

AN OVERVIEW OF MALAYSIAN HALAL CERTIFICATION AMONG MICRO-ENTERPRISES

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Abstract: *The swift advancement of the Halal industry in Malaysia can be attributed to the pivotal role played by Halal certification in propelling business performance. Malaysian Halal certification has attained global renown for signifying safety, ensuring high-quality standards, and guaranteeing wholesomeness in Halal-certified products and services. While larger corporations adeptly navigate the Halal certification process, micro-enterprises encounter distinctive challenges. This article aims to analyse the overview of Halal certification for micro-enterprises in Malaysia, exploring its significance, challenges, and opportunities. Employing the library research method, this research synthesizes pertinent information from secondary sources to fulfil its research objectives. The findings of this article clarify the primary challenges impeding broader application of Halal certification among micro-enterprises are financial constraints, intricate application procedures for Halal certification, and lack of awareness regarding Halal-certified products. Notably, this article highlights the opportunity for micro-entrepreneurs to enhance their enterprises significantly through the attainment of Halal certification recognition. In conclusion, the study asserts that the Malaysian Halal certification is imperative for micro-enterprises to effectively market their products and emerge as a lucrative promotional instrument.*

Keywords: *Halal Certification, Halal Industry, Micro-Enterprises, Halal-Certified Products*

Introduction

The surge in the demand for Halal products has evolved into a noteworthy business phenomenon, exerting a substantial influence on both local and international markets as they strive to meet this heightened demand (Abu Bakar et al., 2017). In 2018, the Malaysian Halal Market commanded a valuation of USD 68.4 billion, and projections indicate an anticipated increase to USD 113.2 billion by the year 2030. Within this market, Halal food and beverage being the largest core sectors of consumer preference in the Halal market, followed by cosmetics and personal care, pharmaceuticals, and others including modest fashion, medical devices, and medical tourism (Halal Development Corporation Berhad, 2020). Malaysia maintains its prominent position atop the Global Islamic Economy Indicator (GIEI) rankings across various sectors, including Islamic Finance, Halal Food, Travel, Media, and Recreation (Dinar Standard, 2022).

With a holistic and systematic Halal ecosystem, Malaysia aspires to be a global reference for the best practices of Halal standards and business operations by encouraging local businesses towards participation in the global Halal market (Halal Development Corporation Berhad, 2020). The Malaysian government, as outlined in the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (2021-2025), has dedicated itself to the ongoing facilitation of the Halal industry's progression. A pivotal element of this commitment involves strategic interventions aimed at augmenting economic growth. The primary focus is on elevating the competitiveness of the Halal industry, with the overarching goal of securing a substantial portion of the global Halal market (Ministry of Economy, 2021).

Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) play a crucial role in bolstering the national economy by furnishing a diverse array of goods and services (Md Husin & Haron, 2020). Additionally, they contribute to the development of regional markets and societies, provide employment opportunities, stimulate market competition, and foster innovation. In terms of business size between 2016 to 2022, micro-enterprises in Malaysia indicated the largest share of MSMEs component, followed by the small and medium-sized enterprises (SME Corporation Malaysia, 2023). While prior research has addressed the hurdles faced by Malaysian SMEs in achieving growth and sustainability (Abdul Rahman et al., 2016; Abu Bakar et al., 2017; Mohd Thas Thaker & Mohammed, 2013; Munoz et al., 2015; Wee et al., 2019), there is a scarcity of studies delving into the importance of Halal certification for the expansion of micro-enterprises in Malaysia. Saiman & Yusma (2022) addressed the pursuit of Halal certification serves as an elective endeavor for entrepreneurs aspiring to broaden their business activities both within Malaysia and on a global scale. Besides, the government has provided a lot of opportunities for local MSME entrepreneurs, especially for Bumiputera entrepreneurs to grow their business empires (Abu Bakar et al., 2019). The government encourages local entrepreneurs to apply for Halal certification to seize the opportunities offered in the Halal industry. However, the majority of Bumiputera entrepreneurs who are operating in micro-enterprises sector are reluctant in obtaining Halal certification.

Therefore, to fill the gaps in past studies, this article aims to examine the overview of Halal certification among micro-enterprises in Malaysia, exploring its significance, challenges, and opportunities for future growth of these enterprises. Micro-entrepreneurs are encouraged by the government to become Halal-certified enterprises for the purpose of growing the business performance and the products can easily penetrate the domestic and global Halal market.

Research Methodology

This article adopts a library research method to gather relevant information from secondary sources to support the discussion of this article. Library research helps the authors to identify and locate sources that provide information on the topic of another research (George, 2008). The secondary sources are the documents of Malaysian Halal Standards and regulations, as well as the previous literature in the form of research papers, journal articles, online articles, conference proceeding papers, and reports related to the Halal certification and micro enterprises in the Halal industry. The search of the past literature was based on relevant keywords like Halal certification, Halal industry, micro-enterprises, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and Halal entrepreneurship. The literature was sought through the available search engines such as Google Scholar, and the online databases provided by International Islamic University Malaysia such as Scopus, Emerald Insight, JSTOR, BASE, CORE: Connecting Repositories, and Malaysian Citation Index. For the data collection, the study adopts the documents analysis technique because the sources are used from the available literature. The authors used the content analysis technique for the data analysis to review the selected papers and documents and arrange the findings systematically.

Literature Review

Halal Certification In Malaysia

The Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) functions as the federal-level competent authority for Halal matters, overseeing the administration of Halal certification and formulating policies subject to cabinet decisions. JAKIM is the primary Halal authority responsible for the endorsement of the Halal certificate logo and assessing products for compliance with rigorous Halal requirements stipulated by Shariah law. Apart from JAKIM, the State Islamic Religious Department (*Jabatan Agama Islam Negeri* - JAIN) serves as the state-level competent authority with the mandate to administer Halal certification matters (Asa, 2019; Mohd Sulaiman et al., 2017).

The primary legislative foundation for the standardization of Halal certification issuance in Malaysia is the Trade Descriptions Act 2011 (TDA 2011). Originating from Section 28 of the Act, it grants the Minister of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs (MDTCA) the prerogative to provide precise definitions for any term. Section 29 of this legislation empowers the Minister to designate a "competent authority" for the issuance of Halal certification and the marking of products as 'Halal'. This appointment of the "competent authority" for certification and marking, as outlined in the Trade Description (Certification and Marking of Halal) Order 2011, became effective on January 1, 2011.

The Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) and the State Islamic Religious Department (JAIN) have been specifically designated as the Halal competent authorities for certifying Halal in accordance with the terms of the Order. This mandates that, as per the Order, any food, goods, or associated services cannot be labeled as Halal unless certified as such by the Halal competent authority, which is either JAKIM or JAIN. Consequently, no other entities or agencies are authorized to issue halal certification under this regulatory framework (A. Rahman et al., 2018; Zakaria & Abdullah, 2019).

The Malaysian Halal Certification Procedure Manual (Domestic) 2020 outlines nine distinct schemes for industry players attaining Halal certification from JAKIM or JAIN and aiming to maintain their status as certified Halal certification holders. These schemes encompass various

sectors, including food or beverage, cosmetic, pharmaceutical, food premise or hotel, consumer goods, logistics, slaughterhouse, original equipment manufacturer (OEM), and medical devices (JAKIM, 2020). The Halal certification process is characterized by stringency to ensure adherence to Islamic law principles (Abd Hamid et al., 2022). A recent development in Halal assurance management system requires micro and small-sized enterprises to establish and implement the Internal Halal Control System (IHCS), while the Halal Assurance System (HAS) is for medium and large-scale industries, thereby the products or services are qualified to be endorsed as Halal by the Halal authorities (JAKIM, 2020).

The Halal assurance management system functions as a systematic process serving as an internal mechanism for the monitoring, control, improvement, and prevention of any non-compliance issues, with the overarching aim of safeguarding the Halal status of products (Mohd Safian et al., 2020). The verification of the Halal status involves comprehensive scrutiny at each stage and process, facilitated by official site inspections conducted by JAKIM. These inspections assess the effectiveness of the Halal assurance management system, ensuring conformity with the stipulations outlined in the Halal Manual and Halal Standards (Hasan et al., 2020).

The implementation of IHCS and HAS encompass the concept of *halalan toyyiban* at the entire stage of the supply chain starting from the sourcing of raw materials until the finished products reach the consumers. Most past studies have discussed the concept of *halalan toyyiban*, which is indicating the combination of two words that consist of *halal* and *toyyib*. *Halal* signifies anything lawful and permissible for consumption, while *toyyib* refers to something that is good, pleasant, clean, pure, and wholesome (Al-Qaradawi, 2007; Kamali, 2013; Mustaffa, 2019; Zainal Arifin et al., 2021). The establishment and implementation of IHCS shall comply with the following minimum requirements which are Halal policy, Halal raw material control / Halal risk control and Halal traceability. For HAS, there are ten Halal requirements for companies to comply with, encompassing Halal policy, Halal raw material control, Halal risk control, Internal Halal Committee, Internal Halal Audit, Halal Training, Halal Traceability, HAS Documentation, Laboratory Analysis and *Sertu* (JAKIM, 2020). Entrepreneurs need to control and maintain the Halal integrity of products to assure the permissibility for consumption and ensure the product safety and quality assurance.

Micro-Enterprises And The Malaysia Halal Industry

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role in numerous global economies. They are perceived as vital entities in fostering growth, success, and entrepreneurial development of small-scale businesses. These enterprises are anticipated to hold the potential to significantly impact the economic landscape of nation (Abd Hamid et al., 2022). Micro-enterprises constitute the predominant segment among Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Malaysia, accounting for 78.7% of the overall MSME population, equivalent to 923,667 establishments. Small-sized enterprises comprise 19.7% of the total MSME count, equivalent to 231,546 firms, while medium-sized enterprises constitute the remaining 1.6%, totalling 18,388 firms. Notably, the period spanning from 2016 to 2022 witnessed an incremental rise of 109,418 micro-enterprises, indicating an average annual growth rate of 2.1% (SME Corporation Malaysia, 2023). The burgeoning prominence of micro enterprises constitutes a noteworthy sector in the trajectory of economic expansion, offering employment opportunities to a multitude of Malaysians.

The advancement of the micro enterprises sub-sector assumes considerable importance in safeguarding the realization of shared prosperity and fostering growth during the nation's transition towards establishing a high-income earning economy (Alom et al., 2016; Mohamed Imtiyaz et al., 2022). In the context of the Halal business sphere, entrepreneurs wield a significant influence to embark Halal entrepreneurial activities within a nation, thereby contributing to the various economic advantages. It is imperative for entrepreneurs to be acquainted with viable business prospects and to broaden the market for Halal products (Soltanian et al., 2016). Entrepreneurs are known for their entrepreneurial spirit and innovation. Their entry into the Halal industry can lead to the development of new and creative business models, processes, and products, contributing to the overall growth and competitiveness of the sector.

Challenges Of Halal Certification Among Micro-Enterprises In Malaysia

There are too various issues that have been highlighted in the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) literature about the challenges and business difficulties (Abdul Rahman et al., 2016). The most challenging to obtain Halal certification among micro enterprises are financial limitations, complexities of Halal certification procedure, and lack awareness of entrepreneurs towards the production of Halal-certified products.

Financial constraint is an issue that has always been highlighted by previous researchers (Abu Bakar et al., 2017). Muridan (2019) addressed financial limitations have emerged as a major concern for micro and small businesses seeking capital from financial institutions. Although micro and small businesses confront several hurdles in obtaining finance, financial sources are vital to growing and sustaining the business. Access to financing is a critical component for entrepreneurs in achieving productivity, competing in business, and creating jobs in developing countries. Abu Bakar et al. (2023) explored the financial challenges associated with Halal certification in their study, highlighting that applicants perceive the cost of the certification process as prohibitive. The primary concern lies not in the registration fee itself, but rather in the necessity for enterprises to allocate funds for the sourcing of Halal-certified raw ingredients to fulfill the comprehensive application requirements. This becomes particularly challenging when suppliers display indifference towards the Halal certification of their raw materials or, worse, they manipulate Halal certificates for profit maximization. Consequently, companies are compelled to incur higher costs for Halal-certified raw materials or invest additional time in searching for new eligible suppliers. Additionally, entrepreneurs need to separate production line from the residential area. Micro-enterprises with limited operational budgets should additionally increase the expense of setting up the business premise according to the authority's requirements.

Halal certification in Malaysia includes detailed guidance on how and what a company must do to obtain Halal certification for its products. The challenge for micro-entrepreneurs to obtain Halal certification is the intricate requirements and procedures of Malaysia Halal Standards (Arif et al., 2021). As articulated by Abu Bakar et al. (2023), the obstacle faced by food and beverage companies in the northern region of Malaysia in acquiring Halal certification revolves around the intricate nature of the certification procedure and the requisite documentation. The temporal dimension adds another layer of complexity to this challenge, as the certification procedure demands a significant investment of time, with applications extending over several months or potentially close to a year. The duration is contingent upon various factors such as the procedural flow, auditor availability, and the volume of applications that regulatory authorities must address to. Another challenge that should not be overlooked is micro-

entrepreneurs in Malaysia failed to meet the minimum criteria and requirements in applying for a Halal certificate. The business should have an SSM License (*Suruhanjaya Syarikat Malaysia* – Companies Commission of Malaysia) and be registered with the local authorities (PBT – *Pihak Berkuasa Tempatan*). However, several micro-entrepreneurs have failed under the scrutiny of local authorities since they did not have their own premises to produce the products (Saiman & Yusma, 2022).

Researchers have consistently deliberated on the issue of insufficient knowledge and awareness of the Halal principles among entrepreneurs, identifying it as a contributing factor to the challenges encountered in the overall production of Halal products (Abu Bakar et al., 2017). They do not realize the benefits of Halal certification in preparing for their participation to further enhance the Halal industry by fully positioning Malaysia as a global regional Halal hub (Hashim & Mohd Nor, 2022). Another study conducted by Saiman & Yusma (2022) revealed that there are a lot of Muslim entrepreneurs lack of awareness of the significance of producing products with Halal certification and exhibit limited interest in obtaining such certification. Meanwhile, Hashim & Mohd Nor (2022) addressed the industry players of SMEs have an awareness of the huge potential of the Halal business, but the number of Halal certification holders from SMEs remained low, especially Bumiputera, which increasing possible obstacles in obtaining Halal certification from the Halal competent authorities.

Opportunities for the Development Of Micro-Enterprises Through Malaysian Halal Certification

The main opportunity for micro-entrepreneurs by having the Halal certification is they are capable to grow their business with a high-level impact of Halal certification recognition. Halal certification ensures that the products adhere to the standards of being Halal and tayyib concerning aspects such as food hygiene and safety, ingredients, equipment and utensils, packaging, storage, processing, transportation, and waste management (Saiman & Yusma, 2022; Zainal Arifin et al., 2021). A study conducted by Ab Talib et al. (2017) highlighted Halal food certification can help entrepreneurs improve their business performance. Food enterprises, for example, could boost productivity and standardize internal operations by obtaining Halal food certification.

Furthermore, greater operational effectiveness will contribute to increased sales and profits. There was another study by Nordin et al. (2016) related to favorable influence of Halal certification on the enhancement of comprehensive business financial performance. This encompasses aspects such as sales, market share, profit, productivity, opportunities for export, and the effective promotion of products. The utilization of Halal certification emerges as an innovative instrument for fostering business expansion, as it serves to differentiate Halal products within the marketplace from their non-Halal counterparts (Asa & Azmi, 2017; Yusuf et al., 2016). If entrepreneurs intend to export, the Halal certification will assist them in assuring the status of Halal in importing nations. At the worldwide level, it can improve product marketability, particularly in Muslim nations, where Muslim consumers are becoming more conscious of their need to consume properly prepared Halal food (Hashim & Mohd Nor, 2022a). Hasan et al. (2020) addressed the consensus of SMEs on Halal certification and the Halal logo will provide the company with a competitive advantage. Malaysia's Halal logo is not only recognized in Malaysia but also as one of the valid certifications worldwide (Abu Bakar et al., 2023). Therefore, the existing micro-enterprises should seize the opportunity to be more proactive in the production of Halal products, as it can provide a competitive advantage for micro-entrepreneurs to expand their business both locally and globally (Hasan et al., 2020).

The success of any business depends on acquiring the trust of its customers. Consumers will feel more confident if a product has been approved by authorities, particularly the government, because the Halal certificate is the definitive evidence that the products meet those Halal standards and requirements. Halal certification serves as a mechanism for consumer protection, signifying that the consumable products have undergone meticulous examination before being distributed to the consumers. Through Halal certification, Muslim consumers can place confidence in the integrity of Halal products, as the ingredients used and the manufacturing procedures adhere to the principles outlined in Shariah law (Hakim et al., 2022; Hashim & Mohd Nor, 2022).

Conclusion

Muslim entrepreneurs are obligated by business ethics to closely adhere to the rules of avoiding selling unlawful goods and products. These motivations will drive them to follow the Islamic rules to gain business growth by selling and providing Halal products or services to the entire Muslim community (Yusuf et al., 2016). Malaysia has systematic and well-documented Halal guidelines for industry players to establish a Halal assurance management system within the organization. Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises play essential roles in the development of Malaysia's Halal industry. Thus, the government always encourages MSMEs to obtain Halal certification to expand their business domestically and internationally. Starting in 2020, there is a significant change related to the Halal assurance management system in Malaysia, in which there is a requirement for medium and large industries to establish Halal Assurance System (HAS), while micro and small enterprises need to establish the Internal Halal Control System (IHCS) to be certified as Halal Certificate Holders by the Halal competent authorities (JAKIM, 2020).

However, there are several challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs to apply for Halal certification as there are only limited resources and financing to operate the business. The entrepreneurs have little awareness of the importance of producing Halal-certified products for business growth in Malaysia's Halal industry. They prefer to be in their comfort zone without having the intention to expand their business. Meanwhile, the government is proactive to assist entrepreneurs in obtaining Halal certification due to the great opportunity offered by the growth of the Halal industry. There are Halal-related agencies in Malaysia that are responsible for the implementation of Halal entrepreneurship development programme in terms of financial support, training on the procedure to apply for Halal certification, as well as establishing the business with Halal compliance practices.

The validation of Halal certification depends on the well-implemented of Halal assurance management system in the entire business operations according to Halal standards and requirements. Muslim consumers currently are more aware of their responsibilities to consume Halal products that are certified by the authorities (Hashim & Mohd Nor, 2022), thus entrepreneurs shall seize this opportunity to fulfil the demand from consumers.

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