Expectations of Non-Malaysian Restaurant Managers towards
Halal Certification

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ABSTRACT

Halal food industry has gained tremendous demand from all over the world that includes both the Muslim and non - Muslim consumers thus contributing to significant economic growth in the *halal* market. Previous *halal* studies has been focusing on *halal* food purchasing, *halal* marketing, *halal* tourism and *halal* meat. However, research on *halal* hospitality industry that look into the restaurant sector is very sparse.

Therefore, this paper aims to investigate on the expectations on non- Malaysian restaurant managers toward *halal* certification as Malaysians do prefer to eat non local food. Taking into considerations the number of restaurants that offer non-local food is high in Nilai and Cyberjaya, a qualitative survey was performed on three restaurant owners/managers.

The findings show that the managers have very positive understandings on *halal* connotations and the implications on their restaurants as far as the plural society in Malaysia is concerned. *Halal* attributes that include trust, hygienic and traceability were related to signify *halal* certification. Future research may consider looking into restaurant managers and *halal* certification worldwide as return visit is crucial in attracting the Muslim customers in particular.

Key Words: *Halal*, Certification, Restaurant, Malaysia

1. INTRODUCTION

The *halal* food industry has grown so rapidly that it has gained world attention because its role is so significant in the international trade. *Halal* terms have been used conventionally to

show food products such as *Shariah* slaughtered meat that does not contain pork or non-alcoholic beverages. Due to the development of the *halal* food industry that attracts the attention of the world, various other foods such as dairy products, snacks, food and beverage products have been instrumental in adhering to the *halal* process to maintain and display *halal* integrity. Recently, the *halal* food market has doubled compared to the non - Muslim food market. According to the Pew Research Center (2017), Muslim populations in the world are expected to reach 2.2 billion by 2030 and this causes the *halal* food industry to attract in the global trading market.

Indirectly, international *halal* food trade has grown not only in Muslim countries like the Middle East and Southeast Asia, but also for Muslims in North America and Europe. With this phenomenon, certification of *halal* food has become very important and is a necessity in ensuring the Muslim consumers believe in buying *halal* food and beverage products. Eventually, this evolution or phenomenon has also spread throughout the multicultural countries of Southeast Asia, Muslim minorities and trade associations in North America, Europe and Australia (International Trade Center, 2015).

Malaysia, a multicultural nation whose population is not 100 percent of Islam, is also among the producers of food and beverage products. Therefore, the government has enforced the *halal* certification for use by manufacturers, retailers and food outlets to protect the religious interests of the Muslim community. *Halal* certification by the Malaysian government operated by JAKIM has been recognized as an administrative system in the *halal* food industry worldwide. *Halal* certification has encouraged satisfaction and trust among consumers. In addition, *halal* certification has also been used as one of the marketing strategies by many industries and companies to attract customers (Rosnan et al., 2015). *Halal* certification ensures consumer confidence and more effective assurance of *halal* context.

Indeed, *halal* certification is very prominent in the Malaysian restaurant industry. Although, *halal* certification is needed to capture the market, there are many food operators operating without *halal* certification. Abdul, Ismail and Mustapha (2013) identified that due to the process of obtaining the certificate are expensive, tedious and strict would contribute to the reason why this scenario occurred. Furthermore, the lack of judgment on the ethics and Islamic values leads to an indifferent attitude towards non-compliance with *halal* requirements among restaurant entrepreneurs. Thus, this study aim is to measure the expectations of non-Malaysian restaurant manager towards *halal* certification.

2. *HALAL* CERTIFICATION ATTRIBUTES

As a product feature, *halal* refers to the nature, origin and method of food processing itself. The quality feature cannot be verified or ascertained by others, even if they have used the product. In this regard, the role of information, knowledge and *Shariah* approval is indisputable in the user's *halal* food choices. Additionally, the characteristics of *halal* food beliefs are about trust and confidence in the sources that provide information on how the products are processed or made. For Muslim consumers, the level of confidence in *halal* food is related to the validity and uncertainty about the nature of the process (i.e. the handling and processing that lead to *halal* status). This has caused Muslim consumers to be more cautious about what they buy and consume. Hence, the lack of enforcement in monitoring the use of certified *halal* logo has caused the public to question the legitimacy of some of the products that are said to be *halal*.

The life of a Muslim revolves around the concept of *halal* and *haram* as Riaz and Chaudry (2004) highlighted thus Islamic law must be observed at all times. In addition, Islam permits food that is 'wholesome'(Al-Qaradawi, n.d.) as found in *Surah Al-Baqarah* [The Cow], verse 168 that stated:

> O mankind! Eat of what is permissible and good on earth and do not follow the footsteps of Satan, truly he is an open adversary to you.

Therefore, *halal* certification can be described as one of the conventional mechanisms that can be used to provide quality signals for the product. *Halal* certified products provide confirmation for consumers, especially Muslims, that their products and expenditure processes are *Shariah* compliant. *Halal* certification focuses on the cleanliness, quality, and safety of food and its preparation. However, there are non-Muslims who prefer to eat *halal* food not because of religious aspects but because of the fact that it is essential in preparing *halal* food it should comply with certain hygiene principles to ensure that *halal* food is healthy to be consumed. Concomitantly, *halal* certification is significant as a feature of promising that a product that has met the *halal* requirements.

JAKIM is the Malaysian government institution responsible for the *halal* certification from the establishment of the *halal* logo to the monitoring and implementation of the *halal* guidelines. Crucially, JAKIM must play the most important role in ensuring the use of *halal* logo is legally and constantly monitoring the premises of the *halal* logo. This will increase the level of confidence among the Muslim consumers with regards to the food products in the market place that carry the *halal* logo.

There are several attributes in *halal* certification and consumers tend to use different types and number of attributes in purchasing a product (Aliman, 2007). In this context, Manning

(2007) has listed other attributes that include confidence with a specific standard, trust and wish to buy in a humane way. In this paper, three main attributes that will be discussed are trust, hygiene and traceability.

2.1 TRUST

Trust is one of the attributes of *halal* certification and is important to both restaurant owners and customers. *Halal* trademarks and trust-marks are part of the dimension of *halal* certification. They are legally protected by law under intellectual property in the form of pictures, texts, motifs, labels, logos, trade names, designs, tunes and even colors and scents (Coombe, 1991). Since these trademarks and trust-marks are legal evidence, their *halal* status cannot be undermined. Malaysian *halal* trust-mark has been recognised by Indonesian government since 2012 (Yahya, 2013). Thus, *halal* branding is a valid marketing tool to produce and market locally and internationally. Non-Muslims restaurant owners would lure more local and international customers once their *halal* branding is trusted. Trust plays a big role in influencing consumer purchasing behavior in the *halal* food industry in Canada (Reynolds-Zayak, 2004), Belgium (Bonne & Verbeke, 2008) and United Arab Emirates.

Though restaurants owned by non-Muslims are operated in Malaysia, with the *halal* trust-mark from JAKIM, they can somehow be trusted by customer. Authorities of JAKIM are adamant about *halal* status of the restaurants. Customers can check the status of the restaurants on JAKIM website to check their *halal* status. Furthermore, operators of *halal* certified and *halal* claimant restaurants were very particular about trust in the food they purchase and the way they prepared it (Syed Marzuki, 2012)

2.2 HYGIENIC

The second important attribute that non-Malaysian restaurant managers take seriously in *halal* certification is the hygiene aspect. In this context, *halal* food emphasized hygiene that relates to food safety. Syed Marzuki, et al. (2012a) in their study highlighted that managers understood hygiene in *halal* certification as not only mean food is *halal* but also safe to eat. Pang and Toh (2008) found that Muslim food hawker who emphasize on body cleanliness and hygiene have a higher significant effect in food safety performance standard that others. In order to produce safe and hygienic food for human consumption, several steps and procedures are required to control the operational conditions within a food establishment (Hashim, 2004)

In Malaysia, the Malaysian Standards MS 1500:2004 *Halal* Food Production, Preparation, Handling and Storage and MS 1514:2001 General Principles of Food Hygiene covered all aspects of *halal* from primary production until preparation of food. As food that is clean and safe starts from the production process, restaurant managers emphasized that they recognized

their roles by following relevant instructions and applying appropriate food hygiene measures (Syed Marzuki, 2012).

2.3 TRACEABILITY

Traceability is another important attribute to signify *halal* certification. Therefore, according to Lodhi (2009), the ability to trace *Halal* food products movement along the supply chain is one of the key factors to ensure *halal* integrity. Traceability can be defined as a system which enables to trace all the information related to a product starting from its origin to the last point before it is sold to the consumer. *Hence, halal* traceability systems are crucial in the supply chain. It can be used to trace potentially Non-*Halal* ingredients. The system will be able to validate and to authenticate that the product is *halal*. Restaurant operators must be aware of the *halal* integrity of the supplies that reach their restaurant. Since there are many parties involve along the supply chain before it reaches the restaurant operators, the possibility of cross contamination might occur. A successful supply chain partnership relies on mutual trust and long-term commitment. Therefore, the operators must understand the whole *halal* food supply in order to protect their *halal* integrity.

3. *HALAL* RESTAURANTS OPERATED BY NON-MALAYSIANS/*HALAL* RESTAURANTS IN MALAYSIA

Today, Malaysian Muslim consumers are becoming more careful and aware of *halal* conformance and avoid products that are without the *halal* sign. Regardless of the profoundly increasing demand for *halal* food, the number of food provider in Malaysia with *halal* certification from JAKIM is still scarce. Several of restaurant owners tend to manipulate the use of *halal* logo in their outlets (Ibrahim & Othman, 2014).

Regardless of its significance, *halal* certification has some major weaknesses. Motivational elements are found to be not visible, for example the *halal* product integrity or the product's safety and quality features. This shows that food providers have inadequate knowledge about the vital of applying *halal* certification (Talib et al., 2015). Indeed, Rahman et al., (2012) discovered that paucity of information, implementation cost, changes in management, supplier and governance issues, as well as lack of observing and enforcement are some of the challenges and difficulties faced by the restaurateurs to comply with *halal* requirement.

On the other hand, according to Fernando, Ng and Yusoff (2014), product safety and quality seems to be one of the highest motivational factors among Malaysia food companies. Similarly, Syed Marzuki, Hall and Ballantine (2012), agreed that the benefits of *halal* certification should necessarily reflect the image of a clean and germicidal restaurant where the *halal* food providers must ensure that hygiene and cleanness associated with food safety.

4. SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Semi structured interviews that featured a fixed but open-ended questionnaire framework were conducted in Nilai and Cyberjaya as the existence of restaurants owned by non - Malaysians are heavily located in those particular areas. It appeared that restaurant owners or managers that have been personally approached earlier were not cooperative and were reluctant in taking part. Considering the overall time and cost, the researchers had adopted a convenience sampling approach. The researchers entered the eating premises and met personally with the restaurant managers and asked their permission as to whether they were willing to participate or not.

Then, the researchers informed the participants of the general aims of the study and explained that the interviews would be recorded and that the recordings would then be transcribed. Anonymity in the transcripts and reporting was assured. An information sheet was given to restaurant managers who agreed to participate prior to the interview session. Once they gave their consent, the discussions commenced based on a series of questions. Participants were given the opportunity to discontinue their participation at any point of time. As a result, data was drawn from a series of interviews with 4 restaurant managers (Table 1.1). Due to better accessibility, there were more participants in Cyberjaya.

Table 1.1: The Selection of Restaurant Managers for Semi-structured Interview

Area/Restaurants	Halal claimant
Nilai	1
Cyberjaya	2
TOTAL	3

A semi-structured questionnaire was presented to allow managers to respond freely. The interviews took between thirty minutes to one hour per session and were conducted over a span of a month. The main focus of the interview session was to unearth the expectations of the non-Malaysian restaurant managers about *halal* and it was also interesting to integrate *halal* with other *halal* attributes and challenges. Seven topics served as the primary focus of discussions with restaurant managers:

1) Understandings on *halal* certification
2) The importance of *halal* certification
3) The reliability of *halal* certification
4) The connection of *halal* certification on customers
5) The reliability of the food supply chain

6) The problems of *halal* certification

7) The restaurant managers' views and experiences of operating an eating premise in relation to *halal* certification in a plural society like Malaysia

The questions that were asked during the interview sessions and following discussions covered the participants' understanding of *halal* certification and its importance in a restaurant context. The conversations then went on to cover the reliability and the connectedness of the *halal* status to marketing aspects and return patronage as well as the food supply chain. Participants were also asked with respect to issues surrounding regulating *halal* certification and their views and experiences in operating a restaurant in Malaysia.

Patton (2002) emphasized that in qualitative research, discovery of choices made by the researcher(s) and the rationale behind such choices are indispensable in clarifying the assumptions and theoretical dimensions of the methodology. In this qualitative research, all discussions were recorded and transcribed and the author handled the data extraction and analysis in a systematic way. The next step is to read all transcripts carefully and identifying arising issues. Repeated readings of the transcriptions were performed to avoid miscoding. The data were extracted manually under thematic headings. With a thematic analysis, the author formulates themes which are based on the whole data from the interviews. In relation to this, cases were then compared to look for areas of general agreement.

The researchers have drawn up a list of coded categories and organized into three main categories. As mentioned earlier, this was done manually and following the initial categorization of interview material, three common themes were identified among the participant interviews: the importance in understanding the underlying term of *halal* concept, the reliability of *halal* certification and supply chain to ensure return visit; and the connection of getting people of all races to dine together in offering non-Malaysian food. Each segment of transcribed data with relevant keywords was carefully selected and placed under one of these categories. It is important to highlight that the author have used keywords in identification of the categories. For example, if participant A has mentioned on *halal* certification on food supplies, the transcribed data pertaining to this would be positioned under the category of reliability of the food supply chain.

In this study, interviews were conducted entirely in the English Language as restaurant owners or managers are non-Malaysians. In the following analysis information provided by specific respondents is given with the respondent's background information in brackets so as to maintain confidentiality. The interviews have provided the authors an opportunity to explore

interesting subject matters dealing with the participants on their holistic understandings of *halal* including the issues surrounding it.

4.1 The importance in understanding the underlying term of *halal* concept

The attitudes and comments of the participants during the interviews indicated that most of them were aware of the Muslim dietary restriction of *halal* and *haram*. During the interview sessions, respondents stressed the importance of knowledge on *halal*, Muslim sensitivity and religious practices. In fact, they have defined the meanings of *halal* in interesting ways according to their understandings.

Halal in food context is about what can be eaten according the guidance from Allah. Muslims have been told from birth about *halal* and Muslims are raised in such a way that they must follow the rules and regulation provided in the Quran and Hadith.

> I believe that all Muslims must know the things that need to be followed and avoided. It is good for our life, marriage and work environment if we follow the procedure of *halal* and haram. *Halal* certification is important because it builds trust for the customers to come and dine (Male, Arab, *Halal* Claimant, Nilai)

> *Halal* has nothing to do with alcohol/liquor. I know that, in order to perform *halal* slaughtering, prayers must be said first. (Female, Chinese, *Halal* Claimant, Cyberjaya)

> In my opinion, *halal* concept is about following the Islamic Law. Here, cleanliness is very well taken care of. (Female, Indonesian, *Halal* Claimant, Cyberjaya)

Literature on *halal* certification from the perspectives of the restaurant managers is very limited (Wan Hassan and Hall, 2003). The views expressed by the participants showed that *halal* certification was an important aspect of Muslim followers where they emphasized that a restaurant manager should not only have some knowledge on *halal* matters but should also have an understanding of the basis of the practices and beliefs of other religions as well.

4.2 The reliability of *halal* certification and supply chain to ensure return visit

This section clearly highlights on restaurant managers with respect to the reliability of *halal* certification and supply chain. Respondents felt that *halal* certification is prominent in ensuring return patronage to their restaurants.

This restaurant is pork free but sells liquor. At the moment we are not keen to apply for *halal* certification. However, if more Muslims come and dine, it is better for us to apply for the certification. (Female, Chinese, *Halal* Claimant, Cyberjaya)

For me, it is better to have a *halal* certification as it indicates trust. When a restaurant has the certification, it is complete. The customers have more confidence to come and eat with peace of mind. (Female, Indonesian, *Halal* Claimant, Cyberjaya)

Looking at the supplies of raw materials, respondents were fully aware of the origin although it seems that they did not look into the matter seriously.

Raw materials are imported from the Middle East but we do not check whether they are *halal* or not because they are from the same suppliers that always deal with us. (Male, Arab, *Halal* Claimant, Nilai)

I must admit that certain Japanese products do not have *halal* certification but most of the supplies have *halal* logo on it. (Female, Chinese, *Halal* Claimant, Cyberjaya)

An interesting finding during the interview was that respondents placed such an emphasis in fulfilling the needs of a Muslim as far as *halal* is concerned. When probed further, they admitted that Malaysian Muslims most of the time preferred to dine at restaurants that offer non local food offerings particularly Arab and Japanese food.

4.3 The connection of getting people of all races to dine together in offering non-Malaysian food

Dahalan (2008) highlighted that non-Muslim entrepreneurs dominated the *halal* service industry in Malaysia. As such, the Muslims do visit restaurants by trusting the *halal* certifications being displayed at the premises are genuine. Malaysia is a multicultural country and the relationship between races is known to be at its best where they can sit and dine together (my citations). This is supported by a study on public dining experiences in Singapore (Mohamed Nasir & Pereira, 2008). With this, restaurant owners/managers benefited from the satisfaction and return visits of the customers.

I have observed that the Muslim customers do not ask if this restaurant is certified or not or even want to see *halal* certification because they know that this is an Arab restaurant

and they trusted that the restaurant serves *halal* food and drinks. There are also non-Muslims who come and visit our eating premise. (Male, Arab, *Halal* Claimant, Nilai)

The Malays gave best support towards our food so far and I can say that 95% of our customers are Malaysians and non-Muslims do come here to enjoy our food offerings. (Female, Indonesian, *Halal* Claimant, Cyberjaya)

Customers have their own reasons to visit restaurants of their own choice and find their ways for return patronage if they are satisfied (Dube 1994). Within this context, Al-Harran and Low (2008) emphasized on Muslim requirements that demand healthy and quality food products that conform to *Shariah* requirements.

5. CONCLUSION

Restaurants that display *halal* certification signify trust for the Muslim customers to come and dine. The comments gained from the interview session reflected that *halal* is such an important factor to attract the Muslims and they are aware and sensitive to Muslim's dietary requirements and practices. Even though all of the respondents did not apply for *halal* certification but they had the initiatives to ensure that *halal* food is served and *halal* traceability is taken into account at all times. The respondents despite their individual religions, kept reiterating trust, hygiene and traceability, and they were committed to ensure that Muslim customers would have peace of mind while dining. They also consider the non–Muslims who are their customers as they know that food can unite people in multiethnic country like Malaysia.

Halal studies by Syed Marzuki and Yahya (2017), Syed Marzuki(2016), Syed Marzuki, Hazudin, Ishak and Abd. Wahid (2015), Syed Marzuki, Hall and Ballantine (2014), Syed Marzuki and Abdullah (2014), Syed Marzuki (2013), Syed Marzuki, Hall and Ballantine (2013), Syed Marzuki (2012), Syed Marzuki, Hall and Ballantine (2012a), Syed Marzuki, Hall and Ballantine (2012b) and finally, Syed Marzuki, Hall and Ballantine (2009) have made several highpoints on the integration process of Muslim and non–Muslim restaurant patrons on dining together that creates unity and at the same time fulfilling the food restrictions for the Muslims in food consumption.

This study suggested that *halal* certification signified three dimensions; understanding *halal* concept, reliability of supply chain and integration of multi-ethnicities. Generally, respondents have positive expectations that *halal* certification has strong attributes to fulfill Muslim food

restrictions and also the demand from the non-Muslim customers who are likely to dine together because *halal* certification is making its mark among non-Muslims as well (Muhammad, 2007). In order to remain competitive in the *halal* food service industry, it is imperative that restaurant managers consistently work towards promoting the *halal* certification and *halal* foods (Syed Marzuki, 2012). It is indeed a long-term investment as the awareness of *halal* is developing rapidly. In fact, *halal* certification covers not only religious needs but also commercially and community-based needs.

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