

Linking Halal Requirement and Branding: An Examination of Halal Flight Kitchen Provider in Malaysia

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Abstract— There is something very appealing about Halal branding and its linked to Halal requirements. The establishment of Halal branding is actually closely related to Syariah compliance requirements. This study aims to explore how Halal branding is created in the context of Halal Flight Kitchen in Malaysia. This study adopted single case study method for deep exploration of the topic. This interpretive study opted for semi-structured interview, observation, and documents review as a main data collection method. Findings suggest proper segregation, sertu and workers hygiene are the three main elements to establish Halal branding in Halal flight kitchen. This study is among the pioneering research on Halal branding establishment from Flight Kitchen perspective

Keywords— Halal, Halal requirements, Halal branding, Halal Kitchen, Airline, Kosher

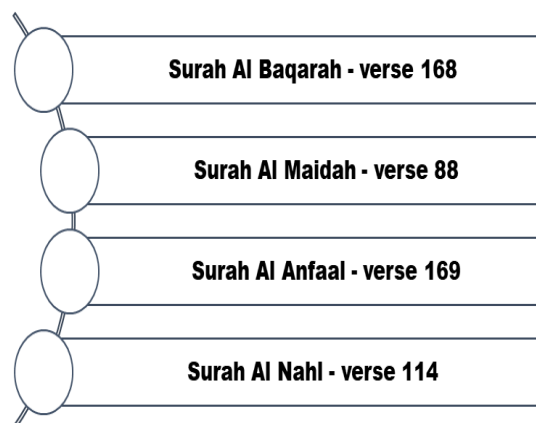
1. Introduction

Halal Definition and Halal Food Supply Chain

Essentially, Halal is a Quranic term that explains two elements namely permissible and Thayyib. Permissible here means the food is not Haram

(prohibited) and it is lawful in traditional Islamic law. While Thayyib explains about cleanliness, healthy, safe and quality. Halal is closely related to Islam and a Halal product is also known as Muslim friendly product. The ‘Halal’ term has been mentioned in Al Quran in four (4) surah; Surah Al Baqarah, Surah Al Maidah, Surah Al Anfaal and Surah An Nahl (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Halal explanation in Al Quran



Globally, the growth of current and future Muslim population convinces us that Halal food demand will also continuously increase. At present, the total population of Muslims in the world is at the second

rank after the Christians. According to Pew research centre [1], in fifty (50) years' time, the total number of Muslim population will be leading since fertility of Muslim women proven higher than Christians. Research by Pew research centre also shows that the total population of Muslim in the world will reach 2.76 billion in the year 2050. Addendum to that, the demand for Halal food will be the main focus worldwide. As such, Halal has become a branding that is connected to Islamic Marketing or Islamic Branding. It is about the strictness, the quality, the credibility and the quality of the product. Strictness here refers to the adherence of the Islamic law of not serving food that contains pork and meats that is not slaughtered based on requirements. This is very appealing about Halal branding. A study from [2], Muslim believers naturally expect that business conduct and marketing activity is impacted by the precepts of their faith. Halal has become a branding whereby it is certified and approved to be regarded as wholesomeness and high quality requirement due to rigorous controls and checks throughout the supply chain

This is also supported by recent scholars [3,4], agreeing that every business parties are responsible to ensure that the Halal product status must be maintained from the point of origin until the point of consumption. However, this coverage does not reflect the ingredients only, but it includes the whole supply chain activity of its Halal product such as the logistics activity of the product including transport, warehouse and at the retail. This view shows that Halal integrity throughout the supply chain activity is significant. Therefore, each channel member must be aware and have knowledge about the halal requirements to ensure the Halal status of any product or raw materials from point of origin is still Halal when it reaches the consumers. While from the scholars or researcher's point of view, future research should focus on Halal branding issue and challenges.

As discussed above, Halal can be considered as one brand for Muslim product or services as it represents the image of the product. In other words, Rahman et al says the Halal brand is something related to the image and identity [5]. Once the product is Halal certified, it is a norm to mention that the product is related to Muslims, regarded as good quality product and permissible in Islamic law. Further, it complies with Shariah compliance.

Therefore, it is acceptable to say that Halal branding actually represents the compliance of Islamic principle. There are certain requirements that products need to fulfill to qualify them as a Halal product. In any Halal product or services, there are certain requirements to be fulfilled to categorize it as Halal. This is what we are trying to explore in the context of Halal Kitchen branding in the airline perspective that actually refers to the Halal requirement in the halal flight kitchen. Halal flight kitchen here refers to the halal kitchen provider or caterer to the airlines. As the in-flight food provider, the airline/caterer supply Halal food for passengers on board.

In industrial branding, service quality of any services provided links to the establishment of the branding and sustainability of the business performance [5]. In the halal context, we would say that halal branding refers to halal requirement compliance. Even though there is a study that looks into Halal branding, however, there is a dearth of study that focuses on the Halal flight kitchen perspective. From the past review, there is a number of studies that explains the actual definition of Halal. However, in explaining how do we ensure the genuineness of Halal food especially in the in-flight kitchen perspective, it is still vague in many aspect and context especially in maintaining the integrity of Halal at each point of supply chain activity such as transportation, manufacturing, distributing, warehousing, at the retail and during storing. Yet, Halal study, particularly in food supply chain, needs further attention. The halal term is not new, it exists decades ago and mentioned in the Holy Quran. Halal explanation in Al Quran is not only about food consumption, but also including things and action. Halal term has many connotations depends on what product or services [6,7,8]. Halal explains the true quality of a product in the Islamic religious context and by certifying bodies authorities in any country [4,9]. If branding (in the business to business context) refers to the name of the company, in Halal, branding is actually the attributes or the quality of each halal product or services itself. This view stated earlier in [10] who indicate that little research and theoretical branding in Halal development study. The recognition of the quality of each Halal product and Halal services exemplifies the Halal requirement itself.

With the emergence of Halal branding, other terms also arised to reflect Halal branding which is known as Muslim friendly. Halal branding signifies the image of the product or service that is complied with Sharia compliance. In other words, it means it complies with the Halal requirement, guidelines or standards. For any Halal product or services, there is a number of standards or guidelines that is established as a reference for any business player, manufacturer or any other stakeholder to refer to. For instance, in Malaysia, for Halal food, they should comply with MS1500, MS2400 for halal logistics player and MS2424 for Halal Pharmaceutical, they should comply with MS2424. The manufacturer (pharmaceuticals products) has complied with the requirements stipulated in the standard in manufacturing and handling of halal pharmaceutical products and shall be verified through site inspection as deemed necessary by the competent authority.

Halal VS Kosher: Holy Quran VS Thorat

On the other hand, the above entails similarities to branding in Kosher products. Similar to Halal, Kosher also have its main reference. Halal refers to Holy Quran while Kosher refers to Holy Thaurat. The Kosher branding is also well known. Kosher describe the food that is suitable and best for Jews to consume. There is vast literature that touch on the issue of Halal especially on food supply chain which mostly looks at the issue and challenges, the Halal integrity and halal requirement [11]. With the emergence of Halal and Kosher food, these two brands become the major focus of two different religious and practice. Despite the popularity of Halal and Kosher concept among practitioners and scholars, there is lack of study on Halal in the airline perspective such as Halal Flight Kitchen. Halal flight kitchen refers to the Halal food provider to the airline's company.

This current article considers the issue of halal requirement and the halal branding in the airline perspective. The main objective of this research paper is twofold. Firstly, this paper aims to explore the challenges in implementing halal in-flight kitchen. Secondly, to explore how Halal fit the requirement with halal branding. The remaining part of the paper is structured as follows. It starts with a review of past studies in Halal conceptualization and branding, followed by the methodology used in this study. After that, the

results and discussion explained and the paper concludes with possible scope for further research.

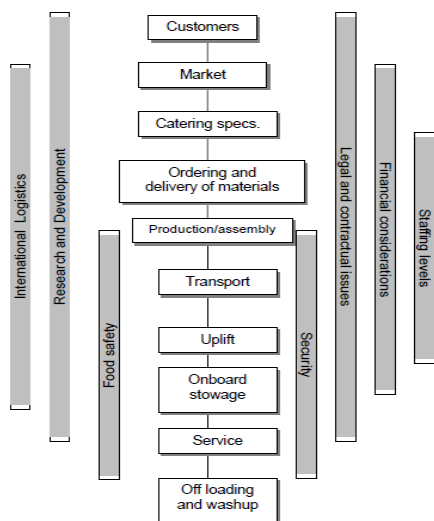
2. Literature Review

Halal flight kitchen

Halal food supply chain in the airline context started gaining popularity in the early 2000s. Halal food also supports Halal tourism activities worldwide. In this context, serving Halal food beverage in flight is significant to support Halal tourism [12]. Halal flight kitchen refers to the Halal Kitchen caterer that provides food to the airlines for passengers onboard. The in-flight meal menu is now moving toward customized and religious issue like Halal and Kosher. Flight catering is recognized as one of the important activity in the industry. The process of preparation of food to be served 30,000 feet above from the ground is much more complicated as compared to preparing a meal at the restaurants. Many parties involved such as suppliers, the halal kitchen or halal caterer, the materials, customers, and warehouse [13]. The airline caterer always has their scheduled menu like other caterers to support and meet passengers. For Halal in-flight meals, the way food and utensils are prepared, stored and served should comply with the Islamic Shariah regulations. We acknowledge the difficulties to ensure the integrity of the Halal in-flight meal from the point of preparation until to the point of consumption on-board. Case study examination per se in this field is insufficient in literature. This study aims to provide a framework of halal requirement challenges for understanding the Halal branding value that created to the halal flight kitchen or halal flight caterer.

Figure 2 below shows the in-flight catering system starting from categorizing customer requirements through the preparation until the preparation of the food. Means that, at each stage of preparing the menu until it been served on board it must comply with Halal requirement activity.

Figure 2: In-flight catering system



Source: Flight Catering, Butterworth Heinemann: Oxford

As shown in Figure 2 above, Halal flight catering process is similar to normal flight catering process except that at each point is critical to ensure no contamination occurs between halal and nonhalal food. It starts when they receive information about their passengers. Then, airlines will consult the halal caterer or halal flight kitchen provider on the product and services specification. This specification refers to the exact food. An earlier study from [14,15], in response to forecasts of passenger numbers on any given flight, the production unit follows a series of complex steps to produce tray meals and non-food items ready for transportation to the aircraft.

Major stakeholders in-flight catering

The in-flight catering industry consists of five major players: the airlines, or their various representatives; the providers, in this case, Halal specialized flight caterers; the suppliers, either to the providers or direct to the airlines; those using the airline's services that is the fare-paying passengers and distributors. The major stakeholders' activity process flow in the aviation industry shown in Figure 3 below. Alongside, Table 1 shows the roles of these five major stakeholders in halal flight catering.

Figure 3: Major stakeholders in halal in-flight catering

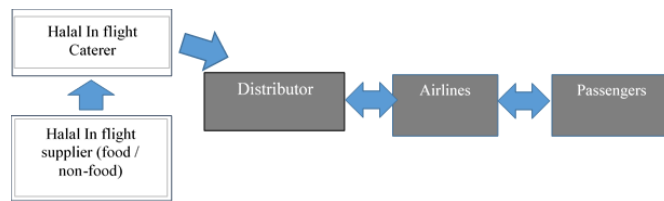


Table 1: Role of Halal in-flight catering stakeholders

Role of each stakeholder	Description
Halal in-flight caterer	Caterers have two main roles: to prepare items not bought indirectly from suppliers to a state ready for loading on board and to assemble trays and trolleys. Flight kitchens are always located near to major airports and are usually used to manufacturer's consumable food items.
Halal in flight supplier	Distributors are typically global logistics companies, specializing in moving goods around the world, often in containers. They provide two main services for airlines or caterers. They can distribute materials and meals from vendor/suppliers to both the caterers and the airlines and they can track the numbers, volumes, and brands of the products they distribute. Using a specialized distributor or logistics company allows the airline and caterer to better manage the flow of materials from aircraft to flight kitchen and back again. This applies to both short-term food items and to longer-term recyclable items, including equipment.
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Airlines Airlines are responsible for the design of onboard service. This is influenced by the flight time, duration of flight, point of embarkation and disembarkation, nationality or ethnicity of passengers, seat class (economy, business or first), budget allowed by the airline, price of food, seasonality of food, cost of labour to make a food item, time required to serve the food, number of flight attendants available to serve food, time needed to consume food, ability of meal to be consumed in a small place on a plane, the time and effort needed to clear an item, the needs and desires of the passengers, odours that may penetrate the cabin, the ability of meal to be etherealised and the ability of the meal to withstand low humidity and pressures. Given this long list of variables, it is not surprising that the nature of on board service varies widely from flight to flight and airline to airline.

3. Design, methodology and approach

The focus of this study requires deep exploration of the topic and the most suitable method to understand the phenomena is by adopting qualitative methodology. Case study method adopted to answer both objectives developed earlier. Single halal flight kitchen provider in Malaysia been chosen as a starting point for further exploration in future. Also, the choice of this

company been made as there is an approval from this company to be involved in this study compared to other companies that we contacted. However, we have to keep the name in secret for a confidential purpose. For the purpose of this study, we will call this organization as Case A. As suggested by [16,17,18] and other qualitative researchers such as [19,20], the best method to study the unexplored phenomenon is through qualitative methodology. We believe that case study is the best method for understanding complex phenomena and in developing theory.

As explained by [21], "the case study is a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within a single setting". As such, the use of case study strategy in understanding the challenges in implementing Halal flight kitchen in Malaysia is well justified. Regarding the single case study in this research, there is an overlapping argument from the scholars whether to use single or multiple cases. However, [22,23,24,4], emphasise that, there is nothing wrong with using one case in case study research because "*one can often generalise on the basis of a single case*". This is also supported by [25]. Thus, the above arguments justifies a single case study used in this research.

In order to understand the issue of Halal requirement challenges and its link with halal branding in nature, two interviews were conducted in case A. Subsequent to the interview, document review on Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) been performed to provide deeper and further understanding. Transcribing voice recorder into verbatim, coded and categorized performed after the interview. The process of data collection controlled by emerging themes. This study uses purposive and theoretical sampling to fill the gap of halal in-flight kitchen study on the requirement and challenges. By using single case study, the data provided are comprehensive in nature - in the quest of understanding this unexplored phenomenon.

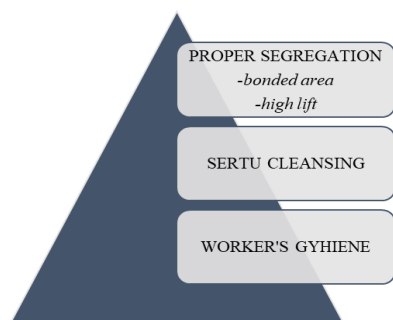
4. Findings

The requirement for Halal Flight Kitchen

From the detailed and in-depth interviews with *Halal* flight kitchen operator, there are three main critical halal requirements highlighted. Both of the interviewees shed light on these three issues

namely proper segregation, sertu (shariah cleansing) and worker's hygiene.

Figure 4: Three (3) main issues highlighted



From the findings on the issue of proper segregation requirements, respondent emphasizes on two main type of segregation namely segregation in the bonded area and segregation in the high lift. Both respondents agree that cross-contamination at the bonded area can occur when bacteria and viruses transferred from a contaminated surface to one that is not contaminated. The bacteria and viruses can come from people, work surfaces or equipment, and other foods. For example, it can happen when bacteria from the surface of the raw meat, poultry, and raw vegetables with visible dirt such as unwashed potatoes, transferred onto ready to eat food, such as green salads, rice or pasta salads, cooked meats or poultry or even fruit. This is aligned with what has been stated by Food Safety Information Council (2008) that highlight the bacteria on the raw food are killed when the food is cooked, but the ready to eat food gets eaten without further cooking bacteria and all.

Respondents did also mention about the segregation during transportation and lifting up of the products. Accordingly, the person in charge which was the loader driver must take note that he must meet the two criteria below during handling the Halal and non-Halal products :

- i. No Halal and non-Halal product can be transported in the same truck or container and;
- ii. If any Halal or non-Halal product transported in the same truck or container it must be correctly segregated.

Secondly, the issue of sertu machine requirement. Sertu or also called as Syariah ritual cleansing is a process of cleaning that ensures there is no occurrence of contamination from nonhalal substance. One of the challenges been highlighted is the sertu need to be performed by well-trained

staff. Staff needs to be trained on how to use a machine and then follow the procedure. Another challenge is that their sertu machine is quite old, may need to be replaced. During the sertu process, sertu machine and sertu powder will be used by the well-trained staff. As mentioned by the interviewees, all their customers (airlines) aware of the process and will allow them to perform the sertu process. The sertu machine is operated by a specifically trained staff and they are aware of the sertu process and will use sertu powder to clean the related products.

The third issue highlighted by both respondents is related to the workers' hygiene. As explained by the interviewee, all staffs must wear gloves. This is important to avoid bacteria from spreading to the passengers. This is serious as bacteria can easily get spread to the spoon and fork during via direct contact and touch. All workers are required to wear hand gloves since hands are recognized as the easier medium in transferring bacteria from raw to ready to eat food, but direct contact or undirected contact with any items in the food preparation can also spread the bacteria. In order to prevent this, the staff must:

- a) Wash hands with soap and hot water before and after handling food, and after using the bathroom, changing diapers; or handling pets.
- b) Use hot, soapy water and paper towels or clean clothes to wipe up kitchen surfaces or spills. Wash cloth in the hot cycle of your washing machine.
- c) Wash cutting boards, dishes, and countertops with hot, soapy water after preparing each food item and before you go on to the next item.

The above discussion on Halal requirement at the halal kitchen is summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2: The Halal requirement in the Halal Flight kitchen

Issues with regards Halal requirements	Explanation from the interviewee
<u>A. Must have Proper segregation</u>	"All Halal must be segregated from the non Halal product at all times. Segregation can be provided by leaving ample space between Halal and non Halal
a. Cross-contamination in the bonded area	

b.	Cross-contamination in the high lift	product or by providing totally separate storage areas for Halal and non Halal product”
B. Hygiene		“All workers must wear gloves and caps all the time”
a.	Wearing gloves and hygiene cap	
C. Proper handling of Sertu		Most of the staffs are foreign workers from Bangladesh. We already trained them for 7 to 8 years until they can fluently speak Bahasa Malaysia and already trained them by schedule. We did not limit the usage of this machine to several airlines. As what being said by the interviewee they used it to all airlines and they used the so-called "Samak Powder" when the machine was in the operational mode.
a.	Sertu machine	
b.	Sertu powder	

In addition, in implementing Halal kitchen supply chain, halal flight caterer must also be well versed with the requirement set by the Halal agency. The requirement outlines are based on the Halalan Thoyyibban principle to ensure the Halal integrity from farm to fork. And this actually refers to the process of Halal branding establishment for Halal inflight catering or also known as Halal flight kitchen. The next subsection will further discuss the relationship between Halal branding and Halal requirements.

How Halal requirement fit Halal branding?

To answer how Halal requirement fit Halal branding, both respondents agree that the Halal requirements itself are actually representing Halal branding establishment. An earlier study by Rahman et al [5] shows that logistics branding was established based on the quality of the services provided by the logistics provider. Means that the quality of the service provided by the third party

logistics provider will create recognition to the logistics provider which in turn help to establish logistics branding. As in logistics context, the name of the company itself is the brand of the company.

In this context, both respondents suggest that Halal brand establishment actually depends on the requirements that are already set up by JAKIM (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia), MAIN (Majlis Agama Islam Negeri) and also standards Department of Malaysia. Meaning that, when we mention Halal food, it is acknowledged that the food actually complies with halal requirements set up by JAKIM and MAIN, and it complies with MS1500 standards for instance.

5. Contributions, practical implications, and future research agenda

This study contributes to branding and food supply chain research in two major ways namely linking the halal requirement with halal branding creation; and also halal flight catering investigation which is very lacking in the halal food supply chain literature.

Future research should also investigate Halal flight catering from passenger and regulator perspectives.

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