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Original Article

Developing Halal Tourism in Singapore and Policy Implications for Vietnam

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Abstract - This study examines Halal tourism in the context of post-pandemic changes in travel demand and argues that destination competitiveness increasingly depends on service standardization and the credibility of trust-building mechanisms. Using Singapore as a case study, the analysis examines how certification governance, compliance enforcement, service provision across key travel touchpoints, a+

nd public–private coordination shape Muslim-friendly destination competitiveness. A mechanism-oriented case study design is combined with policy content analysis and structured policy benchmarking based on secondary sources (GMTI, Relevant Academic Literature, MUIS/MCCY documents, and Vietnam's Emerging Policy–Standards Framework). The findings suggest that Singapore's advantage lies in turning Halal compliance into a more consistent and reliable travel experience. Based on these findings, the study suggests a destination-clustered policy approach for Vietnam aimed at expanding Muslim visitor markets while limiting reputational risk.

Keywords - Halal tourism, Muslim-friendly tourism, Destination governance, Singapore, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

The recovery of international tourism in the post-pandemic period has not simply resulted in a rebound in visitor numbers; it has also accelerated a deeper restructuring of travel demand through more refined market segmentation. Within this evolving landscape, Halal tourism has increasingly emerged as a strategic growth segment.

What distinguishes this segment is its normative and compliance-sensitive character: Muslim travelers' experiences are shaped by system-level requirements, including Halal food provision, prayer facilities, alignment with religious and cultural norms, safety, and inclusivity. As a result, destination competitiveness depends not only on service availability but also on the capacity to govern standards and generate trust [1].

The Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) 2025 reports that international Muslim travelers reached 176 million in 2024 and are projected to continue growing toward 2030, while also identifying major trends such as the digitalization of Halal travel journeys and rising expectations for safe and inclusive travel environments [1]. These developments suggest that Halal tourism is no longer competitive simply because a destination offers a few supporting services. Rather, it increasingly depends on destinations' ability to build a coherent ecosystem based on: (i) supply-side standardization, (ii) credible verification and compliance assurance, and (iii) effective communication of trust signals that reduce uncertainty for travelers. Once institutionalized, Halal tourism can serve

not only as a market segment but also as a channel for building affinity and strengthening national reputation, thereby contributing to a destination's soft power.

Within this broader context, Singapore offers an especially instructive case. GMTI 2025 continues to rank Singapore as the leading destination among non-OIC countries, highlighting its strengths in inclusivity and cultural sensitivity in experience design [1]. From a policy perspective, Singapore is notable because, despite being a multicultural state with a Muslim minority, it has developed a relatively comprehensive Halal ecosystem. This ecosystem is anchored most visibly in the centralized certification role of the Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS), alongside a high level of service readiness across food provision, visitor amenities, and public information. MUIS also maintains directories and search tools for Halal-certified establishments, thereby generating credible signals for both travelers and service providers [2, 3].

In Vietnam, the Government has issued the national scheme 'Enhancing international cooperation to build and develop Vietnam's Halal industry toward 2030' under Decision No. 10/QĐ-TTg dated 14 February 2023, marking a shift from fragmented initiatives toward a more policy-framed approach [4]. In 2024, Vietnam further strengthened its certification governance infrastructure through the establishment of the Vietnam Halal Certification Authority (HALCERT) under QUACERT, with the aim of consolidating certification functions and improving capacity for integration into international Halal markets [5, 6]. In the tourism domain, the issuance of TCVN 14230:2024, Muslim-friendly Tourism Services-Requirements, also represents an initial step toward standardizing service conditions in line with emerging market expectations.

1.1. Research Gap and Problem Statement

Despite these policy developments, a major gap in Vietnam lies in implementation at the ecosystem level: specifically, how standardization instruments can be translated into consistent destination-level experiences, and how cross-sectoral coordination among tourism, trade, standards, quality infrastructure, and external affairs can be operationalized so that Halal readiness becomes a tangible competitive capability rather than a merely declaratory ambition.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research problem at the intersection of International Relations and destination governance: how has Singapore institutionalized and operationalized Halal tourism, and what policy lessons can Vietnam draw from this experience?

1.2. Objectives and Contribution

This study pursues two objectives. First, it analyzes Singapore's Halal/Muslim-friendly tourism model in order to clarify the operational logic of a non-OIC destination with a high level of readiness. Second, it benchmarks this model against Vietnam's current context in order to derive policy implications for Halal tourism development.

In academic terms, the study contributes by conceptualizing Halal tourism as a salient case of norm-governance in destination competition, in which 'Halal trust' functions as an intervening variable linking service governance capacity with national image and soft power. In practical terms, the study proposes a set of feasible policy implications for Vietnam.

The study is structured as follows. It first reviews the literature, theoretical foundations, and methodology. It then analyzes the Singapore case through its institutional and service components, before drawing out policy implications for Vietnam. The study concludes with ethical considerations, limitations, and directions for future research.

2. Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, and Methods

2.1. Literature Review

International scholarship uses multiple labels-Halal tourism, Islamic tourism, Sharia tourism, and Muslim-friendly tourism-but generally converges on a shared principle: the design of tourism products and services that are compatible with Islamic religious and cultural norms while also meeting broader expectations of destination service quality. Battour and Ismail (2016) emphasize the systemic nature of Halal tourism by arguing that 'Halalness' is not limited to food attributes but extends to a broader bundle of conditions shaping multiple components of the tourism experience, including accommodation, leisure, conduct, privacy, and the consumption environment [7]. In this vein, Muslim-friendly tourism is commonly understood as an approach that foregrounds service readiness and the capacity to respond to Muslim travelers' specific needs in multicultural settings, particularly in non-OIC destinations [8].

A major strand of research focuses on Halal food, certification governance, and the implications of both for tourism markets. Henderson (2016), in a comparison of Malaysia and Singapore, argues that Halal certification functions as a hybrid governance mechanism that is simultaneously religious and market-based, generating trust signals for consumers and travelers while imposing requirements of standardization, monitoring, and accountability on service providers [9, 10]. A key policy-relevant insight follows from this literature: in non-OIC destinations such as Singapore, Halal competitiveness is not rooted in a Muslim-majority demographic structure but in the institutional capacity to formalize trust through rules, procedures, traceability, and verifiability. This logic underpins the present study's approach, which treats 'Halal trust' as a core intervening variable linking service governance capacity to destination attractiveness. Recent review and bibliometric studies also indicate the rapid expansion of Halal and Islamic tourism scholarship, with major clusters focusing on Muslim travelers' motivations and behavior, Muslim-friendly product and service development, and destination governance, standardization, and marketing [11]. Recent scholarship increasingly treats Southeast Asia as a central site for Halal tourism research, with Indonesia and Malaysia featuring prominently in both publication output and case-based analysis. Recent empirical studies in the region have moved beyond definitional debates and now focus more directly on tourist experience, behavioral intention, destination image, and service readiness. For example, evidence from Indonesia shows that halal tourist experience is multidimensional and that recreational experience may shape satisfaction and revisit intention even more strongly than narrowly defined halal service attributes. Related work has also shifted attention toward readiness constraints in non-Muslim or mixed settings, including the knowledge gap of frontline actors and the difficulty of translating formal standards into everyday service practice. This line of research is particularly relevant for emerging destinations because it shows that policy ambition does not automatically translate into operational readiness.

Despite the growth of international scholarship on definitions, traveler behavior, and implementation challenges, several gaps remain. First, limited work directly connects Halal tourism to soft power and cultural diplomacy frameworks. Second, relatively few studies on non-OIC destinations unpack institutionalized trust as a foundation of competitiveness. Third, the literature still offers only limited guidance on how international experience can be translated into conditional and implementable policy lessons for emerging Halal-building contexts such as Vietnam. The present study addresses these gaps through a case analysis of Singapore and a policy-oriented benchmarking exercise against Vietnam's recent standardization steps, including TCVN 14230:2024.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Halal tourism in this study is examined through four intersecting theoretical perspectives:

First, soft power is understood as the capacity to achieve outcomes through attraction rather than coercion or payment. In tourism, such an attraction is produced through lived experience, including service quality, safety, inclusivity, and respect for religious and cultural differences.

Second, within cultural and public diplomacy, tourism functions as a channel of cross-border social interaction that shapes foreign publics' perceptions of a state [13, 14]. In the case of Halal tourism, this interaction is explicitly normative because it is tied to religious identity, everyday practice, and perceptions of respect.

Third, nation branding and competitive identity highlight how destination image and the credibility of service governance affect travel choice and loyalty, thereby consolidating a nation's reputational assets [10, 15]. In Halal tourism, these reputational assets depend heavily on the ability to deliver what may be described as verifiable trust.

Fourth, policy transfer theory is also useful because it helps explain how policy lessons are adapted across contexts rather than reproduced mechanically. In this perspective, the central question is not whether Vietnam can replicate Singapore, but which elements of Singapore's Halal governance model are transferable, by whom, under what institutional conditions, and with what likely constraints.

Policy transfer theory is particularly useful here because it directs attention to barriers to transfer, including differences in certification capacity, inter-agency coordination, market maturity, workforce readiness, and reputational risk management.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest an analytical framework in which Halal trust functions as an intervening variable linking certification governance and enforcement capacity, Muslim-friendly service coverage across the travel chain, and information-signaling mechanisms to outcomes in destination competitiveness, reputational assets, and the conditional transferability of policy lessons.

2.3. Methodology

This study adopts a mechanism-oriented case study design, selecting Singapore as a strategically relevant case of a non-OIC yet highly ranked Muslim-friendly destination. The case study is combined with policy content analysis and structured policy benchmarking in order to identify causal mechanisms, institutional arrangements, and areas of potential policy adaptation.

The analysis relies primarily on secondary data and document analysis across four source groups: GMTI 2025 reports and related materials; key scholarly studies on Halal certification and Muslim-friendly tourism; recent review and empirical studies on Halal tourism; and Vietnam's policy and standards documents. This source base suits the study's purpose because the analysis focuses on governance design, standards architecture, and policy coordination rather than on directly measuring tourist satisfaction or firm-level behavior. Given that the central research problem concerns how Halal tourism is institutionalized and operationalized at the policy and destination-governance levels, official reports, regulatory documents, standards texts, and prior academic studies provide a valid evidentiary base for tracing how trust is formalized, signaled, and maintained.

At the same time, the study does not claim that secondary materials alone are sufficient to capture all experiential and market-level dimensions of Halal tourism, particularly in the Vietnamese context, where implementation remains uneven, and data availability is still limited. Primary data, including interviews with certification bodies, tourism operators, and Muslim travelers, would therefore be most valuable as a subsequent stage of empirical validation rather than as a prerequisite for the present mechanism-based analysis.

The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, documents are collected and screened against relevance criteria related to certification and standardization, service infrastructure, and destination governance. Second, the material is coded according to the framework's main components: certification and enforcement, service infrastructure, information signaling, and ecosystem coordination. Third, policy implications for Vietnam are derived through benchmarking under a conditionality principle, whereby recommendations are assessed against

institutional capacity, implementation costs, and reputational risk. This procedure clarifies how documentary evidence is selected and interpreted, and how it is used to derive policy lessons that remain sensitive to context rather than being treated as universal prescriptions. This study is therefore best read as a policy case study based on documentary analysis and analytical interpretation. Its contribution lies in identifying institutional mechanisms and transferable lessons, while leaving traveler-level perception, business compliance behavior, and impact evaluation to subsequent primary-data research.

3. Halal Tourism Development in Singapore

3.1. Overview of Halal Tourism in Singapore

Within the global Halal tourism market, Singapore stands out as a notable non-Muslim-majority destination with a high degree of Muslim-friendly readiness. This position rests on governance capacity, service standardization, and a trust system that helps travelers make decisions when compliance cannot be verified directly. At the level of international positioning, Singapore's sustained leadership among non-OIC destinations in the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) 2025-and its consistently high ranking over time-suggests that its competitive advantage cannot be reduced to tourism endowments or branding alone; rather, it reflects the institutionalization of Halal travel experiences into service norms that are verifiable and reproducible at the system scale [16].

More importantly, Halal tourism in Singapore should not be understood as 'religious tourism' in a narrow sense. It is better seen as a form of Muslim-friendly tourism that facilitates access to faith-related needs (Halal food availability, prayer facilities, reliable information, and a sense of cultural safety) within a modern urban tourism ecosystem. Under this approach, the policy center of gravity is not the creation of a separate "Halal product line", but the mainstreaming of Halal conditions across ordinary travel chains, enabling Muslim visitors to consume destination experiences without trading off religious norms-an emphasis also reflected in COMCEC-commissioned analysis that highlights Singapore as a salient non-OIC case of appropriately designed services in major attractions and public spaces [20].

Analytically, Singapore's Muslim-friendly standing should not be interpreted as a direct outcome of "visible" indicators such as the number of Halal restaurants or the mere presence of prayer rooms. The underlying driver is the destination's capacity to institutionalize trust. In Halal tourism, many quality attributes are credence attributes at the moment of consumption: travelers cannot personally verify the full chain of sourcing, processing, storage, and segregation to ensure end-to-end compliance. Consequently, destination choice and service selection depend heavily on credible signals produced by governance arrangements-clear standards, consistent verification procedures, sufficiently strong monitoring, and transparent information that enables traceability. In other words, the competitive destination is not the one that "talks the most" about Halal, but the one that renders Halal a verifiable state, thereby reducing uncertainty, lowering compliance risk, and protecting reputation in the eyes of international Muslim travelers-particularly important for destinations outside Muslim-majority contexts.

These features indicate that the Singapore model works through four connected mechanisms: (i) standardization and certification to establish minimum compliance thresholds; (ii) enforcement and post-certification auditing to preserve the credibility of the label; (iii) credible signaling through directories/search tools/recognizable identifiers to reduce travelers' information-search costs; and (iv) ecosystem scaling so that Halal becomes a mainstream amenity rather than a siloed niche offering. A key implication is that these mechanisms cannot operate in isolation: without auditing, certification loses value; without signaling, compliance is not "visible" to users; and without ecosystem scaling, experiences become fragmented, causing even "compliant" destinations to be perceived as inconvenient.

3.2. Government Support and Coordination: Certification Governance as Compliance Assurance

Singapore's core policy foundation for Halal/Muslim-friendly tourism lies in the Halal certification regime coordinated by the Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS). MUIS functions both as a statutory religious authority and as a quality-assurance institution for the Halal sector, transforming "Halal" from a value claim into a condition that can be standardized and verified. Crucially, MUIS does not treat certification as a marketing tag; it operates as a tool for reducing market uncertainty. By disclosing certification processes, certification schemes, Halal Competency Assessment requirements, and providing a searchable system of certified establishments, MUIS generates credible signals that travelers and consumers can rely on-while reducing information frictions in a diverse service environment [3].

At the level of public governance, Singapore does not stop at "issuing certificates"; it designs enforcement and post-certification audit mechanisms to preserve the stringency of the standard. According to MCCY information, MUIS conducts at least one audit within a certificate's validity period and may conduct spot checks, particularly for establishments handling meat and meat products; providers with weaker compliance histories face more frequent monitoring [17]. This arrangement reinforces compliance across the system and directly affects destination competitiveness: in Halal tourism-where quality is difficult to verify-the value of certification depends on whether the market believes it is enforced, not merely granted. In this sense, post-certification control is the condition that keeps the Halal label effective as a credible signal, thereby protecting national reputation and sustaining the Muslim-friendly image over time.

Alongside certification–enforcement, Singapore also deploys "soft support" policies to upgrade tourism-sector supply capacity. TIP-iT (Training Industry Professionals in Tourism), implemented by the Singapore Tourism Board, exemplifies skills development and service professionalization support for tourism businesses [18]. While not a Halal-specific program, TIP-iT matters because culturally and religiously sensitive service provision ultimately materializes through occupational standards, service behaviors, and situational competence at service touchpoints, rather than through physical infrastructure alone. Under this logic, Muslim-friendly quality is treated as an industry capability that must be accumulated, maintained, and updated-reducing implementation slippages that can rapidly translate into reputational risk in a digital media environment.

From a policy and economic-diplomacy perspective, Singapore's coordination model indicates that stringent Halal certification does more than serve a visitor segment; it also sends a broader signal of governance capacity-multicultural coordination, service quality standardization, and norm-governance in a global service economy. This "governance signal" helps explain why Singapore's Halal readiness is often perceived as part of its national brand of efficiency, reliability, and high-quality service delivery.

3.3. Muslim-Friendly Infrastructure and Services: Touchpoint Coverage and Low-Friction Journeys

Singapore's competitiveness in Muslim-friendly tourism is not driven by a handful of "checkbox" services; it is reflected in two systemic components: (i) sufficiently high density of Halal options to enable convenience within urban space; and (ii) the extent to which faith-related amenities are integrated into mainstream tourism infrastructure, sustaining Muslim travelers' experiences across the travel chain. These components are complementary: service density enables flexible choice, while integration reduces operational friction as travelers balance itinerary demands with religious requirements.

First, regarding Halal food supply, Henderson notes that by 2013 Singapore had more than 2,600 Halal-certified premises (across multiple premise categories), supported by an online process combined with inspection and audit mechanisms; certified establishments are permitted to display the certification mark and are listed in Halal directories/yearbooks [9]. The policy significance is not merely "large numbers"; rather, this indicates service coverage sufficient for Halal to function as a mainstream urban amenity. When Halal options exist at high density,

Muslim travelers are not "pushed" into a limited set of zones or niche venues; instead, they can consume food as a natural part of the destination experience. From a product-development standpoint, this marks an important shift from Halal as a niche product to Halal as an amenity standard that supports destination competitiveness.

Second, regarding prayer facilities and religious amenities, Singapore adopts a touchpoint-coverage strategy, ensuring access across multiple nodes in the journey (gateway infrastructure, retail–leisure spaces, and major attractions). At the community-institution level, MUIS indicates that 69 mosques currently offer up to two Friday (Jumu'ah) prayer sessions (under normal Friday conditions, excluding public holidays), reflecting substantial religious-space provision within a multi-religious society [19]. At the destination level, COMCEC analysis highlights that many major attractions provide both Halal options and prayer facilities, indicating a strategy not of segregating Halal into a separate tourism track, but of embedding Halal into mainstream experience ecosystems [20]. Analytically, this integration prevents faith-related needs from becoming barriers to sightseeing and shopping; instead, they are treated as predictable operational conditions addressed through service design.

The broader implication is straightforward: if certification establishes baseline trust, destination competitiveness depends on whether that trust is translated into a seamless end-to-end experience. Singapore avoids the "fragmented readiness" trap-where services exist but are not interoperable: Halal restaurants without navigational information, accommodation without faith-related amenities, or amenities clustered so narrowly that travelers incur itinerary-adjustment costs. By contrast, through touchpoint coverage and integration into mainstream infrastructure, Singapore substantially reduces the costs of "self-organizing" a Halal-compliant journey: travelers change plans less, face lower decision errors, and experience less exclusion. This is precisely where compliance converts into attractiveness (compliance → attractiveness): the lower the friction across the journey, the more likely the destination is to be positively evaluated, to generate affinity, and to be recommended.

3.4. Training and Awareness: Institutionalizing Service Capability as an Occupational Standard

A common weakness in Halal tourism development is the tendency to reduce Halal to minimal physical conditions or technical standards, whereas Muslim travelers' experiences also depend strongly on cultural compatibility and a sense of "assurance" in service interactions. Singapore addresses this by institutionalizing Halal across two complementary layers: a compliance layer anchored in certification procedures, and a service-capability layer upgraded through training, occupational standards, and sectoral capability-building mechanisms.

At the first layer, MUIS requirements, such as Halal Competency Assessment, indicate that Singapore treats Halal as capability governance, not merely an administrative procedure aimed at "getting the certificate". This design is crucial: when capability is embedded into compliance conditions, Halal standards become not only an end state but a sustainable operational process, reducing implementation slippages. At the second layer, the tourism sector is mobilized to translate compliance into experience: STB's TIP-iT enables businesses to invest systematically in skills upgrading and leadership capacity-factors that determine the ability to sustain consistent service quality and cultural sensitivity across touchpoints [18]. In short, Singapore does not assume certification automatically yields good experiences; it treats training as the bridge between being "technically compliant" and being "experientially credible" from the traveler's perspective.

From a destination-governance standpoint, the strength of this approach lies in addressing the human bottleneck in Halal readiness. Many Halal tourism policies prioritize infrastructure (restaurants, prayer rooms, signage) yet overlook that traveler experience is largely formed through interaction at human touchpoints-front desk staff, servers, tour guides, restaurant managers, and tour operators. Singapore links Halal readiness to sectoral capability upgrading because it recognizes that Muslim-friendly quality is not only about having amenities, but also about how staff provide guidance, respect privacy, explain service options, handle sensitive situations, and maintain experiential consistency throughout the journey.

In this context, service capability should be treated as an occupational standard rather than as an adhoc "soft skill". When occupational standards are institutionalized through training, assessment, and service protocols, destinations not only improve service quality but also substantially reduce reputational risk: a minor lapse in behavior or information can spread rapidly through word-of-mouth and social media, making reputational repair far more costly than prevention through training. Therefore, workforce investment in Singapore's model should be understood as a policy risk-governance tool that preserves competitive advantage in an increasingly contested Halal tourism market.

3.5. Outcomes and Implications: Beyond Numbers Toward Capability-based Advantage

Crescent Rating estimates that Singapore received 3.65 million Muslim travelers in 2019-roughly one-fifth of total international arrivals in that year [21]. While this figure should be treated as a market estimate rather than an official administrative count, it is still analytically significant because it suggests that the Muslim travel segment had already reached a scale large enough to matter for a high-value urban tourism economy. This significance becomes clearer when set against wider market trends: GMTI 2025 estimates 176 million international Muslim arrivals in 2024 and projects 245 million by 2030, with total Muslim travel spending expected to reach US$230 billion [1]. In Singapore's case, where international visitor arrivals reached 16.5 million in 2024, and tourism receipts were expected to reach the upper bound of STB's S$27.5–29.0 billion forecast, a segment of this size is economically material even without an official breakdown by religion [25]. Because official tourism statistics do not normally disaggregate arrivals by religion, the analysis avoids presenting the segment as an exact administrative total. Instead, the estimate is used more modestly-as an order-of-magnitude indicator showing that Muslim-friendly tourism in Singapore is already substantial enough to carry policy salience and to justify investments in certification, information systems, and service integration.

More important than the headline figure is the institutional arrangement Singapore has built to make Muslim-friendly tourism credible, visible, and reliable in practice. Singapore's advantage lies not in the mere availability of Muslim-friendly facilities, but in the way those facilities are embedded within a governance chain. Certification creates the initial trust signal; post-certification audits and unannounced inspections protect the credibility of that signal; competency requirements and service routines reduce implementation slippage; and consumer-facing search tools make compliance visible and usable in real time. In effect, the model does not simply add amenities-it lowers verification costs for travelers, coordination costs for firms, and reputational costs for the destination.

This is precisely why the Singapore model performs better than facility-checklist or promotion-led approaches that are still common in emerging destinations. In those approaches, Halal readiness is often treated as the addition of isolated elements-certified restaurant here, a prayer room there, or a short-term branding effort-without ensuring that standards are consistently enforced, information is easily searchable, and service quality is maintained across the travel chain. The likely result is fragmented readiness: compliance may exist in parts, but the journey still feels uncertain, inconvenient, or reputationally fragile. This reading is also supported by broader tourism research. Empirical research in Indonesia shows that Muslim tourist satisfaction and revisit intention depend on a holistic experience that combines halal attributes with recreation quality, rather than on isolated halal features alone. Related tourism research also indicates that trust in destination governance can significantly improve revisit intention and reduce perceived travel constraints. Read together, these findings help explain why Singapore's trust-based and touchpoint-integrated model is more likely to generate durable competitiveness than a fragmented amenity-based approach.

These capabilities help explain why Singapore has remained the leading non-OIC destination in GMTI 2025 and why its competitive position appears to rest less on short-term campaign visibility than on institutionalized trust, operational consistency, and ecosystem coordination.

4. Policy Implications for Vietnam

While Singapore provides a valuable policy reference, its model should not be treated as a template for direct replication. The more relevant policy question for Vietnam is how selected elements of Singapore's Halal governance system can be adapted under different institutional, market, and implementation conditions. In practice, the challenge is not simply to import best practices. It is to adapt them carefully by sequencing reforms, concentrating resources, and ensuring that promotion does not outpace actual service readiness.

4.1. Strengthening Halal Certification Governance: from "Labels" to a National Trust Infrastructure

A central lesson from Singapore is that Halal tourism competitiveness rests on a credible and transparent certification regime capable of generating verifiable trust signals. For Vietnam, however, the transfer of this lesson is constrained by a more fragmented institutional landscape, uneven certification capacity, and the still-limited international recognition of domestic Halal assurance mechanisms. For Vietnam, the policy priority should not be framed as simply "creating another agency," but as consolidating authority, standardizing procedures, and upgrading enforcement capacity so that Halal certification becomes a national-level reputational asset rather than a fragmented market label. Vietnam has already taken an important step through the establishment of the Vietnam Halal Certification Authority (HALCERT) under QUACERT, which provides an institutional foundation for more coherent certification oversight and international engagement. Even so, institutional consolidation alone will not be sufficient unless it is followed by procedural harmonization, transparent public disclosure, and a credible system of periodic audits and risk-based inspections [6]. Building on this institutional platform, Vietnam should operationalize a certification architecture centered on clear and unified certification schemes, traceability and disclosure requirements suited to tourism-related services, periodic auditing and risk-based spot checks, and a roadmap for mutual recognition or functional equivalence with key source markets. To reduce transfer risk, this architecture should be introduced in stages, beginning with a limited number of destination clusters and service categories where monitoring capacity can be concentrated and demonstrated. The overarching objective is to ensure that "Halal compliance" is not merely claimed but is rendered verifiable and enforceable, thereby reducing compliance uncertainty and reputational risk for the destination.

4.2. Investing in Muslim-Friendly Destination Infrastructure: Mainstream Integration and Destination Clustering

Vietnam's infrastructure investment for Halal/Muslim-friendly tourism should move beyond scattered, stand-alone initiatives toward an ecosystem approach that delivers low-friction, end-to-end experiences. The main contextual barrier is that Vietnam's tourism infrastructure and service quality remain uneven across destinations, making nationwide standardization difficult to achieve in the short term. In practice, this implies a destination-clustering strategy that concentrates resources in gateway and high-demand tourism hubs-such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang, and Nha Trang-where international connectivity and service ecosystems already exist. This phased clustering approach reduces implementation costs, avoids dispersing limited resources too thinly, and creates demonstrable pilot cases that can later support wider diffusion. The policy rationale is to build sufficient service density and amenity coverage in selected clusters so that Muslim travelers can navigate the destination without excessive search and itinerary-adjustment costs.

Vietnam can operationalize this strategy by using TCVN 14230:2024 (Muslim-friendly tourism services-Requirements) as a "standardization rail" that translates principles into auditable service conditions across accommodation, package tours, guiding services, and facility management. More specifically, priority investments should focus on: (i) Halal-certified or Halal-compliant food provision in tourist zones and transport nodes; (ii) accessible prayer facilities at airports, shopping centres, and major attractions; (iii) Muslim-friendly accommodation features (e.g., Halal meal options, prayer-related amenities, culturally sensitive service practices); and (iv) consistent information provision (maps, directories, signage, and digital guidance) that reduces search frictions. The objective should be to mainstream Muslim-friendly amenities within mainstream tourism infrastructure rather than to create segregated 'Halal-only' corridors that risk marginalization and operational

inconvenience. In the Vietnamese context, this is also a risk-mitigation strategy: integration into existing tourism circuits is more feasible politically, economically, and operationally than building parallel service systems from scratch.

4.3. Promotion and International Cooperation: Branding Anchored in Credible Signaling and Standards Cooperation

In Halal tourism markets, demand is highly sensitive to credibility signals and reputational assurance. This creates a particular challenge for Vietnam: if destination promotion advances faster than certification credibility and service readiness, the result may be reputational overreach rather than market trust. Consequently, promotion should not be treated as image-making alone; it should be designed as a component of economic diplomacy and standards cooperation, where market access and trust are co-produced through certification credibility, verifiable compliance, and international partnerships.

Vietnam's national scheme on enhancing international cooperation for Halal industry development toward 2030 provides a strategic umbrella for this approach. The policy challenge, however, lies in ensuring that promotional diplomacy and standards diplomacy move together rather than on separate tracks [4]. In implementation terms, Vietnam should combine two mutually reinforcing tracks: targeted market outreach to connect with intermediaries, airlines, and tour operators in priority markets, and standards-based cooperation to increase the international acceptability of Vietnam's Halal assurance through mutual-recognition pathways, joint capacity-building, and alignment with widely recognized assurance practices. A practical mitigation strategy would be to sequence these efforts so that outward promotion is concentrated first on markets and routes where Vietnam can already demonstrate a minimum credible service base. This dual-track design reduces the risk of "promotional overreach" (marketing claims that outpace actual service capability) and helps position Muslim-friendly readiness as a credible component of Vietnam's destination brand.

4.4. Tourism Workforce Development: Institutionalizing Service Capability as an Occupational Standard

A core implication of the Singapore case is that Muslim-friendly readiness depends not only on infrastructure but also on service capability at human touchpoints. In Vietnam, this dimension may prove to be one of the most difficult to transfer quickly, because workforce readiness depends on training systems, managerial routines, language capacity, and everyday service culture rather than on physical investment alone. Vietnam should therefore treat workforce development as a core professional requirement rather than as an ad hoc "soft skill" add-on. In Halal/Muslim-friendly tourism, small deviations in behavior or information can trigger disproportionate reputational costs; prevention requires systematic training, assessment, and service protocols.

Practically, Vietnam should develop modular training packages covering foundational knowledge of Muslim travelers' needs, operational routines consistent with certification and standards, tour-guiding competencies for Muslim-friendly itineraries, and reputational risk management. To make such training transferable and scalable, the first priority should be short-cycle modules for frontline service staff and managers in pilot destinations, followed by integration into vocational and higher-education tourism curricula. TCVN 14230:2024 can serve as the reference baseline for integrating these competencies into vocational and higher education tourism curricula as well as in-service training across hotels, restaurants, and tour operators. The policy objective is to convert "Muslim-friendly" from an aspirational label into a repeatable service performance standard across destination clusters.

4.5. Business Support Policies: Conditional Incentives Tied to Standardization and Verifiable Compliance

Financial support and tax incentives can accelerate Halal tourism supply upgrading, but they are effective only when designed along a conditionality principle: incentives must be tied to standardization, capability-building, and verifiable compliance in order to avoid Halal-washing and reputational erosion. This is especially important in Vietnam, where many tourism SMEs operate under cost constraints that may otherwise encourage symbolic

compliance rather than sustained capability upgrading. In this respect, Vietnam should shift from short-term demand stimulation toward capacity accumulation among tourism SMEs and service providers. A policy package could therefore include co-funding schemes for businesses investing in certification readiness, targeted support for digital information signaling, and preferential measures for businesses that demonstrate sustained compliance through periodic audits and service-quality monitoring. To reduce fiscal waste and implementation slippage, these incentives should be targeted first at firms operating in designated pilot clusters and should be reviewed against measurable compliance outcomes rather than awarded as broad-based promotional subsidies. Such conditional incentives help align private investment with broader public reputational goals: they reduce compliance uncertainty, protect the destination brand, and make Muslim-friendly readiness scalable within destination clusters.

Taken together, these implications show that Vietnam should not imitate Singapore mechanically, but adapt selected lessons in a phased way. For Vietnam, the most credible path is to build Halal tourism capacity gradually through concentrated pilots, monitored standards implementation, workforce upgrading, and tightly coupled promotion–assurance strategies.

5. Ethical Considerations

This study relies exclusively on secondary sources, including published reports, policy documents, standards, and official institutional materials, and does not involve human participants, interviews, surveys, or the collection and processing of personal data. Accordingly, formal ethics approval was not required. All sources are properly acknowledged, and the study adheres to established norms of academic integrity, including accurate attribution and a clear distinction between empirical description and analytical interpretation. However, ethical responsibility in Halal tourism research extends beyond citation practice because the subject intersects with religious identity, market trust, and reputational vulnerability.

Because Halal-related issues intersect with religious and cultural norms, the analysis applies ethical caution not only in interpretation but also in the formulation of policy recommendations. It avoids stereotyping, value judgments, and reductive portrayals of religious identities, and treats 'Muslim-friendly' primarily as a destination-governance and service-delivery concept rather than as an essentialized cultural label. Policy implications are therefore presented under a conditionality principle in order to mitigate the risk of Halal-washing, understood here as the mismatch between symbolic Muslim-friendly claims and verifiable service capability. In practical terms, Halal-washing may occur when destination branding, promotional narratives, or business self-labeling move faster than certification credibility, staff preparedness, and enforceable standards. The ethical problem is not only misrepresentation. It is also the creation of trust claims in a market where travelers rely heavily on signals that they often cannot verify independently.

For this reason, ethical Halal tourism policy should be guided by a principle of verifiable inclusion: destinations should expand Muslim-friendly provision only to the extent that such provision can be transparently signaled, operationally maintained, and independently checked. This principle is especially important for emerging destinations, where reputational damage from overclaiming may be more costly than slower but more credible capacity-building.

6. Study Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the analysis is based primarily on secondary data and document analysis; it does not directly measure Muslim travelers' perceptions, satisfaction, or behavioral outcomes, nor does it empirically assess Vietnamese firms' operational Halal readiness. Second, the Singapore–Vietnam comparison is case-based, and therefore the conclusions should be interpreted as context-sensitive and conditional on institutional capacity, market structure, and implementation feasibility at the destination level. Third, due to

data constraints, the study does not provide a fully disaggregated quantitative estimation of Halal tourism's contribution to macroeconomic indicators (e.g., tourism receipts and GDP) or to sectoral spillovers (retail, food and beverage, aviation, and MICE).

These limitations suggest directions for future research, including the use of primary data (surveys, interviews, and stakeholder consultations), the development of destination-level indicators for Halal readiness and Halal trust, and the evaluation of policy effectiveness across destination clusters as Vietnam's standards and certification governance mature. A further limitation is that the study does not directly operationalize Halal trust through measurable indicators. While the concept is used here as an analytical bridge between governance capacity and destination reputation, its empirical specification remains a task for subsequent research.

7. Future Research Directions

The stated limitations point to several directions for further research, particularly with respect to measurement, validation, and policy evaluation. Future studies should integrate primary data-including surveys, structural-equation modeling, and in-depth interviews with businesses, Muslim travelers, and certification bodies-in order to validate the proposed mechanism empirically and to test whether Halal trust mediates the relationship between governance quality and destination outcomes. In addition, future research should develop destination-level indicators for both Halal readiness and Halal trust, and should assess policy effectiveness across destination clusters during the implementation of standards and certification governance in Vietnam. At a minimum, Halal trust could be operationalized through four observable dimensions: certification credibility, information transparency, service consistency, and perceived reputational assurance. In empirical terms, these dimensions may be measured through indicators such as the visibility and accessibility of certified-provider directories, the frequency of audits and enforcement actions, the consistency of Muslim-friendly amenities across travel touchpoints, complaint patterns related to non-compliance, traveler confidence in destination information, and revisit or recommendation intention among Muslim visitors. Policy effectiveness may likewise be evaluated through a mixed set of input, process, output, and outcome indicators. These may include the number of certified establishments in priority clusters, audit compliance rates, training completion rates among frontline staff, the availability of prayer and halal-food facilities at major tourism nodes, the usability of official information systems, Muslim visitor satisfaction levels, and the relative growth of arrivals from priority source markets.

8. Conclusion

The analysis shows that Singapore's success in developing Halal/Muslim-friendly tourism does not derive from a Muslim-majority demographic advantage, but rather from its institutional capacity to formalize trust and standardize the travel experience. The core of Singapore's model lies in building a Halal trust infrastructure through a centralized certification regime, transparent procedures, and-critically-post-certification auditing and compliance monitoring that preserve the credibility of the Halal label as a verifiable market signal. This approach reduces information asymmetries for Muslim travelers-a segment that is particularly sensitive to "non-compliance risk" - and enables Halal to become a mainstream service amenity within the urban tourism ecosystem.

A second major contribution of Singapore is the integration of Halal into the destination ecosystem via a "touchpoint coverage" logic, rather than developing a segregated Halal product line. Ensuring core amenities-such as prayer facilities within transit infrastructure and key public spaces-demonstrates Singapore's ability to translate faith-related needs into a normalized component of service quality. From an International Relations perspective, this can be interpreted as a mechanism through which service governance capacity is converted into reputational assets and national attractiveness, thereby supporting soft power: consistent and credible experiences generate affinity, strengthen an image of being "safe–inclusive–well-governed," and increase revisit and recommendation intentions through transnational social networks.

For Vietnam, the policy challenge is not simply to attract Halal visitors. It is to build the institutional and service capacity needed to support that market over time. First, strengthen certification governance architecture toward a credible focal authority, unified procedures, rigorous post-certification controls, and a pathway for mutual recognition; the establishment of HALCERT provides a foundation but must be closely tied to implementation requirements in tourism services. Second, develop Muslim-friendly service infrastructure via destination clustering rather than dispersive investments, using TCVN 14230:2024 as a "standardization rail" to translate requirements into verifiable service delivery in accommodation, tours, guiding, and facility management. Third, align market promotion with economic diplomacy and external affairs through credible signals-prioritizing standards/certification cooperation alongside fairs and roadshows consistent with Vietnam's Halal international cooperation agenda. Fourth, institutionalize workforce training as an occupational standard, ranging from service modules for Muslim travelers and religious–cultural literacy to standards-based operating procedures, thereby ensuring consistency at service touchpoints rather than formal compliance on paper. Fifth, redesign business-support policies from generic incentives toward conditional support mechanisms in which financial/tax assistance is tied to standardization, training, and verified compliance-both reducing Halal-washing risks and enabling long-term capability accumulation while safeguarding market trust.

From this perspective, the strategic value of Halal tourism lies not only in attracting a specific visitor segment, but in demonstrating whether a destination can convert standards into a credible experience. A more useful policy test is whether Muslim-friendly claims are backed by auditable systems, reliable information, trained personnel, and sustained traveler confidence. For Vietnam, this implies that policy success should be judged less by symbolic visibility and more by the gradual accumulation of verifiable trust. Ultimately, the most durable lesson from Singapore lies less in promotional sophistication than in the steady construction of a trustworthy service ecosystem.

Data Availability

This study draws on publicly available secondary sources, including published academic literature, government policy documents, industry reports, and publications produced by relevant organizations. All evidence supporting the study's conclusions is accessible through the cited references. No primary dataset was generated for this research.

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