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ISLAMIC AND HALAL TOURISM IN MUSLIM COUNTRIES: THE CASE OF IRAN

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Islamic tourism *Halal tourism* *Muslim countries* *Iran*	This study aimed to explore various dimensions of Halal tourism among Muslim countries using the example of Iran. The research method is descriptive-analytical. The data were collected by referring to books, articles, and electronic resources. According to the results, although a statistical study of the current status shows the favourable situation of Muslim countries in the Halal tourism market due to their special geographical location, historical background, and cultural structure, it should not be forgotten that this is not the real position and share of these countries in this market. The tourism industry in general and Halal tourism in particular in these countries is always exposed to internal and external threats, and Iran is no exception as an Islamic destination.

1. Introduction

Islam has an independent view of the concept of tourism and considers tourism as a bearer of lofty affairs and moral values and has encouraged Muslims to visit different lands and experience cultural exchanges (Jafari Samimi & Khebreh, 2015). The World's Muslim population, and consequently the number of international Muslim tourists, is growing and expanding at an incredible rate around the world every year. According to the latest statistics, the total number of Muslim tourists who travelled around the world during 2015 was 117 million, and the current forecast indicates that with an increase in 2020 to about 168 Millions of Muslim international tourists, revenue from this lucrative and emerging segment of the tourism industry will also increase tenfold from a total of US$20 billion in 2000 to US$200 billion in 2020 (MasterCard & Crescent Rating, 2015, 2016; COMCEC, 2016a).

The emergence of Halal tourism is a promising factor for the Muslim countries in their tourism sector and an increasing majority of the people in Muslim countries prefer to use Muslim friendly services and facilities during their travel experience (SESRIC, 2017; SESRIC, 2015). Although in many ways Halal tourism is lagging behind more conventional forms of international tourism and has yet to realize its fuller potentials, with a total economic impact of US$139 billion in GDP and 4.5 million jobs worldwide in 2015, it is clear that Halal tourism is an important sector within the global tourism industry, delivering wealth and prosperity to key nations and regions. Indeed, a closer look at each influential segment shows clearly that the Halal tourism market is growing in size, influence, and importance (Kamali, 2012; Salam Standard, 2016).

As Scott and Jafari (2010) have reported, the development path of the tourism industry in different countries cannot always follow the same pattern. However; it can be underlined that even when some countries appear to share some commonalities, they experience different patterns in most cases in terms of tourism development (Heydari Chianeh, Del Chiappa, & Ghasemi, 2018).

While the formation and development of the nature, framework, and foundations of the tourism industry in Iran based on Islamic and Halal principles, as well as the prohibition of non-Halal options in the tourism industry in recent years has create ambiguities in the scientific community about the necessity and importance of the understudied subject in the present study, it seems that referring to the latest international statistics about the current

situation of Halal tourism in the Islamic Republic of Iran will be a good answer to a high percentage of such ambiguities (Kian, Heydari Chianeh, & Babaei Aghdam, 2017).

In fact, a quick look at the statistical sources shows that despite the formation of the Iranian society of 99.4% of the Muslim population (Statistics Center of Iran, 2012), having a government based on Islamic principles and the possibility of using the advantages in the form of Halal tourism, this country has witnessed not so positive experiences in recent years, so that Iran has not been able to be among the world's top ten countries in the field of Halal tourism. With this backdrop, the present research is concerned with the main opportunities and challenges of the development of Halal tourism in Islamic countries by analysing the latest available statistics using the example of Iran in particular as one of The most striking Islamic destinations with its unique place in the world tourism map as well as its diverse cultures and ancient history.

2. Literature Review

According to a study by Crescent Rating (2015), Halal is an Arabic word meaning permissible and acceptable, and in Islamic terms, it means permissible according to Islamic law. Halal is a concept related to Islamic values, beliefs, and norms that actually includes something beyond food or drink and includes various types of goods and services that are provided and offered to Muslim tourists (Samori, Salleh, & Khalid, 2016).

Although the correct definition of the concept of Halal tourism is one of the main challenges of the research in the field of Halal tourism, at the same time, the most widely used concepts in the literature and theoretical foundations of various studies for this purpose are Halal tourism and Islamic tourism that due to the existing overlaps between these two concepts, sometimes in some cases and mistakenly we see the use of these two concepts by some researchers and scholars in common or instead of each other, while the difference between Islamic and Halal tourism is as follows; Islamic tourism is mainly done for religious and pilgrimage purposes and the focus of this type of tourism is on actions that are based on the principles of Islam (Henderson, 2016). But Halal tourism is a type of tourism that is used for various purposes, including social or recreational purposes (Ryan, 2016).

Duman (2011) believes that if we can combine Islamic and Halal tourism with the definition of tourism by the World Tourism Organization, this type of tourism includes all the activities that Muslim tourists do during their travels and their stay in an environment outside their usual environment and in less than a consecutive year, and all of these activities are originated from Islamic values. Ala-Hamarneh (2011) also considers the concept of Halal tourism from an economic point of view, a developmental and expanded concept that emphasizes the importance

of tourism in Muslim communities as a new market and destination. He also believes that this concept from a cultural perspective includes the ideas that emphasize the need to include cultural-religious and Islamic views in the tourism development programs.

According to Hassan, Halal tourism is one of the new ethical dimensions in the tourism industry, which in the partial sense means religious tourism and includes visiting Islamic holy places throughout the Islamic world, and in the general sense also includes a type of tourism that respects Islamic values and laws as its priority (Hassan, 2004; 2007).

As Akyol & Kilinc (2014) argued, Halal tourism includes details such as; Halal hotels, Halal flight services and airports, restaurants with Halal food and beverages, and Halal tour packages, and he also believes that this type of tourism includes different parts that are in close contact and interaction with each other.

According to Henderson (2010), Halal tourism is a new concept in the international market of the tourism industry that the production and presentation of more and better Halal goods and services is one of the basic requirements to meet the needs of this emerging and dynamic market, and he believes that this type of tourism includes all marketing activities and the development of tourism goods and services that are produced and offered directly and exclusively to Muslim tourists. According to Shakiry (2006), the concept of Halal tourism can't be summarized only in the form of religious tourism and this concept can be extended to all forms of tourism except forms that are contrary to Islam and Islamic principles.

Halal tourism, in fact, tries to emphasize the importance of the Islamic lifestyle by emphasizing religious and Islamic motives and prioritizing the needs arising from these motives during the trip, and its incompatibility with the lifestyle and common behaviors in Western tourism that has dominated modern and contemporary tourism industry (Sriprasert, Chanin & Abd Rahman, 2014). Considering the common points of different definitions provided in this regard, it can be said that this type of tourism is a type of tourism that in providing goods and services to applicants, is required to comply with Islamic principles and tries to refrain from providing foods, drinks and any services and facilities that are contrary to the religious beliefs of Muslim tourists, and while being attractive to Muslim tourists, causes satisfaction and meets their minimum material and spiritual needs during the trip in a desirable and acceptable manner (Kian, 2017).

3. Methodology

This study adopts a desk-based case study approach using the example of Iran. The research method is descriptive-analytical and the data were collected by referring to books, articles, and electronic resources. During the research, first,

the relevant literature was extracted from various sources and previous researches in this regard, and then the trends of Halal tourism and its current situation were examined at three levels (global, Islamic countries, and Iran).

4. Discussion

4.1. Global Halal tourism market

The growth of the Muslim population and the increase in their income has increased their desire to travel for leisure, business, medical and religious purposes (COMCEC, 2016a), and today Muslim consumers in the tourism market are usually younger, more educated and with higher income, and they have a high tendency to spend money on travel, which means that tourism and its various branches are now one of the largest target markets in the Muslim consumer space (MasterCard & Crescent Rating, 2015).

Halal is a well-known brand in the world business today, which has a high share of financial transactions in various fields (Barari, 2018). In this way, today Halal tourism is an important industry in the global economy, and with the boom of this industry in different parts of the world, non-Islamic countries have also provided the necessary infrastructure to attract Muslim tourists (Ghoudarzi, 2019). A few years ago, Muslim international tourists focused on only a few specific destinations, and this continued until other destinations did not understand the specific needs of Muslim tourists. But in recent years, many businesses and destinations have begun to adapt the goods and services they offer to the special needs of Muslim tourists (MasterCard & Crescent Rating, 2016), and accordingly, today many destination management organizations and hotel managers around the world to host the growing number of Muslim tourists, especially from the Middle East, have added information related to some of the essential needs of Muslim tourists to their websites that the most important of this information are the times of pray and the location information of mosques and places from which Halal food and drink can be prepared (Timothy & Iverson, 2006).

All in all, the Halal tourism market is becoming one of the most important segments of the international tourism market with its increasing growth, and according to the statistics, the total number of Muslim tourists who traveled around the world in 2015 was equal to 117 million people. Looking back, this has risen from a total of 25 million Muslim international tourists and revenue of US$20 billion in 2000 to 108 million Muslim international tourists and revenue of about US$145 billion in 2014, and also accounting for about 10% of the whole tourism economy. Plans are set to increase that to 168 million Muslim international tourists by 2020, and the total spending on the global Halal tourism market is expected to increase to US$200 billion, accounting for about 11% of the total tourism economy (MasterCard & Crescent Rating, 2015; 2016).

4.2. Halal tourism in Muslim countries

Today, however, Western countries and pioneers of the tourism industry with a high understanding of this industry, along with appropriate physical infrastructure and quality products and services, have an acceptable position in the international Halal tourism market, Muslim countries have a comparative advantage in Halal tourism due to their knowledge of Islam that implies an understanding of Muslim consumers' needs. While OIC countries offer a variety of Muslim-friendly products and services, the development of those products varies from one country to another (COMCEC, 2016b). The main arrival destinations in the OIC are Morocco and Tunisia in the north of Africa, Malaysia, and Indonesia in East Asia, Turkey in Europe, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, UAE, and Bahrain in the Middle East, and Iran and Pakistan in South Asia. This group receives between 75% to 80% of the OIC's total arrivals but only between 7% to7.5% of the world's total volume of arrivals (SESRIC, 2000).

Muslim tourist arrivals to the OIC destinations were estimated to be 116 million in 2014, and are projected to grow to 178 million by 2020. This constitutes around 11.4% of the total tourist arrivals projected by 2020 (COMCEC, 2016b). On the other hand, according to research by Mastercard and Crescent Rating, 230 million Muslim tourists are expected to embark on travel, locally and abroad by 2026. By that time, Muslim tourists are expected to inject US$300 billion into the global economy. As shown in the table below, the latest GMTI (Global Muslim Travel Index) results say, of the top 10 Muslim-friendly destinations in 2019, all of them- except Singapore- are OIC member countries and for the first time since the launch of the index, Malaysia has shared the top position with another destination, Indonesia. Indonesia's lift in ranking reflects its efforts to educate the industry on the opportunities presented by the Muslim travel market. Furthermore, as another major highlight, Turkey has also risen to the third position in comparison with the previous year (Mastercard & Crescent Rating, 2019).

Contrary to what is seen, although a brief statistical study of the current status shows the favorable situation of Muslim countries in the Halal tourism market due to their special geographical location, historical background, and cultural structure, it should not be forgotten that this is not the real position and share of these countries in this market. Because the tourism industry in general and naturally Halal tourism in particular in these countries is always exposed to internal and external threats. Logistical problems along with the lack of transparency and weakness in policy-making, management, education, and planning can be considered as the most important internal threats, which, unfortunately, negative propaganda and hatred against Muslims at the international level by some Western media and policymakers causes these problems to increase day by day.

Table 1. Top 10 Halal tourism destinations in 2019 (Mastercard & Crescent Rating, 2019)

OIC Rank	Total Rank	Destinations	Score (100)
1	1	Malaysia	78
1	1	Indonesia	78
3	3	Turkey	75
4	4	Saudi Arabia	72
5	5	United Arab Emirates	71
6	6	Qatar	68
7	7	Morocco	67
8	8	Bahrain	66
8	8	Oman	66
10	10	Brunei	65
-	10	Singapore	65

4.3. Halal tourism in Iran

Being the largest Shia majority Muslim country, Iran is located in the Middle East region; it has an area of 1,745,150 square kilometers, a GDP of US$460,976 billion and a population of around 82 million (81,800,269). Iran's location at the intersection of major Asian, Middle Eastern, and European countries and trade routes has shaped its diverse cultures and history and it holds a unique place in the world tourism map (Heydari Chianeh et al., 2018a; SESRIC, 2019). Iran's tourism assets come from various eras, ranging from Persian Zoroastrianism (3000 BCE), the Achaemenid Empire (559 BCE), and the Sassanid Empire (224 CE) to the post-Islamic Samanid (864 CE), Ghaznavid (977 CE) and Safavid (1501 CE) dynasties. To visit Iran is a unique experience, the experience of being in the cradle of civilization and culture that has had, and continues to have, its impact on the world for more than 2,500 years of written history, where antiquity blends in harmony with modern society (Heydari Chianeh, 2017).

Iran has a long history of tourism planning that is characterized by a high degree of state intervention (Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010). The official tourism policymaking organization in Iran is the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts (MCTH), and its involvement with other governmental and semi-governmental institutions has resulted in the management of tourism infrastructure and facilities (Heydari Chianeh & Zargham, 2016). Iran hosts one of the most diverse and richest compilations of cultural heritage found in contemporary societies today. Registry of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts for immovable national heritage now includes 27,500 properties of significant cultural heritage around the country. Nevertheless, discoveries of heritage, ranging from prehistoric (e.g. rock art), ancient, and medieval to the Islamic period are being constantly made or recognized (Rodrigues, Ghasemi, Correia, & Kozak, 2018). Also, Iran with 24 world heritage sites and 13 elements in the world intangible cultural heritage list has a unique

superiority over its neighbors and this country focused on meeting cultural objectives on attracting tourists who are familiar with and have an interest in Iran's rich history and culture and who respect Iranian people as well as Iranian cultural-religious tradition (UNESCO, 2019a; UNESCO, 2019b; Zamani-Farahani & Eid, 2016).

Iran's tourism industry has been constrained by political and economic factors in the past but with the recent change in the geopolitical landscape, a better future is envisaged (Heydari Chianeh, 2017). In recent years, because of international economic sanctions and their impacts on Iran's oil and gas industry, Iranian government officials have begun to recognize the importance of the tourism sector segment for economic development. As such, with more emphasis on this industry, there has been a slight growth in both the number of tourist arrivals as well as international tourism receipts (Zamani-Farahani & Musa, 2012). The latest statistics indicate that Iran received about 7,295,000 tourists in 2018, with an International impact of US$4.1 billion. Also, the total contribution of travel and tourism to GDP and employment was around US$28 billion (6.5% of the total economy) and 1.3 million jobs (5.4% of total employment) in the same year. This growth is of special significance in the light of the problems faced by Iran due to its image (UNWTO, 2019; WTTC, 2019; Heydari Chianeh, 2017). Table 2 shows the key trends of tourism in Iran from 2015 up to 2018.

Tourism policies in Iran are rarely based on tourism nature and its current patterns and these policies are mostly affected by cultural, social, and especially Iran's political economy (Heydari Chianeh & Rezatab Azgomi, 2012). The values and norms ruling in Iran as an Islamic country have shaped and evolved the nature, structure, and foundation of this country's tourism industry based on Islamic and Halal principles (Kian, et al., 2017). Halal tourism is one area in which Iran has been active in terms of planning for more developments and aiming to attract more tourists (Heydari Chianeh, Soleimanirad, Fekri, Ahmadi, Ghanbari, & Ranjbarzadeh Tamaj, 2018). The government has said that it desires to earn revenue only from Halal sources (permissible to use or engage in, according to Islamic law) and not to depend on the sale of any Haram sources (prohibited). As cited from the tourism authorities of Iran, many principles of Halal tourism, including serving Halal meat in airplanes, hotels, and restaurants, and the prohibition of serving alcoholic beverages in such places, are already observed in Iran. According to officials, this is "part of an educational program to ensure tourists respected the local tradition and culture necessary in the interests of Muslims and required of Islam" (SESRIC, 2016; Heydari Chianeh et al., 2018a).

Given the enormous interest among tourists for visiting the special parts of Iran that have a religious significance, Iran has the potential to leverage its own culture to expand the tourism industry. Of the 24

Table 2. Tourism Trends of Iran in 2015-2018 (UNWTO, 2017; 2018; 2019)

International Tourist Arrivals (1000)				International Tourism Receipts (US$ million)			
2015	2016	2017	2018	2015	2016	2017	2018
5,237	4,942	4,867	7,295	3,868	3,713	4,402	…

UNESCO world heritage sites located in Iran, which include both the natural and the cultural sites, six of them have Islamic cultural roots. Being the largest Shia Muslim country in the world, Iran has a wealth of monuments, mosques, sites (both historical and modern), and religious rituals and rites associated with this branch of Islam that makes the country unique amongst the Halal tourism destinations in the world. There are more than 1,100 Shiite shrines varying in importance throughout Iran. The most visited shrines in Iran are those housing the tombs of the eighth Imam in Mashhad and his sister Fatima in Qom. Other shrines – Imamzade, which commemorates descendants of Imams – receive lesser pilgrims, and sometimes due to their locations either in the deserts or in very remote areas they are of importance mainly to the local populations (Heydari Chianeh et al., 2018a; Heydari Chianeh, 2017).

As Kian et al. (2017) argued, Halal foods and beverages, prayer facilities, water usage friendly toilets, Ramadan services and facilities, facilities with no non-Halal activities, recreational facilities with privacy and family-friendly activities such as; shopping, sightseeing, and theme parks, are the main and fundamental needs of Muslim tourists during their travel and it is worth noting that providing these services and facilities is the primary priority of tourism service suppliers in Iran. Furthermore, the two main religious festivals associated with Islam, namely the Eid-al-Fitr (marking the end of Ramadan) and the Eid-al-Adha (feast of the sacrifice or the Hajj festival) are celebrated throughout the country and constitute holiday periods during which there is much movement of people who return to their families and hence constitute a sizeable portion of domestic tourism. However, certain traditions and customs proper to the Shia faith are a feature of Iran, and of these the most important about the month of Muharram (the first month of the year in the Islamic calendar) in which the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet is commemorated. In addition, the month also marks other important religious events that have national significance. The anniversaries of various religious figures are also celebrated locally and draw a large number of fervent followers and visitors and thereby give a special flavor to the festivals and the customs associated therewith (Heydari Chianeh, 2017).

All in all, Iran plans to turn into the world's hub for Halal tourism, which could draw 20 million tourist arrivals by 2025 and more than 15 million Muslims a year from around the world in a near future (SESRIC, 2016; Tajzadeh-Namin, 2012). Recently in GMTI 2019 report, Iran is ranked as the 12th in the world

and 11th among the OIC member countries in the list of the most popular Halal tourism destinations. Also according to this report, Iran is one of the top 20 outbound markets and the 8th top inbound market for Halal tourism among the OIC member destinations in 2019. In addition, this country is known as one of the top 10 destinations in terms of providing Islamic and Halal services for Muslim tourists in the same report (Mastercard & Crescent Rating, 2019).

In fact, Iran has a great potential as a Halal tourism destination but it is as yet little known in the world. accordingly, the unfavorable position of Iran in the Halal tourism market as one of the most important Islamic countries, its low share of this highly profitable market in spite of possessing a maximum Muslim population and an Islamic government with high compatibility of this type of tourism with its socio-cultural and religious values and norms, depicts the importance of this newfound type of tourism as one of the most appropriate options for tourism industry development in Iran and the necessity of paying attention to this sector in this country's tourism planning and policymaking process (Kian et al., 2017).

5. Conclusion and Implications

Despite the existing advantages and positive trends, some of the constraints and challenges also facing the growth of Halal tourism in Muslim countries such as; the lack of Halal tourism component in the national tourism strategies, limited marketing, branding and promotion of Halal tourism services, and products, lack of allocated budget item or human resources, lack of the sufficient infrastructures necessary, Islamophobia and negative sentiments toward Muslim countries, and Iran is no exception as an Islamic destination. Although the economic, social, and cultural components of many developing and Muslim countries have emerged as an important challenge to tourism development in these countries; but most of them have different experiences in the field of tourism. For example, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Malaysia, Turkey, Tunisia, Jordan, and Indonesia are among these countries that have successful experiences in this field, despite having many similarities with Iran (Heydari Chianeh, Rezatab Azgomi, Soltani, & Motamedi Mehr, 2013).

In fact, what the tourism industry of Iran and other Islamic countries suffers from is the lack of a comprehensive national tourism development plan in line with important trends in information globalization; so that the Opportunities, threats, strengths, and weaknesses are often not properly analyzed and evaluated and in the absence of a

comprehensive program, advertising programs without scientific and expert support are carried out by organizations in charge of tourism and other tourism institutions, without having the necessary effectiveness (Soltanifar & Nour Abadi, 2003). In addition to political, cultural, and economic challenges, the most important reasons for this can be the lack of a clear long-term development strategy, the multiplicity of decision-making centers in the field of tourism, the inefficiency of government management, weak organizational structure, and the lack of independent civic institutions and real monitoring mechanisms (Heydari Chianeh et al., 2013).

Meanwhile, one of the most important tourism capacities and potentials in Iran is Halal tourism, and according to Iran's vision document, one of the goals is to attract 20 million tourists in 2020, and due to Iran's cultural affinity with Muslim countries, it is necessary to pay attention to the position of the Halal tourism pattern in the planning process for the prosperity and development of various sectors of the Iranian tourism industry. Although in recent years Muslim tourists have always been a significant part of incoming tourists to Iran, but not enough of Iran's high capacity in this area has been used. According to the officials, the issue of Halal tourism has been considered in Iran's tourism planning and policy-making system since 2011, but in practice, no planning, branding or marketing have been done in this direction (Rahghoshay, 2016; Hajinejhad, Paydar, Bagheri, & Abdi, 2016).

It seems that one of the most important reasons for Iran's insignificant share of tourism markets is to adopt an approach during which, for various reasons, which are mainly socio-cultural, changes appropriate to the global tourism conditions are avoided. In other words, the development policies of the tourism industry in Iran, instead of harmonizing the domestic conditions, destinations, and attractions and tourism products with the global conditions of this industry, try to combine international tourism with its domestic conditions (Heydari Chianeh et al., 2013).

As a socio-cultural barrier, a look at the views of individuals in Iranian society regarding the arrival of tourists to Iran shows that many people still evaluate tourism flows negatively and think that tourism causes destruction and damage to local cultures in the country. If a society has a rich culture, in light of this rich culture, it should treat tourists appropriately and should not be afraid of tourism flows. Rather, all of the host societies should consider the arrival of tourists as a kind of export of culture and cultural values and influence tourists with their cultural elements through proper plans. In this regard, Iran can mention how to provide touristic places, how to introduce them, how to promote standards and the quality of cultural patterns and elements; a quality that can provide a good platform for the spread of Iranian culture and values while providing appropriate welfare services (Moslemi, Kian, & Pishdast, 2016).

As mentioned, Iran is one of the few countries where all Islamic principles are observed in its tourism industry, and according to the constitution and indigenous culture of this country, it is expected that Iran should be one of the world's strongest hubs for Halal tourism due to its potentials and economic, cultural, religious and political advantages. Halal tourism should not be reduced to those tourists who travel to Iran to visit religious areas such as Mashhad and Qom. In fact, any Muslim tourist who travels for leisure in order to take advantage of tourism services, in accordance with Islamic rules, is looking for Halal tourism. For example, the Iranian beach resorts, which are governed according to religious beliefs, have a high capacity to attract Muslim tourists. In particular, the islands of Kish, Qeshm, and Chabahar, which also have a suitable climate, can receive a large number of tourists who are looking for a place for Halal entertainment. Another advantage of Iran compared to other leading countries in attracting Muslim tourists is the lower cost of travel as well as proximity to Muslim countries and having multiple religious sites. Therefore, the atmosphere in the country's touristic areas, if properly managed, can be a strong point for Iran in attracting Muslim tourists and by turning Iran into a Halal tourism hub, provide the development of the country's tourism sector. For this purpose, it is necessary, firstly, to increase the level of service to the Muslim tourists entering Iran so that it can compete with other countries, and secondly, an extensive advertisement should be carried out in the religious strata of people in other countries of the world, especially in neighbouring countries, and the possibility of Halal entertainment in Iran should be introduced to them (Ebrahimi,Yavari Ghohar, & Hassan Kashi , 2019; Yaghfouri, Alizadeh, Eslam Fard, & Alam al-Huda, 2012; Rahghoshay, 2016).

Also, Iran's abundant tourism potentials and attractions in natural, historical, cultural, and religious dimensions with the expansion of the Halal tourism industry can cause a strong cultural integration between Islamic countries (Yaghfouri et al., 2012), and the tourism industry decision-makers in Iran should positively influence the minds of international tourists to reduce Iranophobia and actualize this country's Halal tourism potential. Furthermore, they can increase their low share of this highly profitable market by offering short-term and long-term plans and policies in addition to a well-researched strategy in the form of a proper branding and marketing process. In addition to the benefits of attracting Muslim tourists, Islamic and Halal tourism is also one of the most appropriate ways to overcome international sanctions against the Iranian economy and it can be considered as the global discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the world tourism industry and in this regard show Iran as a leading and discourse-building country in the

Muslim world (Rahghoshay, 2016).

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