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## **EXPLORING CROWDFUNDING POTENTIAL FOR SUPPORTING COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM IN MALAYSIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper discovers the potential of the Islamic crowdfunding model for supporting community-based tourism in developing states Malaysia in particular. Community-based tourism has provided a great opportunity for rural areas to empower the socio-economy of local people to earn main or additional income, and crowdfunding is seen as a potential fund for supporting community-based tourism. This study applies a library research method as its data are collected through literature related to community-based tourism and crowdfunding topics. The special model of Islamic crowdfunding proposed by this study can potentially support community-based tourism if it is applied to a real platform. As a result, it can reduce the burden of the government in providing funds for tourism. While crowdfunding creates an alternative opportunity for community and tourism-based projects, it promotes job opportunities and economic growth within society including business and services. However, this approach could be challenging to apply because of awareness among people. Nevertheless, a suitable Islamic crowdfunding model with a proper campaign can be a practical solution for funding community-based tourism projects. As this study is conceptual, the outcomes may not be limited. However, it still provides a substantial contribution in terms of offering a practical model of Islamic crowdfunding in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Islamic finance, Islamic crowdfunding, community-based tourism, Infaq.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Recently, community-based tourism has become a popular trend worldwide as this concept has been widely argued to improve the development of rural areas and support the local socio-economy through various tourism sectors. In general, incomes from community-based tourism activities are actively generated by local people in many forms, mainly through business and service providers. In Malaysia, the government officially launched community-based tourism in 1995 under Malaysia's Rural Tourism Master Plan (MRTMP). The plan aims to increase the participation of rural communities in the tourism sector so that it can reduce rural-urban migration (Rojulai, 2012).

In fact, community-based tourism has been found in many studies, it can provide additional income opportunities for the rural area (Samimi et al., 2011). As a result, this could contribute to poverty alleviation as well as it could create a better life quality in rural areas (Kayat & Zainuddin, 2016). Regrettably, financial stability has been one of the major issues associated with community-based tourism activities, particularly in developing states (Mizal et al., 2014). In practice, community-based tourism sectors require extensive capital along with various skills to be taught to local people so that they can achieve higher quality and attract a huge number of tourists.

Additionally, the size or structure of businesses, a lack of resources, and funding challenges faced by the locals have become the unsuccessful factor for the business within community-based tourism. These factors must be carefully addressed by the management of community-based tourism to assure the sustainability and longevity of their operation (Mizal et al., 2014). This can be illustrated through the lack of financing aids provided for local entrepreneurs as well as a limited source of grants experienced by related government agencies (Temelkov & Gulev, 2019).

Financial sustainability has appeared as the most crucial matter for many community-based tourism businesses. In addition, local entrepreneurs need special training programs to enhance their skills related to business and entrepreneurship, which may have a significant impact on tourism activities. Furthermore, they have experienced inadequate funding either to operate and expand their current commercial activities (Mizal et al., 2014). In fact, providing sustainable funds does not only support sustainability of community-based tourism, instead, those funds can reduce the dependency of local people on aids provided by government agencies.

In this regard, this study aims to discover Islamic crowdfunding as a new potential fund to support community-based tourism in Malaysia. Over the period, crowdfunding has been recognized as an alternative financial instrument for entrepreneurs and community-based projects. This idea could potentially provide a great opportunity for rural areas in terms of empowering the socio-economy of their people through business activity in tourism. To achieve its objective, this study applies library research in which its data is obtained from related literature and crowdfunding websites. The study reviews the literature that involves community-based tourism and crowdfunding to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the topics.

At the end, this study proposes a special model that can be applied to a real platform. It is believed that crowdfunding for community-based tourism does not only reduce the burden of the government in terms of providing funds, but most importantly, it can spread awareness and responsibility within society to support local tourism activities.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Community-Based Tourism**

To begin with, Suansri (2003) defines community-based tourism as " tourism activity monitored and maintained by the community to increase tourists' awareness and learn about the community and local ways of life. Over the period, community-based tourism has provided a great opportunity for rural areas to empower their local people so that they can earn main or additional income. This could contribute to the local economic development as well as it can reduce poverty among communities (Simpson, 2007). Moreover, this sector can promote to the culture and environment that at the end it would significantly benefit the most susceptible groups, such as indigenous communities, women, and children.

According to Wondirad (2019), 45% respondents from a survey of local people at Pulau Redang, Terengganu participating with the community-based tourism is to promote the local traditional culture of the area. It's demonstrated competitiveness in the tourism industry whenever the local community

has an ability to attract and maintain stakeholders through appropriate marketing (Kayat & Zainuddin, 2016). Currently, community-based tourism projects are actively carried out at developing countries as some of them are supported by international or national Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), individuals, or cooperative companies. Nevertheless, those institutions usually channel their financial support only for the early phase of development. These include providing training as well as building basic tourism facilities (Mizal et al., 2014).

Regrettably, the approach between community and stakeholder engagement might be unsuccessful to recognize the impacts of influential person within communities on the members during the process. Various rural tourism developments in Malaysia are determined by foreign ownership, the commercial sector, or even influential and rich individuals within the community. They were arguing do not fully contributed to the tourism community issue (Wondirad, 2019). In many cases, the major objective of many business enterprises, as well as a few influential people and families in the community, is to generate money from tourism projects. The community and stakeholder involvement are simply considered in cursory terms (Pasape, Anderson, & Lindi, 2015).

To overcome these issues, four conditions are identified to provide a higher degree of engagement among local communities and other participants in the sustainable community-based tourism development and decision-making process. These include (1) offering individuals the legal right and chance to engage, (2) providing access to information, (3) providing enough resources for people or groups to get active, and (4) focusing on populist involvement rather than selected or elite involvement (George, 2004). In fact, a close engagement between the community and stakeholders is important in supporting community-based tourism as several advantages can be experienced. For example, direct involvement of project members along with tourist can give a good impression and attraction towards rural area project development. When many tourists visit the rural area directly, it will increase the community's economy and at the same times, several project organizers can have more prospect to fund the project at the community-based tourism area.

According to Khartishvili (2020), community-based tourism can be divided into four categories: the preservation of culture and nature, the appreciation of traditional products, broadening the rural economy, and the community development. In more detail, each category can be explained as follows:

- *The preservation of culture and nature*

Community-based tourism is an approach that intends to increase the understanding and participation of the local people in environmental management and ecosystem protection. In more details, it can improve the communication between the government and locals that can benefit tourism activities in terms of the promotion and development of both tangible and intangible cultures in rural areas.

- *The appreciation of traditional products*

The participation of community-based tourism among local farmers would bring back the value of traditional local products that have been discarded over time. In other words, it can create awareness and give opportunity among entrepreneurs to market their products through the tourism sector.

- *Broadening the rural economy*

Community-based tourism involvement in the rural area can generate additional income through job opportunities by hiring locals, especially the youth. This will increase the development of the rural economy with more employment offered in the places.

- *The community development*

Community-based tourism can be considered as community mobilization and capacity-building instrument. This cooperative approach is used to improve the community's living and sustainable

development. Various organizations are willing to help locals to identify problems in their community and work together on community development issues that are significant to them. For example, improve the basic necessities at the area included transportation, water and electric utilities at the community area.

Regarding Malaysia, community-based tourism in this country is considered an active activity especially in terms of tourist businesses. One of the community-based tourism entrepreneurs in Malaysia is Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) among the local community. According to the study of Che Rose (2018) who conducted a survey 42 local entrepreneurs in Cherating, Pahang, the tourism sector had a positive impact on their economic development. This can be seen through the entrance of tourists that can affect the economic improvement of SMEs businesses in terms of sales, productivity, capital gains, bonuses, and job opportunities.

Meanwhile, according to Syaripudin (2017), community-based tourism activities in Semporna, Sabah are argued to give a positive impact on the social and economic development within the community. From a social perspective, community-based tourism can improve and develop infrastructures, facilities. Furthermore, if a good facility offered, it can promote a convenient communication access among members of the community. Moreover, from an economic perspective, community-based tourism improves the community's standard of living as well as SMEs activities. The positive effects of this economic aspect further widen the opportunities for employment and source of income for the local community. In terms of environmental conservation, the impact of this eco-tourism development leads to an increase the marine care and protect marine life. Nevertheless, the cleanliness in tourist centers is increasingly emphasized with community-based tourism engagement.

In addition, community-based tourism at Batu Puteh, Sabah had provided job opportunities and become the primary source of income. Instead of working at palm oil farms, the youngsters prefer community-based tourism activities. Interacting with visitors was seen as a more gratifying option since they would have the opportunity to meet people from various ethnic and social backgrounds. Another attractive factor that drives these young people to tourism was the genuine potential to enhance their communication in English (Mohamad & Hamzah, 2013). Community-based tourism activities do not only generate income and preserve local culture, also it opens chances for the community to widen the knowledge, and to improve communication skills through interaction with tourists.

According to study conducted by Adnan and Mamat (2018), it was found that there are positive effects received by the local community with eco-tourism development around Lumut. Environment eco-tourism benefits the local community either in terms of the contribution to the eco-system environment as well as to local development. Community perceptions of the ecotourism environment and the impact on the population is positive, especially from the economic aspect. It will illustrate residents' interest in the involvement of eco-tourism activities thus, provides an additional source of income to the community.

As a conclusion, it can be learned that community-based tourism in Malaysia is argued can support the development of rural area economy and improve the standard of living. In addition, preserve to the environment and heritage, community-based tourism activities with proper planning, good finances, and adequate funds can enhance the eco-tourism sector in Malaysia. Besides, it presenting a variety of exciting tourism activities to attract more tourists to the country. Crowdfunding is seen as a potential substitute fund to finance the tourism-based projects in terms of economy development and heritage conservation at rural areas in Malaysia. This unique financing can be an alternative way to reduce the reliance toward government funds.

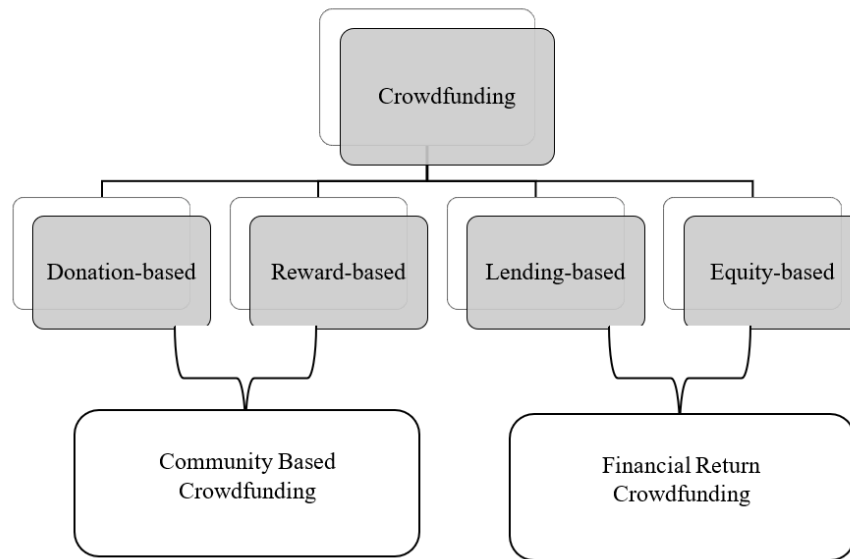
## **Crowdfunding: An Overview**

In this regard, crowdfunding could be an alternative fund. To begin with, the term crowdfunding comes from crowdsourcing (Mollick 2014). Both terms share similar practices to reach the target by receiving small contributions from individuals (Zhang, 2012). Nevertheless, these two are different in terms of the role of funders in the project (Muliawati & Masya, 2019). Crowdfunding connects funders and fundraisers to obtain the return for their projects (Hendratmi et al., 2019). Crowdfunding has developed a huge opportunity to gather cash in an open and transparent manner by utilizing the internet (Aderemi & Ishak, 2020). This fundraising has become a new trend for individuals to obtain funds for their projects through an online website. In more detail, crowdfunding facilitates a cooperation among people, particularly those who have a relationship with fundraisers (Mollick, 2014).

Accordingly, modern crowdfunding is characterized by three following elements: Firstly, the fund comes from various individuals. In practice, the fund is obtained from a group called funders or backers, or investors. This group has financially supported the project initiated by fundraisers. At the same time, funders play roles in market testing for the project or product initiated by fundraisers (Beaulieu et al., 2015). Secondly, the fund collected from funders aims to support a group of fundraisers. They can be individuals or teams. They need the fund to realize their idea into a project and seek those who are willing to finance them (Beaulieu et al., 2015). Thirdly, the internet platform link funders and fundraisers. What makes modern crowdfunding different than traditional crowdsourcing, the former utilizes the internet as an intermediary platform to transfer funds from funders and fundraisers (Hendratmi et al., 2019).

In general, there are four models of crowdfunding that are widely practiced. Firstly, donation-based crowdfunding which is also known as contribution-based crowdfunding where funders support a certain social project with their money (Marzban et al., 2014). The second model is reward-based crowdfunding, which is slightly different from the previous model as fundraisers provide an initiative token such as album covers, tickets, t-shirts, mugs, and key chains as a reward for their funders (Kraus et al., 2016). The next approach is equity-based crowdfunding, which occurs when fundraisers offer shares in their business or project to the market using a crowdfunding platform (Pierrakis and Collins 2014). Unlike the donation and reward, equity-based crowdfunding offers funders a financial return from the income generated by the project (Collins & Pierrakis, 2012). Lastly, lending-based crowdfunding is similar to banking institutions in terms of offering a loan with interest to their borrowers on one side, while investors deposit their money on the other side (Ramos & Stewart, 2014). However, lending-based crowdfunding provides an option for their investors to choose any business launched by fundraisers.

From the above four models, another clear classification for crowdfunding can be divided into two types: community-based crowdfunding and financial return-based crowdfunding (Figure I). As for the former, it aims to fully support people which funders do not expect any return. Thus, donation and reward-based crowdfunding may fall under the first type. The second type includes lending or equity-based crowdfunding (Ahammed, 2017).



**Figure 1.** *Classification for Crowdfunding*  
(Source: Author)

In terms of benefits, crowdfunding offers multiple advantages for involving parties such as providing funds and triggering job opportunities, particularly when fundraisers begin to run the project (Bale 2018 & Abdullah, 2016). Therefore, crowdfunding promotes a win-win situation for both fundraisers, particularly entrepreneurs as well as society in generating economic growth and creating jobs in areas where financial aid is restricted (Ramos & Stewart, 2014). Nevertheless, crowdfunding has a limitation in terms of achieving the big-scale project target, even though fundraisers may attract many funders since their contribution is small (Ramos & Stewart, 2014). Also, the unclear protection of ideas from imitation and delay in deliver the campaign, even the failure of the campaign, could be the main disadvantage of crowdfunding (Manchanda & Muralidharan 2014).

### **Islamic Crowdfunding as An Alternative Financial Aid for Community-Based Tourism**

From Islamic perspective, crowdfunding generally can be considered a good act in human life. This can be illustrated when Muslims are defined as brothers who work together to develop teamwork especially in good matters. The disclosure of the brotherhood does not only lead to the formation of energy or other support, but Islam teaches its members to help one another and to assist in financial needs. In many respects, crowdfunding illustrates the act of Sadaqah Jariyah (charitable giving) for a lengthy Muslim brotherhood (Suhaili & Palil, 2016).

In terms of crowdfunding operations, crowdfunding activities must be fully Shariah-compliant to ensure that Muslim can benefit from them. First of all, crowdfunding should not support non-halal projects such as pork or alcohol, regardless what types of models. In terms of crowdfunding instruments, while there are no issues for donation-based and reward-based crowdfunding, equity and lending crowdfunding need to be adjusted to ensure its coherence with Shariah principles and rulings. In other words, those instruments must be free from riba' (usury) and gharar (uncertainty) (Suleiman, 2016).

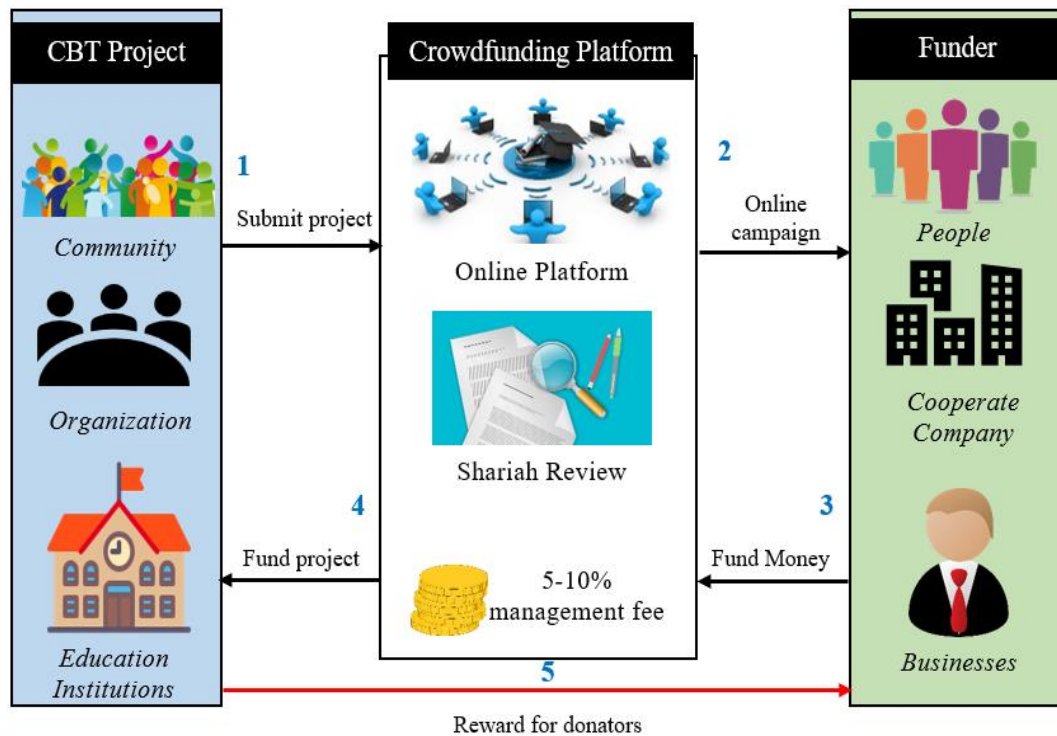
As for donation or reward based, the fundraising project must be halal (permissible in Islamic law). Furthermore, any fund used to support the project, it must be ensured to be halal in terms of sources. Thus, Shariah management or committee must be established before a project or product is determined

to be shariah-compliant (Ramli & Ishak, 2022). Nevertheless, the money donated to fund a project or product must be lawful from an Islam perspective, it must align with the Islamic policy that the donation should from halal sources. (Imam & Widayat, 2015).

### PROPOSED INFAQ-BASED MODEL FOR COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM

This study identifies a clear gap in community-based tourism regarding the topics utilizing Islamic crowdfunding for supporting community-based tourism. Since this study is conceptual paper, as an initial finding, it proposed crowdfunding model Infaq-based for community-based tourism support. Through literature review conducted, this topic is still limited especially in terms of proposing model.

In exploring the suitable concept for this model, this conceptual study proposes Infaq-based model as follows:



**Figure 2.** Flow Infaq-based model for community-based tourism

In general, Infaq means the giving of money or property spent on charity from the people to seek the pleasure of Allah (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, n.d). In other ways, its mechanism is the same way as a general donation. The difference between a conventional donation and Infaq is Shariah practices would be included in the proposed model (Ishak & Kamaruddin, 2021). Thus, Infaq-based concepts could be a simple and efficient way of helping community-based tourism in rural areas through Islamic crowdfunding.

As an alternative, this model can help the local community and government to develop the community-based tourism area, especially in terms of finances. It can reduce the burden on the government in

allocating huge budgets for tourism. Moreover, it also promotes more tourists to visit the attractive rural area and at the same time increases the government and local community's source of income.

The purpose of using Infaq is to encourage more Muslims to contribute their money to the community-based tourism project with pleasure from Allah. However, every project proposal must follow the Shariah rules. Any activities forbidden in Islam that included an element of gambling, fraud, uncertainty, and immoral practice are strictly forbidden for this project. In addition to maintaining the harmony of the area, the purity of Infaq must also be looked after. Furthermore, some community-based tourism is related to the culture of the community. Since this is Islamic crowdfunding, the practice of culture that against Islamic principles should be avoided. It has been discovered that Shariah strives to restrict any channel for superstition or topics contrary to the Islamic religion.

The Infaq-based crowdfunding model in supporting community-based tourism is present as in figure 2. The explanation for the flow can be simplified as below:

*1. The application of the project.*

A project initiator needs to submit his project proposal online to the management of the crowdfunding platform. The project initiator can be the community from the local, organization or education institution that want to perform Cooperative Social Responsibilities (CSR). The management will review the project in terms of Shariah compliance, budget, and risks. In this case, the management can be the Government (Ministry of Tourism) or a Government Link Company (GLC) that intend to cooperate in developing the community-based tourism area.

*2. The platform launches the project campaign.*

Following that, if the project is accepted, the campaign can begin on a crowdfunding platform. The project campaign, as always, must be clear in terms of expenditures included. It must provide a timeline and a clear objective. Besides, it has to show clarity of the project progress in the platform. Meanwhile, the project initiator must encourage the community from the area to contribute to this project by sharing attractive pictures of project progress. This can inspire the funders to pay a visit to the community-based tourism project.

*3. Funders donate money to the platform.*

Under the name of Infaq, funders give money to this project. Funders can choose which project he may interested to fund in the platform. In additional detail, it is most likely a standard contribution with no expectation of financial return. This is the most basic model that may be used at the beginning. Even though it appears to be the same as the conventional donation, Infaq is different in terms of the project proposed must be Shariah-compliant.

*4. Community-based tourism project obtain the fund from the crowdfunding platform.*

After the halal declaration source of funds from management's review, the fund will be channelled to the project. Once the project target is achieved, the campaign will be stopped collecting money from the funders. At the same time, the project initiator can continue to update the recent progress of the community-based tourism project.

*5. Reward for funders.*

To ensure the continuity of the economic cycle in the community-based tourism area, the project initiator can reward the funders. For example, to offer a discount coupon. Funders can use the coupon to get a discount or special gift when they visit the community-based tourism area after the project's success. This reward can be considered as an appreciation for the funder's contribution to the project. This is to encourage the funder to fund more projects on the platform.



## CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL

In practical terms, few challenges and potential are acknowledged from document analysis regarding crowdfunding in community-based tourism. Certain issues must be confronted before fundraising may be used for community-based tourism. First, building trust. To achieve the target of a crowdfunding project, a fundraiser must examine how to build adequate brand trust with the funders (floschip, 2018). Good branding will lead to good trust. On one hand, to gain trust, all agreements and transactions must be carried out honestly and openly. (Khairuddin & Ishak, 2021) This will encourage more online users to fund with the community-based tourism project. On the other hand, to build a good trust with the funders, the fundraiser can offer personal and authentic experiences. A campaign on the platform may not be sufficient to build trust with the funders. A practical method to improve the public's interactions with charity is to provide them with direct experiences that expose them to community tourism. Thus, allowing them to see for themselves what's needed and how they're making a difference. (Boncaro, 2019) For example, Ndemban Community Based Tourism Booster Project managed raised £2,078 which is more than their target of £2,000. They offered the funders to visit Ndemban to feel the experienced by themselves and see how appreciated they are for the supported given (McCombes, 2019). Concisely, this practice can be a good promotion for the community-based tourism location which can attract more tourists to visit and at the same time increase the economy of the community.

Next, the willingness of the community to collaborate with the community-based tourism project. Providing employment opportunities that produce high earnings in rural areas is one solution to eradicate poverty. Community-based tourism can boost economic advantages, nevertheless, it must be accompanied by efficient strategic planning. The local community can generate income by creating useful products and services that promote community-based tourism activities. This may be accomplished through the join-up of a cooperative community. In addition, state governments should establish the environment, infrastructure, and policies that facilitate cooperative activity.

However, in the Malaysian community-based tourism context, the delayed implementation of community cooperatives implies a lack of engagement from local communities and key authorities (Mohamad & Hamzah, 2013). Many community-based tourism programs in Malaysia are managed by the Village Development and Security Committee (JKKK), which is inefficient. Under JKKK's administration, many community-based tourism service providers felt unsatisfied with the management as it is claimed that this activity are vulnerable to exploitation, cronyism, and financial exploitation. This argument is raised via research on the presentation of the homestay program in Peninsular Malaysia's East Coast states (ECER/UTM, 2009).

Lastly, the awareness of Muslim to support crowdfunding for tourism. The general perception among Muslim, the donation practice should be applied to Islamic activities such as building a mosque, Islamic schools, or helping the poor and orphan rather than helping community-based tourism activities. This is because the campaigns implemented are not linked with a religious foundation that emphasizes three important aspects which are the human relationship with Allah S.W.T, human-to-human relationships, and relationships with human beings with nature. However, the perception among Muslim in the tourism activity more human-to-human relationships and relationships with human beings with nature. In applying life as a Muslim, these three relationships are necessary to create and preserved to ensure Muslims do not deviate from the purpose of human creation (Halim & Akhir, 2016). Truthfully, when a Muslim decides to make a donation, he has built a relationship to get closer to Allah as long as the donation is aligned with Shariah (Asyraf, 2019). Therefore, the awareness of supporting crowdfunding for tourism can be increase because it includes all three aspects emphasized in Islam stated above.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to explore the potential of Islamic crowdfunding as a source of funds for empowering community-based tourism in Malaysia. As known, tourism sectors play an important role in contributing the country's source of income. However, the movement of the tourism sector has been relatively slow over the past few years due to undefeatable factors which cause community-based tourism activities to lack funds and some of them need to be stopped. Malaysia is known as "truly Asia" which has a lot of hidden gems that should be maintained and shared the value with the tourist. Maintaining the nature and culture of rural areas needs cost funds. However, the government budget allocated for tourism is not sufficient to recover the community-based tourism activities, therefore, it should be a public concern among the society.

This study proposes an Infaq-based crowdfunding model through the library research method. By offering a reward for the funders, community-based tourism projects have a high chance to be successful. Moreover, the reward in terms of coupons or special gifts can attract more people to give funds and visit the community-based tourism area. As a result, it will boost economic development and provide more job opportunities for the locals. The model has a high probability to be applied in real practice, yet a few challenges like building trust, acceptance of community, and awareness of Islamic crowdfunding towards tourism should be put in concern.

Since the impact of this study may be restricted since it is a conceptual work, additional study is recommended to include the empirical side by using either qualitative or quantitative methodologies for future study. Even though this is a conceptual study, it contributes to community-based tourism, especially in terms of developing a model crowdfunding for community-based tourism with focusing in Islamic crowdfunding.

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