

SOUTH KOREA'S MUSLIM FRIENDLY TOURISM PROGRAM AS PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN 2015-2019

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Abstract

The tourism industry is one of the influential industries in South Korea as effect of the spread of popular culture of South Korea to international society. South Korea's progress in tourism also impacts on Muslim tourists' interest to visit the country. Seeing this progress in tourism industries, South Korea try to take advantage of these opportunities. One of the methods used by South Korea is by choosing public diplomacy in implementing Muslim Friendly Tourism (MFT) policies and obtaining assistance from non-governmental organizations in its implementation. This study uses a descriptive qualitative research method derived from the analysis of literature data and scientific writings that have been collected, then described in a more detailed elaboration. This study is analyzed using the Halal Tourism and Public Diplomacy concept in this research, the three dimensions of public diplomacy become the focus of analysis, include: News Management, Strategic Communication, and Relationship Building. Public diplomacy efforts in implementing Muslim Friendly Tourism (MFT) carried out by South Korea from 2015 to 2019 have contributed to the growth in South Korean Muslim tourists.

Keywords: South Korea, Tourism, Muslim Friendly Tourism, Public Diplomacy.

Abstrak

Industri pariwisata merupakan salah satu industri yang memberikan pengaruh besar di Korea Selatan sebagai dampak dari penyebaran budaya populer Korea Selatan ke masyarakat internasional. Kemajuan Korea Selatan dalam bidang pariwisata juga mempengaruhi minat wisatawan Muslim untuk berkunjung ke negara tersebut. melihat kemajuan industri pariwisata ini, Korea Selatan mencoba memanfaatkan peluang tersebut. salah satu cara yang dilakukan Korea Selatan adalah dengan memilih diplomasi publik dalam mengimplementasikan kebijakan Muslim Friendly Tourism (MFT) dan mendapatkan bantuan dari lembaga non-pemerintah dalam pengimplementasiannya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif deskriptif yang diperoleh melalui analisis data literatur dan karya tulis ilmiah yang telah dikumpulkan, kemudian didekripsikan dalam penjabaran yang lebih detail. Kajian ini dianalisis menggunakan konsep Pariwisata Halal dan Diplomasi Publik, yang mana tiga dimensi diplomasi publik menjadi fokus analisis, meliputi: Manajemen Berita, Komunikasi Strategis, dan Pembangunan Hubungan. Upaya diplomasi publik dalam implementasi Muslim Friendly Tourism (MFT) yang dilakukan Korea Selatan sejak 2015 hingga 2019 telah memberikan kontribusi terhadap pertumbuhan wisatawan Muslim Korea Selatan.

Kata Kunci: Korea Selatan, Pariwisata, Muslim Friendly Tourism, Diplomasi Publik.

Introduction

The World Tourism Organization stated that tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon involving the movement of visitors to a country or place outside their usual environment for personal, professional or business purposes (UNWTO, 2014). Tourism is now one of the industries to be recognized as the main activity is affected to international trade as the primary sources of income for many developing countries (WTO, 2012). The World Tourism

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By the means of data from the Korean Tourism Organization, states of that tourists visiting South Korea in 2014 increased by 19.2% from 2010. Korea Tourism Organization, Annual Report of Tourism Statistics, Korea Tourism Organization (Seoul, 2015). Mostly, tourists from countries with a majority Muslim population, such as Malaysia, Indonesia and the Middle East, increased (Han et al., 2019). The Korea Tourism Organization recorded an annual tourist growth rate from 2010 to 2014 of 21.6% from Malaysia, 21.1% from Indonesia and 22.7% from the Middle East. Korea Tourism Organization, Annual Report of Tourism Statistics.

South Korea are known as country with non-Muslim population majority. According to the 2015 national census, most Koreans are atheis (Service, 2015). With the fact that Islam is a minority religion in South Korea, foreign Muslim tourists must be carefully when shopping and consume food, considering that products composition of pork and food mixed with alcoholic beverages. Meanwhile, processed pork products and the like, as well as alcoholic beverages, are forbidden to consume according to Islam, this halal is also one of the problems South Korea faces to develop Halal tourism industry.

South Korea began realizing *Muslim Friendly Tourism* in 2015 by signing a cooperation in halal certification with the United Arab Emirates. South Korean government also collect more information about halal food and halal food provisions. In the same year, South Korea published a tourist guidebook which contained information about halal restaurants in South Korea. The guidebook entitled “Muslim Friendly Restaurant in Korea” will continue to be updated annually and can be accessed through the Visit Korea website (Ah-young, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

In analyzing the implementation of *Muslim Friendly Tourism* in South Korea, the author will use the concept of Public Diplomacy and the concept of Halal Tourism. Mark Leonard explained that public diplomacy is a process of communication between countries that aims to

build relations, understand the cultural and societal interests of other countries, convey perspectives to other countries, and build efforts with parties from other countries to realize a collaboration (Mark et al., 2002). In addition, Leonard explained that there were three dimensions that have an essential role in the process of public diplomacy and can assist in encouraging the success of public diplomacy (London: The Foreign Policy, 2002).

The first dimension is New Management, the government utilizes both offline and online media as a form of news management by providing news content that aligns with national interests. The second is Strategic Communication which aimed more to public, such as individuals, non-governmental organizations, and companies, to shape the perception of a country as a whole. The third is Relationship Development, and this dimension requires an extended period for relationships with international actors or individuals through various events such as cooperation, scholarships, holding conferences, student or labour exchanges, training, seminars, and others.

The concept of Halal Tourism is a term that describes friendly tourism for Muslim tourists, or the tourism activities that fulfill the spiritual needs (Islam) when travelling for sightseeing (Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (COMCEC), 2016). The Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) provided four indicators for the development of Halal Tourism (Mastercard-CrescentRating, 2019). The first indicator is Accessibility (easy access to destinations); accessibility are easy to access or permits to enter an area to make it easier for tourists to go to tourist destinations. The second indicator, Communication, easy to obtain and convey information, including information of businesses or digital media. The third indicator is the Environment, in the form of a safe and comfortable environment for tourists to worship in the place destination and the provision of facilities that can meet the needs worship of tourists. The fourth indicator is Service (services provided), the service is the primary need of a Muslim, for example with the availability of halal food and places to pray.

Discussion

South Korea's Tourism Development and Muslim Friendly Tourism Opportunities

World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) stated that South Korea had succeeded in absorbing 1,432,000 native South Korean workers until 2018, thanks to contributions from the tourism sector, which also included tourist visits, investment, food services, and trade. The jobs the tourism and culture industry contributed from 2013 to 2017 outperformed the total jobs from

other industries. In addition to, the estimated Economic Impact Report (EIR) data by WTTC also shows that South Korea provides nearly 49,000 new jobs each year and was expected to reach 1.8 million in 2032. WTTC also revealed that the tourism sector in South Korea would outpace the economy as a whole for the next ten years (WTTC, 2022).

Received revenue by Korea from the tourism industry in 2016 was estimated at 17.1 billion USD, which had increased by 13.2% from tourism revenue in 2015. The expenditure of tourists visiting South Korea in 2016 was 31.7% in accommodation spending and 9.1% in food service spending. In 2016 the South Korean tourism industry contributed around 5.1% of the total GDP, and the benefits gained by South Korea through the South Korean travel and tourism sector were seen from the contribution that the tourism industry contributed to the country's GDP of 4.4% or as many as 84, 3 trillion KRW. Meanwhile, the number of employees in the tourism industry in 2016 was 1.5 million, or around 5.8% of the total national employees (OECD iLibrary, 2020).

The South Korean Institute of Culture and Tourism notes that Muslim tourists from Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman, have the highest spending in South Korea. They spend an average of 40 million rupiahs per visit (Kyung Min, 2017). Seeing the growth of Muslim tourists to South Korea also contributes to increasing the demand and needs of Muslim tourists when travelling. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism of South Korea make programs to improve the quality of their country to implement *Muslim Friendly Tourism* by collaborating and coordinating with the Korean Halal Association (KHA) and the Korean Muslim Federation (KMF) through the Korean Tourism Organization (KTO). KMF itself is the federation responsible for the halal certification process in South Korea. This certification is needed to ensure South Korean products are correct and follow Islamic law, especially in restaurants serving South Korean specialities.

The South Korean government provides convenience to restaurants wishing to register their business as halal-certified restaurants by bearing the cost of halal certification. Several categories of Muslim Friendly restaurants in South Korea include:

1. *Certified Halal* Restaurants get official halal certificates from the Korean Muslim Federation (KMF) if they have obtained halal certification from the South Korean Ministry of Food and Drug Safety. Another requirement that must be met to obtain Halal Certified is that the restaurant employs at least one Muslim operator or cook.

2. *Self Certified* Restaurants can get halal certificates if restaurant owners self-certify their place of business as a halal restaurant. The main requirements that must be owned by a restaurant wishing to obtain a Self Certified Restaurant must employ at least one Muslim operator or cook and not sell alcoholic beverages. The restaurant uses halal raw materials and meat, does not store alcoholic beverages and non-halal meat is prohibited from cooking with liquor and shows what halal food is available in the restaurant.
3. *Muslim Friendly*. A restaurant will have a Muslim Friendly label if it offers Halal food on its menu. The requirements are that restaurants must use halal raw materials and meat in part or whole, the restaurant must store halal meat separately except for ingredients such as vegetables and seafood, and restaurants are prohibited from promoting dishes that use pork as a special menu. They must indicate which dishes are considered Halal on their menu.
4. *Pork-free*. Restaurants with this label do not offer halal menus but do not use pork for ingredients. In menu restaurants can still sell alcohol, but the main point is to getting the halal label is to prohibit restaurants from using pork or its by-products, such as ham, bacon and pork broth. Korea Tourism Organization, "Development of Muslim Friendly Korea."

There were challenges for South Korea in handling the halal tourism industry. Among these challenges is the lack of public and government knowledge regarding Muslim-friendly tourism. Meanwhile, South Korea as matter of fact most of population are atheis or do not have any religion (Service, 2015). South Korea has difficulty to apply halal tourism thus concept. To develop tourism with a Muslim-friendly label, South Korea needs to provide facilities that can balance the needs of Muslim tourists with standards that comply with Islamic guidelines. Another challenge South Korea must face was competition for the attractiveness of tourist destinations and tourism infrastructure. South Korea is still relatively new in developing the *Muslim Friendly Tourism* industry. Therefore, South Korea still needs to learn and develop this concept.

South Korea's Muslim Friendly Tourism Program as Public Diplomacy in 2015-2019

Public diplomacy is a process of communication between countries that are used to build a relationship by understanding the needs, culture and people of other countries and then communicating the views of each actor to find common views (Mark et al., 2002). Referring to the objectives explained by Mark above, the government must carry out precise two-way

information delivery to achieve public diplomacy goals, considering that public diplomacy involves a much wider group. Mark Leonard also stated that three dimensions have an essential role in the success of implementing public diplomacy, there are News Management dimension, Strategic Communication and Relationship Building dimension.

Some of the news management dimension programs carried out by South Korea there are making Korean Halal Applications who contains information about halal food ingredients in South Korea, including the location of Halal restaurants or Muslim Friendly standards and supermarkets. The next program is publishing guidebook “*Muslim Friendly Restaurant*” that contains information about Muslim-friendly restaurants in Korea. The another guidebook published by South Korea is “*Muslim Friendly Routes in Korea*” that offers information on various tourist destinations according to the themes that tourists want to do or visit. The last program in news management dimension is making Halal Korean site with purpose to share market information in Islamic countries and take advantage of opportunities to enter the halal industry (Halal Korea, 2014).

The second dimension are strategic communication that requires strategic planning and good communication skills to display the image wanted. Some of the strategic communication dimension programs carried out by South Korea there are organizing Halal Trade Expo Korea since 2015 which objected to support and provide a platform for companies interested in entering the halal industry and promoting themselves to the global halal market (Korean Products Blog Magazine, 2016). The second programs are implementing Halal Restaurant Week was first held in 2016 as a serious effort by the South Korean government to make South Korea a Muslim-friendly destination by developing facilities that support the needs of Muslim tourists when travelling to Korea, especially supporting easy access to halal food (Korea Tourism Organization, 2019). The last program are organizing K-Food Fairs which has been held since 2015 in Indonesia and the UAE, and in 2016 in Malaysia.

Some of the relationship building dimension programs by South Korea are signing the MOU with UAE in 2015 for exchanging information on halal food and building a certification system. The other programs is Halal Assurance System Training that be held in 2017 as a prerequisite program to obtain a halal certificate from the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) and aimed to provide a broader understanding of halal guarantees for a product. The last programs is

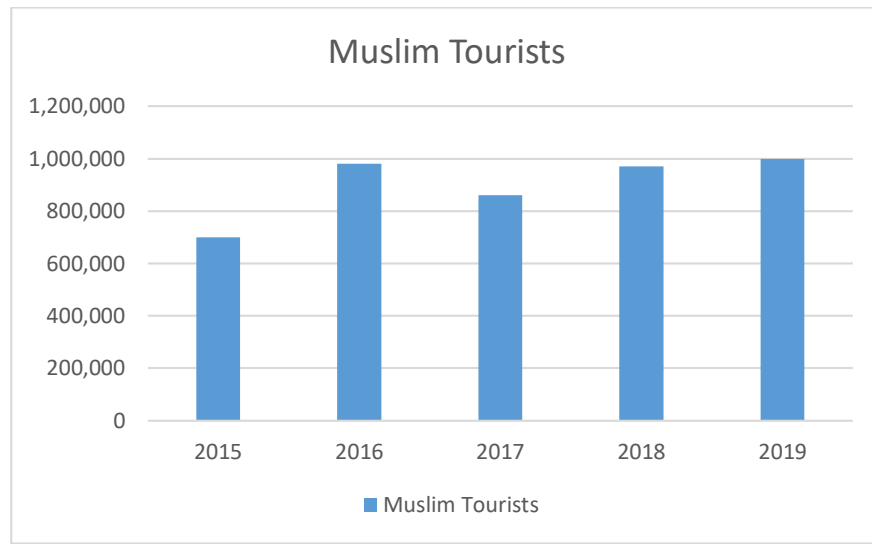
held a South Korea and Malaysia International Halal Conference to strengthen cooperation between South Korea and Malaysia in advancing the halal industry in the both countries.

The total number of visits by foreign tourists to South Korea in 2015 was 13 million visitors, and this number has decreased by around 6% from the previous year as a result of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) outbreak (Joo et al., 2018). After successfully getting through the epidemic, in 2016, South Korea improved the number of foreign tourists, which had decreased. The number of international tourists to South Korea reached 17.2 million, which increased by 30.3% compared to 2015 (OECD, 2021). The number of Muslim tourists to South Korea in 2016 amounted to 980 thousand. This number increased by 33% compared to Muslim visitors in 2015, which amounted to 770 thousand of people (Korea Tourism Organization, 2017).

In 2017, South Korea's tourism industry did not go well, and there was a decrease in the number of international tourists by 22% from the previous year to 13.3 million visitors in 2017. This tourist decrease was due to South Korea's agreement to build a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense system with the United States in July 2016. The tourism decrease was dominated by China tourists, decreased to 4.17 million visitors and had the same number as half of the total China visitors in 2016 (Korea Tourism Organization, 2021). The number of Muslim of tourists visit to South Korea in 2017 also decreased to 860 thousand visitors related to regulation regarding the construction of THAAD set by China, in which countries in the Asian region, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, have a high ratio of cruise crew members in China (Yoon-seok, 2018).

In 2018 the number of South Korean visitors experienced an improvement from the previous year, namely 15.3 million visitors, an increase of around 15% from 2017 and also the number of Muslim tourists that increased to 971 thousand (OECD iLibrary, 2020). The number of foreign tourists visiting South Korea in 2019 was the highest recorded by the South Korean government, namely 17.5 million visitors; this number was higher than the number of foreign tourists in 2016, which amounted to 17.2 million (MCST, 2020). Also in this year, Muslim tourists reached 1 million, which was the highest compared to previous years (Korea Tourism Organization, 2020).

Figure 1. Number of Muslim Tourists to South Korea in 2015-2019



The growth of Muslim tourists in South Korea has also affected South Korea's ranking in the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) issued by Master Card-Crescent Rating. GMTI was created to be a benchmark or reference in assessing a country that is a Muslim-friendly tourist destination. South Korea was ranked 55th in the Global Muslim Travel Index in 2015, in 2016 South Korea climbed one place from last year to 54th.

Even though South Korea's tourism figures in 2017 experienced a decline due to South Korea's approval of the THAAD missile defense system development, South Korea's ranking in the GMTI showed considerable progress and was ranked 47th with a total score of 45.5, progressing by seven levels from rank 54 in the previous year. This year, South Korea also managed to rank 18th in the index of 20 favourite destinations from Non-OIC countries, shifting Bosnia's position in 2016 (Mastercard-CrescentRating, 2017).

After recovering from a reduction in tourism due to problems of the construction of the THAAD missile defense system last year, in 2018, South Korea began to absorb foreign tourists again to come to the country. South Korea's tourism progress this year has also positively impacted the country's position in the 2018 GMTI. South Korea's ranking has increased this year from 47th in 2017 to 41st. South Korea also managed to rank 13th in the index of 20 favourite non-OIC country destinations, shifting Sri Lanka's position from the previous year (Mastercard-CrescentRating, 2018). This result is a sizeable increase from previous years, seeing South Korea's

success climbing five places in the index of 20 favourite destinations. South Korea also made it into the top 10 destinations with easy access to their country as the 10th rank.

In 2019, South Korea reached the peak of its success in attracting foreign tourists to visit their country; this year, South Korea continues its movement to improve the quality of its country as a Muslim Friendly country. It is evidenced by South Korea's success in entering the top 10 rankings among the top 20 favourite destinations of Non-OIC countries. In this index, South Korea is ranked at eighth; meanwhile, South Korea is ranked 19th overall GMTI (Mastercard-CrescentRating, 2019). This year, South Korea also made it and was ranked 7th on the list of 10 destinations with the best environment.

Conclusion

South Korea started by enter and implement *Muslim Friendly Tourism* in 2015 through the Relationship Development dimension by signing an MOU with the United Arab Emirates regarding halal food certification and information. Through the News Management dimension, South Korea issued a tourist guidance book entitled Muslim-friendly Restaurant, which contained restaurant information from the Visit Korea website. While efforts in Strategic Communication, the *Korea Halal Export Association* (KHEA), sponsored by the *Korean International Trade Association* and many other organizations, organized the *Halal Trade Expo Korea*. It was intended to assist and provide a platform for companies entering the halal industry. South Korea continues to carry out and develop their efforts to add insight and complete its facilities regarding *Muslim Friendly Tourism* to take advantage of tourism opportunities as result of globalization and the spread of the Korean Wave. Through the implementation of public diplomacy, South Korea has succeeded in achieving the goal of implementing public diplomacy by instilling positive perceptions in other countries so that they are interested in collaborating or traveling to South Korea. South Korea's efforts in developing Muslim Friendly Tourism policies in the period 2015 to 2019 produced positive results that had an impact on the development of tourism in the country, especially the development of Muslim tourists.

Suggestion

From the conclusions above, this study explains the efforts to implement and develop *Muslim Friendly Tourism* in South Korea with a non-Muslim majority population. Public

diplomacy efforts carried out by South Korea are the right choice to develop and disseminate information about *Muslim Friendly Tourism* policies that apply to foreign communities. In addition, implementing public diplomacy can also involve various non-governmental actors who assist the government in realizing its interests. Through this research, researchers provide suggestions for further academics to add insight and examine progress in *Muslim Friendly Tourism* policies in Korea in the following years.

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