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Integrating Sustainability and Cultural Sensitivity: Clustering Muslim Tourist Lifestyles in the Andaman Coastal Cluster, Thailand

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Abstract: This study explores the integration of sustainability and cultural sensitivity in clustering Muslim tourist lifestyles in the Andaman coastal region. The Muslim tourist demographic, representing a significant portion of the global population, prioritizes halal standards and Islamic attributes in their travel experiences. This research investigates the lifestyle patterns of Muslim tourists and their alignment with sustainable tourism principles, particularly in Thailand's Andaman coastal area, known for its marine and beach tourism. A multi-method approach was employed, utilizing the AIO (Activities, Interests, and Opinions) framework for quantitative data collection through the surveys of 836 Muslim tourists, and qualitative insights from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with local stakeholders. The study identified key lifestyle clusters: Mainstream Travelers, Experience Seekers, and Chillouts, each with specific preferences for halal services, prayer facilities, and eco-friendly accommodations. The findings underscore the importance of a tailored approach in promoting sustainable tourism that respects cultural values. Recommendations include enhancing halal-certified services, improving infrastructure for religious practices, and promoting eco-friendly tourism options. By aligning sustainability with cultural sensitivity, the Andaman coastal region can attract more Muslim tourists while preserving its environmental and cultural heritage. This research contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable tourism by emphasizing cultural sensitivity and provides practical guidelines for tourism stakeholders in the Andaman region to develop inclusive and sustainable tourism strategies.

Keywords: Muslim tourism; tourist behavior; lifestyle segmentation; sustainable tourism; halal tourism; travel behavior; factor analysis; Islamic attributes; Thailand; Andaman coast



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1. Introduction

The global tourism industry has experienced significant growth and diversification over the past decade, driven by technological advancements and increased travel accessibility. Among the various segments of this expanding market, the Muslim tourist demographic has emerged as a significant focus, representing approximately 25% of the global population and is projected to reach 30% by 2050 [1–5]. Consequently, various countries are increasingly tailoring their tourism offerings to meet the unique needs of

Muslim travelers who prioritize halal standards and Islamic attributes in their travel experiences [6,7]. Thailand, renowned for its rich cultural heritage and scenic coastal areas, has proactively enhanced its appeal to Muslim tourists. Various initiatives by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports have been implemented to enhance Thailand's tourism industry's competitiveness within the region. The Andaman Coastal Cluster represents a key tourism cluster comprising world-class destinations such as Phuket, Krabi, the Phi Phi Islands, and Koh Lipe [8].

Integrating sustainable development principles into tourism strategies is crucial for long-term success. Sustainable tourism aims to minimize environmental impact, preserve cultural heritage, and ensure economic benefits for local communities. For Muslim tourists, sustainable tourism also ensures that travel experiences align with their religious and cultural values, such as halal practices and the importance of community engagement [9]. This dual focus on sustainability and cultural sensitivity not only attracts Muslim tourists but also fosters positive interactions between tourists and local communities, enhancing overall community well-being. By respecting local customs, traditions, and social norms, tourism initiatives can create a more inclusive environment that benefits both visitors and residents, ultimately promoting cultural exchange and understanding [10].

The Andaman coastal area, famous for its marine and beach tourism, has begun embracing these requirements through various initiatives to promote Muslim-friendly and sustainable tourism [8]. However, to compete effectively with leading Muslim-friendly destinations like Malaysia and Indonesia, Thailand needs to deepen its understanding of Muslim tourists' lifestyle patterns and travel characteristics. Applying sustainable development to manage multicultural tourism can significantly reduce social impacts and promote community cohesion. Sustainable tourism practices help mitigate potential conflicts arising from cultural differences and ensure that tourism development benefits all stakeholders, including local communities [10,11]. By fostering mutual respect and understanding among diverse tourist groups and residents, sustainable tourism can enhance the social fabric of destination areas and promote peaceful coexistence [12].

Thailand's efforts to promote Muslim-friendly tourism align with the broader sustainable development goals. By implementing eco-friendly practices, preserving local cultural heritage, and supporting local economies, Thailand can attract and retain Muslim tourists while ensuring that tourism growth is inclusive and sustainable. This approach aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), by fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth through tourism [12].

Incorporating sustainable development principles in tourism planning also involves engaging local communities in decision-making processes, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are addressed. This participatory approach helps build community support for tourism initiatives and enhances the overall visitor experience by providing authentic cultural interactions [13,14]. For Muslim tourists, the availability of halal food, prayer facilities, and other Islamic attributes is crucial, but so is the opportunity to engage with and learn from local cultures in a respectful and meaningful way [15]. However, while the existing literature has extensively explored the general characteristics and requirements of Muslim tourists, there is a paucity of research focusing on the segmentation of these tourists based on their lifestyle patterns. This study aims to address this gap by employing the AIO (Activities, Interests, and Opinions) framework to identify key lifestyle clusters among Muslim tourists in the Andaman coastal area and examine how these clusters can inform more targeted and culturally sensitive tourism offerings [9,16].

Additionally, there is a need to integrate sustainable development principles into tourism strategies to promote cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness effectively. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of halal standards and Islamic attributes in attracting Muslim tourists. Still, there remains a lack of empirical evidence on how sustainable practices can be aligned with these needs to enhance overall tourist satisfaction and commu-

nity well-being [6,10]. By filling these gaps, this research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable and inclusive tourism development by classifying Muslim tourist groups in the Andaman coastal area based on their lifestyle patterns and identifying the services that meet their religious requirements. By doing so, Thailand can develop effective strategies that enhance its competitive edge in the growing Muslim tourism market and promote sustainable tourism development. This research will contribute to a deeper understanding of how sustainable tourism practices can be effectively integrated to support multicultural tourism and community well-being in Thailand's Andaman coastal region.

2. Muslim Tourist Lifestyles and Sustainable Tourism Practices

The concept of lifestyle, rooted in psychology and sociology, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding consumer behavior, including within the tourism industry. Alfred Adler's early work in the 1960s emphasized individual uniqueness and similarities in life patterns. William Lazer [17] later introduced lifestyle in marketing, defining it as a broad system encompassing a society's distinctive mode of living. Demby's [18] psychographics combined psychology and demographics to study social class, personality, and lifestyle, focusing on behavioral patterns and consumption habits [19,20]. This approach aids in comprehending consumer motivations and goal-setting, making it valuable for market segmentation and strategic marketing planning [21,22].

The AIO (Activities, Interests, and Opinions) framework, developed by Wells and Tigert [16], is widely accepted for analyzing consumer lifestyles. Activities refer to time spent on pursuits; interests, attentiveness to preferences; and opinions to views on society, economy, and culture [23]. AIOs, assessed alongside demographic information, provide a close approximation of population group characteristics [24,25]. This method has been extensively used to categorize consumer lifestyles and explore their relation to tourist behavior [26–33]. Despite its value, there is limited research on tourists' lifestyles in southern Thailand [34,35].

As a significant market segment within the tourism industry, marketing scholars need to gain a comprehensive understanding of tourist insights and the factors influencing travel decisions. Religious and cultural values influence this demographic's travel behavior, requiring destinations to adapt their offerings [36–40]. Halal tourism, which includes halal food, prayer facilities, and gender segregation, caters to these needs [7,41–44].

Thailand has recognized the potential of Muslim tourism, particularly in the Andaman coastal area, which is known for its marine and beach tourism. Initiatives like the "Thailand Muslim Friendly Destination" mobile application and events such as the Phuket Andaman Halal for Tourism and Krabi Halal Food Festival reflect efforts to create a welcoming environment for Muslim tourists [8]. However, to compete effectively with Malaysia and Indonesia, Thailand must deepen its understanding of Muslim tourists' lifestyle patterns and travel behavior [4].

Many countries and destinations have adopted sustainable tourism practices to mitigate the impacts of tourism [10], which is crucial for long-term success. For Muslim tourists, sustainable tourism also involves aligning travel experiences with their religious and cultural values [9]. Integrating sustainable development principles into tourism strategies can significantly reduce social impacts and enhance community cohesion [10]. This approach aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth through tourism [12].

Characteristics of the Muslim market segment include a strong preference for halal products and services, as well as specific religious needs such as prayer facilities and gender-sensitive amenities [6]. The Muslim market is not homogeneous, with significant diversity in age, income, travel motivations, and preferences [45]. Research indicates that younger Muslim travelers, for instance, may prioritize adventure and experiential tourism, while older demographics might focus more on cultural and religious tourism [5]. The rise in the Muslim middle class, especially in Southeast Asia, has increased the demand for luxury travel experiences that still adhere to Islamic principles [9]. However, this study

does not focus on religious tourism or the travel of pilgrims to holy sites [46,47]. Instead, it delves into the behavior of Muslim tourists, offering an in-depth examination of the cultural aspects that emphasize religious beliefs, lifestyles, and other related factors.

Understanding these characteristics is crucial for developing effective marketing strategies and tourism products. By addressing different Muslim tourist groups' specific needs and preferences, destination managers can create tailored offerings that enhance the overall visitor experience and promote sustainable tourism development in the Andaman coastal region. However, while the existing literature has extensively explored the general characteristics and requirements of Muslim tourists, there is a paucity of research focusing on the segmentation of these tourists based on their lifestyle patterns. This study aims to address this gap by employing the AIO (Activities, Interests, and Opinions) framework to identify key lifestyle clusters among Muslim tourists in the Andaman coastal area and examine how these clusters can inform more targeted and culturally sensitive tourism offerings [9,16]. Additionally, there is a need to integrate sustainable development principles into tourism strategies to promote cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness effectively. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of halal standards and Islamic attributes in attracting Muslim tourists. Still, there remains a lack of empirical evidence on how sustainable practices can be aligned with these needs to enhance overall tourist satisfaction and community well-being [6,10]. By filling these gaps, this research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable and inclusive tourism development, particularly in non-Muslim majority destinations like Thailand, which aims to position itself competitively in the growing Muslim tourism market [4,12,13].

3. Methodology

This study employs a multi-method approach to comprehensively understand Muslim tourist lifestyles in the Andaman coastal region, focusing on identifying key lifestyle clusters and discussing sustainable development as a tool for promoting cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness [45]. The AIO (Activities, Interests, and Opinions) framework proposed by Plummer in 1974 was utilized for quantitative data collection. A structured questionnaire was developed based on this framework, including sections on demographic profiles, tourism behaviors, and lifestyle dimensions. The questionnaire consisted of 58 statements measured on a five-point Likert scale. A purposive sampling method was used to select 836 Muslim tourists from Phuket, Krabi, and Phang Nga, chosen for their high tourist influx and significant tourism-generated income. Data were collected through face-to-face surveys and online questionnaires distributed via social media and tourism websites over six months, capturing both peak and off-peak travel seasons.

For qualitative data collection, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders and focus group discussions with local community members and business owners were conducted to gain insights into cultural sensitivity and sustainable tourism practices [14]. The quantitative analysis involved descriptive statistics to summarize demographic characteristics and tourism behaviors, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify underlying lifestyle dimensions, and cluster analysis to segment tourists into distinct lifestyle groups using hierarchical and k-means clustering. The Elbow method and Silhouette analysis determined the optimal number of clusters. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the key themes related to sustainable tourism and cultural sensitivity [13]. The reliability of the lifestyle construct was tested using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.97, and validity was ensured through expert reviews and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Ethical guidelines were strictly followed, with informed consent obtained from all the respondents.

This comprehensive approach segments Muslim tourists based on their lifestyle patterns and integrates sustainable development principles into tourism strategies. By combining the quantitative and qualitative data, this method offers a deeper understanding of how sustainable tourism practices can align with Muslim tourists' cultural and religious values, thereby enhancing overall tourist satisfaction and promoting community well-being.

This innovative methodology provides practical solutions for promoting sustainable and culturally sensitive tourism in Thailand's Andaman coastal region, setting a precedent for future research in multicultural and sustainable tourism development.

4. Results

4.1. Muslim Tourist Cluster

The age distribution highlighted that 40.55% of the respondents were between 21 and 30, indicating that younger adults are a significant segment of the Muslim tourist demographic. Furthermore, 40.15% held a diploma degree, reflecting a well-educated group of travelers. The marital status data showed an almost equal split between single (48.23%) and married (48.48%) individuals, suggesting diverse travel motivations and arrangements. A substantial portion of the respondents (56.72%) earned less than USD 2000 per month, while 33.85% were employed in private companies, indicating the importance of affordable travel options. Additionally, more than half of the respondents (56.94%) were from Southeast Asia, highlighting the regional draw of the Andaman coast. These findings emphasize the need for targeted marketing strategies that cater to young, educated, and budget-conscious Muslim tourists from Southeast Asia (see Table 1).

Table 1. Demographics of foreign Muslim tourists.

Measures	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	411	56.39
	Female	318	43.61
Age	Below 21	85	11.69
	21–30	296	40.55
	31–40	217	29.85
	41–50	69	9.45
	51–60	33	4.48
	61 and above	29	3.98
Marital status	Single	352	48.23
	Married	353	48.48
	Divorce/widow/separated	24	3.28
Occupation	Student	116	15.90
	Private company staffs	247	33.85
	Entrepreneur	168	23.08
	Government agencies	80	11.03
	Unemployment	101	13.85
	Others	17	2.31
Education	Lower than high school	22	3.07
	High school	114	15.60
	Diploma	293	40.15
	Undergraduate	177	24.30
	Higher than undergraduate	123	16.88
Income per month	Below USD 2000	413	56.72
	USD 2001–5000	236	32.34
	USD 5001–8000	42	5.72
	USD 8001–10,000	29	3.98
	USD 10,001 and above	9	1.24
Birthplace/Home town	Asean	415	56.94
	Europe	162	22.22
	Middle East	109	15.00
	America	33	4.44
	Others	10	1.39

Table 2 presents the results of the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity. The KMO value of 0.961 significantly exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.5 [48], indicating that the sample size is more than adequate for factor analysis. Furthermore, Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity yielded an approximate Chi-Square value of 32,816.770 with 1770 degrees of freedom, achieving a statistical significance of 0.000. This result suggests that the correlations among the variables are sufficiently large for factor analysis.

Table 2. KMO and Bartlett’s test.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.961
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	32,816.770
	df	1770
	Sig.	0.000

The substantial sample size of 836 participants from three provinces provides a robust representation of the Muslim tourists in the Andaman coastal region [49]. According to Grimm and Yarnold [50], a larger sample size enhances reliability, which is evident in this study’s findings. The high KMO value underscores the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis, while the significant Bartlett’s test confirms the factorability of the correlation matrix. These metrics collectively validate the methodological rigor of the study and reinforce the reliability of the insights into the lifestyle characteristics and behaviors of Muslim tourists visiting the Andaman coast of Thailand [51]. Therefore, the data’s adequacy and appropriateness underscore its potential to yield meaningful and reliable factor analysis results, contributing valuable knowledge to the field of Muslim tourism.

In this study, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was employed to reduce the number of variables and identify the key factors that represent the underlying dimensions of the dataset. The initial eigenvalues, as shown in Table 3, reveal that eight factors had eigenvalues greater than one, aligning with Kaiser’s criterion for factor retention [48]. The total variance explained by these eight factors was approximately 65%, indicating that these factors adequately represent the dataset’s variability [52].

Table 3. Total variance explained.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	22.321	37.201	37.201	22.321	37.201	37.201	11.936	19.894	19.894
2	5.565	9.276	46.477	5.565	9.276	46.477	8.970	14.950	34.844
3	3.260	5.434	51.911	3.260	5.434	51.911	6.903	11.505	46.349
4	2.056	3.427	55.337	2.056	3.427	55.337	3.125	5.209	51.558
5	1.644	2.740	58.077	1.644	2.740	58.077	2.949	4.916	56.473
6	1.512	2.521	60.598	1.512	2.521	60.598	1.825	3.042	59.516
7	1.308	2.180	62.778	1.308	2.180	62.778	1.804	3.006	62.522
8	1.049	1.748	64.525	1.049	1.748	64.525	1.202	2.004	64.525

The rotation method used was Varimax, which helps in obtaining orthogonal factors that are easier to interpret. The rotated component matrix revealed the factor loadings, with only the variables having loadings of 0.32 or higher being considered significant [53]. This method ensured that only the most relevant variables were grouped into distinct factors.

The variable reduction was conducted using Kaiser’s criterion, which selects factors with eigenvalues greater than one. According to Table 3, there are eight factors with eigenvalues exceeding this threshold. The factor analysis was further validated by ensuring the total variance explained by these factors was greater than 65% [52]. Tabachnick and Fidell [53] suggested that the choice of cutoff value for factor loadings should be determined

by the researcher. From Table 3, it was observed that the eight factors collectively explained approximately 65% of the total variance, indicating that these factors were appropriate for variable reduction.

In organizing the components, a factor loading threshold of 0.30 was set following [52]. Additionally, according to Tabachnick and Fidell [53], only the variables with factor loadings of 0.32 or higher are considered significant for interpretation. Furthermore, the analysis required each factor to consist of at least three variables following Kaiser's guidelines. Therefore, while examining the factor loadings, it was found that although there were initially eight components, the eighth factor only included two variables. Consequently, the lifestyle model was consolidated into seven meaningful components.

The analysis identified seven meaningful factors, as the eighth factor contained only two variables, which is insufficient according to standard practices. These seven factors were named based on their loadings and the nature of the grouped variables, as shown in Table 4. The factors are as follows:

1. The Traveler: Comprising 18 variables and explaining the highest variance at 19.894%, this factor represents mainstream travel behavior, highlighting the significant aspects of Muslim tourist activities.
2. Discoverers: Including nine variables, explaining 14.950% of the variance, this factor reflects those who seek new experiences and adventures.
3. Classic Excursionist: Consisting of 11 variables, explaining 11.505% of the variance, this factor captures traditional tourism activities and interests.
4. Adventure Tourist: With seven variables, explaining 5.209% of the variance, this factor represents tourists seeking thrilling and challenging activities.
5. City Tour: Including five variables, explaining 4.916% of the variance, this factor pertains to urban tourism activities.
6. Leisure Tourism: Comprising three variables, explaining 3.042% of the variance, this factor represents leisure and relaxation activities.
7. Thainess Tourism: With five variables, explaining 5.010% of the variance, this factor highlights tourists interested in experiencing the Thai way of life.

Table 4. Rotated component matrix (factor loading).

Variable	Component						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Traveling within my country/domestic travel	0.824						
Traveling by following the trail of films, series, and magazines	0.823						
Traveling outside your country/international travel	0.814						
Ecotourism/environmentally friendly tourism	0.808						
Cultural tourism, study lifestyles of local people, and study local history and traditions	0.806						
Social tourism can make new friends, or socialize	0.794						
Travel during the sanctity worship trip	0.792						
Famous, well-known, and popular tourist attractions (in trend)	0.774						
Tourist attractions that remain an old/classic nature as ever as much as possible	0.771						
Seeking new and unseen tourist attractions that are unbeknown even though there are some risk-taking or unsafe activities	0.767						
New tourist attractions that you have never been to before	0.743						
Familiar tourist attractions with safety that you have been there before	0.663						
Private, quiet, and peaceful atmosphere for traveling	0.641						
Visit historical tourist attractions or local ancient ruins, such as museums, monuments, temples, religious places, etc.	0.473						
Tourism that restricts the rights of specific groups of tourists, such as high-class and high-income tourists only	0.460						

These factors collectively explain a substantial portion of the variability in Muslim tourist behaviors, providing a nuanced understanding that can inform tailored tourism strategies. The study's rigorous methodology and robust sample size underscore the reliability of these findings, offering valuable insights for enhancing sustainable and culturally sensitive tourism practices.

When clustering the seven lifestyle components, three major groups emerged:

Cluster 1: Mainstream Travelers—This group comprises Muslim tourists who prefer general relaxation and spending leisure time with family or friends. They often use travel agencies and are the largest group, predominantly visiting Phang Nga and Krabi provinces. Typically traveling in groups of 4–5 people, they gather information through the internet, especially Facebook and Instagram, and rely on friends for travel decisions. They tend to stay in five-star hotels for an average of six nights, spending about THB 5282 per day mainly on accommodation and food. They prioritize having mosques, prayer facilities, and water for ablutions at tourist sites, airports, hotels, shopping centers, and parks.

Cluster 2: Experience Seekers—Also referred to as Discoverers, this group mainly consists of tourists aged 18–34, traveling in groups of 3–5 people. With an average expenditure of THB 3778 per person per night, they prefer independent travel without using travel agencies, often visiting Phuket and Phang Nga. They source information online but make decisions based on trusted friends and word-of-mouth marketing. They typically stay for 3–7 nights and come from Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Their basic needs include prayer facilities and halal food, but they are particularly drawn to adventure tourism activities such as rafting and mountain climbing.

Cluster 3: Chillouts—Primarily visiting Phuket and Krabi, this group enjoys independent travel without using travel agencies, traveling in groups of 4–6 people. They gather travel information from the internet, particularly Facebook and Instagram, and are influenced by Thai government agencies and friends in their travel decisions. Staying for 4–7 nights in five-star hotels, they seek halal food and prayer facilities. This group, aged 31–40, includes businesspeople, entrepreneurs, and retirees from the Middle East and various parts of Asia, spending an average of THB 6010 per day. They prefer beach relaxation, famous tourist attractions, and convenient amenities.

Overall, Mainstream Travelers form the largest segment at 40.85%, followed by Experience Seekers at 24.72%, and Chillouts at 22.21%. A subset of Mainstream Travelers, focusing on family relationships, accounts for 12.22%. This subgroup values relaxation and general activities with friends and family, and is interested in both natural resources and the Thai way of life at tourist destinations, emphasizing the importance of family-oriented tourism activities. The close proportions of Experience Seekers and Chillouts suggest diverse yet significant market segments within the Muslim tourist demographic.

4.2. Muslim-Friendly Destination and Sustainable Culture and Natural Resources

Additionally, to understand more about sustainability and cultural sensitivity, a qualitative approach was employed by conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with local community members, as well as hotel, tour operators, and restaurant owners, which provided valuable insights into cultural sensitivity and sustainable tourism practices.

4.2.1. Muslim-Friendly Tourism

Do we need to be “Halal Tourism?” is a question during the focus group interviews. Business operators expressed the view that the Muslim tourist market can help distribute revenue to local communities, as these tourists seek deeper, more meaningful experiences that connect them with local businesses.

Driving Economic Sustainability: Most restaurant businesses have observed that tourists continue to closely monitor the presence of the halal logo to ensure that the food complies with their religious principles. The following quote is an example of Muslim-friendly tourism and sustainability in terms of economics.

“...tourists who dine at these restaurants are predominantly Muslims who prioritize safety in their choice of dining establishments. These restaurants place great importance on obtaining a “Halal Food” certification, which serves as a guarantee and reassurance for tourists...” (Focus group interview—Restaurant Owner)

As mentioned by one restaurant owner, certification with the “halal” sign can ensure that Muslim tourists receive services that align with their religious principles, thereby enabling tourism businesses to generate revenue. However, the process of “halal” certifying consists of strict standards and varied interpretations, making it challenging to fully understand and implement.

“...if we promote ‘Halal Tourism’, I am concerned that there may be insufficient entities capable of meeting the requirements for ‘Halal Certifications’. Businesses cannot successfully operate in this sector if they aim for ‘Halal’ status without obtaining the necessary endorsement through certification...” (Focus group interview—Former Director of Tourism Authority of Thailand)

This concern has led to the discussion for developing a strategy to persuade Muslim tourists without breaching religious principles.

Laws of Understanding: All stakeholders totally agree that the Muslim tourism market plays an important role in driving the local economy; thus “How can we serve Muslim tourists?” needs to be discussed. However, the tourism industry holds differing views from the local community, suggesting that Muslim tourists be classified into three categories: those who strictly adhere to religious principles, those who follow them less rigorously, and those for whom religious rules are not a priority. Therefore, tourism stakeholders, including local businesses and communities, have engaged in discussions about promoting “Muslim-friendly tourism” as an alternative to the term “halal”. However, it is essential for tourism businesses to demonstrate their understanding of Islamic principles in order to effectively cater to this market segment. These distinctions are evident in their varying demands for amenities such as halal food, restrooms with bidet sprayers, prayer spaces, and activities that align with their religious beliefs. Additionally, they pay attention to the arrangement of prayer areas, as well as the design of swimming pools and beaches. From a policy standpoint, it is crucial to develop strategies that accommodate the diverse lifestyles of Muslim tourists while ensuring these practices are compatible with the local community’s customs.

4.2.2. Sustainable Culture and Natural Resources

The lexicon “Muslim Friendly Destination” was raised during the discussion regarding “trust” and “credibility” whereas Muslim tourists can visit and experience without violating religious principles. Additionally, the implementation of Muslim-friendly destination guidelines is a crucial process that contributes to sustainability. According to Islamic teachings, local communities involved in tourism, such as the Tung Yee Peng Tourism Community or Baan Nai Nang Tourism Community, emphasize the importance of conducting environmentally friendly tourism activities. These communities focus on conservation efforts, such as increasing green spaces and reducing energy consumption. One significant aspect is utilizing tourism as a mechanism to sustain natural resources while preserving local culture and traditions in accordance with Muslim practices. This approach ensures sustainability amidst the growth of tourist cities, where visitors from diverse religious backgrounds utilize the community’s natural resources. The following quote is an example of the Chair of the Tourism Community who employs tourism activities to sustain the local culture of Muslims and natural resources.

“...we live in a thriving environment rooted in the way of life guided by Islamic principles within our community. One day, tourism arrived next door, bringing people from other cultures and backgrounds. Amidst this change, we must steadfastly adhere to our religious principles and continue to drive tourism in alignment with Islamic values. This approach ensures that future generations can preserve their cultural heritage and way of

life. Simultaneously, we remain committed to maintaining the richness of our natural environment. . .” (Focus group interview–Chair of Tourism Community)

This is evidence of how the Muslim way of life establishes a foundation for tourism based on the concept of a Muslim-friendly destination. At the same time, tourism communities are able to sustain the environment and preserve natural resources within the community. These are exactly the aspects that Muslim tourists seek and expect from their travel experiences at various destinations. It ensures that tourists can trust that the activities and processes align with their religious principles, providing them with a sense of confidence and comfort during their travels.

5. Discussion

The findings of this research underscore the significant potential for growth in the Muslim tourism market, particularly in non-Muslim majority countries. This is a segment that destination managers should prioritize. The study suggests that understanding the lifestyles and travel behaviors of Muslim tourists is crucial for effective destination marketing and management. While religious requirements, such as halal food and prayer facilities, are significant, the findings reveal that Muslim tourists have diverse motivations and travel behaviors extending beyond religious needs. This aligns with earlier research indicating the need for a nuanced approach in catering to this market [45,54].

The segmentation of Muslim tourists into lifestyle clusters, as identified in this study, provides a more detailed understanding of their preferences and behaviors. This supports the argument made by Battour et al. [40] about the heterogeneity within the Muslim tourist market. Tailoring offerings solely based on religious criteria may not be sufficient to attract this segment. Instead, a nuanced understanding of the different lifestyle segments within the Muslim tourism market can help develop more targeted and effective marketing strategies [44]. This nuanced approach is crucial for enhancing marketing effectiveness.

For instance, the “Mainstream Traveler Group”, which constitutes the largest proportion of Muslim tourists, exhibits similar travel motivations and behaviors to the general tourist population, focusing on relaxation, spending time with family and friends, and experiencing local culture [15,40]. In contrast, the “Experience Seekers Group” and the “Chillouts Group” have distinct preferences for adventure tourism, shopping, and immersing in the local way of life [40,55]. Therefore, destination managers should develop diverse tourism products and experiences that cater to these different lifestyle segments within the Muslim tourism market. This approach aligns with the need to address varied consumer motivations and preferences, enhancing marketing effectiveness [15,40].

Additionally, it is crucial for destination managers to ensure that Islamic attributes, such as the availability of prayer facilities and halal food options, are prominently featured in their marketing communications and on-site experiences. This not only reassures Muslim tourists but also demonstrates the destination’s commitment to catering to their specific needs. Effective marketing and communication strategies are vital for reaching Muslim tourists, with digital platforms, word of mouth, and influencers being particularly effective in engaging this market segment [40,54].

Furthermore, integrating sustainable development principles into tourism strategies can enhance the appeal of destinations to Muslim tourists, and also drive tourism sustainability in the areas, aligning well with Muslim tourists’ values. By incorporating sustainability into tourism offerings, destinations can attract more Muslim tourists while contributing to the broader goals of environmental conservation and cultural preservation [9]. As noted by members of the community-based tourism initiatives participating in the Muslim-Friendly Destination program, a sustainable tourism mindset has been instilled in local communities within the Andaman Coastal Cluster. This approach encompasses not only local operators but also other village members in the community [56]. Furthermore, within the framework of Sharia law, the practices of local Muslim communities emphasize hygiene and the preservation of natural resources, which can enhance sustainability in social, economic, and environmental dimensions [57]. From this perspective, tourism is not

merely a mechanism for driving the nation's economic engine; rather, it serves as a sustainable strategy for preserving the natural, social, and cultural resources of the community. Consequently, the findings of this paper contribute not only to the field of Islamic tourism but also demonstrate how local Muslim communities in the Andaman Coastal Cluster can implement Muslim-friendly tourism to promote sustainability.

This study's findings highlight the importance of sustainable and culturally sensitive tourism practices in enhancing the attractiveness of the Andaman coastal region to Muslim tourists. Sustainable tourism aligns with Muslim tourists' values and fosters positive interactions between tourists and local communities, enhancing overall community well-being [10]. Previous research from SCOPUS journals has reinforced the value of integrating sustainability in tourism development. For instance, Gössling et al. [14] emphasize the need for sustainable practices that benefit both the environment and local populations. Schiederig et al. [11] discuss how sustainable development can reduce social impacts and promote community cohesion.

Thailand's proactive initiatives, such as the "Thailand Muslim Friendly Destination" mobile application and events like the Phuket Andaman Halal for Tourism and Krabi Halal Food Festival, reflect its efforts to create a welcoming environment for Muslim travelers. However, to compete effectively with leading Muslim-friendly destinations like Malaysia and Indonesia, Thailand must deepen its understanding of Muslim tourists' lifestyle patterns and travel behavior [4]. This study's comprehensive methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative data, provides valuable insights into these patterns and behaviors, offering practical solutions for promoting sustainable and culturally sensitive tourism.

In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights for destination managers in non-Muslim majority countries on effectively catering to the growing Muslim tourism market. By understanding this market's diverse needs and preferences, destination managers can develop tailored offerings and marketing strategies to attract and satisfy Muslim tourists. Moreover, integrating sustainable practices into tourism strategies can enhance the overall appeal of destinations, ensuring long-term success and alignment with the values of Muslim tourists. This approach attracts Muslim tourists and fosters positive interactions between tourists and local communities, enhancing overall community well-being and contributing to sustainable tourism development goals.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study aims to classify Muslim tourist groups in the Andaman coastal area and identify services that meet their religious requirements, promoting sustainable and culturally sensitive tourism practices. Muslim tourists are one of the crucial tourism market segments in the Andaman Coastal Cluster due to its populations and the readiness of destinations. Thus, destination managers, including the local government, need to well understand Muslim tourist insights through lifestyle and psychological factors [20]. Not only quantitative method was employed to classify Muslim tourist behavior, but also qualitative method for understanding the sustainable culture and natural resources of Muslim tourism communities.

This paper elucidates the lifestyle patterns of Muslim tourists by classifying their behaviors using AIO models. In accordance with Islamic teachings, Muslim tourists are required to adhere to Islamic principles during their travels, necessitating that tourism businesses offer appropriate services. Furthermore, insights from tourism stakeholders indicate that sustainable tourism practices are informed by a "halal" taxonomy that encompasses both tourist requirements and service offerings. An increase in tourist visits to destinations correlates with a greater commitment from local community members to preserve the environment and uphold their traditional way of life.

To effectively cater to the growing Muslim tourism market, destination managers should develop targeted marketing strategies that address the diverse needs of different lifestyle segments identified in this study. Emphasizing Islamic attributes such as halal food and prayer facilities, alongside promoting sustainable tourism practices, can enhance

the overall appeal to Muslim tourists. Utilizing digital platforms, influencers, and word-of-mouth marketing will effectively reach and engage this segment. Additionally, fostering community involvement in tourism planning ensures authentic cultural interactions and supports sustainable development. By integrating these approaches, destinations can attract and satisfy Muslim tourists while promoting long-term sustainable growth.

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