

## Viewpoint by Guest Writers

# Halal issues in processed food: Misuse of the Halal logo

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## 1. Introduction

Lately there have been media reports of unethical behaviour on the part of food manufacturers that use non-halal ingredients in their products, yet display the halal logo. One such case is that of a sausage manufacturer who used non-halal items to make his sausages. The reason for this behaviour is none other than the desire to maximize profit. Despite the efforts by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) to introduce the halal logo and shariah compliant standards for food and other

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products, the false halal logo was unashamedly used by these unscrupulous manufacturers. Muslims were sadly deluded into believing that the products were halal due to the halal logo that these manufacturers blatantly displayed on the food packaging. Increasingly aware of the logo misuse and the manipulative behaviour of the food manufacturers, many Muslim consumers are making noise, demanding that the authority takes action against them. Several manufacturers have, so far, either been caught using the fraud halal logo or misrepresenting the actual ingredients used in the food products. To restore Muslim consumers' confidence in purchasing halal food products, this issue must therefore be solved.

Studies could be carried out to ascertain whether the halal logo (indicating trusted product and content) is regarded as highly important for Muslim consumers when making their purchase decisions. For non Muslims who may not care about halal or haram, it would be interesting to note whether the purchase intention of halal certified products is made for the assurance that certain standards have been met in the making or delivery of the products or services. To the non Muslims, the halal brand reflects quality. Thus, it is compulsory for the manufacturers or producers to study the differences between halal and haram first before entering the business with a noble cause.

## 2. Understanding halal and haram

Halal, an Arabic word, means 'lawful' or 'permitted'. Haram, in contrast, means 'unlawful' or 'prohibited'. These two terms are universally applicable in every aspect of life. In this paper, we use these two terms only in reference to food products, meat products, cosmetics, personal care products, food ingredients, and food contact materials. Although many things can be considered halal or haram, there are certain items whose status are not clear, rendering them questionable or suspect. These items are often referred to as *Mashbooh*, meaning 'doubtful' or 'questionable'. More information is hence required to determine whether they are Halal or Haram. All food is halal, except for the following items, which are considered haram:

- Swine/pork and its by-products
- Animals improperly slaughtered or dead before slaughtering
- Animals killed in the name of anyone other than ALLAH (God)
- Alcohol and intoxicants
- Carnivorous animals, birds of prey and land animals without external ears
- Blood and blood by-products
- Foods contaminated with any of the above products

The term Halal to Muslims, means permitted or allowed. As the Muslim population grows, Halal certification of food is becoming ever more important, particularly for the export business (Fischer, 2005). Bearing the Halal sign is enough to convince any Muslim that the food sold is as what it said. The Halal food business is evidently a profitable business in Muslim-majority areas. Therefore, it is no surprise that some retailers are keen to attract Muslim customers to purchase their products despite using prohibited ingredients or methods. As such, Muslim customers must exercise extra caution when making their purchases to avoid being deceived.

According to Islamic law, Halal describes substances that are deemed 'pure and clean' which Muslims are allowed to consume. Given the industrialisation of food processing in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the

Muslim community is exposed to ingredients such as blood plasma, transglutaminase and gelatin that may be present in processed food. This makes it difficult for Muslims to determine which products are permitted and which are not under Islamic law. In Malaysia, if one succeeds in acquiring the Halal logo issued by JAKIM, this means that all ingredients and processes used in the food production are Syariah compliant.

Islam places major emphasis on its followers to choose wholesome, clean and Halal food in everyday lives. This emphasis is clearly understood by the followers from their knowledge of the benefits of consuming clean and Halal food and its relationship to religiosity. Syariah law which is based on Al-Qur'an, the Sunnah, consensus of opinions of Muslim jurists (*ijma'*), analogy (*qiyas*) and other methods of legal reasoning (*ijtihad*), generally guides the lives of Muslims. Hence, the concept of Halal should be observed. Furthermore, the Syariah rulings in Malaysia based on *ijtihad* or 'fatwa' on Halal matters should be in line with the Shafie Mazhab of Ahlul-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah. The Halal or non-Halal status of a particular food can be determined through the use of any of these sources. In terms of food and beverage, Islam guides us in three ways; whether the consumption of foodstuff is prohibited by Allah; whether the foodstuff is obtained through Halal or Haram (prohibited) means; and whether or not the material is harmful to health (Mohamed El-Mouelhy, 1997).

The Halal logo signifies high quality of hygiene, safety, and assurance of Halal for consumption. These attributes could attract non-Muslims towards the halal brand, thus increasing the size of the market for halal food products both locally and internationally. In the meantime, the advent of science and technology, as mentioned previously, exposed Muslim consumers to food ingredients and additives that they are uncertain about. Food ingredients are those reported on the packaging in descending order by weight. Meanwhile, additives are substance used in food to affect its quality such as texture, appearance, odour, taste, alkalinity or acidity. Additives are also useful in the manufacture, process, preparation, treatment, packaging, transportation and storage of food. Additives include preservatives, colouring substances, flavourings, flavour enhancer, antioxidants and other food conditioners, but exclude nutrient supplements. Ultimately, it is imperative for the nature and true application of food ingredients to be described to avoid misinformation. Some food ingredients may contain pork gelatin, blood plasm, lard, alcohol, whey, rennet, transglutaminase (meat gum) and hormones; or food colours (E100-199), preservatives (E200-299), oxidant and antioxidant (E300-399), gelling agent, emulsifiers, anti-caking, stabilizers (E400-499), enzymes, glycerin/glycerol (E422) and flavor enhancers (E600-E699) (Ismail, 2006). The appearance of a Halal logo on the food package will definitely make it easier for consumers to determine the halal or haram status of the food product, without having to sift through the myriad of information displayed on the package.

Religion is a factor influencing one's purchase decision as different religions do deter their devotees to consume certain food (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010), particularly meat consumption (Simoons, 1994). Swine meat is taboo in Islam whereas pork and beef are both prohibited in Hinduism and Buddhism. As mentioned before, Muslims must consume only Halal food, thus, there is great demand for Halal products in the global market. The Halal food market is valued at more than USD2 trillion and is expected to continue growing to USD2.5 trillion in 2019. Meanwhile, the Muslim market population is more than 1.6 billion people or 23 percent of world population. Non-Muslims also prefer Halal products (Abdul Aziz & NyenVui, 2012) for their cleanliness, health benefits and taste (Burgmann, 2007). Thus, there is a vast market for Halal products that businesses should venture into.

Halal food, according to Shariah law, must not contain any non-Halal parts or products of Haram animals or products or animals that are not slaughtered in the name of Allah and Shariah methods. It must not contain any ingredients that are considered najis (unclean). It must be safe and not harmful and must not be prepared, processed or manufactured using tools or equipment that are contaminated or used together with non-Halal or najis. Furthermore, the ingredients or by products must not contain any human

parts. During the process of manufacturing, preparation, packaging, storage and distribution, the Halal and Haram products must be physically separated.

### 3. Conclusion

It is stated in the Holy Qur'an that:

*"the Halal is clear and the Haram is clear. Between the two are doubted matters concerning which people do not know whether there are Halal or non-Halal. The one who avoids them in order to safeguard his religion and his honor is safe"*

(Al-Qaradawi, 2007)

Tieman (2011) meanwhile quoted:

*"the Prophet cursed not only the one who drinks intoxicating drinks but also the one who produced them, the one who serves them, the one to whom they are served, the one to whom the price of them is paid, etc."*

This is evidence that it is important not only for the products to be safe for consumers at the point of consumption but also throughout the entire supply chain network from the initial source of material to the end users. Furthermore, the mixing between Halal and non-Halal should also be a cause of concern because the non-Halal will prevail. Therefore, businesses must ensure that there is no contact between the two in any way possible (Mohamed Syazwan & Mohd Remie, 2012).

Furthermore, food manufacturers could also take advantage of the differences that are evident from previous studies between gender, race, religion, marital status, age and education background in developing their marketing strategies for the Halal food market. For example, in previous studies, women are found to be more concerned with halal verification from JAKIM as compared to men. Thus, food manufacturers could utilise this information in designing their marketing strategies if their target market is female consumers. The question of which Halal certification body issues the Halal status as well as enforce the Halal standards is also important. The appointment of private companies in addition to a government or public authority in providing the Halal status would only make it difficult to achieve standardisation in Halal certification and create confusion amongst consumers (Nuradli et al., 2007).

In short, Muslim consumers are concerned with the authenticity of the halal logo to ensure that the ingredients used and labelled on the product packaging are truly Shariah compliant. Manufacturers should take heed of this and do not falsify the halal logo just for the sake of increasing market share and profitability without understanding fully and strictly the requirements. Instead, food manufacturers are advised to take the opportunity to tap the Muslim market that is lucrative as the market has a population of more than 1.6 billion globally. Furthermore, Muslim population growth is set to expand faster than global population.

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