mediating variable between religiosity and the purchasing intention of luxury services. The travelers' well-being and satisfaction are increased when presented with luxury services that cater to their specific cultural and religious needs. Halal luxury consumption extends beyond conventional motivations such as prestige and exclusivity ([Wirtz et al., 2020](#)). In halal luxury hospitality contexts, consumers may also associate service excellence with religious comfort, faith congruence and ethical reassurance ([Eid and El-Gohary, 2015](#); [Zainol et al., 2024](#)). As a result, Muslim travelers may evaluate luxury hotel experiences differently from general luxury consumers, as perceptions of service quality are shaped not only by tangible and experiential factors, but also by the extent to which the service environment supports Islamic values and practices ([Papastathopoulos et al., 2021](#); [Han et al., 2019](#)). Studies have shown that high-income Muslim consumers are more likely to purchase luxury services due to religious and spiritual reasons ([Eid and El-Gohary, 2015](#); [Koburtay, 2022](#); [Papastathopoulos et al., 2021](#); [Zainol et al., 2024](#)). [Han et al. \(2019\)](#) suggest that halal attributes such as services, social environment, food and beverage, staff and residents significantly affect destination image, destination revisits and recommendation intentions of Muslim travelers visiting South Korea. [Eid and El-Gohary \(2015\)](#) posit that Islamic physical attributes such as prayer facilities, availability of the Quran and toilets equipped with bidets can also significantly and strongly affect Muslim travelers' satisfaction. Conversely, the Islamic non-physical attributes such as segregated service, Shariah-compatible television channels, Shariah-compatible entertainment tools and art that does not depict human forms only significantly affect the more religious Muslim travelers. [Papastathopoulos et al. \(2021\)](#) also showed that particular attributes may be expected by Muslim travelers staying in different hotel tiers.

2.3 Halal luxury hotels and service quality

Based on the definition of service quality by Zeithaml (1988), we define halal luxury hotel service quality as consumers' perceptions of the excellence or superiority of the services provided by the halal luxury hotel. In the hospitality sector, research on service quality includes an adaptation of the seminal SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988) and its set of service quality dimensions of reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness for hotels (Akbaba, 2006). Using SERVQUAL, Mok and Armstrong (1998) found that different cultures had varying service quality expectations. However, a limitation of these scale adaptations is that SERVQUAL may not completely capture the total service experiences of hotels, including the dining features, which may be more salient in food service scales such as DINESERV (Stevens *et al.*, 1995) or DinEX (Antun *et al.*, 2010). This is because the unique set of service quality dimensions expected by consumers can differ based on the service environment (Noor, 2025). With respect to the halal luxury context, SERVQUAL may not fully capture dimensions associated with both the halal and luxury paradigms. Evidence from Dandis and Wright (2020) shows that salient faith-based dimensions such as compliance with Islamic law may be valued by consumers of halal services. Such faith-based dimensions are not present in SERVQUAL. Further, it is uncertain how "wasatiyyah" or moderation may affect how Muslim consumers perceive luxury in the halal context (Zainol *et al.*, 2024). Such an attribute is not reflected in SERVQUAL. Hence, these warrant further exploration and motivate our study.

More importantly, halal luxury hospitality involves symbolic and spiritual consumption elements that extend beyond conventional operational service evaluations (Wilson and Grant, 2013). Muslim guests may evaluate hotel experiences not only based on efficiency, tangibles and responsiveness, but also according to whether the environment reinforces Islamic identity, religious comfort and faith-compatible luxury experiences (Dandis and Wright, 2020; Eid and El-Gohary, 2015). Consequently, existing service quality frameworks developed for general hospitality settings may not fully capture the unique expectations associated with halal luxury hospitality contexts (Noor, 2025). To capture a more holistic measurement of hotel service quality in the context of luxury (five-star) and first-class (four-star) hotels, Wilkins *et al.* (2007) developed a new scale and found that hotel service quality is comprised of physical product (e.g. room quality), service experience (e.g. quality staff) and quality food and beverage (e.g. provision of a sumptuous buffet breakfast). However, while there continues to be positive inroads on insights into luxury services (Jain *et al.*, 2023; Wirtz *et al.*, 2020), including luxury hotel service quality (Ryu *et al.*, 2022), attributes and experience values (Leutwiler Lee and Kim, 2025), little is known of the perceptions of growing halal markets in the hotel industry (Arasli *et al.*, 2023) and specifically in the context of emerging halal luxury hotels (Zainol *et al.*, 2024) and the growing paradigm of more responsible and sustainable halal tourism (Noor and Bahardeen, 2025). In their seminal study analyzing guest reviews of general hotels, Arasli *et al.* (2023) uncovered nine key themes relevant to Muslim-friendly hotel service quality: hotel, staff, food, room, location, pool, facilities, cleanliness and Wi-Fi. However, their research explored Muslim-friendly hotels in general and was not focused on the category of halal luxury hotels. Given these limitations, our study adopts a qualitative approach using guest reviews to uncover the themes that reflect service quality perceptions in halal luxury hotels.

2.4 Customer reviews and service quality dimensions

There are two reasons as to why customer reviews can be a valuable source in identifying service quality dimensions. First, service quality is recognized in the literature as a type of attitude of the service performance that can be formed particularly after experiencing the

service (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988), and different service environments can comprise unique sets of service quality dimensions (Noor, 2025). Accordingly, empirical studies such as Dandis and Wright (2020) have used traditional self-administered surveys to identify service quality compositions with unique dimensions such as compliance with Islamic law. However, user-generated content such as customer reviews from hotel guests on online platforms can also be rich Sources of data, representing real-world customer feedback and experiences with less survey bias and fatigue, which can translate to consumer attitudes (Kübler *et al.*, 2025). Accordingly, accessible reviews from consumers based on their experiences of the service performance can be a suitable data Source to explore service quality perceptions. Thus, several studies have acknowledged the usefulness of user-generated content in service research and explored the possible composition of service quality dimensions from attitudes reflected in customer comments (Arasli *et al.*, 2023). Our study adopts a similar approach in analyzing guest attitudes toward halal luxury hotels that infer service quality.

Second, insights from analyzing customer comments with Leximancer, such as those from Arasli *et al.* (2023) or our present study, allow the transformation of unstructured user-generated content into more settled themes that often mirror concrete cues. For instance, our first theme “Staff” is a concrete cue that is related to the higher-order dimension of interaction quality (Brady and Cronin, 2001). In the service quality literature, based on the means-end-chain framework, service quality dimensions are more global compositions of perceptual attributes, which are more enduring and useful as measures for scales as opposed to their antecedents of concrete cues, which can change (Parasuraman *et al.*, 2005). Accordingly, our study is a useful first step in identifying the concrete cues of halal luxury hotel service quality, which can conceptually approximate service quality dimensions. Future scale development studies can use our study as a foundation to empirically determine and validate halal luxury hotel service quality dimensions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection

To identify the major themes experienced by tourists at luxury hotels catered to halal travel markets, data was gathered from customer online reviews on the TripAdvisor.com website. Online reviews are valuable in understanding hotel service quality (Chan *et al.*, 2025), while TripAdvisor has a large global online travel community (Brochado *et al.*, 2019) and is widely used in tourism studies analyzing online reviews voluntarily obtained from guests (Mellinas and Martin-Fuentes, 2022). In addition, the use of user-generated content from TripAdvisor to assess service quality has been used in past hospitality studies, including airlines (Brochado *et al.*, 2019) and hotels (Arici *et al.*, 2023).

Reviews were drawn from travelers’ postings on TripAdvisor in which they shared with fellow travelers about their experiences. For this study, comments were specifically analyzed from guests who stayed at a chain of three different hotels under the Shaza Hotels brand. Shaza Hotels was chosen as a suitable sample hotel for this study as Shaza Hotels positions itself as a luxury hotel service catering mainly to Muslims (Shaza, 2024), although it does acknowledge attracting non-Muslim guests (CrescentRating, 2018). This is consistent with the literature that defines the halal market as comprising Muslim consumers as the primary market, while non-Muslim consumers are the secondary (Alserhan, 2010; Battour *et al.*, 2018; Wilson and Liu, 2010). In addition, Shaza Hotels was awarded the Muslim-friendly hotel chain of the year for 2023 (CrescentRating, 2023). The use of a single service brand (Chen *et al.*, 2024), including a categorical brand leader in halal lifestyle (Noor *et al.*, 2026) and halal hospitality (Noor *et al.*, 2025), has been used in the

literature as sample representations for category-level service quality perceptions. Similar to our use of a chain of hotels, in a recent study, [Han et al. \(2026\)](#) also analyzed customer online reviews of a single restaurant chain to evaluate categorical perceptions of service attributes in the hospitality sector.

All online reviews were collected until the end of the data collection period in July 2024, following which data analysis and subsequent research phases, including write-up and submission, were completed for this study. In total, 369 online English reviews of Shaza Hotels were collected. This comprised reviews from guests who stayed at Shaza Makkah (77 reviews), Shaza Riyadh (105 reviews) and Shaza Doha (187 reviews). In terms of the descriptives of these reviews, of the 165 guests who indicated their country of origin, the majority of guests were from Asia (80 or 21.68%) followed by Europe (58 or 15.72%). Most of the reviews were from guests who stayed in halal luxury hotels in 2024 (141 or 38.21%) and the previous year 2023 (123 or 33.33%). Guests also used TripAdvisor’s bubble ratings to rate their overall experience, with one bubble indicating “terrible” and five meaning “excellent” ([TripAdvisor, 2024](#)). Most hotel reviews (318 or 86.18%) were excellent. [Table 1](#) summarizes the descriptive statistics of the reviews analyzed for this study.

3.2 Data treatment

Content analysis was done on the online reviews using Leximancer. Leximancer is a reliable tool that reduces the biases associated with manual content analysis ([Smith and Humphreys, 2006](#)). This Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) has been used in multiple hospitality and tourism studies ([Goh and Wilk, 2022](#)), including research on specific halal market segments ([Oktadiana et al., 2020](#)). In addition, Leximancer has been used in research assessing guest perceptions of general hotels that are Muslim-friendly

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of reviews

Variable	Category	#	%
Continent	Asia	80	21.68
	Europe	58	15.72
	North America	10	2.71
	Africa	10	2.71
	Oceania	5	1.36
	South America	2	0.54
	Unspecified	204	55.28
Stay period	2024	141	38.21
	2023	123	33.33
	2022	34	9.21
	2021	19	5.15
	2020	13	3.52
	2019	28	7.59
	2018	11	2.98
Bubble rating	5 – Excellent	318	86.18
	4 – Very good	20	5.42
	3 – Average	10	2.71
	2 – Poor	9	2.44
	1 – Terrible	12	3.25

Source(s): Created by the authors

4. Results

Source: Created by the authors

4.1 Staff

The theme “Staff” was the most significant theme in this study. This theme encompasses the concepts of “friendly” (71%), “helpful” (67%), “professional” (59%), “lovely” (43%) and “amazing” (39%). One guest shared the following review:

The staff was very helpful and friendly.

Another guest commended the supervisor for the training provided to produce the quality staff:

Hotel staff are very polite, professional, and helpful [...] I heartfully thank the supervisor for training such amazing staff with excellent services.

This “Staff” theme is conceptually related to the extant service quality dimension in the literature on personal interaction quality and supports the importance of staff in halal luxury hotels in resolving customer problems with excellent attitude, expertise and conduct (Brady and Cronin, 2001; Caro and Garcia, 2008). In addition, compared to the perceptions of guests in general Muslim-friendly hotels in which “Staff” was ranked second in its level of significance to “Hotel” (Arasli *et al.*, 2023), guests in halal luxury hotels place greater significance on the level of assurance provided by staff and have greater expectations on the level of staff quality. Wilkins *et al.* (2007) also found quality staff to be a significant factor for luxury and first-class hotels.

While our findings suggest that guest satisfaction is based on staff professionalism, it would be worth considering the adjacent context of what service is like by staff. Apart from the courtesies, the staff is well-dressed and presentable. The idea that staff are dressed in themes related to the Islamic tradition with design or motifs also adds to the trust and ambience of the halal-compliant service (Bastaman, 2019; Syahriyal *et al.*, 2025). Hence, in luxury hotels, the level of staff service is as significant as the dress code. This supports the luxury hospitality services literature in which guest-staff interactions are key to forming multiple premium perceptions and intimate connections (Jain *et al.*, 2023).

4.2 Hotel

The second most significant theme was “Hotel” and includes the concepts of “stayed” (54%), “walk” (52%), “hotels” (50%), “location” (47%) and “beautiful” (18%). Reviews left by guests included the following:

Excellent place to stay with some notable drawbacks. We stayed in Shaza Makkah in May 2022, overall it is a very nice, clean impressive hotel.

Great stay at Shaza Doha. We stayed at the Shaza Doha on a Qatar Airlines stopover package recently and were pleasantly surprised at the value for money experienced.

The “Hotel” theme conceptually captures the importance of the service quality dimension of tangibles and how visual and functional quality can contribute to hotel service quality (Taylan Dortyol *et al.*, 2014). While the “Hotel” theme was the most significant for Muslim-friendly hotels in general (Arasli *et al.*, 2023), this theme appears second in its significance for halal luxury hotels. The positive impression that the physical product of the hotel needs to give in terms of its style and comfort was also found to be critical for general luxury and first-class hotels (Wilkins *et al.*, 2007).

Hotels generally do have a variety of room types. From singles, doubles to triples and adjoining rooms. Muslim travelers have particular preferences, especially those with young children or big families (Singgalen, 2024). Luxury hotels also cater to a large variety of guests to fulfill special customer requests for privacy and spatial convenience with proper

signs of prayer directions or provision for prayer halls or rooms. In some instances, such as Turkey and Indonesia, luxury hotels are able to cater for separate spa areas for men and women in addition to segregated gym as well as resort beaches with appropriate gender designated areas (Bastaman, 2019; Jeaheng *et al.*, 2019).

4.3 Experience

“Experience” was the third most significant theme. This theme included the following concepts: “wonderful” (29%), “best” (22%), “amazing” (22%), “thanks” (20%) and special “20%”. Guests left the following comments related to this theme:

I had a lot of massages throughout my life but the experience at Shaza spa was the best.

Overall the experience was fantastic as it was the first time for me.

The “Experience” theme is conceptually related to the service quality dimension of outcome quality (Brady and Cronin, 2001) and emerged tangentially in the “Facilities” theme uncovered by Arasli *et al.* (2023) in their study of general Muslim-friendly hotels. However, in their study, while “Facilities” did capture aspects of entertainment and service comfort, the experience aspect was not as intense and significant as that found in this study. Similarly, the “Added extras” expectation for luxury and first-class hotel guests (Wilkins *et al.*, 2007) was expressed more pronouncedly from the experience the guests would have in halal luxury hotels.

Zainol *et al.* (2024) identify that guests’ experience is at its highest when luxury and halal characteristics converge. Hence, the overall experience for Muslim travelers can be highly satisfactory when all aspects of the hotel services and facilities meet the expectations of the guests in a five-star hotel.

4.4 Room

The next theme was “Room” and encompassed the following concepts: “bed” (65%), “coffee” (44%), “bathroom” (43%), “floor” (36%) and “spacious” (34%). Guests commented on the following:

The room was clean and tidy, and the beds were comfortable.

Our rooms were luxurious with lacquer furniture, adequately spacious, comfortable, very clean, and had large, marble tile bathrooms.

One guest commented that they expected more from the rooms including adequate size for performing prayers:

The rooms are clean, beds comfortable, but they were very small (praying in the room was a challenge for one person, so forgot Jama ‘a), and don’t fall for paying extra for a partial Haram view, you will face next building back wall, and if you tilt your head stick it to the window, you will see a meter of the Abraj and its frontward. The women’s prayer room was clean, but small and next to the kids’ playroom, so it was used as a playroom.

This theme is conceptually related to the extant service quality dimensions in the literature on the appearance of the physical areas and fixtures (Dabholkar *et al.*, 1996) and the design benefits in serving the needs of the customer (Brady and Cronin, 2001). In addition to the visual aspects of the service, this theme also captures the service quality dimension of ambient conditions, including the room feeling comfortable (Caro and Garcia, 2008).

It is notable that these requirements are interlinked with the faith-based service needs of the Muslim traveler to access appropriate prayer facilities (CrescentRating and Mastercard, 2024). This theme was also significant for luxury and first-class hotels

(Wilkins *et al.*, 2007), as well as general Muslim-friendly hotels, including the need for cleanliness (Arasli *et al.*, 2023).

4.5 Food

The “Food” theme consisted of the following concepts: “delicious” (29%), “restaurant” (25%), “buffet” (24%), “quality” (21%) and “amazing” (18%). Guests left the following comments:

Very good breakfast venue, the food is more than perfect.

The food in this restaurant is very delicious, especially the breakfast.

Comments on the “Food” theme tap into the high-quality food measure from the service quality dimension of food quality and reliability (Taylan Dortyol *et al.*, 2014). This theme was also significant in the study for general Muslim-friendly hotels (Arasli *et al.*, 2023). Muslims choose a halal luxury hotel for various reasons, but one of these is clearly the assurance of ethical approaches to religious practices and services, especially in the provision of halal luxury gastronomy and prayer halls or prayer directional signs to Mecca in rooms.

In this regard, Batat’s (2022) research indicates that views on moral dining are broad in upscale venues, and they do include the element of heritage safeguarding. The comments extracted assumed that the status of the food consumed is halal, implicitly believing that the preparation and selected food offerings is in accordance with Islamic principles. In the context of luxury and first-class hotels, while the availability of bars for drinks is more applicable for non-halal markets, the quality of the food presentation and range of fine dining are also important service expectations for halal luxury hotel guests.

4.6 Referral

The theme “Referral” included the concepts of “place” (20%), “family” (19%), “visit” (16%), “front” (14%) and “thanks” (12%). Words left by guests recommending the halal luxury hotel included the following:

I did not have any issues with anything. Totally recommend it.

I highly recommend it especially if you want to be a little away from the crowd of Riyadh Center.

I recommend staying there and do not ever hesitate. You will live there.

Unlike nine of the themes uncovered in the content analysis, which are related to service quality attributes, this theme is associated with the outcome of halal luxury hotel service quality. This outcome theme supports the extant literature in which customer loyalty is a key consequence of service quality in various service environments (Cronin *et al.*, 2000; Noor *et al.*, 2022).

Patwary *et al.* (2025) and Abror *et al.* (2021) further expound on the experience and communication with guests as significant to enhance the referral element. Thus, our findings draw a similar conclusion based on the reviews where guests recommend to prospective guests on the basis of their own experience.

4.7 Gratitude

The theme “Gratitude” consisted of the following concepts: “lovely” (14%), “team” (13%), “sure” (12%), “hospitality” (12%) and “wonderful” (11%). Guests left the following comments:

Thank you to the staff for such a pleasant stay.

Thank you to everyone at the Shaza Makkah for making our stay very welcoming and comfortable.

Similar to “Referral,” the theme “Gratitude” represents another outcome of halal luxury hotel service quality as detected from the content analysis of guest reviews. The strong emergence of this service outcome is reflective of the Islamic tradition in which the guest may feel a more salient need to express and prioritize gratitude (shukr) over the service performance (Noor, 2022).

Luxury hotels welcome guests who are similar in sentiments to any other hotel guests. They show gratitude and are always thankful when they receive extraordinary service, often leaving a handsome tip for the service staff. This happens even when the service staff in upscale hotels do not have direct contact with the guests other than leaving their room clean and refreshed for the second half of the day (Shih *et al.*, 2019).

4.8 Buffet

The theme “Buffet” includes the concepts of “quality” (14%), “breakfast” (10%), “area” (8%), “food” (8%) and “service” (6%). Comments included the following:

Wednesday buffet is recommended. A very relaxed evening.

We will certainly return, perhaps as soon as tomorrow for the Indian buffet!

Some guests commented that the price of the dinner buffet was worth it while others expected more variety:

The dinner buffet was expensive but overall well worth the price!

The food variety for the dinner buffet can still be improved.

The “Buffet” theme taps into the variable of a high variety of hotel meals in the service quality dimension of food quality and reliability (Taylan Dortyol *et al.*, 2014). We found that the reviews were focused on quality, price and variety of the menu spread. Hence, the hotel’s status of being Muslim-friendly did not come into play as a factor. Importantly, the fact that dining took place in a luxury hotel, the desire for quality and appropriate pricing was a discerning remark, as was the call for variety of dishes.

The “Buffet” theme did not emerge in the study for general Muslim-friendly hotels (Arasli *et al.*, 2023). However, the ability of a luxury or first-class hotel to provide a sumptuous buffet breakfast was an important service quality component expected by guests as detected by Wilkins *et al.* (2007).

4.9 Location

The “Location” theme contained the following concepts: “distance” (23%), “location” (13%), “beautiful” (8%), “lovely” (7%) and “excellent” (7%). Comments related to this theme included:

It is very close to the Souq Waqif, the corniche, multiple museums and the airport.

Close to a lot of shops and close to the infamous Souq Waqif market.

You have easy access to the metro, the Corniche, Souq Waqif, and museums.

At walking distance from the Corniche and Souq Waqif.

The “Location” theme conceptually captures the service quality dimensions of interaction with culture and entertainment opportunities (Taylan Dortyol *et al.*, 2014). This theme is similar to the “Location” theme in the study of general Muslim-friendly hotels (Arasli *et al.*, 2023) and refers to the proximity of the hotel and its convenient location to nearby attractions

and transportation routes. Hotel location is one of the key factors in guest decision-making (Noor, 2025), and luxury hotels both in urban and remote settings are no different when establishing their business based on convenience, transport connectivity to attractions and safety as some of the many investment considerations.

Luxury hotels located closer to the city center and with convenience are higher in value and attractiveness to guests (Valentin and O'Neill, 2019; Yasser, Mahrous and Adel, 2025). However, this is the only theme that was not found significant in the study by Wilkins *et al.* (2007) on the service quality of luxury and first-class hotels.

4.10 Manager

The theme "Manager" included the concepts of "front" (23%), "everything" (13%), "team" (9%), "special" (7%) and "during" (6%). Guests left the following comments:

The presence of the manager at Shaza Hotel adds a reassuring touch of leadership. Emphasizing the manager's commitment to guest satisfaction, effective management, and creating a welcoming atmosphere could enhance the hotel's reputation.

The restaurant manager looked after us very well.

One guest's comment emphasized the importance of the manager in resolving customer issues:

I asked to speak to the manager. She said he wasn't there, and she couldn't bother him.

The "Manager" theme taps into the service quality dimension of personal interaction as it emphasizes the importance of managers inspiring confidence and being helpful (Dabholkar *et al.*, 1996). This theme did not clearly emerge in the study for general Muslim-friendly hotels (Arasli *et al.*, 2023). However, being afforded VIP treatment and attention, being recognized and the hotel staff remembering the guest's requirements are indeed key expectations for luxury and first-class hotels (Wilkins *et al.*, 2007; Battour and Ismail, 2016).

The quote on not immediately attending to a customer request to speak to a manager or attempting to resolve a matter raised by the guest is unusual in a high-end hotel, let alone a luxury halal recognized hotel. The concept of halal hotel and hospitality is inclusive of the common courtesies accorded to all guests, with the only difference being accommodating to a religio-belief practice (Battour and Ismail, 2016).

4.11 Coffee

The final theme was "Coffee" was associated with the concepts of "bathroom" (10%), "area" (8%), "quality" (7%), "delicious" (6%) and "bed" (6%). Comments related to various aspects of this theme included the following:

The coffee break was a refreshing pause, with a wide array of options that catered to everyone's preferences.

On the bright side, I thoroughly enjoyed the cappuccino coffee which was indeed good and energizing.

The room contained amenities to make tea and coffee.

The literature suggests that "Coffee" may be linked to the service quality dimension of core hotel benefits, which does not fit entirely in the traditional SERVQUAL model (Ramsaran-Fowdar, 2007). The "Coffee" theme did not clearly emerge in the study for general Muslim-friendly hotels (Arasli *et al.*, 2023). Room amenities such as beverages and quality beddings, toiletries are all part of the consumptionscape and aesthetics that luxury hotels curate, with aesthetics often given more weight in luxury service environments (Chen, 2026).

With halal themes, the spiritual element of prayer directions and space for prayer is usually a characteristic and highly appreciated (Fatihaddin, 2021; Singgalen, 2024). However, there is a tangential similarity in the need and availability for exquisite beverages between the coffee expectations of halal luxury hotel guests and the expectations of guests at luxury and first-class hotels for drinks from a range of bars.

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1 Discussion

The objective of this study was to better understand the key attributes of halal luxury hotel service quality from the guests' perspectives. Through an analysis of online customer reviews of luxury hotels catering primarily to Muslim travelers' needs, a unique set of nine key service quality themes emerged: staff, hotel, experience, room, food, buffet, location, manager and coffee. These nine themes are able to conceptually capture the definition of luxury services as proposed by Wirtz *et al.* (2020), with a focus on the needs of luxury halal markets (Zainol *et al.*, 2024).

A possible concern that needs to be addressed is the degree of positivity bias in the data that was used to derive the service quality themes. Indeed, TripAdvisor's report of reviews being generally positive supports the standing of Shaza Hotels as a leading halal luxury hotel. However, our thematic analysis does not preclude negative comments, and Leximancer's machine learning analysis considered all user comments that could be extracted from TripAdvisor. Accordingly, the themes that emerged from our study are irrespective of the degree to which the reviews were positive or negative, as recurring concepts from the reviews (whether positive or negative) would be organized into key themes. To emphasize, the salience of positive reviews as illustrative comments from the Leximancer analysis merely emphasizes the relatively strong positive perceptions that customers have of Shaza Hotels. By contrast, using the same methodology as our study, Noor *et al.* (2025) found 11 themes for the service quality of halal mobile apps. However, several of their themes contained illustrative negative comments that were salient from their Leximancer analysis. This reflects the valence of the service quality perception but does not discount the presence of the service quality attribute as being significant.

Table 2 provides a summary of these key themes found in our study and how they compare against the two seminal studies of the service quality of Muslim-friendly hotels by Arasli *et al.* (2023) and of luxury and first-class hotels by Wilkins *et al.* (2007). For the comparison with Muslim-friendly hotel service quality themes, Table 2 also indicates if any similar themes detected had moved up or down in their order of significance.

A few themes in our analysis appear to be linked more explicitly to the halal context. The "Room" theme specifically mentions the requirements of prayer facilities. It is also reasonable to suggest that the presence of the "Food" and "Buffet" themes implies the weightage and need for halal-certified food in luxury hotels. Prayer facilities and halal food are indeed key faith-based services for Muslim travelers (CrescentRating and Mastercard, 2024), to which our study confirms as being significant for the context of halal luxury hotels.

Other themes uncovered in our analysis can be conceptually linked to the halal context. For instance, the significance of the "Staff" and "Manager" themes implies that hotel personnel need to be aware of the unique cultural needs of Muslim travelers that can affect interaction quality. "Experience" and "Location" also emphasize the importance of designing unique experiences that appeal to Muslim travelers.

We augmented our analysis of halal-specific terms by running a further query on Leximancer to determine how frequently such terms appear when linked to the identified themes. Table 3 provides a summary of our results.

Table 2. Comparison of halal luxury service quality themes against seminal studies

Halal luxury hotel service quality (our study) Theme	Muslim-friendly hotel service quality (Arasli et al., 2023) Theme	Comments	Luxury and first-class hotel service quality (Wilkins et al., 2007) Theme	Comments
1. Staff	✓ Staff (↑)	Staff was ranked #2 in their study	✓ Service experience	Associated with the “quality staff” elements of the service experience
2. Hotel	✓ Hotel (↓)	Hotel was ranked #1 in their study	✓ Physical product	Associated with the “stylish comfort” elements of the hotel
3. Experience	≈ Facilities (↑)	Facilities captured some experience aspects and was ranked seventh in their study	≈ Physical product: added extras	Guest experiences from added services were expressed more pronouncedly in the context of halal luxury hotels
4. Room	✓ Room (=)	Room was ranked #4 in their study	✓ Physical product	Associated with the “room quality” elements of the hotel
5. Food	≈ Cleanliness (↑) ✓ Food (↓)	Cleanliness featured in our room theme Food was ranked #3 in their study	✓ Quality food and beverage	Associated with “exquisite food presentation” and “provision of fine dining restaurant”
6. Buffet	✗	Undetected in their study	✓ Quality food and beverage	Associated with the “provision of a sumptuous buffet breakfast” item
7. Location 8. Manager	✓ Location (↓) ✗	Location was ranked #5 in their study Undetected in their study	✗ ≈ Service experience	Undetected in their study Associated with the “personalization” elements, including VIP treatment and attention, being recognized and remembering guest requirements
9. Coffee	✗	Undetected in their study	≈ Quality food and beverage	There is a tangential association between the coffee expectations of halal luxury hotel guests and the expectation of guests at luxury and first-class hotels for the provision of a range of bars for drinks
–	Pool, Wi-Fi	Pool and Wi-fi attributes were not significant in our study	Service experience: speedy service	Speedy service as an attribute was not significant in our study
Source(s): Created by the authors				

Table 3. Frequencies of halal-specific terms linked to themes

Term	Frequency relationship to theme								Total linkage frequency
	Staff	Hotel	Experience	Room	Food	Buffet	Location	Manager	
Prayer		1		2	3		2		8
Ramadan	1			1	1				3
Alcohol-free	1	1							2

Source(s): Created by the authors

Table 3 further supports our finding that Muslim guests expect halal luxury hotels to particularly cater to their prayer and halal dietary requirements and shows that such care should be communicated to guests via the physical atmosphere of the hotel premises as well as the social environment created by the hotel staff. Our keyword query also highlights the importance of the Ramadan period as an important experiential event and opportunity to cater to the faith-based needs of Muslim guests in halal luxury hotels. However, as the overall salient quotes and terms as captured by Leximancer reflecting halal elements were limited, further research is required to better assess the degree to which the halal context is important and can be fleshed out from these service elements.

As for the composition of all nine themes, our findings in Table 2 illustrate that there are indeed differences in the expectations of consumers in the context of halal luxury hotels as compared to Muslim-friendly hotels and luxury hotels respectively. While the significant thematic overlaps signify the shared service quality attributes that are valued by consumers of the hotel category as a whole, the absence of more explicit halal factors from our analysis also suggests that the luxury context can result in Muslim consumers prioritizing other service expectations as opposed to baseline faith-based needs. This is in tandem with the service quality literature, which has proposed that different service classifications may give rise to consumers placing different levels of importance on specific service quality dimensions (Chowdhary and Prakash, 2007), although the nature of these generalizations concerning different service types remains inconclusive (Sachdev and Verma, 2004).

Further, our study highlights the importance of human and experience-related attributes in evaluating the service quality of halal luxury hotels. The nine themes identified in our research did not fully align with those outlined in the extant literature on Muslim-friendly hotels and luxury or first-class hotels. In comparison to the findings of Arasli *et al.* (2023) on Muslim-friendly hotel service quality, our study did not identify pool and Wi-Fi as relevant key attributes. Similarly, speedy service, emphasized by Wilkins *et al.* (2007) in the context of luxury and first-class hotels, was not significant in our analysis. For Wi-Fi, this may be because having the ability to connect to the internet using Wi-Fi is considered a fundamental expectation of a typical hotel and therefore can be regarded as basic facilities rather than a distinct expectation of a luxury hotel. Similarly, a pool is an integral feature of a traditional hotel and is not a remarkable expectation of a halal luxury hotel. Furthermore, speedy service was not a significant theme in our study, suggesting that this factor is not a priority for customers of halal luxury hotels. Instead, guests of halal luxury hotels place greater emphasis on careful staff interaction, hospitality and the overall care and experience of their stay and perceive these as elements that define luxury as opposed to hasty service.

5.2 Theoretical contributions

This study makes several key contributions to the literature. First, this is one of the first empirical studies to explore service quality in the context of halal luxury hotels. While

studies by [Arasli et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Wilkins et al. \(2007\)](#) provide grounds for a conceptual synthesis of the concept of halal luxury hotel service quality, our study builds upon their research and uses real-world consumer data to derive a more accurate nexus between Muslim-friendly hotels and luxury hotels. Accordingly, our findings allowed for a comparison between our themes and those associated with [Arasli et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Wilkins et al. \(2007\)](#) to ascertain the extent to which they overlapped. This provides the research field with a more confident postulation of halal luxury service quality attributes, which future scale development studies can use to further identify and validate dimensions related to halal luxury hotel service quality.

Our research shows that insights from prior seminal studies on service quality for generic halal hotels and luxury hotels are insufficient to answer the question of what the key service quality attributes are that are valued by halal luxury hotel guests. As shown earlier in [Table 2](#), compared to the nine key themes of service quality in halal hotels by [Arasli et al. \(2023\)](#), our results suggest that halal luxury hotels only directly contain six of their themes, with the addition of “Buffet,” “Manager” and “Coffee.” Separately, [Table 2](#) illustrates that while service expectations of halal luxury hotels do tap into the central themes of “physical product,” “service experience” and “quality food and beverage” associated with luxury and first-class hotels ([Wilkins et al., 2007](#)), guests of halal luxury hotels may not necessarily seek the variable of speedy service and instead prioritize the theme of location.

These differences in the combination of themes associated with halal luxury hotel service quality uncovered from our study are critical; future scale development studies on halal luxury hotel service quality need to tap into accurate perceptions of the attributes that matter to guests to formulate their item measures and develop their constructs, for which our study provides a reliable foundation. This is similar to scale development studies in the service quality literature in which qualitative customer insights are fertile and useful for the identification of possible service quality dimensions ([Noor et al., 2021](#)), which can then be validated in subsequent empirical studies ([Noor et al., 2022](#)). An analysis of our postulations on the possible service quality dimensions that our themes may be conceptually linked to (i.e. personal interaction quality, tangibles, outcome quality, appearance and design benefits, food quality and reliability, interaction with culture and entertainment opportunities, core hotel benefits) also motivates a future scale development study as our suggested set of dimensions does not appear in extant scales related to halal hospitality ([Noor, 2025](#)). Further, our study also suggests a nomological framework that proposes a relationship linking halal luxury hotel service quality to customer gratitude and referrals.

Second, our research extends the service quality model theory, in that consumers’ expectations of service quality can change based on the service environment ([Noor, 2025](#)) by analyzing this phenomenon in the previously unexplored context of halal luxury hotels. Our composition of halal luxury hotel service quality themes did not completely match the service evaluations valued by consumers of Muslim-friendly hotels ([Arasli et al., 2023](#)) or luxury hotels ([Wilkins et al., 2007](#)), both in terms of the order of importance of the attributes or the presence of all themes. Our results demonstrate overlaps in service quality expectations, as well as an altogether unique set of nine service quality themes for halal luxury hotels. This indicates the presence of a shared service environment that can be valued by both halal markets and luxury travelers, respectively, but which can also be optimized specifically for halal luxury hotel guests with the activation of all nine service quality themes. We further posit how luxury as a service type can affect the degree to which travelers place weight on more halal-specific service expectations, contributing to the ongoing discussion on generalizations in service quality dimensions based on different service types ([Chowdhary and Prakash, 2007](#); [Sachdev and Verma, 2004](#)).

Third, our study highlights the value of analyzing user-generated content in hospitality research as an alternative to traditional methods such as pen-and-paper surveys and researcher-led interviews. While many studies on customer satisfaction have relied heavily on survey-based approaches, often criticized in customer experience research (Nilashi *et al.*, 2021), our research uses Leximancer, a sophisticated text-mining tool, to identify key themes from text-based online reviews. Leximancer has proven highly effective for analyzing text-based reviews, particularly in the domains of hospitality and e-commerce. By using Leximancer, this study analyzed a large data set of guest reviews from the TripAdvisor platform, uncovering predominant themes and concepts in customer perceptions with minimal manual intervention. Our study offers theoretical clarifications on how user-generated content in the form of consumer feedback on services can be used as an approximation for service quality.

Finally, our study suggests a nomological link between halal luxury hotel service quality, gratitude and referral. Notably, while extant service quality models broadly identify customer satisfaction and loyalty as the principal consequences of service quality (Cronin *et al.*, 2000; Noor *et al.*, 2022), the recent systematic review of halal service quality by Noor (2025) consolidates the outcomes of halal service quality around constructs such as satisfaction, loyalty and behavioral intentions but does not explicitly position *shukr* (gratitude) as a distinct theoretical outcome of halal service quality. Our findings show that the emergence of gratitude alongside referral expands the conceptual framework by highlighting a faith-led emotional outcome that intensifies when halal principles meet luxury consumption. Theoretically, this is consistent with the Islamic marketing literature, which positions *shukr* as a religiously sanctioned disposition rather than a background emotion. Muslim consumers are encouraged to treat blessings (*ni'mah*) as divine in nature and to manifest gratitude through internal acknowledgment and outward expression (Mathras *et al.*, 2016; Noor, 2022). In the luxury hotel context, where service encounters are intentionally heightened and multi-sensory (Ryu *et al.*, 2022; Wilkins *et al.*, 2007), such encounters may function as direct cues that trigger this religiously framed gratitude response among Muslim guests more strongly than equivalent encounters in non-luxury settings. This complements the findings of Koburay (2022) and Rehman *et al.* (2022), which suggest that religiosity actively shapes how Muslim consumers derive meaning from luxury consumption and aligns with Zainol *et al.* (2024) on the self-congruity between halal and luxury values. Importantly, the link between *shukr* and referral in our findings suggests that gratitude in this context acts as a catalyst. The religious obligation to convey blessings outward (Noor, 2022) translates into elevated word-of-mouth and recommendation behaviors, echoing the experience-driven referral mechanisms identified by Patwary *et al.* (2025). This positions *shukr* as a potential mediating construct through which halal luxury hotel service quality converts into referral intentions among Muslim consumers and offers a theoretically grounded outcome that future quantitative work can empirically test and integrate into halal service quality frameworks.

5.3 Managerial implications

Given the continued growth of the halal luxury hotel industry, the insights of this study offer important implications for service managers and other key stakeholders.

First, our findings illustrate how designing halal luxury hotels can also translate to creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for Muslim travelers. Hotels with staff who are culturally trained and that can offer highly personalized service, rooms with a meticulous attention to detail in facilitating prayers, food that is not only halal but sumptuous in its offering and a location with proximity to rich heritage experiences not only bode well in creating luxurious travel experiences, but also acknowledge the Muslim traveler's identity

and provide travel experiences that respect the faith-based needs. These contribute to the positive standing of the luxury brand in the eyes of Muslim travelers and support Muslim travelers' sense of dignity and belonging in global travel contexts.

Second, our findings highlight the importance of having robust customer relationship management (CRM) systems in halal luxury hotels. Such CRM systems can help to further encourage and collect customer reviews, monitor service performances and identify key service areas for better real-time and immediate service recovery to maintain luxury hotel standards. Specific to halal luxury hotels, these premium CRM systems should not only monitor multiple customer touchpoints during the pre-, during and post-service phases but also be able to analyze data and sentiments from multiple languages to identify and better care for their guests based on their cultural nuances and needs. The investment in advanced CRM systems is critical to avoid a one-size-fits-all treatment that disregards the cultural diversity of the global halal luxury travel market.

A halal luxury hotel can indeed be seen as a *consumptionscape* – a space where consumption practices are shaped by cultural, religious and social meanings. In this case, the hotel becomes more than just a place to stay; it is a curated environment where Muslim travelers can consume services and experiences aligned with Islamic principles (e.g. halal-certified food, prayer facilities, alcohol-free environments, gender-sensitive amenities). In other words, halal luxury hotels are not just about meeting religious obligations; they are also about branding, differentiation and tapping into the growing Muslim travel market. Whether the hotel is a conventional or Muslim-friendly hotel, especially in a non-Muslim country, the branding and positioning of facilities and convenience matters (Alserhan *et al.*, 2023). By framing it as a commodified practice, we highlight how religious and cultural values are translated into marketable services. The hotel industry packages these practices into tangible offerings – like halal menus, Qur'an in rooms, or qibla direction indicators – turning them into commodities that appeal to a particular group of people seeking faith-compatible travel experiences.

Finally, the overlaps between our themes and the service quality themes from luxury hotels suggest a path for other luxury hotels to become Muslim-friendly. Offering halal food and prayer amenities are key faith-based services for Muslim travelers (CrescentRating and Mastercard, 2024), and this remains true in luxury environments. Implementing these in luxury hotels requires care, additional support and cooperation from halal hospitality experts, advisory bodies, as well as brand experts who are able to provide consultation on how best to position Muslim-friendly elements with the luxury brand in the contexts of the cultural markets and regions the brand serves. Beyond proper halal food certification and prayer facilities, luxury hoteliers need to ensure that rich cultural heritage sites are also accessible and offered to Muslim travelers. This is to further elevate the hedonic experiences that guests expect as part of their stay and experience with halal luxury hotels.

5.4 Limitations and future research

There are several limitations to this study, which represents opportunities for future research. First, this study analyzed 369 online reviews of a halal luxury hotel and was limited to a chain of three Shaza Hotel locations, which restricts the generalizability of the results. Brand-specific experiences of a categorical leader, while significant, may not fully define customer expectations of all halal luxury hotels. This is because other halal luxury hotel brands may have developed other distinct offerings that can also influence customer perceptions of the category. Thus, in line with Han *et al.* (2026) to improve generalizability, future research could expand the scope by including other diverse halal luxury hotel chains, encompassing different locations and countries for broader insights and facilitating

comparisons across different Muslim-friendly luxury hotels. By identifying the factors that influence customer engagement, both positively and negatively, practitioners can implement targeted initiatives to sustain brand value and foster trust. This includes exploring consumer perceptions of halal luxury hotels in non-Muslim regions or countries.

The temporal relevance of our data also limits the breadth of our findings. Although reviews were collected up to July 2024 due to the research design process as this was the period in which this study was conducted, we acknowledge that changes in the business environment, including emerging artificial intelligence technologies that can influence customer experiences and emotions (Lytle and Gopinath, 2026), may affect how luxury is positioned in the halal tourism industry. Accordingly, we encourage continued research on customer sentiments and expectations amid these new developments.

This study focused solely on TripAdvisor as the source of user-generated content. Future research could expand by analyzing data from other online platforms, such as Expedia, Trivago, Agoda and Booking.com, to evaluate the consistency and compatibility of findings across different platforms. Additionally, this study only considered English reviews from TripAdvisor. Future research could incorporate reviews in other languages and how different Muslim regions (Thanasi-Boçe and Kulakli, 2023) and cultures (Liao *et al.*, 2024) can affect service expectations. As mentioned in our study, our choice of Shaza Hotels is also significant as Shaza positions halal luxury hotels mainly for Muslim travelers while also acknowledging non-Muslim travelers as constituting a secondary market (CrescentRating, 2018). This is in alignment with the literature, which acknowledges how halal markets, despite being mainly designed for the needs of Muslim consumers, can also be more universal and inclusive in attracting non-Muslim consumers as secondary markets (Alserhan, 2010; Battour *et al.*, 2018; Wilson and Liu, 2010). Thus, although our study captures halal luxury service quality perceptions of halal markets, and Muslim travelers should constitute a large proportion of the reviews as targeted by Shaza hotels as its primary market, TripAdvisor may also attract the comments of non-Muslim travelers to halal luxury hotels. Thus, the inclusion of other online platforms and non-English language reviews in future studies can help to better isolate halal luxury service quality themes that matter to Muslim travelers. Such a comparison study can also help to determine if more explicit Muslim-friendly services such as prayer facilities, halal food certification or gender-segregated amenities are indeed less salient service quality themes for Muslim guests in halal luxury hotels.

Another area for further exploration involves examining whether the main themes and expectations of hotel experience vary according to customer profiles, such as gender, nationality, market segments (e.g. couples or families), type of travelers (e.g. business vs leisure) and travel intentions, including repeat visits (Patwary *et al.*, 2025). Another future line of enquiry is to analyze only negative customer comments, which can lead to specific insights into dissatisfaction and service failures. Gaining insight into the unique preferences and expectations of various segments would enable hotels to tailor their services to different groups of customers. To gain these rich insights, different qualitative or mixed methods approaches could be used. Addressing these limitations and exploring these avenues in future studies will contribute to the development of modern marketing strategies for halal luxury hoteliers.

Finally, we encourage future empirical studies to organize and transform the themes uncovered in our study into service quality dimensions by adapting or creating suitable measure items that represent halal luxury hotel service quality. Such studies will also help to clarify thematic overlaps and our postulations of the possible dimensions that could be captured by our themes and illuminate our understanding of the relative importance of each dimension in creating the extraordinary and exclusive halal hedonic experience. As the main aim of our study was to explore key service quality perceptions in the context of halal luxury

hotels, to which the consequences of gratitude (*shukr*) and referral intentions were also uncovered, the creation of suitable halal luxury hotel service quality constructs from our themes can help validate their theoretical links to these suggested outcomes.

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Corresponding author

Nurhafizh Noor can be contacted at: nurhafizh.noor@jcu.edu.au