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Clients, Consumers and Customers' Perceptionon Halal Implementation in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Brunei

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Abstract:
The demand of Halal market is seen to be increasing and has been accepted by both Muslim and Non-Muslim customers. The implementation of Halal certification especially in food and beverages industry is shaped by numerous factors. These include confidence level towards Halal standard and Halal logo and understanding towards the policy red tape that is applied in order to obtain it. As the demand is seen to increase positively, eventually the demand of Halal market will enter into global market, it leads to an understanding the perception of consumers' towards gaining international and global accreditation especially in the context of Brunei Halal market. A survey was conducted among 50 respondents in Brunei via a structured questionnaire and interview in order to evaluate and understand the processes SMEs has to go through during the implementation procedures. A descriptive statistic was used to identify the demographic characteristics and all the factors towards Halal implementation. In general, various demographic characteristics and confidence level were found to be significantly to influence the likelihood of respondents' degree of confidence towards Halal logo and standard that are available and being used. Thus, majority of the respondents are confident towards the assurance of Halal logo with regard to "Halal purity" of the food products and strongly agree on Brunei Halal market gaining international accreditation.

Keywords: Brunei, Halal, 3C, SME

1. Introduction

Halal has gained more than just an international acknowledgement, it managed to capture global attentions. In Brunei Darussalam, Halal specifically in food and beverages industry play a big role that leads to a growth to international and global Halal food industry. Halal market has become a huge international player and oxfordbusinessgroup (2012) approximated a staggering $630 billion of annual revenue in Halal market alone. Oxfordbusinessgroup (2012) further stated that Brunei International Halal Products expo that took placealmost every year in Brunei managed to attract hundreds of people from different sectors and country to participate in and has marked as a new beginning of growth in Brunei Halal products along with getting recognition by international exhibitors. The concept of Halal in Quranic (Arabic) means permitted, allowed and lawful in accordance to Shariah Law to consumed, it is the opposite of Haram which means forbidden or not permitted to be consumed (Rezai, 2008). When Halal is used in reference to food, it is known to be a dietary standard as stated in the Quran. The Al-Quran mentioned that:

"*O you, who believe, eat of the good things we have provided to you and be grateful to Allah, if it is He whom you worship*" (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:172-173).

Whereas, the unlawful or Haram foods are also specifically mentioned in the Quran, in the following verses:

"*He has but prohibited for you the carrion, the blood, the flesh of swine and what has been invoke upon with a name other than that of Allah. However, if anyone is compelled by necessity- neither seeking pleasure, nor crossing the limit (of necessity) – then, Allah is Most-Forgiving, Very Merciful*" (Surah An-Nahl, 16:115).

"*Animal killed by strangulation, or killed by a blow, or by a fall, or by goring, or that which is eaten by a beast unless you have properly slaughtered it; and that which has been slaughtered before the idols, and that you determine shares through the arrows*". (Surah Al-Maeda, 5:3).

Zakaria (2008) clarifies from the above mentioned verses from the Quran stated that consuming the food that is Halal and to avoid what has been said forbidden or unlawful or Haram, is part of a commitment for every Muslim to obligate. It is also understood that, for every verses and hukm that has been stated in the Quran must not be taken for granted as it has its own reasoning for it to be act upon. In Islam, Halal is inclusive of food products and non-food products such as medication, cosmetics and services. This principle of Halal also includes Thoyibban (wholesome) which means that the wholesome of delivering this products and services to the market to reach the consumers, customers and clients contain a good quality, purity and safety of Halal (Sandikci and Rice, 2011).

2. Problem Statement

Often the processes on implementing Halal leads to several challenging issues, clearly due to the rising of many Halal labels internationally and globally along with different interpretation on Shariah law and certification bodies, doubts and disagreements among consumers and participating countries that commonly takes place (Ab.Halim and Mohd.Salleh, 2012). Masli (2011) of Brunei Times reported that, several SMEs and restaurateurs voice out that the process of Halal implementation is a "complicated" process. Many argued that the requests of listing and tracing back the origins of every ingredient used in their premise or menu is what has been stopping SMEs from obtaining it. As of 2011, there were 27 restaurants and 24 food and drink producers in Brunei which are certified as Halal premise along with eight foreign companies which have been permitted with Halal permit under the national flagship project, the Brunei Halal Brand (Masli, 2011). As stated by Wan Hassan (2007), countries with their own Halal standards find it difficult to make a fair agreement on having only one particular global Halal standard as it would mean to yield their sovereign rights on such decision made.

Apart from problems that occurred through implementation processes, there are several relentless issues faced by Brunei Halal authorities and it also has an effect towards the consumers as Halal safety issues are striking Brunei market. Most of the issue came from several local and foreign products that are being imported and introduced into Brunei market. In 2011, it was recorded in a local newspaper that Brunei is still facing issues on products that contain prohibited ingredients that led to uncertainty and this issue had raised anger and dissatisfaction among consumers (Bruneitimes, 2011). Misused and abusing of Halal logo for it being either certified or uncertified is also one of the common problems that occurred in Halal market. The act of abusing and misusing of Halal logo and certification has leaded the consumers to feel insecure about the clarity and pureness of the products that are delivered to them. According to Rezai (2008), this has been the major problem as it may challenge consumers' confidence and trust level towards Halal logo that is being implemented in Brunei.

3. Research Objectives

The aim of the researchers in this study is to identify the factors that are affecting SMEs in Brunei, by investigating the awareness among Brunei SMEs towards the availability of Halal Standardisation that may affect the implementation procedures, and to study and investigate on 3c's (Clients, Customers and Consumers) perceptions and acceptances on global Halal accreditation.

4. Literature Review

4.1. Halal Standardisation

Riaz (2010) defined halal standard as a set of documentations issued by authorised part to certify that the products users consumed are according to the dietary guidelines based on Islamic perspective. According to Spiegel et.al (2012), Halal standards are used in making Halal production more unambiguous, it supports customers and consumers in choosing the products that comply with halal requirements. A study conducted by Abdul Talib, Mohd Ali and Jamaluddin (2008) stated that the availability of a proper Halal standard and recognised logo being used and implemented on products has enabled SMEs to capture a broader market both internationally and globally which showed an affirmative relationship towards the study of Halal implementation for SMEs in Brunei. Riaz and Chaudry (2004) identified food as an essential aspect in our life; it plays an important factor on various ethnics, social and religious groups. Furthermore, human beings are more concern on what they consumed and this awareness has created a unique and sentimental value to everyone especially in the concept between Halal and Islam on food aspects. Over the years there have been an increasing demand over Halal market which has encourages restaurants and food and beverages producer to transform their premises to be Halal certified. Syed Marzuki (2012) stated that Halal is no longer focuses on just food for Muslims; it has been considered a much more universal food to be consumed by both Muslims and Non-Muslims. Nonetheless, previous researchers highlighted the most common difficulties and challenges that are faced by SMEs which includes the challenges and difficulties that have direct relation towards SMEs especially on Halal implementation procedures and guidelines. From time to time, quite a number of previous studies have focused on the issues faced by SMEs. Noordin et.al (2009) studied on the rising issues of lack of professionalism and inefficient systems being implemented in the government. This has therefore piloted SMEs to have difficulties on understanding and getting access on Halal implementation processes and conflicts have been occurring between the government and SMEs continuously. Mohamed et.al (2008) also found out on a previous study about an issue on consumers' confidence level towards Halal logo that are being used on products and food of which that are available in the market. A legally certified Halal logo has a huge influence towards the factors that has enable consumers' confidence level to boost up especially among the Muslims consumers all around the world. Ab.Halim and Mohd Salleh (2012) also stated that the growing number of Halal agencies around the world globally has resulted in lack of uniformity and compromising taking place between all the countries that are involved. Hence, difficulties in trying to agree and forms a strong 'One Global' Halal standard for world-wide usage that will cut off barriers that may limit any trials to enter the growing global market occurs.

Ramezani (2011) further confirmed that apart from assuring Muslim users that the products they consume and use are according to Islamic laws, both Halal certificate and logo also assure and encourages manufacturers to meet the required Halal standard. With the availability of the Halal standard and Halal logo, it enriches a broader product market especially towards Muslim countries with a small amount of investment needed that will lead to a multiple growth in revenues and enhances the image of Halal products to meet the standard of customer needs in the future (Ramezani, 2011). However, according to Wan Hassan (2007) halal industry is still lacking of its own standardised Halal standards that causes the industrial growth to slow down despite the growing demand for Halal food products globally. "Market need, consumer demand and industry scenario must be re-engineered and realigned in order to achieve standardised Halal certification" (Zulfakar, Anuar and Ab Talib, 2014). Therefore, procedures for the application of Halal certification should not be too strict or too lenient as it may results in the players in halal industry to

drift apart and avoid re-applying which will raise new issues such as false Halal certification and misused of the procedures or to claim that non-halal ingredients to be Halal (Zulfakar, Anuar and Ab Talib, 2014).

4.2. Policy Red Tape

A study on Halal implementation is used to understand the process, steps-by-steps procedures, guidelines and paperwork that are involved during the process of implementing and acquiring Halal certifications for any food and beverages premises starting from obtaining guidelines which has been provided by Halal authorities. The study of Halal implementation has led to a study of policy red tape. According to Pandey and Moynihan (2006) in a basic understanding, policy red tape can be defined as a set of rules and regulations along with procedures that are in force by specific authority for applicant to follow through in order to obtain the desired and specific system. According to Abd.Ghani (2012) the process of obtaining halal policy red tape began from the stage where the application to the authorized authority is completed. In general, all the required documents are used to declare the detailed profile about the status of Halal especially towards the ingredients that are being used. Furthermore, Abd.Ghani (2012) stated that the overall process of obtaining halal certification is not a simple task. In actual fact, in order for SMEs to meet the required standard, the needs of high creditability in all elements which starts from the input up until where the food or finished products are ready for distribution into the market or the end users. Moreover Spiegel et.al (2012) stated that there are several major aspects of halal production that are mostly available at the standards and guidelines such as MSI1500:2004 of Malaysia standards. This is needed to clarify clearly and explain the requirements sequentially to compile and obtain Halal certification and permits issued by the authority such as Majlis Ugama Islam Brunei Darussalam (Majlis). This also includes getting accreditation along with the fees and charges to obtain it including the timeframe such as the expiry date of the certifications and the duration taken before premises are being Halal certified. All of these procedures are needed and compulsory to be obtained by SMEs in Brunei in order to meet Brunei'sstandard for Halal food, PBD24:2007. Furthermore, three crucial follow-up will also be included in Halal implementation process; adequacy, compliance and audits appointed by certified authorities. Adequacy audits is a documented audit used to inspect which content supportive documents required by Majlis such as list of ingredients used, packaging of materials which needs to meet the requirement of Halal certificate and Halal label order provided. There are verses in the Quran that confirms that human beings will be accounted for their deeds on the day of resurrection in which all the deeds either big or small will be checked evenly.
"And we set a just balance for the Day of Resurrection so that no soul is wronged in aught. Though it be of the weight of a grain of mustard seed, We will bring it. And we suffice for reckoners." (Al-Anbiya, 21:47)

4.3. Global Accreditation

Global accreditation has been defined to be one of the major key advantages and a greater benchmark especially for small-medium enterprises in developing countries to gain international and global market share and market segment. The growing Halal market allows SMEs to be more recognisable and well known in a wider and global context in which the growth of Muslim food market are expected to grow to $1,626 billion by 2018. That accounts 17.4% of the global expenditure as stated by Shikoh (2013) as cited by the Halal Journal (2014). According to Padmadinata (2007) the global accreditation encourages opportunities such as penetrating the markets from variety other countries without any doubts and significant barriers limiting SMEs to move about and gain beneficial advantages. According to Borzooei and Asgari (2013) Halal hub in its operational meaning is also known as the "centre", "critical mass" or the "core" in which it gives opportunity and encouragement for most of the developing countries including Brunei to set aims and sights into becoming the next Halal hub in the Halal industry in producing and certifying Halal food to cater the worldwide market. Furthermore, such a characteristic in the global position enhance the credibility and wholesomeness of the Halalimage in the marketplace (Othman et al., 2009; Noordin et al., 2009). Despite the availability of previous studies that addressed the study of global recognition and Halal hub such as establishing a global halal hub (Borzooei and Asgari, 2013), Malaysia as an international halal food hub (Othman et.al, 2009), value chain of halal certification system (Noordin et.al, 2009) and Quality management system and Product certification process and practices for SMEs in Indonesia (Padmadinata, 2007), there are still more gap to be fill in. Thus, this study will attempt to analyse the perceptions and acceptances of three groups of people (Consumers, Clients and Customers) towards Brunei gaining a global recognition for its Halal standard. The three C's are a group of customer with different characteristics in which customers are the people that purchase the products in the market, consumers consume or use the products that are bought and clients are the group of people that listen to advices and personalised the solution based on their needs (Fisher, 2013).

5. Research Methodology

This research uses both interview and questionnaire distribution in collecting necessary data needed. 50questionnaires were circulated to broad areas of people with different background, different understanding and perception on Halal implementation, government rules and regulation and acceptance of consumers on Brunei gaining accreditation widely and globally which enable and has led to better information collection from different perspectives. In addition, interviews were conducted with restaurateurs and the government officers in Brunei Darussalam to develop further understanding and contextualise their understanding, perceptions and expectations toward Halal certification. In-depth interview helped the researchers to develop a further understanding of how the restaurateurs' respond towards Muslim dietary needs and prohibitions; and enabled the researchers to gain participant's perspective on factors and attributes of Halal certification implementation that focuses on food service industry of Brunei.

6. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics for each variable in order to determine the distribution of the data, means and standard deviations that were calculated through the software, SPSS. The three variables, namely, Halal standardisation; policy red tape; and perception and acceptance towards global accreditation were used to determine whether there is a co-relation between the dependant variables to Halal implementation in Brunei. The result is a positive relation in which it was supported by the findings where restaurant managers claimed during the interviews that with Halal certification, the food provided for customers is guaranteed for its hygiene and it prevents customers from being uncertain towards the ingredients used and the food provided.Apart from that, the respondents also claimed that through implementing Halal certification and being a Halal certified restaurant, it enables SMEs to gain extra advantages to increase their revenues and Brunei to gain opportunity to be a Halal-Hub in global perspective. Thus, the result of the study has proven that the researchers have achieved the two main objectives of this research.

Majority of the respondents participated in this study showed interest and concern on Halal status towards food and beverages industry. Implementation of Halal certificate has become essential for food and beverages industry in Brunei and the actual implementation of it has become one of the most crucial requirements every restaurant premises should have. Overall, respondents in Brunei believed that being a Halal certified restaurant or premises gives an advantage especially currently, Halal market is seen growing positively and consumers demand to have Halal certified food and beverages. The study on Halal standardisation has led to a study on Halal logo and the standards that are being used on products. According to Ambali and Bakar (2014) in their study that awareness among consumers towards the importance of consuming products and engaging with services based on Islamic guidelines and principles has been generated and become an important aspect as the introduction of Halal logo and its standards has been introduced. In which 42% of the respondents are strongly confident that with Halal certificate or Halal logo, it gives assurance that the ingredients or additives used in the restaurants are Halal and premises serve on Halal and consumable food especially for Muslim consumers. This finding is supported by Ambali and Bakar (2014) in their study where it was stated that with the availability of Halal standardisation, it shows that the food or beverages that are available in the market are considered as trusted in terms of three factors: hygiene, safety and Halal transparency.Sanep Ahmad et.al (2007) stated that Halal logo enables the processes of consumers buying the products or services to feel ease and certain on a basis of religiously consumable or allowable. Moreover, considering the awareness towards Halal standards and logo, the results of the study showed that consumers are very concerned about Halal food and the logo that are being put on food products and used in restaurants.42% of the respondents are on an average confident towards the availability of international standard for Halal logo in the local (Brunei) market that is considered trustable. This is finding is substantiated by the evidence that consumers are now more concern on evaluating the purity of Halal especially on food and beverages terms (Rezai, Mohamed and Shamsuddin, 2012). Rezai, Mohamed and Shamsuddin (2012) also stated that, consumers are much more sceptical on whereabouts or the origin of the products despite the countries is having its own Islamic council. Therefore, the availability of Halal standard has given several advantages to Muslim countries especially in terms of promoting in the global market. Apart from understanding it in the context of country's revenues, the availability of Halal standard can also be applied to consumers' context in which with Halal standard, it gives the quality of food and beverages a guarantee and eliminate doubts as per mentioned earlier in this chapter (Samori, Kassan and Ishak, 2014).

Furthermore, Halal market and its demand has been growing time to time. Based on the result from the questionnaire majority of the respondents strongly agree towards the potential of Brunei Halal market being a Halal Hub and to gain global recognition for its Halal standard. According to Nik Muhammad, Md Isa and Kifli (2009), gaining global accreditation or in general Halal-Hub is one of the platform that allows Halal supply-chain and certification for assurance to be generated. Moreover, Halal is more than purely religious issues, it has been understood as a symbol for global quality assurance and lifestyle choice. The growing acknowledgement of Halal industry has led Brunei to position itself as one of the trading Halal hub. The emerging of Halal industry has also became as one of the most profitable and dominant market arenas in today's world, events, society interest and consumer demand and awareness globally (Nik Muhammad, Md.Isa and Kifli, 2009). Furthermore, Mohamed et.al (2008) agrees that confidence level is one of the factors that define consumers' view towards Halal products and it does not only confine towards the religious point of view. Respondents stated that the opportunity of going global enables Brunei Halal market to gain international recognition along with enables it to increase the country's revenue therefore this has been supported by Samori, Kassan and Ishak (2014), that this gives opportunity for a country to increase the country's proceeds especially in the global ground. Ismail and Che Arshad (2009) also mentioned that, by being globally accredited a country may have a greater opportunity and enormous market to endeavour into especially for Halal products as it is acceptable and consumable by all.

Besides that, this research also conducted a particular part on the policy red tape, costs and duration taken during Halal certificate implementation along with the awareness towards the necessary processes, respondents believed that every restaurant should display Halal certification as today's food industry is more to a consumer oriented industry. This result has been supported by Habib et.al (2011) in their study of fast food consumption where it stated that Halal status is one of the influential factors especially towards consumers' purchasing power. Furthermore, Abdul Aziz and Sulaiman (2014) in their study stated that, the availability of Halal policy has become essential as a protection to foods that are supplied and protection towards society health and safety as it contributes to hygiene along with justification for ethical issues. Majority of the respondents are aware of all the necessary processes including the fees required and the duration taken in order to have the Halal certificates in which the awareness of the respondents (at 66.67%) shows that despite the length procedures needed to obtain the certification, respondents understand the importance of understanding the Islamic dietary system. This is supported by Othman et.al (2006) as cited in Zailani et.al (2011) where mentioned despite the considerable costs and high investment needed especially during the initial stages however, the initiatives of complying with the required Halal requirements are no longer seen as a threat but it is clearly seen as an opportunity for most businesses and it has become a source for businesses to sustain its competitive advantages.

From the results of the interview session especially on the effectiveness and efficiency of the Halal certification bodies and authority in Brunei providing guidance to applicants during the Halal implementation process, two results where complied where Muslim applicants gave a positive respond towards the stated question, whereas, non-Muslim applicants gave a slightly different responds towards it. Therefore, it is recommended that the authority and its ministry should concern more on the quality of services in order to provide balance quality of services to both parties hence; this enables the specific authority and its ministry to avoid giving bias responds or decision making. For example authority should give equal or balanced service or guidance to both parties to ease the process of obtaining the Halal certification and help applicants to go through steps-by-steps procedures. Apart from that, during the interview the respondents managed to express their dissatisfaction towards the length procedures, therefore, it is recommended that the authority of Halal certification would consider to improvise their system and adopt innovative technologies so that applicants would feel ease to apply and hence, applicants would cooperate together especially towards complying with the rules and regulation of all that are required. Apart from cutting the lengthy time short, by adopting new system and innovation it enables the process of obtaining Halal certification or implementation to be more efficient and effective especially towards entering to the international market arena. In addition, over the years of escalating Halal market customers are mostly depending on Halal logo as an indication that the products are consumable by Muslim and are consider Halal. Undoubtedly SMEs or manufacturers tend to misused and fabricate the Halal logo in order to order to appear as Halal certified premises, therefore with the rapidly developing technologies, this study is recommending the authority to adopt radio frequency identification technology (RFID) which can be used as a validation system in order to enhance the existing system used in Brunei. RFID enables to authenticate Halal logo easily as this new approach enables to scan and match the unique barcode series that are being used automatically hence, easy to identify a fake or an authentic Halal logo (Mohd Nasir et.al, 2011).

7. Conclusion and Recommendations
The rapid growth of Halal market along with the increasing acknowledgement and growing market demand of Halal market has lead and created a path for Brunei Halal industry to merge itself into a huge international market. With the availability of ingenious plans that helped Brunei to turning its Halal Brand into a must-have brand, Brunei may become the major producer and key player especially in this globally growing Halal market. Acceptance on Halal brand had taken place and this is an opportunity for Brunei in making itself as a centre of the next major Halal-Hub country just like its other neighbouring countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia.Therefore, it is hoped that the findings of this research be used by the relevant ministry in the standardising of Halal implementation system in Brunei. It is also hoped that this research be used as a of a large scale research to determine the implementation, standardisation and acceptance of Halal in Brunei as a whole.

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