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THE POTENTIAL OF HALAL TOURISM IN ETHIOPIA: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

Recently, Halal tourism has been emerging as lucrative tourism niche both in Muslim and non-Muslim Countries' destinations. For a long time, tourism industry had been exclusive against Muslims for it was fenced by the so called "Haram" activities. However, nowadays, this problem is being solved through Halal tourism so that more Muslims are now engaging in tourism without need of sacrificing their religion. Countries such as Malaysia, Turkey, Indonesia and Singapore have already entered into Halal tourism. Though Halal tourism is open for both Muslim and non-Muslim customers, stakeholders including scholars in the field have developed a misconception that Halal tourism is only for Muslims. However, in practice, it is compliant with Sharia but open for all. No doubting, Ethiopia can be among the top beneficiaries of Halal tourism developments. Its history as a land of the first Hijra and her geopolitical position for Islamic world enable her to capture the halal tourists' demand of the Islamic world. In this paper, literatures and previous researches in the area have been analyzed. Both opportunities and challenges that Ethiopia will be facing while implementing halal tourism have also been inventoried and analyzed. Accordingly, the applicability of Halal tourism in Ethiopian context has been well appraised. The finding of this study reveals that there are misconception and misunderstandings among stakeholders and scholars on the concept of Halal tourism. Neither a clear definition is given for Halal tourism. Moreover, the study also approved that Ethiopia has both potentials opportunities and challenges to develop Halal tourism.

Keywords: Halal Tourism, Ethiopia, Tourist Product, Tourism Perception
JEL Classification Code: Z32, L83

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INTRODUCTION

Halal tourism is one of the most lucrative and recently growing tourism segments. It has great potential for destinations, businesses and travel related entities. It is also one of the world's highest spending tourist markets (Mastercard & Crescentrating, 2017:3). It has been flourished in recent years to cater for the needs of Muslim travelers who want to enjoy full holiday services, which at the same time address their religious requirements as well as Islamic customs, values and culture (Battour & Ismail, 2015; Elasrag, 2016; World Travel Market [WTM], 2007). Halal tourism has recently been gaining popularity, and is now become one of the fastest growing niche in tourism industry (Elasrag, 2016:25).With an expenditure of about USD 155 billion in 2016, the Halal tourism Market is a significant contributor to the overall Muslim consumer market - which is estimated to be worth USD 2 to 3 trillion across various Halal industries of food, lifestyle and services (Mastercard & Crescentrating, 2017:3). Malaysia is a pioneer in introducing a comprehensive standard for halal products (Shafaei & Mohammed, 2015). The hotel provides halal food and beverage, a copy of the Quran, a prayer mat (rug), the Qibla direction in their rooms, shampoo and soap provided in the rooms could be certified as Halal (Battour & Ismail, 2015:3). Halal tourism industry has been emerging and will be continuing as competitive in the coming years. Destinations, hotels and resorts, airlines and travel agents are reconsidering to position themselves in Halal tourism market (Battour & Ismail, 2015:4). Even though non-Muslim countries have been entering, the numbers of Sharia compliant hotels and Halal resorts are still limited in non-Muslim destinations. Therefore, this is a good business opportunity for further investment in tourism industry globally, especially in countries that have high inbound Muslim tourists demand like Ethiopia (Ethiopian Herald, 2017). Halal tourism development is important for any destination because the benefits are not restricted for Muslim travelers and destinations. Halal tourism is open to everyone and elsewhere (Jaelani, 2017:7) Emphasis on the importance of Halal or Sharia compliant tourism products and services is growing from time to time. The Islamic perspective of travel and tourism is increasingly

gaining attention and becoming a new marketing segment. It is moving into the mainstream market, affecting and changing perceptions on how Sharia compliant business should be conducted in both Muslim and non-Muslim destinations particularly from a marketing and branding point of view (Battour & Ismail, 2015; Shafaei, 2015; Mastercard & Crescentrating, 2017; Yılmaz & Güler, 2017). Halal products and services are getting popular not only among Muslims, but also among people of other faiths and philosophies as halal products are known for their quality and the halal industry has been creating enabling environment for mutual respect and honest cooperation (Chandra, 2014: 47). As Halal tourism industry become emerging and lucrative business, many Muslim and non-Muslim countries are working to capture the Muslim tourists market by providing the Sharia compliant tourism products, facilities and infrastructures to cater their needs (Samori, Nor & Mohammed, 2016:131). Both Muslim and non-Muslim countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Singapore, Philippines, Australia and France are emerging as hosting destinations of Halal tourists (Chandra, 2014: 48; Elasrag, 2016: 26). In 2017, 130 countries were become destinations of halal tourism. Of which 46 were Muslim countries destinations and 82 non-Muslim destinations (Mastercard & Crescentrating, 2017:13). In 2017, Malaysia, Indonesia, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Morocco, Oman, Bahrain and Iran respectively were top 10 destinations of Halal tourism from Muslim Countries whereas Singapore Thailand, United Kingdom, South Africa, Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, France, Spain and United States respectively were from non-Muslim Countries (Mastercard & Crescentrating, 2017:13). From Muslim countries, Malaysia is positioning itself as best destination of Halal tourism whereas from non-Muslim countries Singapore is positioning itself as a destination for Muslim holidays. It ranked number six on the list of most Muslim-friendly countries for tourists as per the Islamic travel ranking by halal travel specialist Crescentrating. Only 15% of Singapore's population is Muslim, and there are 70 mosques in the city state (Chandra, 2014:48). This destination represents the plurality of Halal tourism in non-Muslim destinations as well. Ethiopia, not only

the first country in Africa and the 2nd in the world to accept Islam, it is also the land of the first Hijira constitute the second largest Muslim Population in Africa, did not include as destination of Halal tourism but it has high potential to be a part in the near future.

According to Pew Research Center (2017), Halal tourism will be continuing as lucrative business because of the following facts from the demand side. Growing Muslim Population: The Muslim population continues to be the fastest- growing religious segment in the world. It is expected to make up 26 percent of the world's population by 2030. By 2050, this Muslim population increase will be faster than the world's population as a whole (Pew research Center, 2017). According to MasterCard and Crescentrating (2017), there is a continued increase in the middle class population in countries with large Muslim populations such as the Gulf countries, Indonesia, Turkey and Malaysia. Muslims are also the youngest segment amongst all other major religious groups with a median age of 23 years old in 2010 (Pew Research Center, 2017). This millennial generation is shaping the future travel industry through their strong viewpoints and unique purchasing behaviors worldwide (Shafaei and Mohammed, 2015). Increasing availability of Muslim-friendly travel services and facilities is also in the positive track. With the increasing growth of the Muslim travel market, more businesses and destinations are now entering the industry to serve the needs of Muslim travelers by adapting their products and services. The increase in these Muslim-friendly services creates a virtuous cycle, creating more opportunities for Muslims to travel worldwide (Shafaei, 2015). With the majority of Muslims representing growing economies such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey and economies in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Halal business travel is projected to grow rapidly. Availability of business opportunities, especially in developing countries, attracts a large number of business travelers. Turkey and Gulf states are the main foreign direct investors of Ethiopia (Ethiopian Herald, 2017). Ethiopia, therefore, has Halal business demands from these and other Muslim countries. Halal tourism has also seen growth contributed by the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events) sector. No doubting,

Ethiopia can be among the top beneficiaries from these developments. Its history as a land of the first Hijira and her geopolitical position for Islamic world (see the discussion below) enable her to capture the halal tourists' demand of the Islamic world.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Before defining Halal tourism, it is very important to define the term "Halal." Even though the term Halal has already been mainstreamed in tourism and marketing literature, some confusions or misunderstanding of the exact meaning of the term mainly for non-Muslim scholars is not impossible.

As Al-Qaradawi (2013); Battour & Ismail (2015) and Ijaz (2011) stated that the term Halal is an Arabic term equivalent with English term "Permissible", "allowable". Many people try to confine the term with dietary but nowadays the term mean more than this. Renown Muslim scholar of al- Azhar University Al- Qaradawi defined it as a permitted with respect to which no restriction exists and the doing of which is allowed by the law-giver, Allah" (Al-Qaradawi, 2013:XXV). Halal also defined as practice or activity in tourism which is 'permissible' according to Islamic teaching (Battour & Ismail, 2015:2). ITC (2015) defined that Halal is an Arabic term meaning permissible or lawful. Its opposite is haram, prohibited or unlawful (International Trade Centre [ITC], 2015:2). Academic thinking from the west has exhaustively considered the usage and consumption of halal from the narrow perspective of Islamic dietary laws (Ijaz, 2011). However there is still a relatively large untapped market potential for halal products and services ranging from halal tourism, medicines, cosmetics, publishing, to halal insurance and loans (ABi, 2007; Bergeaud-Blacker, 2001 as cited in Ijaz, 2011). This let the concept of halal to be explored from the broader context of its applicability and fittingness to secular businesses as well. As Ijaz (2011) stated the concept of halal goes beyond consumption and is no longer purely a religious issue but is in the realm of business and trade. As defined bellow and discussed throughout this paper, Halal tourism is one component of halal business. Al Jallad (2008: 3 as cited in Ijaz, 2011) generalized definition of the term that halal is an Arabic term refers to all facets of life such as permissible behavior, speech,

dress, conduct, manner and dietary in contrast to non-speakers of Arabic particularly in western countries use the term in context of Muslim food Laws particularly where meat and poultry are concerned.

Halal tourism is defined as tourism activities that are permissible under Islamic law in terms of behavior, dress, conduct and diet. It differs from Islamic tourism where non-Muslims visit Muslim countries and vice versa to find out more about Islamic culture (World Travel Market [WTM], 2007:18). Halbase (2015) defines it as: "Offering tour packages and destinations that are particularly designed to cater for Muslim considerations and address Muslim needs". It refers to tourism products that provide hospitality services in accordance with Islamic beliefs and practices. This involves serving halal food, having separate swimming pools, spa and leisure activities for men and women, alcohol free dining areas, prayer facilities, and even women-only beach areas with Islamic swimming etiquette (Elasrag, 2016:25). WTM (2007) explains Halal tourism as a type of tourism that is in compliance with Islamic teachings regarding behaviorisms, dress, conduct and diet. The term Halal tourism refers a type of tourism that includes the Halal and Islamic elements to the marketing mix of tourism such as product mix, marketing mix, products portfolio provided to the customer to make the product(s) compliant with Islamic Sharia (El-Gohary, 2016:128)

To sum up, Halal tourism is any tourism activities which are permissible according to Islamic teachings or sharia compliant to draw both Muslims and non-Muslim without any discriminations in tourism industry in both Muslim and non-Muslim destinations. The definition consider the Islamic law (sharia) as the basis to deliver tourism products and service to the target customers who are mainly Muslims, such as Halal hotels (sharia compliant hotels), Halal resorts, Halal restaurants, and Halal trips. The definition also claims that neither the locations of activities are not limited to the Muslim countries nor the customers are Muslims alone. Therefore, it includes services and Islamic products that are designed for Muslim travellers (non-Muslims can also enjoy) in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. Indeed, non-Muslim Customers who demand

sharia incompliant products and services such as alcohol, bars and pork may not be interested to take part in Halal tourism. But the rest can be part of it. Furthermore, in the definition the term "any activities" refers to the purpose of travel is not necessarily religious. It may be any of the general motivations of tourism such as MICE, business, research, education, visiting friends and relatives (VFR) and so on.

However, there is a misconception that many scholars used Halal tourism and Islamic tourism interchangeably. But which is totally mistake. Carboni et al. (2014, as cited in Shafaei & Mohammed, 2015:2) defined Islamic tourism "as tourism in accordance with Islam, involving people of the Muslim faith who are interested in keeping with their personal religious habits whilst travelling". This definition takes into the consideration the Islamic law and target Muslim customers alone (Shafaei & Mohammed, 2015:2). Islamic tourism exclusively arranged for Muslim customers and most of the time specialized in religious tourism activities such pilgrimage towards Islamic sites. Other terms such as Halal travel, Muslim-friendly tourism, Shari'ah tourism, and Halal transportation have been interchangeably used but they hardly express halal tourism. Moreover, branding Halal tourism as "Islamic tourism" might give a wrong impression that such tourism activities and/or products are only for Muslim customers, which is not true as non-Muslim customers can also consume Halal tourism products for many different reasons (El-Gohary, 2016). According to El-Gohay (2016), it is advisable to use the term "Halal tourism" as the main and only term to brand and describe tourism products and/or activities that have full compliance with the rules and guidance of the Halal concept and Islamic Sharia. This gives a much better way of understanding the true nature and meaning of such type of tourism activities. It is also inclusive to entice non-Muslim customers than terms such as Sharia tourism and Islamic tourism.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research method has been employed to conduct this paper. The data have been collected mainly from secondary sources. However, primary data has been also incorporated from informal focus group discussions and authors' participant-

observation. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) has been conducted with purposefully selected 10 individuals who are Generation Y. The discussion was conducted on December 2/2017. The discussion was lasted for four hours. The author had also opportunities to observe the problems in persons while he was researcher and lecturer of Tourism at Jigjiga University of Ethiopia from 2012-2016. In these periods, he has conducted community services within the community in the area of tourism and recreation. These practical experiences have enabled the authors to add some firsthand data in the paper. For the purpose of this study, a SWOT (strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) analysis is employed and presented table. The SWOT analysis has been used widely as a research methodology in different areas of study. In tourism studies, the analysis frequently ends with the initial definition of various factors like strengths (S) and weaknesses (W), opportunities (O) and threats (T) of a destination. The SWOT analysis would point out attributes and areas of strategy that need to be improved based on the mutual comparison and evaluation of relationships between strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this paper is twofold: to identify research gaps in the existing literatures and researches for further studies; and to assess the feasibility of the title for broader and deeper studies in case of Ethiopia**.**

Previous Studies on Halal Tourism

As an emerging issue, Halal tourism has attracted significant number of scholars and considerable attention have been given from researchers and practitioners to the subject. The authors assessed some literatures that have been conducted in Halal tourism. As discussed below and elsewhere in this paper, majority of these literatures have been done in Muslim states mainly in Malaysia, Indonesia and Turkey. According to Elaziz and Kurt (2017) the first study of halal tourism was conducted in 1989 by Din. In his article entitled "Islam and tourism: Patterns, issues, and options" he stated that prostitution, gambling and the consumption of alcoholic beverages were identified as challenge against Halal tourism. However, most of the researches have been conducted in 2010s and

especially in 2016 and 2017, lots of academic journals have been published on Halal tourism. Faiza (2017) conducted a paper entitled the "Halalification" of tourism." The author tried to identify to what extent tourism marketer applies the term Halal tourism to attract Muslim customers. This study confirmed that Islamic Tourism is used more widely than Halal Tourism in academia to describe the phenomenon. The term Halal is popular within the industry and with the media, as it is probably perceived as having more marketing credibility. Battour (2017); Wibowo and Fuazia (2016) conducted research on "Halal tourism and non-Muslim tourists' perception towards it". The findings of these researches reveal that majority non-Muslims have positive perception for Halal tourism.

However, most researches conducted on Halal tourism have at least two limitations. In first place, most of the researchers did not reveal the difference between Sharia tourism, Islamic Tourism and Halal tourism. But in reality there is clear distinction between these terms. The former two are more exclusive and focus on religious traveling. Whereas Halal tourism is open for everyone. Only few authors such as El-Gohary (2016) have clearly discussed the difference. The second gap is that most researchers have referred Halal tourism as "Muslim for Muslims" which means drawing Muslim customer in Islamic destinations which is very fatal view for the development of Halal tourism. However, some author such as El-Gohary (2016), Wibowo and Fuazia (2016) and Jaelani (2017) have indicated the economic value of Halal tourism for both Muslim and non-Muslims and for any destinations as far as they provide Halal products.

To sum up, even though there is some confusion in the existing literature, few researchers have clearly stated that Halal tourism is not limited for Muslim customers or Muslim destinations; it is open for everyone and elsewhere. What makes Halal tourism peculiar from the rest of tourism is that the product and services of Halal tourism should be Halal compliant with Islamic Sharia nothing other else. This implies that there is no common understanding among stakeholders and literature on the definition and extent of Halal tourism. Therefore, further studies have to be done to

clarify the concept of Halal tourism and to clearly identify its stakeholders.

Table 1: SWOT Analysis of Halal Tourism Development in Ethiopia

Internal		External	
Strength	Weakness	Opportunities	Challenges
➢ Strong Islamic History and Culture ➢ Land of first Hijra ➢ The presence of Islamic Heritages ➢ Huge number of Muslim inhabitants ➢ The existence of High Domestic Demand for Halal Tourism	➢ Lack of Institutions, experience and Human Power in Halal tourism ➢ Resistance from bigoted Muslims ➢ Lack of infrastructure that fit with Halal Tourism	➢ Strategic geopolitical location of Ethiopia ➢ The presence of huge investors from Islamic word in Ethiopia ➢ Rise of Muslim communities interests' to travel ➢ Muslims communities have the habit of traveling in family ➢ The ever increasing of Muslim the number Communities globally	➢ The growing of Islamophobia ➢ The increasing instability in Islamic word ➢ The reluctance and resistance from the Ethiopian Government ➢ Resistance from bigoted Christians ➢ Difficult task to market Halal tourism ➢ It might distract Non-Muslim visitors

OPPORTUNITIES OF HALAL TOURISM IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia has opportunities and special privileges to be best destination of Halal tourism. It has historical and geopolitical competitive advantage to attract Halal customers. Most of, if not all, customers of Halal tourism are from Islamic worlds; and Ethiopia has unique Islamic history and strategic geopolitical location to attract Muslim customer from Muslim countries. For the purpose of this article, we singled out four important aspects that clearly show the intimacy of Islam and Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is the land of the First Hijra: In Human history, it was Axum, Ethiopian ancient city registered by UNESCO, that welcomed the first migrants of Islam *Sahabas* and it was Ethiopia that was preferred by the prophet to be shelter of his companions in the time persecutions. Accordingly, Axum was the place where the first *Hijra* was made towards and is sacred town of Muslims. In Islamic history, Axum in particular Ethiopia in general have unique place. But most of the Christian elites have misconceptions concerning the relationship between Islam and Ethiopia. Ethiopia as a halal tourism destination could be branded as "Ethiopia the land of the First Hijra". (Dereje, 2014:282; Østebø 2013).

The Pioneer Ethiopian Sahabas: Not alone hospitality, Ethiopians were the pioneer Sahabas. Ethiopian Bilal was the first *Muazin* (caller for Prayer) of Islam and he had special intimacy with the prophet himself. Mohammed's nurse was also an Ethiopian woman named Baraka (Ummu Aymen). She looked after him from his birth throughout his childhood until his marriage to Khadija (Haggai, 1994:6). These two individuals are among the highest figures in Islamic History.

"Leave the Abyssinian alone, so long as they don't take offensive": This Hadith (Utruku aal-Habasha Ma tarakukum) is one of the golden historical orders of Prophet Mohammed in favor of Ethiopia. Ethiopia is the first place in the world that exempted from conquest by the order of the prophet. The prophet himself declared not a conquest to be conducted against Ethiopia except for the purpose of defending aggression. This might be Prophet's reciprocate for Nejash's benevolence. According to Islamic traditions, this is the reason why the early conquest was not extended to Ethiopia at a time when all countries in the Red Sea sub region surrendered to the new Islamic political and military power (Dereje, 2014, Haggai, 1994).

The Conversion of King Nejash to Islam: It is also widely believed in the Islamic world and among the Ethiopian Muslims that Najashi not only sheltered the sahabas but also ultimately embraced Islam. Najashi's benevolence is said to have been reciprocated by the Prophet not only in the form of the declaration: *utruku al-habasha ma tarakukum* ("leave the Ethiopians alone as long as they leave you alone") but also the Prophet performed Islam's especial funeral prayer in absentia (*salat al-ghaib*) to King Najashi upon his death. The latter indicates his conversion to Islam. As Hussein noted, "Ethiopian Muslim tradition has canonized the Aksumite king as a Muslim saint under the honorific name, Ahmad al-Najashi,

Ahmad being the name believed to have given to him by the prophet". As part of Ethiopia's religious landscape, the Najashi narrative helps repositioning the Ethiopian Muslims national identity. Accordingly, Ethiopia is not only a special country for Christians (as indicated in the Solomonic narrative) it is also vital for Muslims in general and Ethiopian Muslims in particular (Dereje, 2014, Haggai, 1994, Hussein, 2001). Moreover, there are also lots of Islamic heritages in Ethiopia such as the first Mosque of Negash built by the *Sahabas* in 615; the walled city of Harar considered as the fourth holiest city of Islam in the world and the center Islamic and Arabic education of Horn of Africa since 9th century and registered by UNESCO in 2006 (Mohammed, 2012). These and other Islamic heritages will attract Muslim Customers. There is also initiation by the Turkish government to build Halal Hotel at the Mosques of Negash (Ethiopian Herald, 2017).

Geopolitics and strategic position of the country is another important asset for Halal tourism development in Ethiopia. In one hand, Ethiopia is surrounded by Muslim countries. On the other hand, the country is located in the near distance and strategic position of Muslim countries which are the country of origin for Halal tourists. Not only Arab countries but also other non-Arab Muslim countries have strong tie with Ethiopia. Turkey and Gulf States are the top foreign direct investors in Ethiopia. According to news of Ethiopian Herald (2017), Ethiopia is Turkey's biggest investment destination in Africa. In 2016 above 350 Turkish companies invested 2.3 billion USD in Ethiopia. The number of Turkish investors asking to invest in Ethiopia is also rapidly growing. The country also has strong economic ties with Gulf countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates). Ethiopia has also a lion's share in delivering fresh goat and sheep meat to UAE and Saudi Arabian markets. The country provides in average 80 tons of meat during Ramadan (Islamic fasting month) and 50 tons in non-fasting period for the aforementioned markets (Ethiopian Herald, 2017). Economic analyst at the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates to Ethiopia, Dr. Fikru stated that identifying the Gulf countries' demand and keeping the quality of exports are the tools to bridge the gap between the potential and performance (Cited in Ethiopian Herald, 23 March

2017). While Ethiopia is implementing and restructuring plan to become the five tourism destination in the Africa, it is also working to become commercial and tourism hub of the horn of Arica by attracting tourists from the Middle East (Ethiopian Herald, 2017). Obviously, Muslim countries of Ethiopian neighbors such as Somalia, Djibouti and Sudan are visiting Ethiopia. All these investors need halal products and services. Therefore, in Ethiopia developing Halal tourism is very optimistic. These are also promising activities to flourish Halal tourism in Ethiopia.

Moreover, Ethiopia can boost its domestic tourism through Halal tourism. The authors have conducted focus group discussion through Skype to analyses factors that caused mainly the millennial Muslim Generation not to engage in tourism and recreation activities. All of the discussant (who are in millennial generation) agreed that in Ethiopia all tourism and recreation activities have been fenced by "Haram" things (Sharia incompliant) and there are no halal products that accommodate their interest. But they have a great demand to visit if these problems will be solved. Ethiopia has an estimated (2017) population of 104.96 million, which ranks 14th in the world (UN World Population Prospects, 2017). According to U. S. Department of state (2004) about 50% of Ethiopia's population is Muslim. Hence, for Halal tourism, there is high potential of domestic demand too. According to the Focus Group discussion, especially millennial generation (Generation Y) have strong demand of Halal tourism. Hence, the demand is already confirmed and no doubting, Halal tourism is lucrative business in Ethiopia.

To sum up, there are lots of enabling situations and opportunities to flourish halal tourism in Ethiopia. Even though challenges are also there (as discussed below) to be considered, Halal Tourism is very feasible in Ethiopia.

CHALLENGES OF HALAL TOURISM IN ETHIOPIA

The experiences of many countries reveal that there are also challenges in developing and marketing Muslim-friendly or Halal tourism. Running Halal tourism is not an easy task because of the variance between the demands of non-Muslim tourists and Muslim tourists (Battour & Ismail, 2015:4). Halal tourism practices and

activities are prone to be easily affected by the sociopolitical environment.

Even though Ethiopia has a lot of opportunities to develop Halal tourism as discussed above, there are also internal and external hurdles that challenge and dwarf the development of Halal Tourism in the country. These hurdles include the following: the image of Ethiopia as Christian state, resistance from bigoted Christians and Muslims, Islamophobia, terrorism, lack of experience in the area, shortage of human power and institution in Halal tourism are some identified factors from literatures and during focus group discussion (FGD, December 5, 2017)

The Growing of Islamophobia among Ethiopia Christians: Islamophobia is defined as a "hatred or fear of Muslims or of their politics or culture" (dictionary.com, 2013). Allen (2010) defined it as any ideology or pattern of thought and/or behavior in which Muslims are excluded from positions, rights, and possibilities in (parts of) society because of their believed or actual Islamic background (Allen, 2010). Especially since September 2001, negative perceptions and assumptions about the Islamic Faith have become very prominent and this mindset has been adopted by much of Europe, North America and Australia, thus creating an evident separation and obvious tension between the "Western" and "Muslim" worlds (Allen, 2010). Islamophobia reduces Muslim people to a global acceptance and honesty, treats Muslims as terrorists, and creates a mindset in which Muslims are considered as "others" and can never be accepted outside of their own society; they become alienated (Ihsanohlu, 2010). The negative attitude about the Islamic faith is formed from ignorance and intolerance (Ihsanohlu, 2010). This misconceptions and Islamophobia has created a division between Muslims and non-Muslims in Ethiopia too. This is in turn caused the Ethiopian Christians and the government to see any Muslims' activities by suspicion and doubt (Ahmadin 2010; Hussein, 2006). Hence, there is a possibility that the development of Halal tourism might have been suspected as expansion of fanatic Muslims. The establishments of some Halal institutions have been aborted by the government. For instance, the establishment of Zamzam Bank (Halal Bank) was rejected by the government after it was allowed by the country's parliament [most probably after the

government has been lobbied by conservative Christians] (Dereje, 2014). The marketing of halal tourism is also not an easy task for the tourism industry because of the variance between the demands of non-Muslim tourists and Muslim tourists. In the other way round, consuming halal products and services by non-Muslims tourists in the tourism industry could reduce Islamophobia but it is challenging to persuade non-Muslims to do so (Battour, 2017)

Fanatic Christians and Muslims: There are fanatic groups from both Christianity and Muslims that protested Halal tourism. As stated above fanatic Christians considered Ethiopia as the "Christian Island" and they will never recognize Halal products in the country. Even they do not want to see Ethiopian relation with Arab world or Muslim countries and they do want a single tourist or investor from these countries (Mohammed, 2012). There are also Muslims who considered Halal tourism as unIslamic though tourism is one of the five pillars of Islam. In the view of Islam, tourism is considered as worship in the form of Hajji and Umrah. Millions of Muslims from around the world conducted Hajj and Umrah once in a year towards Saudi Arabia (Jaelani, 2017:4). Terrorism is another great obstacle to flourish Halal tourism in Ethiopia, elsewhere indeed. In recent time as we all see in daily news of various Media, lots of terrorist actions have been committed in the name of Islam, which will have been hurdling the newborn Halal tourism not only in Ethiopia but elsewhere in the globe. Last not least, Currently Ethiopia has no ready institutions and human resources for Halal tourism.

CONCLUSION

Based on informal focus group discussion made through Skype, analyzing the existing literature and the research done by previous researcher the following conclusion has been drawn.

Recently Halal tourism emerged as alternative tourism to include Muslims into ever growing tourism activities. It is also emerged as untapped tourism niche for many destinations. Some Countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey and Singapore have already been entering into this new business. However, the potential of Halal tourism is still untouched. Scholars in subject have also been doing researches on Halal tourism. As Halal

tourism is new business, there are also gaps in the existing literatures and researches from the very definition of the term Halal tourism up to stakeholders' identification. The authors of this paper were able to identify two main gaps of the existing literatures. In the first place, most of the existing literatures have tried to align Halal tourism for Muslim customers alone which is practically not. Such kind of suggestion will rather dwarf the development of the newborn Halal tourism as it will be labeled as Muslims' business alone and it might be also targeted by terrorist to achieve the existing Islamophobia. Another gap is in relation with definition of Halal tourism. Most Scholars have defined Halal tourism as Islamic tourism and they use these terms interchangeably. However even though they have their own similarities as both are sharia compliant, they have also their own distinct features. The former is more religious and intended for Muslims to visit for the purpose of their religion affairs. Whereas the latter is Sharia compliant but not limited for Muslims alone and the purpose of visiting also might not religious; people might travel for MICE, education, adventure and so on. But as far as they use Halal products and Halal services during their visitation or journeys, it is Halal tourism but might not be Islamic tourism. As study conducted in Malaysia and Indonesia reveal that especially millennial generation of Muslim Countries have been increasing. The purpose of the Millennia generations' travel is not religious but they want use Halal products and services during their visitations.

The main Purpose of this study is, therefore, to analyze the existing literatures of Halal tourism and to see the feasibility and practicability of Halal tourism business in Ethiopia. This includes analyzing the nature of Halal tourism from Ethiopia's historical, social and geopolitical perspectives. Accordingly, the author has tried to learn the nature of Halal tourism from the previous experience and tried to see its practicability in Ethiopian context. To do so, the existing facts of opportunities and challenges were inventoried and appraised. Among other Ethiopia's geopolitical position to Muslim Countries (which are sources of Halal most tourists if not for all) and its historical tie with Islam itself are the two grand opportunities to mention here. There are also other opportunities

as discussed above in this paper; whereas, the growing Islamophobia, Ethiopia's image as "Christian Island" and terrorism are major potential threats of Halal tourism in Ethiopia.

However, it is very possible to overcome these challenges and the implementation of Halal tourism in Ethiopia is not impossible. But, deeper and boarder researches have to be done in the area to identify and analyze further challenges and opportunities.

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