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“THE SUSTAINABILITY OF HALAL TOURISM IN SHARJAH, A CULTURE CAPITAL OF ARAB TRADITION”

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ABSTRACT

Nestled between two lagoons, Sharjah is a global metropolis of modern business and vibrant culture. UNESCO declared Sharjah culture capital of the Arab world for its efforts to maintain and promote Arab traditions. It brings advantages and challenges to develop the city as sustainability world class tourism destination. There is no research trying to relate about economic growth and halal tourism itself. The purposes of this paper are: First, to describe the causal relationship between Sharjah tourism vision 2021 and innovative activities approach to improve the tourist experience through halal tourism. Second, to capture the evolution of innovative activities in the halal tourism through the empirical analysis of annual report related to tourism in Sharjah. Third, to enhancing efficiencies in tourism sector through partnership and collaborative action to provide world-class tourism facilities and capabilities. Fourth, to prove how halal tourism in Sharjah is the fastest way of benchmarking to economic growth. Fifth, to explain the impact of social media on halal tourism as innovative benchmarking. Sharjah tourism vision 2021 brings together major actors related to halal tourism: academics, innovative activities, social media, government, e-services, accommodations and transportations. Causal analysis method and calculation formulation economics mathematics are used to analyze halal tourism based on financial assumption and tourist data's in Sharjah. The findings of the paper showed that sustainability of halal tourism in Sharjah would affect significantly to the whole economic growth in United Arab Emirates.

Keywords: Sustainability, Sharjah, Halal Tourism, Innovation

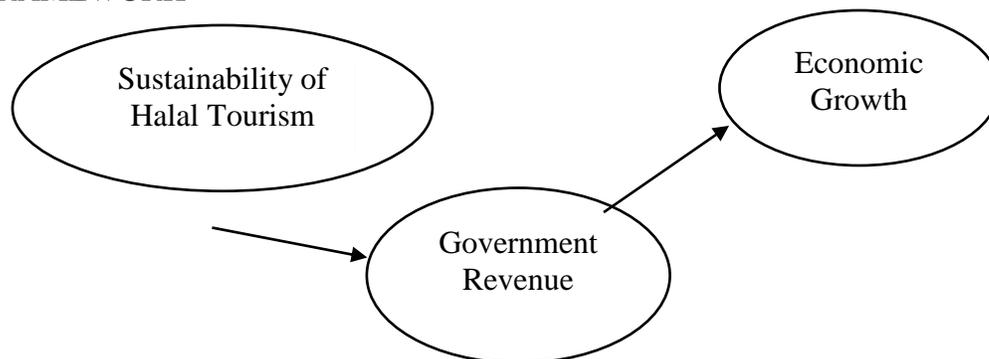
A. INTRODUCTION

Nestled between two lagoons, Sharjah is a global metropolis of modern business and vibrant culture. UNESCO declared Sharjah culture capital of the Arab world for its efforts to maintain and promote Arab traditions. It brings advantages and challenges to develop the city as sustainability world class tourism destination. There is no research trying to relate about economic growth and halal tourism itself. A reform agenda contained in the United Arab Emirates brings a lot of advantages for Sharjah. As an open, independent and beyond the city, Sharjah would be trendsetter to the government United Arab Emirates from halal tourism destination, because it would be fastest way of economic growth and government revenue from tourist relation, for example income from visa single entry, tourist tax, tourist accommodation and transportation, money exchange etc.

B. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To describe the causal relationship between Sharjah tourism vision 2021 and innovative activities approach to improve the tourist experience through halal tourism.
2. To capture the evolution of innovative activities in the halal tourism through the empirical analysis of annual report related to tourism in Sharjah.
3. To enhancing efficiencies in tourism sector through partnership and collaborative action to provide world-class tourism facilities and capabilities.
4. To prove how halal tourism in Sharjah is the fastest way of benchmarking to economic growth.
5. To explain the impact of social media on halal tourism as innovative benchmarking

C. FRAMEWORK



D. PRIOR STUDY

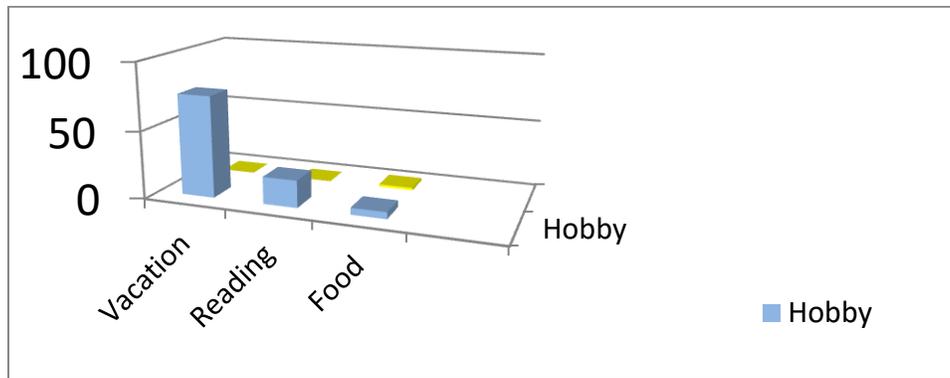
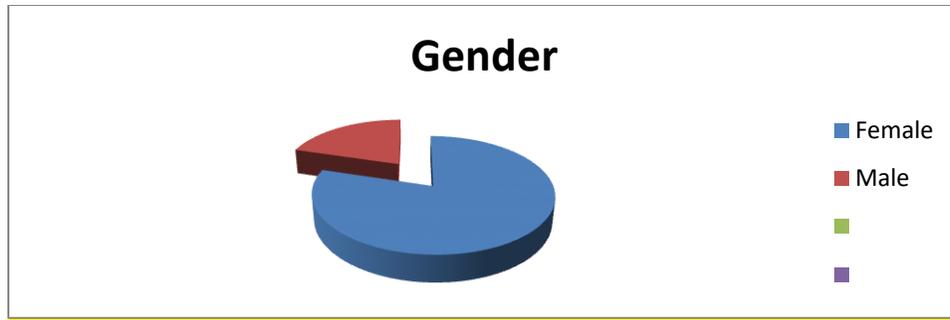
The researcher had been conducted preliminary research related to the optimization of halal tourism on 202 respondents in Indonesia. The research instrument in 10 questionnaire statements / questions with nonprobability sampling. Respondent divided into 2 groups, first; 18 postgraduate students at the Magister of Sharia Economics and second; 184 undergraduate students at the Faculty of Economics and Islamic Business at State Institute of Islamic Studies Ponorogo (IAIN Ponorogo), assuming students are considered capable of rational thinking, critical and visionary towards the development of their beloved country.

The results revealed that out of 202 respondents, 79.7 percent were female, while the remaining 20.3 percent were male. A surprising initial discovery that the highest hobby is traveling 75% are respondents whom their parent's income under 1 million Rupiah, this is inversely proportional to parent income above 2 million, the respondents have a reading hobby 25%. In addition to descriptive statistical analysis, researchers also found that 80.7 percent of all respondents strongly agree that tourism is both desire and need. The highest value of the 10 items the question posed is 90.3 percent said that facilities are most important in tourist destinations. Departing from the initial research concluded that every human being has a basic need to refresh their body and soul. Refreshing is useful to restore energy and enthusiasm, it is hoped that refreshing could fresh mind and making the work productively. In addition to relieving fatigue, natural attractions are built with various facilities to gain income from tourist spending for accommodation, foods, and goods in order to increasing government revenue.

Table of Prior Study
Halal Tourism in Indonesia
September 2018

No	Instrument	Classifications	Total	Percentages
1	Education	a. Postgraduate	18	8,9
		b. Undergraduate	184	91,1
2	Gender	a. Female	161	79,7
		b. Male	41	20,3
3	Hobby	a. Travelling	151	75
		b. Reading	40	20
		c. Others	11	5
4	Tourism	a. Desire and Need	162	80
		b. Desire	24	12
		c. Need	16	8
5	Destination	a. Facility	184	91
		b. Sightseeing	10	5
		c. Food	6	3
		d. Others	2	1

Source: Shinta Maharani, Primary Data processed 2018



Grow to US220 billion by 2020, according to the Global Muslim Travel Index 2017¹ by Crescent Rating.² In 2008, Crescent Rating was launched as the world's first online hotel reference tool dedicated to Muslim travelers.³ Crescent Rating is divided into a rating scale of 1 through 7 and categorizes based on the range of amenities and services each participating property offers Muslim guests, including availability of prayer carpets, qibla direction, alcohol policies and availability of halal-certified food.⁴

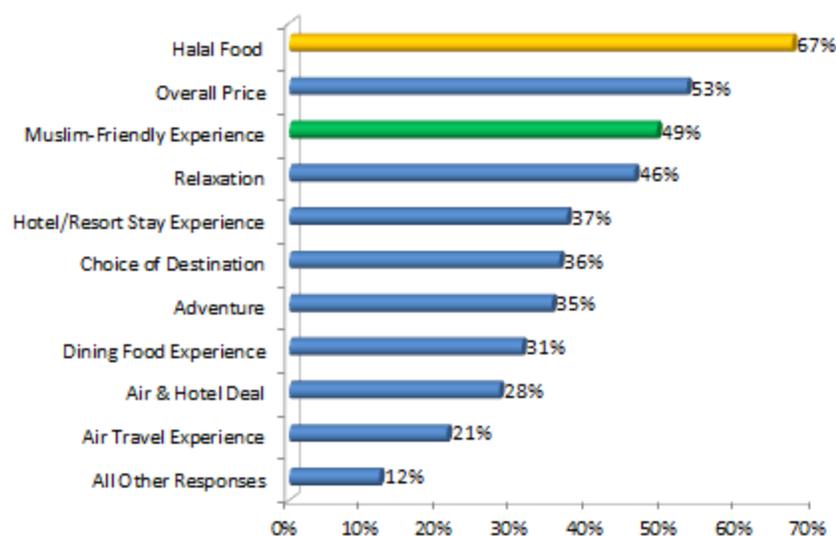
¹ Christine Hinz. "[The Buzz Around Halal](#)". *Travel Tourism News Middle East*, 2015-12-05.

² Crescent Rating. "[Muslim/Halal Travel & Tourism Market Research, Reports & Publications](#)". Crescent Rating, 2018.

³ Crescent Rating. "[Global Muslim Travel Index 2018](#)". www.crescentrating.com, 2018.

⁴ Crescent Rating. "[Halal/Muslim Friendly Hotel Rating Standards](#)". Crescent Rating, 2018.

Factors Affecting the Decision of Muslim Tourists



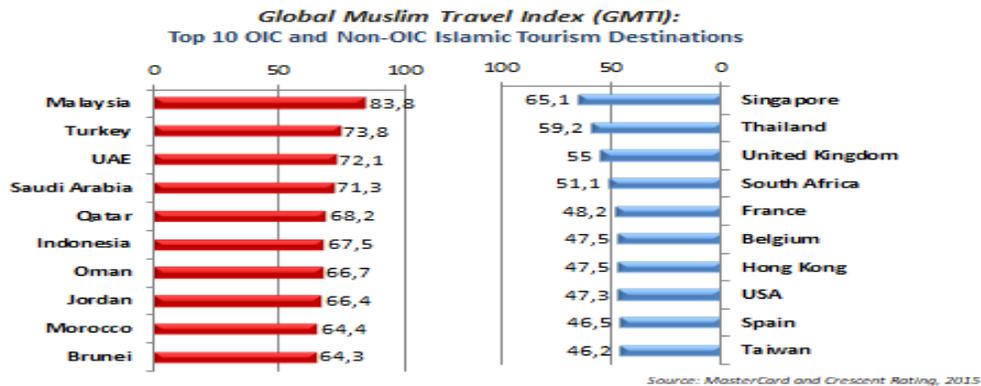
Source: Dinar Standard and Crescent rating, 2015

M. Battour and M. Nazari Ismail, 2015 define halal tourism as follows: All objects or actions that are permissible according to Islamic teachings to be used or covered by Muslims in the tourism industry.⁵ This definition views Islamic law (sharia) as the basis for providing tourism products and services for consumers (in this case Muslim), such as halal hotels, halal resorts, halal restaurants and halal trips. There are 6 basic needs of Muslim tourists identified in the Crescent Rating study in 130 countries, namely:

1. Halal food
2. Prayer facilities
3. Bathroom with water for ablution
4. Service during the month of Ramadan
5. Inclusion of non-halal labels (if there are foods that are not halal)
6. Private facilities

⁵ Battour, M., & Ismail, M.N., *Halal Tourism: Concepts, Practices, Challenges and Future*, Journal Elsevier Tourism Management Perspectives, 2015.

Halal Tourism Destinations



While the standard reference for halal tourism in the world, according to the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) can be specified more or less as follows:

1. Family Friendly Destinations, with indicators:
 - a. Tourist destinations must be family friendly
 - b. Public security for Muslim tourists
 - c. The number of Muslim tourist arrivals is quite crowded
2. Services and Facilities in Muslim Friendly Destinations, with indicators:
 - a. Choice of food and legal guarantee
 - b. Easy and good access to worship
 - c. Facilities at the airport are Muslim friendly
 - d. Adequate accommodation options
3. Halal Awareness and Destination Marketing, with indicators:
 - a. Ease of communication
 - b. Reach and awareness of the needs of Muslim tourists
 - c. Connectivity of air transportation
 - d. Visa requirements

To fulfill these 11 indicators, a halal tourist destination must have commitment at the stakeholder and community level, in this case the government. The location that can be entered by all family members, father-mother and child, then the aspect of public security by the police, security guards and staff.

E. SHARJAH TOURISM VISION 2021 AND HALAL TOURISM

Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) unveiled Sharjah Tourism Vision 2021, aiming to attract more than 10 million tourists by year 2021, when the UAE celebrates its 50th anniversary.⁶ Sharjah has established a leading position on the global tourism map as one of the favorite's destinations for millions of visitors from all over the world. Sharjah has been able to tap into the historical and cultural tourism potential and leverage the advanced infrastructure and innovative hospitality services to attract tourists from different parts of the world. However, sharjah trying to developing tourism capacity and launching strategic projects to ensure sustained growth and excellence. Sharjah focused on maintaining the

⁶ The announcement was made at a press conference held at the Radisson Blu Resort Sharjah, attended by H.E. Mohammed Ali Al Noman, Chairman of SCTDA, and H.E. Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Director General of SCTDA.

uniqueness of tourism sector and expand the market share of tourism in the economy. The main goal of the vision is to build a platform to unite all the efforts, initiatives and tourism programmers under one umbrella, to provide industry players and stakeholders with the ability to reach the stated goal, and enable the tourism industry to the most important economic sectors in Sharjah. To achieve this, Sharjah need the active partnership of all public and private sector companies and institutions in the aviation, tourism, and hospitality sectors to achieve the Sharjah Tourism Vision 2021.

There are four strategic pillars working in parallel to achieve the aim of welcoming 10 million tourists by year 2021. First, Sharjah will be promoted as an ideal family tourism destination by offering distinct packages and offers specially designed for families. Second, improve the tourist experience through the provision of innovative solutions. Third, world Class tourism facilities and capabilities constitute to enhance efficiencies in tourism sector through partnership and collaborative action. Fourth, International Cultural Hub will help achieve the vision through effective promotion of cultural and heritage elements among families. Sharjah has not only emerged as the Cultural Capital of the UAE but has also been crowned as the Cultural Capital the Arab World. The promotion of Sharjah as the Cultural Capital of the Arab World by UNESCO in 1998 has been further endorsed by its recognition as Islamic Cultural Capital in 2014 and Arab Tourism Capital in 2015. Sharjah will create advanced tourism infrastructure to offer an exceptional tourism experience.⁷

F. INNOVATIVE ACTIVITIES IN SHARJAH HALAL TOURISM

Tourism operators should socialization non-Muslim tourists about Halal tourism rules. Some non-Muslim tourists consider halal tourism destination as an option for reasonable price. This could be an opportunity for this type of hotel to reach out to this specific category of tourists, those who seek to experience Muslim culture and experience. Customization should be applied for all guests. Tourism marketers should utilize the emerging technologies, an innovative products should be created and applied to all tourists so the discrimination would not be noticed in hotel room, in ingine call for prayer early morning should be avoided for non-Muslim guests. Thus, non-Muslim tourists could try Halal tourism experience, or purchase Halal products and services. Furthermore, the majority of non-Muslim tourists may not be happy with the banning of alcoholic beverages, so the innovative solution should be applied to solve this problem for example providing similar beverages without alcohol or replacing them with juice, tea or coffee. The more innovative the alternatives that comply with Shari's, the more support for tourism development in the Halal tourism market. Some non-Muslim tourists could accept to consume Halal food as long as the taste is good. This is a promotional tool to attract non-Muslim tourists. Based on the fact that non-Muslim tourists are willing to try Halal tourism experience or purchase certain types of Halal products and services. It is hoped that Halal tourism can increase by marketing its ability to meet the requirements that non-Muslim tourists segments consider important

⁷ SCTDA Chairman said the announcement of Sharjah Tourism Vision 2021 marks a new phase in the Authority's approach, based on innovation and creativity. As part of this Vision, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority will work with partners in public and private sectors to unveil new plans for Sharjah's tourism sector. SCTDA had utilize the Arabian Travel Market 2015 to communicate with major players in the global tourism sector on the objectives and themes of Sharjah Tourism Vision 2021.

G. COLLABORATIVE WORLD-CLASS TOURISM FACILITIES AND CAPABILITIES IN SHARJAH

Some key areas for immediate follow-up and further analysis were also identified in order to benchmarking the capabilities, they include:

1. Exploring the concept of change by examining more closely the proposition that, when tourism growth occurs, those living in extreme poverty benefit and by digging deeper into what tourism growth really means for the poor, especially in terms of employment.
2. Assessing the impact value of different types of tourism.
3. Assessing and developing the role of technology for data collection, impact measurement and communication.
4. Evaluating the use of training for better communication – including assessing what has been tried and what has worked and considering how it could be scaled up.
5. Analyzing the necessity and practicality of improving collaboration among various actors, and assessing the alignment of frameworks along with proposals for greater alignment.
6. Developing ideas and proposals for the enhanced sharing and pooling of impact data.
7. Developing ideas and proposals for greater inclusion of SMEs.

The Bank Group is committed to advancing this agenda. As an international organization heavily invested in the sector, with a deep motivation to deliver change for the world's poorest people, we aim to take a leading role in a number of key areas. Other major stakeholders have also shown their support. Both university, Harvard and the University of Sussex have asked to host follow-up events. Wyndham Hotels, the World Trade Organization, the United Nations Environment Program, the World Wildlife Fund and Sustainable Travel International have sought specific collaboration and partnership opportunities. The Bank Group will continue to convene meetings, promote dialogue, conduct research and publish relevant information – focusing our interventions on those areas where we're well-placed to fulfill the twin goals of eliminating extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity.⁸

H. SOCIAL MEDIA ON HALAL TOURISM

Social media has fundamentally changed the way that many companies communicate with and market to their target demographics. The Internet increased popularity for the travel and hospitality sector as altered travel marketing, from the way that traveler's research potential destinations to the activities that they participate in once they arrive, the new ways that Muslim consumers use social media to make purchasing decisions has influenced halal tourism marketing. The most profound effect that social media has online reviews. Today's Muslim travelers go online to research their future travel destinations and accommodations. The 89% of millennial plan travel activities based on content posted by their peers online when booking travel. From social sharing sites such as Instagram to review sites such as tripadvisor, people are browsing the Internet for travel inspiration and validation. There, they can easily find other travelers' photos, check-ins, ratings and more. This easy-to-attain, real guest feedback serves to

⁸ The paper *'Towards More Effective Impact Measurement in the Tourism Sector: Key Observations,*" March 4, 2016.

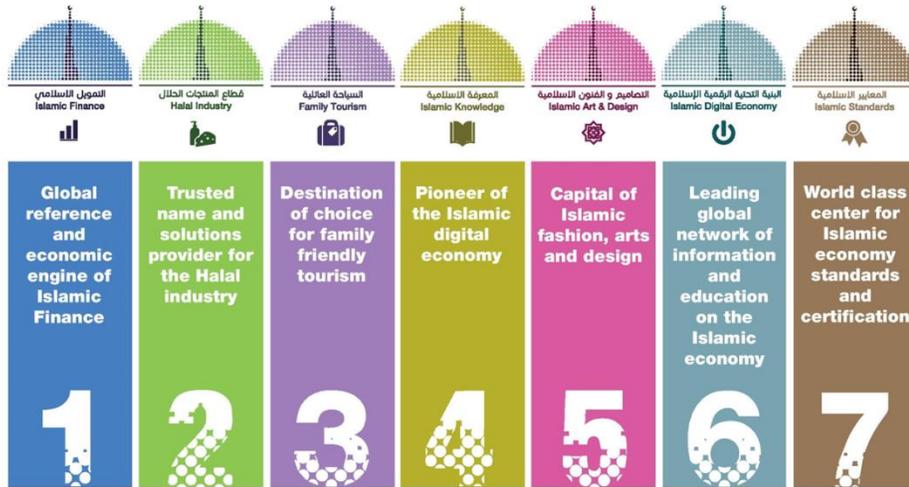
preview the in-person experience that the destination has to offer from a viewpoint other than that of the brand, so social media content is tremendously accessible and influential, and it can inspire Muslim travelers to book. People loved sharing photos and videos taken of their travels. What social media has done is to facilitate and expand people's ability to share travel experiences with a wider audience than ever before. Many halal hotels and resorts have turned to running social contests and campaigns to ensure that they get some credit for their guests' social activity. Customer service and satisfaction had transformed as a result of social media. The vast majority of brands have a social media presence that is being used to become aware to unsatisfied or confused customers. The companies that respond to complaints in a sincere and genuine manner develop a strong reputation to potential Muslim travelers. Social media can serve as a social listening tool to find out information about guests. Listening to customers through social media can create an exceptional experience that is sure to delight guests. With the availability of technologies that allow mention and hashtag tracking across social media channels, it is easier than ever for hotels to discover passionate guests and to reward them accordingly. Integrating social media sharing and posting can be worked into existing loyalty programs to encourage brand promotion across social media platforms. When loyal guests share the easy the redeem and benefits offered by a brand's loyalty programs on social media, other guests see that the benefits are attainable -- and desirable -- and they will be more incentivized to participate. Social media has altered the landscape of marketing in the halal tourism and hospitality industry. Most travelers' plans their travel based on reviews and social media shares, making online customer service a crucial part of building a positive brand reputation. The prevalence of social media has disrupted traditional customer service models -- for hotels and tourism alike. By curating positive reviews and encouraging social shares, hospitality brands can leverage social media to build positive brand, increase loyalty, and display just how much their accommodations and activities have to offer.⁹

I. ECONOMIC GROWTH AND HALAL TOURISM

In order to accelerate the economic growth of United Arab Emirates, the ministry of finance had developed a strategic plan for the years 2017-2021 which targeted at centralizing and providing the highest levels of service to diverse range of customers. The ministry took into account the significant impact of regional and international changes financially and economically while drawing up the strategy. The Strategic Plan was prepared and developed through the joint efforts of leaders, managers and officials in various departments and organizational units. It comprises the following key considerations:

1. The leadership vision and the direction of the UAE Strategic Plan, According to DIEDC (Dubai Islamic Economics Development Center) seeks to develop an enabling and empowering environment, including the necessary legislative and regulatory framework, to support the growth of the Islamic Economy. This is done through 7 key strategic pillars:

⁹ Pixle, 5 Ways Social Media Has Transformed Tourism Marketing 12/12/2016



Picture of seven pillars of Dubai Islamic Economic Development Center (DIEDC)

2. Extensive analysis of external and internal factors that affect the performance of the ministry
3. Analysis of questionnaires completed by influential groups of customers affected by the performance of the ministry
4. The diagnosis of capabilities and key competencies within the ministry
5. Analysis of resources and strategic potential of the ministry
6. Best international practices in the management of financial resources
7. Internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and external risks.

First Strategic Goal

1. Promote the fiscal planning of the Federal Government and the general fiscal sustainability
2. Develop the strategic fiscal planning in the Federal Government
3. General fiscal sustainability and risk management
4. Develop an environment that fosters innovation in the Federal Government
5. Develop a framework to collect data, and create the processes and tools for fiscal planning
6. Build fiscal and economic capacities in the Federal Government

Second Strategic Goal

1. Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the budget and manage the financial position and cash flows of the Federal Government.
2. Develop creative effective mechanisms to follow up implementation of UAE public expenses
3. Develop creative and effective mechanisms to follow up on the implementation of collection of UAE public revenues
4. Manage the financial position and cash Low in the Federal Government
5. Develop the framework with the Office of the Prime Minister to report and evaluate the federal bodies performance financed by the UAE general budget

Third Strategic Goal

1. Maintain the financial and economic interests of the UAE at an international level.

2. Develop and improve the relations with the international financial organizations and institutions
3. Develop and promote international financial relations bilaterally
4. Activate opportunities and advantages of GCC joint financial and economic integration
5. The main perspectives of sustainability for Sharjah vision 2030 regarding halal tourism include: *economic perspective*: upgrading halal tourism by delivering e-Services in an easy and simple manner that tourist could save their time and effort according to the document, while boosting economic growth and being reflected positively on tourist thought. The good concept in halal tourism foresees the need for flexibility of launched services to ensure accommodation and also transportation of future emerging needs and ensure integration with other travel agencies.
6. *Environment perspective*: preservation of environment by launching technology based interdepartmental transactions and e-Services. Paperless services will be delivered to the tourist wherever they need an accommodation, attractions, and others. The tourist only looking their need by browsing an internet, this means less vehicle driving to finding suitable accommodation and less pollution which will eventually be positively reflected on the environment.

Why is it important? Because the third of strategic goal is related to halal tourism in United Arab Emirates and it is influence to the policy of Sharjah halal tourism, it self. If the government do the strategic tightly and continually, the possibility in the next future year, United Arab Emirates became number one halal tourism in the world.

J. CONCLUSION

The good concept of halal tourism adoption of sustainable development is based on several actions including:

1. Decision making process by analysis and research
2. Balance between demands and available resources (e.g. objectives and budget)
3. Engagement of the community and depending on feedback from the public
4. Objective and progressive assessment of all halal tourism activities include visas, accommodation, transportation, communication etc.
5. Developing detailed and comprehensive plans while making alternative public facilities and attractions for Muslim
6. Establishing easy to measure and regular monitoring of visas progress
7. Increasing public awareness relating to halal tourism activities to ensure positive interaction between tourist and public

Simplifying business chance, halal tourism seeks to simplify access by simplification of procedure and mitigating prerequisites. The most prominent facilities in this regard include: the easy issuance of a commercial travel agent register. Simplification of procedures and offering easy tourist e-services. The good concept of halal tourism provide easy, simple and flexible e-services that can be re-structured to accommodate future demands and ensure integration with other government agencies to ensure delivery of a range of e-services; a process that boosts the concept of sustainable e-services. Moreover, as halal tourism destination, Sharjah should using e-government concept as a tool to improve its performance and ensure more efficiency and

effectiveness in travel document. In the same perspective, achieving objective helps halal tourism in a way or another to expand the scope of environment maintenance by stimulating a wide range of effective communal participation of its tourist that would result in elimination of waste of a lot of resources including time and effort while eliminating congestion within the city, pollution, waste of power and raw material.

Actions should take by UAE government to ensure realization of Sharjah, beyond the city as number one halal tourism destination concept include the following:

- a. Ensure interdepartmental e-services travel document transition
- b. Ensure awareness activities point out the importance of e-government as an environment friendly concept.

Based on the explanation about Sharjah halal tourism we conclude the recommendations for United Arab Emirates government:

1. Policy:
 - a. Harmonization between policies and guidelines
 - b. Sharing of expertise and experiences for making a positive images
 - c. Organization and marketing halal tourism events using social media
 - d. Designing long term strategies and master plans to the next 10 years
2. Practice:
 - a. Training the staff related to halal tourism
 - b. Facilitating the access for Muslim travelers
 - c. Paying attention to diversity
 - d. Best accommodation management in halal hospitality
 - e. Good information related to halal tourism
 - f. Offering gender specific facilities
 - g. Appropriate dress code for the staff

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