



# **Managing Halal Knowledge in Japan: Developing Knowledge Platforms for Halal Tourism in Japan**

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the development of halal knowledge embedded in the Japanese tourism industry from the perspective of knowledge management. Specifically, it examines the diffusion of halal standards and certifications in the Japanese tourism market and the creation of halal knowledge in the halal tourism market. Halal guidelines like halal standards and a certification system are being diffused by private halal consultants engaged in the halal certification business. However, these guidelines create contradictions and challenges in Japan's tourism industry by revealing gaps between marketing analyses and Muslim tourists in Japan. Some discomforts and criticisms associated with halal guidelines reveal that halal is based more on tacit knowledge shaped in individual Muslim lifestyles and daily practices, than on explicit guidelines. As a result, the Japanese tourism industry has begun to recognize the importance both of halal knowledge's tacit aspects and of knowledge platforms to create shared social contexts.

**Keywords:** Muslim tourists, halal, tacit knowledge, knowledge platform, Japan

## **Introduction**

The Japanese tourism industry has been focusing on Muslim tourists from Southeast Asian countries since 2012. The Japan Tourism Agency (JTA) and the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) have drafted policies to attract Muslim tourists, and local administrative agencies and private companies have been trying to create a favourable environment for visitors in this category (JTA 2013). To achieve this goal, the JTA is cooperating with the JNTO and the Association of Southeast Asian Countries (ASEAN)-Japan Centre, and has held several meetings, seminars, and conferences on this topic in various cities throughout Japan. As a result, locations suitable for

Muslim tourists have been prepared, the provision of halal (Islamic) foods and beverages has been arranged, and prayer facilities have been made available in public areas such as hotels, restaurants, shopping malls, and airports (Yasuda 2014, 2015).

Since relatively few Muslims live in Japan, Islam and halal requirements are somewhat unfamiliar concepts in the country. However, several tourist agents and companies have begun to promote halal tourism actively by developing a tourist-friendly halal environment. Private consultants play a key role in developing such an environment by facilitating cooperation between public administrators and the private sector. The Japanese tourism industry has also begun to introduce various halal products, services, and infrastructure based on halal standards provided by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI), and Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) (Yasuda and Kim 2013).

Halal tourism is one of the main topics addressed in recent tourism studies, reflecting the increasing numbers of Muslim tourists participating in the international tourism market. Most previous literature on the development of halal tourism focused on marketing (Pink 2009; Haq and Wong 2010; Stephenson et al. 2010; Alserhan 2011; Temporal 2011; el-Gohary and Eid 2014; Haq 2014; Jafari and Scott 2014; Stephenson 2014; el-Gohary and Eid 2015). Conversely, Paul Temporal and Baker Ahmad Alserhan show that the development of halal products, services, and infrastructure based on Muslim halal consciousness has promoted halal tourism (Alserhan 2011; Temporal 2011). They found that halal consciousness is one of the most important foundations of the Muslim consumer demands that shape this market. Muslims prefer to consume halal products rather than ordinary commodities in various markets. Thus, to quantify halal consciousness for branding purposes, market stakeholders have introduced standards for halal products to enable providers to determine whether their products meet the guidelines, and to promote marketing strategies advertising this specialization (Temporal 2011).

Marketing studies on halal tourism and Muslim consumer behaviour have yielded several relevant reports, including the Global Muslim Lifestyle Tourism Market 2012: Landscape and Consumer Needs Study and the MasterCard-Crescentrating Global Muslim Travel Index 2015 (DinarStandard and Crescentrating 2012; MasterCard and Crescentrating 2015). However, a

marketing approach based on consumer behaviour and halal consciousness alone does not fully capture this phenomenon (Yasuda 2014, 2015; Adadiya 2016). These studies describe the development of halal environments based on a certification system and its guidelines; yet, in the case of the Japanese tourism industry, the development of a halal environment has raised serious discussions regarding halal practices and knowledge in the field, revealing that the actual situation of Muslim tourists in Japan differs from that reflected in the marketing analyses and provided guidelines (Yasuda 2014, 2015; Adadiya 2016).

The gap between explicit halal guidelines and actual practice in tourism activities in Japan can also be seen in several other places worldwide. Katharina Graf presents the situation of Muslims in Morocco who do not use an explicit halal certification or guidelines, but instead pay attention to the process of negotiating and interacting with others to determine whether the products meet their desired standards (Graf 2016). Graf explains that consumers in Morocco prefer *beldi* (local) foods that they judge to be halal based on their knowledge of local daily practices (Graf 2016, p. 84-87).

The same trend is seen with Chinese Muslims. Sai Yukari and Johan Fischer highlight differences between the explicit guidelines and actual daily practices in regard to the Hui halal concept in China (Sai and Fischer 2016). While the Chinese government promotes the concept of halal based on explicit guidelines for food exports, local Chinese Muslims practice the *qingzhen* (“Islam” in Chinese) concept, which is based more on daily practices and tacit knowledge (Sai and Fischer 2016). These cases imply that the concept of halal in local Muslim communities is not dependent on explicit guidelines provided by the government and business stakeholders, but is based more on a tacit knowledge of local Hui daily practices (Sai and Fischer 2016).

John Lever and Haluk Anil explain the transformation of the halal concept in Turkey by describing a shift from implicit knowledge to explicit understanding (Lever and Anil 2016). They explain that food production in Turkey is embedded in a local context, in which the fulfilment of halal standards is unquestioned. As the Turkish government develops policies to promote Islamic values internally and export halal products internationally, the demand for an explicit understanding of halal is increasing among Turkish people (Lever and Anil 2016, p. 52).

In each of these examples, halal practices are clearly based more on tacit knowledge in each individual social context, rather than on explicit, uniform guidelines. Johan Fischer also emphasizes that how to practice halal knowledge is more important than what the halal guidelines comprise (Fischer 2015). Halal practices establish individual halal knowledge as tacit aspects of certain social contexts, and embed this knowledge as common property. This dynamic of knowledge interactions has been actively discussed in knowledge management studies, which focus on the knowledge-creating process in management activities (Cooper 2006, 2015; Hjalager 2002, 2010; Shaw 2015). This paper explores the development of halal knowledge in the Japanese tourism industry from the perspective of knowledge management. Specifically, it examines the diffusion of halal standards and certifications in the Japanese tourism market, and the creation of halal knowledge in the halal tourism market. This paper first summarizes discussions of knowledge management in tourism, with a focus on the “management of tacit knowledge” and “communities of practice” in the field. Next, it examines the development of the halal tourism market and the discussion of halal knowledge in Japan.

### **Tacit Knowledge, Knowledge Management, and Knowledge Platforms in Tourism**

As conceptualized by Michael Polanyi, tacit knowledge is a knowledge that is often unexplainable. Polanyi describes this by stating that “we can know more than we can tell” (Polanyi 1966, p. 4). This knowledge is often shared implicitly in a community or society, revealed through practice in a specific context, and transmitted through social networks (Schmidt and Hunter 1993, p. 8-9). In other words, “knowledge is context-specific, as it depends on a particular time and space” (Nonaka, Toyama and Konno 2000, p. 7). Therefore, knowledge management is the art of creating value from intangible assets through the knowledge-creating process (Sveiby 2001).

In the context of organizational management, Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi redefine the concept of tacit knowledge in relation to management activities by identifying the “socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization” (SECI) process, which focuses on the dynamics of the knowledge-creating process (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995; Nonaka, Toyama and Konno 2000). Specifically, they show that interactions between tacit and explicit knowledge—such as standards, guidelines, and routine tasks in management—promote shared knowledge among stakeholders.

To promote the SECI process and accelerate knowledge-creating activities, Ikujiro Nonaka and Noboru Konno concentrate on a platform that promotes a shared context among certain stakeholders. They refer to this context as *ba*, which can be roughly translated as “place” in Japanese (Nonaka and Konno 1998; Nonaka, Toyama and Konno 2000, p. 13-20). Participants in the *ba* share time and space to interact each other; this physical interaction promotes a shared context and creates relationships that yield knowledge assets (Nonaka, Toyama and Konno 2000, p. 14-15). They also note that the concept of *ba* is somewhat like the concept of “community of practice” conceptualized by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991; Wenger 1998; Nonaka, Toyama and Konno 2000, p. 15-16). However, *ba* is a living place and fluid environment that various stakeholders can approach one after another (Nonaka, Toyama and Konno 2000, p. 15-16). It can thus be described as a “hub” of numerous knowledge networks and flows. Practitioners, therefore, create value through the “process of capturing and making use of a firm’s collective expertise anywhere in the business” (Awad and Ghaziri 2004, p. 3), forming knowledge assets that create a certain culture for the firm (Nonaka, Toyama and Konno 2000, p. 20).

Although knowledge management is an important aspect of tourism activities and is driving innovation in this field, few studies focus on this topic (Hjalager 2002, 2010; Cooper 2006, 2015; Shaw 2015). Chris Cooper and other researchers have stated that, as the tourism industry is filled with tacit knowledge embedded in tourism organizations and the entrepreneurial community, the role of knowledge management in tourism is to control knowledge flows within an organization or at a destination (Cooper 2006, p. 52). Knowledge management in tourism drives the transfer of knowledge and creates an organizational or destination culture in tourism activities by forming knowledge networks and “communities of practice” (Cooper 2006, 2015, p. 76; Shaw 2015, p. 48-54).

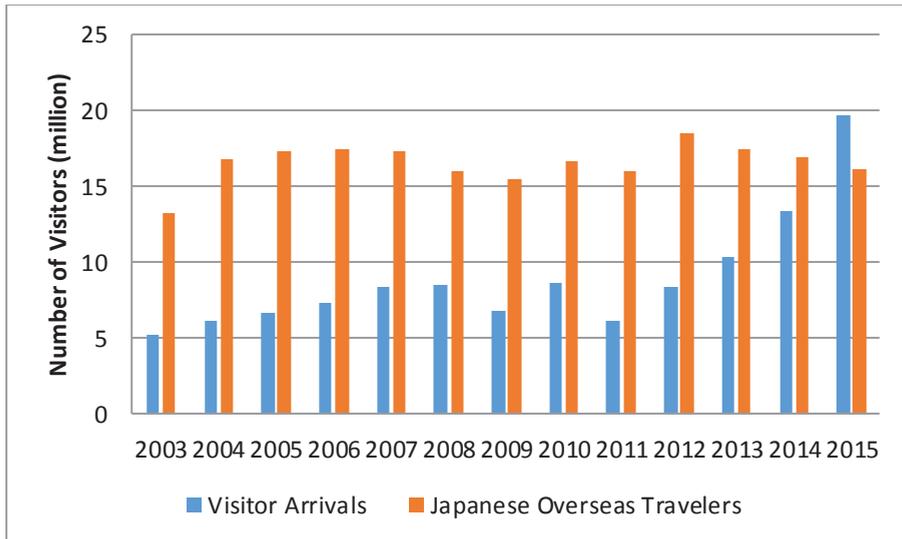
Discussions of knowledge management reveal that the proper management of knowledge platforms accelerates both communication among various agents and individual knowledge interactions, which give rise to specific knowledge flow and innovation through the shared social context inhabited by the stakeholders. Hence, it is important to analyze the development of a knowledge management platform for the halal tourism market in Japan.

## **The Development of Halal Tourism in Japan**

The development of halal tourism in Japan must be placed within the larger sphere of Japan's inbound tourism policy. In 2003, Japan began to shift the focus of its tourism policy from domestic and outbound tourism to inbound tourism (Yasuda and Kim 2013). Prime Minister Koizumi proposed that the number of foreign tourists should increase from five million per year to ten million, and the government began to support activities all over the world promoting tourism to Japan to reach this goal (Yasuda and Kim 2013). The JNTO initiated the "Visit Japan Campaign" and other related promotional events in several Western and Asian countries. A result of the promotion of and market development for inbound Japanese tourism, was that stakeholders began to recognize the demand for and potential of inbound tourism, and shifted the structure of the tourism industry accordingly.

Many tourism entities now actively support inbound tourism. The JTA and JNTO have implemented policies to attract tourists from East and Southeast Asian countries as well as from the West, and local administrative agencies and private companies are working to create a favourable environment for these visitors (JTA 2013). The Japanese government and local administrators have focused especially on Southeast Asian tourists, and have worked closely on related improvements to diversify the dependency on international tourists. As pointed out in its Annual Report (White Paper) on Tourism in 2013, the JTA hopes to provide a comfortable environment for Southeast Asian tourists such as those from Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines, (especially Muslim tourists from these countries) by removing all obstacles that might hamper their travel (JTA 2013).

Some private tourism companies and consultants in Japan are becoming interested in Muslim tourists as they become aware of the potential profits to be made. However, there is very little available information or marketing data regarding the characteristics of Muslim tourists or Islam in Japan. As a result, most major players are reluctant to participate in the Muslim tourist market. Motonari Adachi, Executive Director of the JNTO Singapore, complained that the Japanese tourism industry was reluctant to participate in this field due to scepticism regarding its market potential, and that this reluctance was based on a lack of information (Adachi 2013).



**Figure 1.** The Number of Foreign Visitors in Japan and Japanese Overseas Travelers. Source: JTA 2017

The lack of information on Muslim tourists and on Islam in general in Japan increases transaction costs immeasurably for both the Japanese tourism industry and Muslim tourists themselves. Japan's tourism industry is subject to high bargaining costs when negotiating with stakeholders to alter their products and services for Muslim tourists and to estimate the needs of their customers adequately, while the tourists themselves must pay costs related to investigating the quality of the halal environment at each destination. Thus, the gap between the hosts and guests creates high transaction costs and hinders the development of a halal tourism market. As a result, entrepreneurs have begun to try to bridge the gap between customers and suppliers, and to create more favourable conditions for developing the market for Muslim tourists.

To reduce transaction costs for both the Japanese tourism industry and Muslim tourists, halal consultants, who were originally engaged to increase the availability of halal foods for Muslim residents in Japan and facilitate the export of Japanese foods to Islamic countries, began to work actively to develop a Muslim tourism market and customer base. The Japan Halal Association (JHA), one of the field's first entrepreneurial organizations, was established as a non-profit organization in December 2010 to provide halal foods for Muslim residents in Japan; it has since actively committed to

organizing a halal tour in Japan in cooperation with the Miyako International Tourist Company (JHA 2017). The JHA promotes networking activities and has developed close ties with Japanese tourism companies and international halal institutions to organize halal tours in Japan. In 2011, the association launched a halal tour in Japan that gradually gained stakeholder recognition. In the light of the success of halal tourism in Japan, stakeholders in Japanese tourism facilities like hotels and restaurants as well as travel agencies are beginning to engage with this concept (Yasuda and Kim 2013).

There are currently more than 90 halal consultants active in Japan, most of whom are not professionally trained in the field (Hayashi 2015). Their backgrounds range from Muslim residents and community members in Japanese cities and individual Muslim academics specializing in agriculture and food systems, to Japanese businesspersons familiar with Islamic countries and religious organizations. They have introduced halal standards based on those set forth by JAKIM, MUI, and MUIS, and have developed basic guidelines for the Japanese tourism industry to promote necessary infrastructure, such as special kitchens to prepare halal foods and prayer facilities in public spaces (JTA 2013, 2015; HJBA 2017; JHA 2017; MHC 2017; NAHA 2017). They also promote halal products such as food, beverages, souvenirs, and other tourism-related products (JHA 2017).

Some consultants have begun to concentrate on the need for human resources in the form of mediators with professional knowledge of and experience with halal tourism and Muslim tourists in Japan (JHA 2017; HJBA 2017). To cultivate these human resources, the halal consultants have designed educational systems and curricula for halal tourism and share their knowledge through training courses, international exhibitions, seminars, and conferences. For example, the JHA in collaboration with JAKIM provides two-day training courses for halal hospitality directors covering general knowledge regarding Islam and halal, as well as halal tourism case studies (JHA 2017). Other halal consultants offer similar training courses, which are becoming networking spaces for stakeholders eager to participate in the market.

**Table 2.** Major Halal Consultants in Japan

<b>Name</b>	<b>Established Year</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>Certification</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Japan Halal Association	2010	NPO	JAKIM	Certification, training courses, seminars
Halal Japan Business Association	2012	NPO	None	Seminars, conferences, training courses
Malaysia Halal Cooperation	2010	Co. Lte.	Local halal	Certification
Nippon Asia Halal Association	2013	NPO	JAKIM, MUIS	Certification
Japan Islamic Trust		Religious	Local halal	Certification

Source: JTA 2013, 2015; HJBA 2017; JHA 2017; MHC 2017; NAHA 2017

As a result, competition among consultants has emerged, centred on the standardization of halal products, services, and infrastructure in the Japanese tourism market based on the certification system. Some consultants validate their halal certification by engaging Muslims who are residents of Japan, while others cooperate with foreign halal certificate institutes such as JAKIM, MUI, and MUIS. Most consultants are focused on reducing transaction costs by simplifying the halal knowledge and characteristics of Muslim tourists to increase their customer base. As a result, the Japanese tourism industry is largely using an oversimplified knowledge of halal tourism.

### **Between Tacit Knowledge and Explicit Guidelines**

The development of halal tourism entrepreneurship based on the halal certification system and explicit guidelines raises serious issues regarding halal knowledge in the Japanese tourism industry and society (Yasuda 2014, 2015; Adadiya 2016). Discussions range from the criticism of profit-based marketing activities in the halal environment provided by halal consultants

to gaps in halal knowledge in the Japanese tourism industry. Some Japanese newspapers and magazines have condemned the profit-oriented attitude of certain halal consultants and described their activities as focused on money-making, which is far removed from the concept of the Islamic values recognized by Japanese society. For instance, the Tokyo Shimbun (Tokyo Newspaper) criticized the extravagant certification fees and loose management by halal consultants in Japan, and illustrated the dubiousness of halal certification generally (Hayashi 2015). Some Muslim residents in Japan also condemn the lack of understanding of halal and the general lack of knowledge of Islam promoted by halal consultants (Adadiya 2016).

Some Muslim communities in Japan have heavily condemned the interpretation of halal knowledge in business, saying that simplifying halal to reduce transaction costs frequently veils the actual characteristics of individual Muslim tourists and of Islam, as well as of the Japanese tourism industry and society (Maeno 2016a, 2016b). This discourages both an understanding of Muslims and Islam, and any attempts to bridge the gaps between their values and their everyday practices. Japanese tourism stakeholders such as the JNTO and local tourist associations frequently advise stakeholders that halal guidelines do not always reflect the lives of Muslim tourists, and that gaps may exist between the explicit halal guidelines provided by the consultants and the actual situation of each tourist (JTA 2015). This contradictory environment is confusing the Japanese stakeholders, and some are demanding that the government unify the standards. However, government institutions decline involvement in these activities because of the clear separation of politics and religion in Japan.

These discussions in the Japanese tourism industry are gradually leading to a greater recognition of halal knowledge in Japanese society. Ryoichi Namikawa, a Japanese scholar specializing in food and the halal certification system, points to the gap between explicit guidelines and their implementation (Namikawa 2012, 2015). He illustrates the ambiguity of the halal certification system from the perspective of food labelling system, explaining that it is based on religious as well as scientific values, and that religious values often carry unwritten rules that are shared among Muslims and are difficult for non-Muslims to understand (Namikawa 2015).

These examples illustrate the importance of the implicit aspects of halal knowledge that are embedded in the social context and values of each

community. In discussing the halal knowledge in Japan, the Japanese tourism stakeholders have recognized that halal is not an approach in which the components of each product and service obey an explicit halal standard; rather, it is a core Muslim value based on social beliefs and ethics that are learned tacitly. This implies the importance of individual and social practices related to halal rather than guidelines based on doctrine.

Some Japanese scholars of Islamic philosophy point to this perspective. Kumiko Yagi states that halal knowledge in Islamic law and writings focuses more on social practice than product components (Yagi 2015, p. 73-125). By quoting Alfred Schütz's *Phenomenology of the Social World*, she clarifies that the halal concept of earlier eras was a natural practice of daily life based on the habitual, automatic, and semi-conscious (Schütz 1967; Yagi 2015, p. 115). Conversely, halal in contemporary Muslim society is based more on daily negotiations in regard to consumption. Yasushi Kosugi explains the change in Muslim attitudes by saying that halal is not based on products but on individual practices for Muslims, and is a lifestyle that he calls "Muslim life philosophy" (Kosugi 2015).

### **Filling the Gap in the Knowledge Management Approach**

The discussion in the Japanese tourism industry and society reveals that halal knowledge cannot be diffused through the adoption of explicit guidelines like halal standards and a certification system. Instead, halal knowledge is shaped through the development of a knowledge platform and continuous practices relating to this platform that encourage interactions with individual, tacit halal knowledge, and create a shared social context based on a *ba* or "community of practice", as researchers in knowledge management indicate.

Some stakeholders in the halal tourism market have actively promoted the *ba* or "community of practice" to develop a shared social context. For instance, Japanese government and local agencies like the JTA; JNTO; Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries; local tourism associations; and local chambers of commerce have begun to distribute grants that support the formation of halal knowledge platforms by promoting seminars, training courses, and classes to manage halal knowledge flow, instead of promoting halal standards and certification systems in tourism activities (JTA 2017; JNTO 2017; MAFF 2017). With the help of halal consultants and Muslim

associations, tourism institutions use these grants to form knowledge platforms for halal tourism by organizing seminars, training sessions, and workshops to share examples and information relating to the Japanese halal tourism market. These grants have dramatically expanded the amount of available information and activities related to halal knowledge. Some platforms share experiences by organizing seminars and workshops for businesses, while others hold training courses, internships for local students, and halal events for Japanese people. For instance, the JHA organizes tasting events and cooking classes in collaboration with Japanese chefs who prepare Japanese halal dishes (JHA 2017). The Halal Japan Business Association (HJBA) also provides international and domestic business seminars regarding halal tourism in Japan, in cooperation with both domestic and international stakeholders such as JAKIM, the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), and the Japan Muslim Association, one of the most important Islamic institutes in Japan (HJBA 2017).

Some university institutes and students are also involved in the creation of halal knowledge management platforms. For instance, Japanese and Muslim international students at Keio University and the Keio Research Institute Shonan Fujisawa Campus (SFC) undertook a project to create a tour plan in Hakone, a famous tourism destination in Japan, in collaboration with the Odakyu railway company and Hakone tourism association (Odakyu 2017). The students held workshops and trial tours with an Indonesian Muslim couple with the help of local administrations and tourism organizations (Odakyu 2017). The Keio Research Institute at SFC also released Muslim-friendly Restaurants Guidebook Kanagawa in collaboration with the local administration in Kanagawa to provide halal restaurant information in English (KRI 2017). Other universities have launched similar projects to communicate with Muslim international students by organizing training sessions, seminars, and trial tours through industry–academia partnerships.

Muslim residents and associations in Japan also contribute to the development of such platforms by providing their personal experience and Islamic knowledge in general. For example, the Tokyo Camii (Tokyo Mosque) and other Muslim associations have begun to provide public seminars for Japanese citizens to widen the understanding of Islam in Japan (Tokyo Camii 2017).

These approaches have become communication platforms for sharing experiences in regard to handling halal knowledge in certain social contexts. These platforms connect stakeholders like tourism companies and consultants, government institutions, local administrations, Muslim residents and associations, and Muslim tourists who do not otherwise share a common network or context. As a result, these platforms promote interaction between the tacit and explicit aspects of halal knowledge and Islam in general, and establish specific practices based on this knowledge in the context of Japanese society. The process of contextualization bridges the gaps between explicit guidelines and tacit practices in the Japanese halal tourism market.

## **Conclusion**

This paper explores the development of halal knowledge embedded in the Japanese tourism industry from the perspective of knowledge management. Specifically, it examines the diffusion of halal standards and certifications in the Japanese tourism market and the creation of halal knowledge in the halal tourism market.

Halal guidelines like halal standards and a certification system are being diffused by private halal consultants engaged in the halal certification business. These entrepreneurs introduce explicit halal standards based on certification systems from Southeast Asian countries, including the JAKIM, MUIS, and MUI standards. However, these guidelines create contradictions and challenges in Japan's tourism industry by revealing gaps between marketing analyses and Muslim tourists in Japan. Thus, stakeholders have begun to collate a specific halal tourism knowledge based on both the Islamic and Japanese social contexts through constructive criticism and negotiations. The creation of halal knowledge in the Japanese tourism market is derived from the discussion of halal knowledge in the field. Some discomforts and criticisms associated with halal guidelines reveal that halal is based more on tacit knowledge shaped in individual Muslim lifestyles and daily practices, than on explicit guidelines. As a result, the Japanese tourism industry has begun to recognize the importance both of halal knowledge's tacit aspects and of knowledge platforms to create shared social contexts. Stakeholders are therefore eager to promote platforms for continuous negotiation, interaction, and communication between Muslim tourists and Japanese society, and to

embed Islamic tourism practice in Japanese society. This movement can be described as the encouragement of knowledge platforms in Japan's halal tourism market to share the tacit aspect of halal knowledge, and to create halal practices based on Muslim and Japanese social contexts.

In conclusion, the development of the halal tourism market in Japan reveals that halal knowledge obtains its social value in Japan through the development of knowledge platforms that embed halal knowledge in the Japanese social context through continuous interaction and communication among stakeholders.

## Notes

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