

Halal hospitality goes global: challenges of (not) serving alcohol in an Islamic tourist destination: a case study of Egypt

Mohamed Fawzi Afifi

*Hotel Studies Department, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels,
University of Sadat City, Sadat City, Egypt*

Asad Mohsin

*School of Management and Marketing, University of Waikato,
Hamilton, New Zealand, and*

Mustafa Farouk

AgResearch Ltd, Hamilton, New Zealand

Abstract

Purpose – The study investigates perceptions and debate that are linked to the relationship between religion, alcohol, tourism and hospitality within the context of an Islamic tourist destination. An analytical approach involving a review of literature, assessment of conservationists' attitude representing Islam and Christianity, and current trends using a student sample to determine intentions is used. The study findings suggest that alcohol and religiosity are not compatible, use, abuse and dependency are more common among non-believers than believers. A tense dispute continues in the Arab World around alcohol. The study contributes to the literature by highlighting economics, social practice, theoretical and managerial implications related to alcohol service in Egypt and suggests a way forward for global Muslim staff working in the hospitality, tourism, and travel industries.

Keywords Halal, Hospitality, Tourism, Egypt, Muslim, Alcohol

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The relationship between religion, economy, society and culture remains an area of debate and research despite the growth of secularism (Engler, 2016; Gauthier *et al.*, 2013a, 2013b; Jafari and Sandikci, 2016; Lewis, 2015; Osella and Osella, 2009; Rudnycky, 2009). As consumer expenditure increases and businesses grow in the tourism and hospitality sectors, so too does inbound and outbound tourism to destinations in Muslim countries. The inbound tourism in countries such as Turkey, Malaysia, Morocco, Jordan, Egypt, UAE, Indonesia and Tunisia significantly increased in the pre-COVID-19 period. At one end of the



spectrum is the growth of the outbound Muslim tourism market which is expected to reach US\$300bn by 2026 (GMTI, 2019), a growth also reflected in the increase in inbound travel to the Muslim countries. The rapport between Islam and tourism has generally generated both interest and apprehension. The interest is linked to the opportunity of exponential growth of the Muslim travellers' market and apprehension is linked to the limited awareness about religious practices and needs of Muslim travellers. In terms of awareness, Sandikci (2011) has gone to the extent to state that the discovery of Muslims as consumers resembles the discovery in the USA of ethnic communities such as blacks, Hispanics and Asians as viable market segments. However, the parallel is further complicated by the heterogeneity of the Muslim World (Sandikci, 2011; Stephenson, 2014).

Though outbound Halal tourism from the Muslim countries has attracted scholarship, little is published about the challenges Muslim service providers face in delivering hospitality services at home. Notably little has been written about the serving of alcohol, the focus of this study. To contribute to the current literature on Halal hospitality, a systematic analysis is undertaken, using an Egyptian context as an example. The aim is to identify the relationship between religion, alcohol and hospitality, its impact on social practices and the perceptions of an alcohol dry or wet hospitality industry and service in a Muslim country and the resultant commercial pressures. Hence, should alcohol be served in a Muslim country or not? For those who adopt a strict religious stance, the answer is "No", but those who espouse a commercial (pragmatic) view might reply "Yes". However, the religious, social and economic implications should be carefully analysed before adhering to a dogmatic response.

This paper takes an analytical perspective from a conservationist approach to assess the challenges and issues associated with the serving of alcohol in a Muslim country, the current study specifically investigates the following questions:

- What is the perceived relationship between religion and alcohol within the context of Egypt?
- What do the two major religions in Egypt (i.e. Islam and Christianity) state about alcohol use and practices?
- What is the role of alcohol in the Egyptian context?
- What could be the economic and social implications of alcohol service in the Egyptian hospitality industry?

Tourism is a dynamic, resilient industry, seemingly emerging stronger after every calamity. This compels a country like Egypt, with its huge tourist potential, to carefully assess its services and explore how best it could provide Halal hospitality whilst sustaining both religious obligations and economic development.

As El-Gohary (2016, p. 125) notes "The study of the relationship between religion and tourism focuses often separately on either religion or tourism and pays little attention to the actual interaction and/or linkage between the two. . . Hence, there is a great need to conduct much more research studies that can examine and investigate the interaction and/or linkage between tourism and different aspects of religion". Driven by the economic potential of Islamic tourism (Hall *et al.*, 2020; Mohsin *et al.*, 2020), there is an immediate need to examine such operational issues.

Background and literature review

Exploring the relationship between religion and alcohol

Consumer behaviour is influenced by culture and religion; both have a role in shaping practices (Alam *et al.*, 2011). Religion is one of the principal forces that shaped human's

conception of alcohol. It structured the connection between humans and drink. The three Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – deliberated alcohol and each has its dogma in that respect. As Islam and Christianity are the two main Faiths in the Egyptian context, this study first explores the role of alcohol in Islam and in Christianity then links it to the current situation and religious challenges in Egypt. Egypt is selected as the case study by reason of its popularity as a tourist destination based upon its ancient civilizations. Indeed, [Ashour \(1995\)](#) suggests that religion and culture influenced alcohol consumption in ancient Egypt and the country has a long history in this respect.

What is the relationship between Islam and alcohol?

The Arabic term for intoxicants, whether alcohol or drugs, is “Khamr” ([Battour et al., 2010](#)) and this nomenclature is used in the Qur’an, the Holy Book of Muslims. Terms and aromas might alter but the consequences are the question. “Khamr” is a material capable of beclouding the mind ([Al-Qaradawi, 1997](#)). Islam is largely straightforward regarding the consumption of intoxicants. As dictated in the Holy Qur’an intoxicants are “haram” or unlawful ([Al-Qaradawi, 1997](#)). This is established in the Qur’an (The Holy Qur’an 2:219; 5:90–91, in [Abdel Haleem, 2004](#)) and in several narrations by Prophet Mohamed (for supplemental discussion, see [Al-Qaradawi, 1997](#)).

“You who believe remember, intoxicants and gambling, idolatrous practices and [divining with] arrows are repugnant acts linked to Satan’s doing– shun them so that you may prosper. With intoxicants and gambling, Satan seeks only to incite enmity and hatred among you and to stop you from remembering God and prayer. Will you not give them up”? (The Holy Qur’an, 5:90–92).

In short, Muslims are prohibited completely from consuming alcohol because of the revelations of Allah SWT in the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet SAW. That prohibition is absolute, for not even a drop is allowed ([Afifi, 2014](#)). Not only is the consumption prohibited but even wilfully setting where alcohol is consumed is also prohibited.

Despite that, the Quran does acknowledge that “Khamr” has “... some benefit for people...” but “...the sin is greater than the benefit” (The Holy Qur’an, 2:219). Benefits referred to here are of economic nature as a result of trade ([Khashan, 2016](#)). Nevertheless, preserving physical and mental health is a priority in Islam and prohibiting intoxicants is imposed for this purpose ([Robinson and Kenyon, 2009](#)). Muslims must refrain from using any substance – whatever form it takes – that affects their reasoning capabilities ([Al-Qaradawi, 1997](#)). Verily, alcohol is capable of altering consciousness ([Levine, 1992](#)). Nonetheless, some Muslims violate such proscription and drink alcohol ([Afifi, 2014](#); [Shahzad et al., 2020](#); [Bilal et al., 1990](#)). Under ordinary circumstances, alcohol is assuredly not tolerated in Islam, but exceptional conditions necessitate allowances ([Nurdeng, 2009](#)). If one cannot find a substitute and one would expire if not to ingest a prohibited food or a drink, then one is permitted to eat that required to keep death at bay ([Afifi, 2014](#); [Nurdeng, 2009](#)). However, all activities related to drinking alcohol are normally banned and the transgressors are doomed. This entails alcohol production, sale, purchase and service ([Afifi, 2014](#); [Al-Qaradawi, 1997](#)). Accordingly, the entire supply chain is denounced, giving no chance for conjectures ([Afifi, 2014](#)).

What is the relationship between Christianity and alcohol?

Alcohol is cited several times in the Bible:

Give intoxicating liquor, you people, to the one about to perish and wine to those who are bitter of soul. “Let one drink and forget one’s poverty and let one remember one’s own

trouble no more” (Proverbs 31: 6–7). “The priest shall then wave these before the LORD as a wave offering; they are holy and belong to the priest, together with the breast that was waved and the thigh that was presented. After that, the Nazirite may drink wine” (Numbers 6:20). “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

George (2003) states that wine is indissolubly associated with Christianity. Miraculously, Christ turned water into wine at a wedding (George, 2003). The New Testament identifies the wine as an ecstatic beverage, a medicine and a symbol (Mandelbaum, 1965). Wine is necessary for sacred rites. It is essential for the “Eucharist” (a/k/a Thanksgiving) commemoration although this does not award it a revered significance *intrinsically* – where wine signifies Jesus’ blood (Robinson and Kenyon, 2009). This divine allegory is accentuated by the Catholic Church (Lossifides, 1992). Likewise, the Coptic Church concedes the connotation of wine (Gabra, 2009). Nevertheless, for some Protestant Churches, alcohol is spiritually contemptible; thus, its mere metaphorical presence in the ceremonies of Communion is forbidden (Mandelbaum, 1965).

This connection between wine and Eucharist caused the church to maintain vineyards and winemaking (George, 2003). Notably, monks had salient marks in viticulture and winemaking. Monasteries had their vineyards and wine was produced and perfected under their custody (George, 2003). In addition, other alcoholic beverages were also made, for instance, Benedictine – an herbal liqueur, is an invention of the French Benedictine monks and Trappist beer is tended by Trappist monks (Katsigris and Thomas, 2007). Noteworthy also, many of these were used for medicinal and invigorating purposes (George, 2003).

Generally, Christianity consents to alcohol consumption given that it is done in sobriety (Robinson and Kenyon, 2009) whereas drunkenness is an ethical degeneration (Robinson and Kenyon, 2009). Undeniably, drunkenness is a misdeed pursuant to the New Testament (Cook, 2006). Nevertheless, the stance towards alcohol varies by the church. For example, whilst Mormons prohibit alcohol and the Seventh-day Adventists resolutely refrain from drinking, Lutherans have no limitations on alcohol (Hall *et al.*, 2020). Protestantism has some different beliefs about drinking. Furthermore, Belcher (2006) notes that the different Protestant cults have no agreement on this. Sentiments over its consumption range from condemnation to leniency, whilst delinquency are barred. This discrepancy originates from the varied expositions of the Holy Scriptures (Belcher, 2006). Moderation decidedly stressed in Protestantism, prompted the commencement of temperance movements (Levine, 1992). Levine observes that for the most part campaigns related to Protestant societies – e.g. Sweden and UK – exemplifying “temperance culture”. While Catholic-dominated countries – e.g. Italy and France – were labelled as “non-temperance culture”.

However, there is no mention of Christianity’s view over alcohol-related activities such as serving or selling alcohol.

Role of alcohol in the Egyptian context

The Arab Republic of Egypt is situated in the heart of the Middle East and North African region. Egypt’s population reached 104 million as of July 2020 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020). Islam is the religion of almost 90% of the population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020). The second-largest religion is Christianity with almost 10% of the citizens being followers (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020). The Christians are affiliated to three key sects: Coptic Orthodox, Anglican (Protestant) and Catholic (Ibrahim *et al.*, 1996). Coptic Orthodox constitute most Christians (95%), whilst the other churches make only 5% (Rugh, 2016).

The ancient Egyptians were among the first to produce alcoholic drinks (Afifi, 2015). They pioneered the production of barley beer around 4200 B.C. (Li *et al.*, 2007), even leaving

illustrations of the brewing procedures (Katsigris and Thomas, 2007). Egyptians attributed the creation of beer to Osiris (Hornsey, 2003). Both the divine and earthly shared in beer as a good accompaniment with food as reflected in offerings to the gods (Mehdawy and Hussein, 2010; Samuel, 1996). Basic to the ancient Egyptians' diet, beer was the king of alcohol (Ashour, 1995; Hornsey, 2003). Interestingly, ancient Egyptians regarded beer as a portion of food more than a drink. They consumed it to gain nourishment and vigour and children and lactating mothers consumed it. Ashour (1995) and Soueif *et al.* (1988) state that beer was the most consumed alcoholic drink and it continues to be so, for 62% of alcohol consumed in Egypt is beer (WHO, 2018). Though beer drinking in ancient Egypt, as described by Ashour (1995, p. 64), was "modest and social", binge drinking was practiced. Excessive drinking was, however, frowned upon and related adverse effects on health were acknowledged (Ashour, 1995).

Unlike beer, wines and spirits were not popular and were seen as "dangerous" (Ashour, 1995). However, starting from the New Kingdom (1550–1069 BC), wine progressively gained popularity (Hornsey, 2003). This change was attributed to the arrival of the Greeks and advanced agriculture systems (Hornsey, 2003). Yet, wine – being a costly beverage, was more of a rich person's drink and not for an ordinary Egyptian (Estreicher, 2006). Additionally, wine was used for the medication (Estreicher, 2006; Katsigris and Thomas, 2007). Afifi (2014) opines that these early perceptions have continued to influence drinking into the modern period.

The introduction of Islam in Egypt in 641 AD led to alcohol becoming an anathema (Afifi, 2015; Al-Qaradawi, 1997). Nevertheless, it did not result in eliminating alcohol from Egypt. Alcohol co-existed in Egypt with Islam (Ashour, 1995), despite the Egyptian Government imposing laws and duties inhibiting alcoholics promotion and importation (Ashour, 1995). Initially, production was state-controlled (Ashour, 1995) but the government loosened its clench as part of the privatization process in the 1990s (Sfakianakis, 2004). Today, most Egyptian men (91.2%) and women (97.3%) are "lifetime abstainers" [The World Health Organization (WHO), 2018], yet alcohol persists as a prickly subject in Egypt and the Muslim world. Equally, very little is known about the drinking habits of Christians in Egypt (Afifi, 2014). Previous studies on Egyptian drinking also failed to separate Christians from Muslim subjects (Soueif *et al.*, 1990; Michalak and Trocki, 2006).

In practice, alcohol is rarely studied in the Arab world (Ghandour *et al.*, 2009). For their part, Bilal *et al.* (1990) suggest that there is a belief that alcohol does not represent an issue in the Muslim World and it is not a public issue; but rather is a "personal illness" (Ashour, 1995, p. 73). If the safety of these communities were threatened by alcoholism, probably the case would be different. According to The World Health Organization (WHO) (2018), alcohol abuse causes 3 million deaths annually. The monetary cost of job absence due to alcohol drinking is US\$30–65bn annually (Amiri and Behnezhad, 2020).

Perhaps, the best summary is that of Ashour (1995), alcohol was often present, but demand was usually moderate.

Role of tourism and hospitality industries in the Egyptian context

Egypt is one of the primeval avowed tourist destinations. Largely, tourism is a very crucial source of national income. Statistics demonstrate that tourism accounted for 11.9% of the gross domestic product in 2018 and the sector provides 19.3% of foreign exchange (State Information Service, 2020a). In 2018, Egypt welcomed around 11.3 million tourists, its peak being 14.7 million tourists in 2010 (CEICa). Arrivals are primarily from Europe, followed by the Middle East, then Asia and The Pacific as of December 2018 (CEICb).

However, tourism and hospitality have suffered setbacks mainly due to political turmoil since 2011 (Afifi, 2014; Mohammad *et al.*, 2012). For example, Cairo's hotel's occupancy rates declined from 73.8% in 2010 to 39.9% in 2011 (Afifi, 2014; Mohammad *et al.*, 2012). In addition, it has been reported that a loss of over US\$3.1bn from tourism was incurred due to the "25 January Revolution" in 2011 (Nassar, 2012). To worsen the situation, COVID-19 was the most recent disaster that hit the industry (Knell, 2020).

Tourists with different interests can enjoy Egypt. Lovers of beach and aquatic sports will find their wish in Alexandria, Hurghada and Sharm el-Sheikh. The Western desert oases are a haven for eco-tourists (Afifi, 2014). Luxor and Aswan are world-renowned as an "open museum" of Egyptian monuments dating back to ancient times (State Information Service, 2020c). Notably, Egypt has seven sites listed on the World Heritage List (UNESCO) (World Heritage List, 2021, whc.unesco.org/en/list).

The accommodation industry comprised 161,039 rooms in 1,179 hotels as of 2017 (CEIC). One of the significant benefits of tourism and hospitality is they account directly and indirectly for 12.6% of Egypt's workforce (State Information Service, 2020b). As the unemployment rate reached 13.4% in March 2014 (CEIC) this cannot be belittled.

A fundamental hospitality task is to serve food and beverage, which includes alcoholic beverages. Consuming alcohol is permitted in Egypt, but law controls consumption and provision. It bans drinking intoxicants in public areas and defines sites where it is authorized, primarily tourist hotels, restaurants, etc (Afifi, 2014). In addition, it specifies punishment for culprits (site.eastlaws.com, 2021). The law additionally bars selling alcohol on Islamic holy events – for instance, the birthday of Prophet Mohamed and Ramadan – the Holy month of fasting – (Egypt Today staff, 2017). In Egypt, a country with a mass Muslim population, alcohol was and continues to be a thorny matter.

Law and legislations: Ban of intoxicants consumption

As mentioned earlier, the government issued edicts to administer alcohol handling. Many of these practices are specified by law "No. 63 for 1976" titled: "the ban of alcohol consumption" (site.eastlaws.com). This law comprises 11 articles that cover the designation of intoxicants, banning consumption in public areas, designation of places where it is allowed and banning advertising. It also mandates penalties against violation of consumer law, advertising and drunkenness. For example, provision and consumption of intoxicants are not permissible in public areas and stores. It is only permissible in hotel and tourist establishments and clubs; these are designated by pertinent laws. Violators would be penalized by a fine not exceeding 200 Egyptian pounds and imprisonment for a period not exceeding 6 months. The outlet operator or manager – where the violation occurs – is liable for the same penalties. In addition, this includes confiscation of intoxicants and closure of the outlet for a period not less than one week and no more than 6 months. Whoever is caught in a state of evident intoxication in a public area or outlet will be imprisoned for a period not less than two weeks and no more than six months or charged a fine not less than 20 Egyptian pounds and not exceeding a hundred. If this is repeated, imprisonment must be sentenced (site.eastlaws.com).

Such laws adhering to religious obligations pose a challenge for followers of Islam in the industry. What implications it generates are further discussed below.

Discussion, conclusion and implications

Halal hospitality in Egypt

The word Halal is often only associated with food and things that are consumed (Farouk *et al.*, 2014, 2015), but applies far beyond that. It is about ensuring everything we do is

sanctioned by God and the laws of the societies we choose to live in if those laws do not contravene God's Laws. Yes, not only everything we consume must be halal but also the money we use in buying that which we consume must be legally acquired for what is consumed to be halal. Allah (God) is Pure and only accepts that which is pure (An-Nawawi's Forty Hadith, Hadith No. 10). Thus, unless what we eat, feed our families, feed others, wear, donate in charity and shelter ourselves from the elements are and earned from halal sources, God will not accept it from us. Using Egypt as an example, the relationship between religion and alcohol finds that the Islamic concept of halal is embedded in the values that many non-Islamic countries or corporations espouse such as eating wholesome and nutritious foods and not eating or feeding others what is harmful, living on what is legally earned, giving measure for measure in all our dealings, fair wages for fair services, transparency, not wasting resources nor damaging the environment and, above all, equal opportunities for all citizens and employees regardless of faith or ethnicity. These are all halal because doing anything opposed to those values is Haram (forbidden by God) such as drinking or trading alcohol.

Investigating perceptions about the relationship between religion and alcohol was the first objective of this study and it is noted that alcohol and religiosity are not compatible. Largely observing religious rituals decreases the chance of consuming alcohol (Ellison *et al.*, 2008; Ghandour *et al.*, 2009). Ghandour *et al.* (2009) found that alcohol use, abuse and dependency are more common among non-believers than believers. In the past, Bilal *et al.* (1990) have suggested that religion could fight alcoholism. Some Muslim countries may adopt a very strict adherence to Islamic doctrine, e.g. the theocratic system of Saudi Arabia. However, other countries may tend to be moderate in their observance of this, e.g. Malaysia (Henderson, 2010). As Henderson (2010, p. 247) notes: "social restrictions imposed by the religion and degrees of conservatism vary according to the regime and more secular administrations, especially if dealing with a multicultural citizenry, are usually less exacting". Still, individualism cannot be ruled out as individual Muslims may have opinions differing from the State's formal stance.

The second objective of this study debates the use and practices around alcohol, not only in Egypt but also in other countries in the Middle East and North Africa which tend to have comparable traditions. They likewise have their policies apropos alcohol. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), non-Muslim inhabitants and tourists are equally expected to have a liquor permit to purchase and drink alcohol (Afifi, 2014; Sherif, 2011). Under the law, Muslims in UAE cannot consume alcohol (Sherif, 2011). In nearby Bahrain, offering alcohol was confined to five-star hotels (Battour *et al.*, 2010). In Bahrain, restaurants located near mosques, schools or residential districts are banned from selling alcohol (Battour *et al.*, 2010). A proposal banning Muslims from consuming alcohol in public was advocated by some Bahraini parliamentarians. Under this overture, hotel guests would be left with the option of drinking only in their rooms whereas the suggested ban covers hotels, clubs and restaurants (Sambidge, 2009). However, this plan was not actualized ("Tougher penalties for gambling approved", 2021). That said, it is important to note the burgeoning movement of "Halal Tourism and Hospitality" acknowledging and observing Islamic values, i.e. alcoholic beverages are not served. This mostly focuses on Muslim travellers' needs, but it may appeal to non-Muslims attracted to a "cultural experience" in destinations where intoxicants are not imbibed (Battour *et al.*, 2018). Nonetheless, Spracklen (2014) notes that the power of the alcohol industry continues to raise tensions between capitalism and morality in a society. A relevant example was when, in 2008, a Saudi Arabian Sheikh, Abdel Aziz Ibrahim, owner of the Cairo Grand Hyatt hotel, decided not to provide alcohol in his five-star luxurious hotel (Battour *et al.*, 2010). The owner did so because "foreign tourists have to

respect Muslim cultural norms and to conform with Islamic law “(Battour *et al.*, 2010, p. 8). The Egyptian Hotel Association’s (EHA) answer to this was a warning of downgrading the hotel to be a two-star. The incident instituted a debate about selling alcohol in a Muslim country like Egypt. It is to be noted that the national flag carrier of Egypt, Egypt Air, does not serve alcoholic beverages on its flights (Battour *et al.*, 2010).

A tense dispute around alcohol continues in the Arab world. The case of Bahrain is already mentioned elsewhere. Likewise, controversy on alcohol erupted in Sultanate Oman (Pubic, 2014). In Tunis, Ennahda’s Muslim political party’s first prime minister asserted that drinking alcohol was one of the “sacred liberties” that the party would protect (Wolf, 2017). In Saudi Arabia, the Crown Prince firmly stated that alcohol would not be served in the mega project, NEOM and that those who wish to drink should head to Egypt and Jordan (Whitaker, 2017). In Egypt, Islam-based political parties (headed by the Muslim Brotherhood) came to power and subsequently suggested restrictions on the sale of alcohol. This caused uncertainties about its effect on tourism (Smith, 2013). Heine (2004, p. 9) suggests that “when conservative forms of Islam gained influence in Muslim countries, the prohibition of alcoholic drinks became a general phenomenon”. For their part, Hall *et al.* (2020, p. 11) note that varying aspects of the hospitality industry such as the social, private and commercial have obligations to entertain guests “genuinely”. Such a notion is supported by Stephenson *et al.* (2010), arguing that the hospitality industry is a social and cultural institution and “genuineness” includes consistency with host cultural norms. In general, tourism is regarded as a type of “cultural invasion”, particularly, in communities that have a history of colonization (Besculides *et al.*, 2002, p. 305). It is also suggested that tourism is a threat to societal values and a catalyst for delinquency and dishonesty (Spiegel *et al.*, 2008).

Despite such negative views, some countries are cautiously using tourism to diversify their economies, but many are wary of mass tourism and the clash between foreign and local values (Hammond, 2005). Battour *et al.* (2018) emphasize that alcohol has no place whatsoever under halal tourism. They suggest that to surmount this, nonalcoholic beverages and mocktails can be offered. Theoretically, this seems sound, but the practicalities remain questionable. Alcohol consumption is associated with irresponsible behaviour and damaging consequences including sexual misconduct or experimentation (Tutenges, 2012; Dun, 2014).

Though the past decade or so has experienced an increase in published research on Halal tourism and hospitality, Islam and tourism (Battour *et al.*, 2010; Battour *et al.*, 2018; El-Gohary, 2016; Hall *et al.*, 2020; Henderson, 2010; Mohsin *et al.*, 2016; Mohsin *et al.*, 2020; Vargas-Sánchez and Moral-Moral, 2019; Zamani-Farahani and Henderson, 2010), studies relating to negative impacts involving religious and cultural practices are scarce. This is an important contribution of the current study.

The third objective of the study explored the role of alcohol service in the Egyptian context, discussing whether to serve or not to serve alcohol in the hospitality industry. The answer may seem a straightforward “No” or “Yes” depending on arguments presented by advocates and antagonists – but it has further consequences that need to be carefully studied. Spracklen (2014, p. 94) notes that “[t]ensions which emerge between companies, organizations, governments, groups and individuals provide a rich space for academic enquiry into the significance of alcohol in contemporary leisure policy”. Here, the opinion not to serve alcohol basically emanates from a religious position. Although, some argue “God is best kept out of the argument and that the ethics of alcohol are best analysed by human reason alone” (Cook, 2006, p. 7). Holloway (cited in Cook, 2006) sees this as a “moral calculus”. This logic is not conceded here. Dissimilar to Holloway’s and Cook’s argument, religion is an issue, which should not be ignored when discussing alcohol. Religion is a

distinct origin of ethos that moulds individuals' attitudes and behaviour (Devine and Deneulin, 2011).

Drinking alcohol is seen as an important part of tourism (Moore, 1995) and this, perhaps, is natural as it is an extension of normal day rituals of *some* individuals. It is part of the enjoyment and pleasures of travel (Spracklen, 2014). Tutenges (2012), when observing Danish youth behaviour in Bulgaria, notes that most of their leisure experience is based around alcohol. A study by Dun (2014, p. 196) regard intemperate drinking whilst holidaying as a "quite purposeful activity in which [tourists] seek to escape from their normal lives to explore boundaries and experience states of drunkenness and other behaviours. . . that go far beyond what they would do in their normal lives". It is also seen as a social phenomenon to connect with colleagues and others (Dun, 2014). Though this contention may reflect a Western outlook it is not necessarily valid or applicable in all cases. Many Westerners can enjoy cultural experiences without excessive drinking.

The availability of alcohol to cater to tourists also affects the consumption among locals. Hence, growing fears among the opponents to alcohol provision seem understandable. It should be noted that Egyptians are allowed to consume alcohol as long as it is in designated areas that are legally licenced to serve alcohol. However, gambling, for example, is permitted to only non-Egyptians. Dun (2014) elaborates on the strict alcohol policy in Qatar. Due to these measures, some owners sought shelter within hotels to surmount restrictions over alcohol sales in stand-alone restaurants. Gordon Ramsay's restaurant is a famous example. However, restrictions were also made in regard to offering alcohol in hotels, e.g. not in open spaces such as pools.

Afifi (2015), in assessing intentions of undergraduate hotel management students in Egypt, found that as part of their summer training programme the majority opted to work in alcohol-free places (70/N 123, 56.9%). Refusal to work in alcohol service was mainly justified based on religious obligations. This explains the role of religion and its obligations related to the work environment (Afifi, 2015, 2014). It is to be noted that the formal concept of halal hospitality in Egypt is still at an early stage of implementation as there are no formal procedures or rules available for authorization (Razak *et al.*, 2020).

The last objective examined the economic and social impacts of alcohol service in the hospitality industry of Egypt. The industry's interest is linked to alcohol service as it generates revenue (Kjærheim *et al.*, 1995; Dun, 2014). It is projected that about two-thirds of a club's income comes from drinks sales in the UK (Skinner *et al.*, 2005). This turns the "late-night economy" – with pubs and clubs as the key players – an "alcohol-fuelled economy" (Jones *et al.*, 2003). There are also wider goals, as Dun (2014, p. 193) explains: "Developing some sort of alcohol tourism is a mechanism that is used to boost local economies in urban and regional areas". On the other hand, "Halal tourism activities could be seen as constraints to tourism destination development" (Battour *et al.*, 2018, p. 824). It may drive away western visitors from visiting Muslim destinations where Sharia Law is applied strictly (Battour *et al.*, 2018). That said, there is a thriving trend of "Halal Tourism"/"Islamic Hospitality", that is, "Muslim tourists travelling to destinations where Islam is the official or dominant faith, often for reasons connected to religion" (Henderson, 2010, p. 247). The exclusion of alcoholic drinks is just one factor that distinguishes "Sharia-compliant hotels" (Henderson, 2010). Other facets include dress code for employees and particularly for women, rooms provided with prayer mats and Quran copies of the Quran, segregated floors, separate recreation facilities (El-Gohary, 2016; Razak *et al.*, 2020). Such hotels represent an operational challenge over issues pertaining to design, staffing and marketing (Henderson, 2010).

El-Gohary (2016) argues that halal tourism does not equate with Islamic tourism. For example, Islamic tourism may give the impression that it is only for Muslim travellers whilst halal denotes it is for everyone. Furthermore, calling a certain activity or product(s) “Islamic” suggests that such activity or product(s) completely meets all the guidelines and obligations of Islamic Shari’ah (El-Gohary, 2016). Overall, “Muslim friendly tourism” seems a much more acceptable term (El-Gohary, 2016). Hotels cannot depend solely on tourists originating from affluent Muslim countries, e.g. Gulf States (Henderson, 2010). Serving Muslims and non-Muslims is a challenge as both segments have different requirements (Henderson, 2010; Mohsin *et al.*, 2020). “The conflict between western demands and halal tourism makes catering for both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists a big challenge for destination marketers” (Battour *et al.*, 2018, p. 826). The greatest eminent test facing sharia-compliant hotels is the loss of income from selling alcoholic beverages, which will ultimately impact the food and beverage revenues (Saad *et al.*, 2014). As Stephenson (2010) notes, the growth of Halal tourism in the Middle East has led to an increase in the number of businesses related to tourism. He further states that halal production and consumption is, thus, no longer a regional practice but a growing global trend. This is also supported by the work of Battour *et al.* (2018), stating that halal food products also appeal to non-Muslim consumers because of safety and hygiene-related elements.

The relationship between tourism, hospitality, Islam and the work environment has been quite challenging in Egypt (Afifi, 2015). The challenge also expands to the hospitality curriculum planning and the need to consider religious commitments (Afifi, 2014). The delivery of alcoholic drinks service is linked to a large number of hospitality customers and their satisfaction, which impacts business’s viability (Afifi, 2015; Dahmer and Kahl, 2009). Walker (2011) wrote that selling alcohol is more lucrative than food items. Beverage sales account for approximately 25%–30% of restaurant sales (Walker, 2011). Profit ratio generated by drinks ranges between two to five times greater than that from food (Miller *et al.*, 2005). This sum can surge in various types of outlets, where beverage sales represent nearly two-thirds of a club’s proceeds (Skinner *et al.*, 2005). With the increase in income, a caution is stated in the findings of Spiegel *et al.* (2008) that work stress and more contact with tourists increases rates of alcohol and drug intake. Individuals who work in tourism and hospitality and those exposed to tourism are vulnerable to alcohol and drugs.

There are linkages between alcohol and violence. Islamist groups have argued that mass tourism in Egypt contributed to the war launched against the Government of Hosni Mubarak by radical Islamic groups in 1992 (Hammond, 2005). In Western society, alcohol consumption is linked to public safety issues, domestic and street violence (Dun, 2014). In Muslim societies, activities and practices that contravene the Islamic traditions, e.g. alcohol, have been promoted as a justification by some extremists to instigate terrorist activities against the hospitality industry (Aziz, 1995). On the other hand, El-Gohary (2016) and Battour (2018) emphasize that halal tourism can appeal to tourists conscious about their religion, culture, security and general well-being. On the other hand, Henderson (2010) has expressed scepticism about the viability of “Sharia-compliant hotels” and whether such operations will be successful or not. It is possibly questionable as to whether non-Muslim travellers would be willing to adapt to what might be regarded as more restrictive local circumstances (Henderson, 2010). The current Egyptian grading system does not recognize non-alcohol serving properties as a superior-market establishment, as evidenced by the case of Cairo Grand Hyatt cited earlier. Equally, halal certification is also not organized to recognize up-market businesses in Egypt that do not serve alcohol (Saad *et al.*, 2014). Notwithstanding this, Battour *et al.*’s (2018) study of the perceptions of non-Muslim tourists towards halal tourism in Turkey and Malaysia revealed that these impressions were

“moderately positive”. Some did feel that halal tourism regulations curb their enjoyment, but the findings suggest that acceptance of halal tourism may hinge on visit motivation, the visitors’ culture and the appeal of the destination. Participants also may be encouraged to visit Muslim destinations if they obtain advantages including improved services and competitive prices.

A recent example related to the issue is highlighted by [Dun \(2014\)](#) in discussing the hosting of FIFA World Cup 2022 by Qatar. Alcohol consumption during the tournament will be a huge controversy in a Muslim country and already actions taken by Qatar reflect an internal confrontation between orthodox and liberal forces ([Dun, 2014](#)). Qatar will need to abide by the rules of FIFA over alcohol provision. Dealing with this, Qatar adopted what [Dun \(2014\)](#) describes as a “hedging strategy”. Qatar plans a “quartering strategy” where alcohol consumption places are clearly designated. One way to achieve this is to delineate “fan zones” where they can drink alcohol even though such zones would not be approved by FIFA ([Dun, 2014](#)). However, it seems inevitable that both Muslims and non-Muslims, drinkers and non-drinkers, natives and visitors will mingle ([Dun, 2014](#)). Therefore, complete separation is not realistic. [Dun \(2014\)](#) feels these measures will be futile as FIFA will demand that alcohol is accessible without limitations ([Dun, 2014](#)). This is a huge challenge and [Dun \(2014\)](#) wonders how Qatar will implement a balance between the two opposing interests, where both “identities do not mix” (p. 197). As Qatar attempts to gain a foothold inside the event industry the question arises whether a balance can really be struck between religion, tradition, culture tourism, events and alcohol service?

Theoretical implications

The study is assessing the relationship between religion, alcohol, hospitality and tourism within the context of Egypt, advances knowledge about halal tourism and hospitality by explicitly linking religious obligations and the implication on tourism ([El-Gohary, 2016](#)). As the Muslim service providers battle between religious obligations and commercial compulsions, knowledge and debate linked to alcohol-free tourism in the Muslim countries is important. This study adds to the literature by highlighting a different perspective, that of Muslim staff involved in the service of alcohol and its implications. The study identifies that alcohol service remains a controversial topic in Muslim countries. In raising this debate, the study states that Halal tourism is still evolving and needs to gradually adapt to the demands of both Muslim tourists and Muslim staff. Some innovation is required to develop and market a new concept which leads to the alcohol-free holiday as a new concept. Effective marketing of the concept can help to create demand and introduce it as a new experience in Halal Tourism and Hospitality. Alcohol needs to be substituted with other interesting and motivating experiences linked to culture, heritage, nature, gastronomy and authentic local involvement. The findings suggest a new opportunity to explore and segment the market with an inclination to Halal products and services.

Based on the findings and the intention to create trust among the Muslim travellers and staff, Halal Governance could be introduced with a classification of certification from a recognized authority. The certification should provide information on whether the establishment is fully Halal compliant or partially. This should help the customer to decide if they would consume the product and service in that place or not. Any work done in this area and published should add to the literature on Halal tourism.

Managerial implications

Is there a possibility for the Muslim staff working in the hospitality/tourism/travel industries to avoid handling alcohol?

Because it took four successive stages in the revelation of Quran (first 16:27; then 2:219; then 4:43; and finally, 5:90–19) for Allah (God) SWT to completely prohibit the consumption of alcohol (Khashan, 2016; Al-Halawani, 2016), should Muslim workers in the industry also gradually, rather than abruptly, disengage themselves from handling, selling or serving alcohol?

The answer is “No”. One must disengage instantly unless if one knows by doing so, his/her life will be at stake literally or has interim measures in place such as the ability to swap places with colleagues when it comes to handling alcohol. This is because no one knows their time of death and the prohibition of alcohol in Islam existed prior to the current setup of the service industry and Muslims being used in it; in other words, a Muslim knows alcohol is prohibited and there are alternative sources of income before deciding to join the service industry, where selling or serving alcohol could be a requirement. Thus, one who knowingly joined under such circumstances could not be compared to the one ignorant of it or who joined before becoming a Muslim. One cannot also wait for any legislation to be passed before disengaging. As there is no compulsion in Islam on matters of religion, it should be entirely self/internally driven, by one, as to when to disengage from the industry if alternatives within the industry cannot be found. Allah Says in the Quran (2: 256): “Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things”. Even in Islamic countries, implementing laws to prohibit persons from handling alcohol would have been more difficult – as realized during the alcohol prohibition era in the USA (Al-Halawani, 2016; Hayat, 2018) – had not the faith-driven self-regulation by Muslim individuals being practiced in those countries.

Probably one way is to decide that whoever works in alcohol service should not be an Egyptian Muslim and most Egyptian Christians can fill this role as this does not violate their religious convictions. This solution may seem like a sort of discrimination, but an international example exists. The Government of Macau has decided that casino dealers must be only Macanese (Au *et al.*, 2009). Another way is to import staff to handle this, i.e. use expatriates. Yet, this has its own issues, e.g. adaptation to a different culture (Au *et al.*, 2009). Al-Imam (1999) asserted that Armenians in Egypt “monopolized” alcohol production and selling in the nineteenth century. He furthermore revealed that Islam’s ban on cultivating and selling tobacco offered an opportunity for non-Muslims to lead this industry. Again, an Armenian minority-dominated this industry. Obviously, whilst religion may impose restrictions on Muslims working in alcohol, it opens doors for non-Muslims. Sood and Nasu (1995, p. 2) observed that “ethnic background was also found to be important as members of particular religious groups may have certain occupational roles as part of their cultural heritage”.

What is the way forward?

Concluding remarks and suggestions

What can the current service/hospitality industries do to accommodate Muslim workers who chose not to sell or serve alcohol?

The service/hospitality industry providers could be Muslims or non-Muslims. For instance, there are major airlines, hotels and restaurants owned and run by Muslims where alcohol is served by Muslim owners or employees. For these providers, they should consider avoiding the sale or serving alcohol completely and if not, they must not force their workers to serve alcohol if they chose not to.

The Muslim and non-Muslim providers alike could take the following steps to accommodate or avoid infringing on the rights of Muslim employees who chose not to sell or serve alcohol and to provide equal opportunity employment for all regardless of faith or the lack of it:

- Ban alcohol outright in the services they provide due to its social, psychological and economic harm to individuals and society. It is an established fact that alcohol causes numerous social ills to society. WHO, in its global status report on alcohol stated “The harmful use of alcohol is a worldwide problem resulting in millions of deaths, including hundreds of thousands of young lives lost. It is not only a causal factor in many diseases but also a precursor to injury and violence. Furthermore, its negative impacts can spread throughout a community or a country and beyond, by influencing levels and patterns of alcohol consumption across borders” (WHO, 2011). This is the reason alcohol, is considered “the mother of all evils” in Islam [Sunan an-Nasai (Hadiths 5669), 2021].
- If establishments and services can ban cigarettes, which causes less social, health, economic and psychological harm to people than alcohol (Hydes *et al.*, 2019), then they can equally ban wine/alcohol notwithstanding all the reasons it is still allowed today. Concerned industries should also actively lobby for the ban of alcohol in all establishments and service outlets where cigarettes are currently banned for the sake of all their customers, drinkers and non-drinkers alike and because of alcohol and cigarettes psychopharmacological comorbidity (Adams, 2017).
- If competition and bottom-line become the main concern for serving alcohol in service or establishment, then other creative ways of attracting customers such as discounts and other incentives/promotions should be provided to customers instead of alcohol to attract them. A significant number of people are happy to travel low budget where even food is not allowed and luggage is heavily restricted due to the bargain involved.
- Employers should provide clear policies accommodating existing and potential employees who may not want to sell or serve alcohol to customers. These may include assignments of roles and duties that do not require handling alcohol.
- Faith-based (e.g. Muslims, Seventh Day Adventists and Mormons), ideological or ethically driven alternative services should be created by individuals concerned with alcohol consumption where employment can be provided to adherents of these faiths or ideologies as a last resort. There are already many thriving alcohol-free establishments, particularly in Islamic countries. What is needed is many more around the globe.

The study cannot be conclusive as Halal tourism continues to evolve and the debate on its associated challenges and issues continues.

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Corresponding author

Asad Mohsin can be contacted at: asad.mohsin@waikato.ac.nz