

An Experts' Perspective Based on Consumers' Perception of Halal-Related Issue

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Abstract:

Consumers perceived halal concept differently from each other. Many issues cater to their understanding level, as previous scholars highlighted several factors that contributed to their perceptions. The commencement of the halal logo is one of the substantial parts of efforts in influencing consumers' consideration while building their feelings of assurance towards purchase selection, thus interesting to be discovered. This qualitative study aims to highlight a finding on halal-related issues based on consumers' perceptions. It has been analytically explained from an experts' perspective through an in-depth interview session. Based on the discussion among eight halal experts in this country, the finding reveals six major concerns demonstrated as an essential part of the study, and they were issues of 'fake' logo, COC, religion, ingredients, lacking knowledge and Islamic clues. The outcomes of various issues lead to the conclusion that may grab authorities' attention and sufficient for additional input for the advancement of the halal concept in this country.

Keywords: *Consumers, halal concepts, halal-related issues, perception, experts*

Introduction

The term "halal" is linked with the definition of allowing or permitting any consumable items that have been implied by Islamic rules and shariah. Due to its booming prestige in the global halal market, the indication of the halal logo has been introduced to enlarge further belief and trust during halal consumption. Additionally, it has been declared to persuade the heart of rapid users (Soraji et al., 2017), and crucial as a risk reduction strategy in assuming products' quality (Dimara and Skuras, 2003).

The halal certification mark is generally issued based on the basic principles and procedures aligned as good, safe and fit to consume (H. Iberahim et. al, 2012). Most importantly, it is not only remaining to its understanding, credible characteristic and trust, but moreover in influencing consumers' choices and preferences, thus deeply importance as a cue to Muslim for both religious and quality purposes (Bonne and Verbeke, 2008), (Gurnert, 2006).

In general, consuming halal is closely associated with the religious obligation and requirements as a Muslim, which mentioned in the Quran and hadith, Due to that, it is interesting to briefly discuss the issues facing by the consumers while experiencing on halal practices, commonly during their purchases. A review of the literature undertaken found many influential factors determine their intention of halal purchasing. Despite with the efficiency level of halal certification process (Siti Mashitoh, 2013), other factors may include such as consumers' religiousness and beliefs, confidence and trust on halal labels, education levels, limitless access to halal information, and rising income levels (Sungkar, 2010).

A qualitative research procedure applied to develop the findings, as it suits to capture a detail view in its natural settings. A practice of in-depth interview process is more potent in eliciting native data to investigate people in greater depth (Kvale, 1996). Additionally, it offers valuable data in terms of enabling interviewees to speak their voice and express their thought and feelings (Berg, 2007: 96). In this study, the selection of sample size was according to the selective-purposive sampling, which compromises the experts that have the knowledge and experience with study interest. In the qualitative method, it is common to use purposive sampling as it provides effectiveness in collecting rich information (Patton, 2002).

These underlying issues warrant further attention; thus, it is interesting need and scope for a study to discover their perception, especially to the halal concepts and its related issues. In responding to that, the experts' responses have been gathered purposely to reveal more concise understanding and highlight several issues based on the consumers' perceptions in Malaysia. Although some attempts have been made to address this issue, it still needs more in-depth evidence to light the potential of halal mechanism in this country. Consequently, the study must discover the Muslim consumers' perception and their understanding of halal-related issues for the improvement of the halal industry in Malaysia.

Methodology

The in-depth interview method was carried out among various halal-relevant experts consists of the expertise's from the Religious Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), academicians from public universities in Malaysia, representatives from Islamic councils, and non-profit government organization (NGO). The qualitative procedure among purposively-selected informants was used to select the sample size. It has implied the contributions of open-ended questions through face to face interviews, verbally enacted and recorded to seek further understanding. The verbal data were transcribed and analyzed expressively with the inputs from thematic procedures, and supportive evidence of literature contents. Participant details and its certification bodies have been shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Details of Certification Bodies Involved

Name of a certification body	Description	Participant's Designation
Islamic Religious Affairs Department of Penang (JAKIM)	Halal Penang - State Authorization body	Chief Assistant Director
State Islamic Religious Department Pulau Pinang (JAIS)	MAINPP - State Authorization body	Yang Dipertua
Islamic Religious Affairs Department of Kedah (JAKIM)	Halal Kedah - State Authorization body	Chief Assistant Director
Islamic Religious Affairs Department of Perak (JAKIM)	Halal Perak - State Authorization body	Chief Assistant Director
School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University Science Malaysia	Sch. Pharmacy USM - Public body	Professor, Academician
International Institute For Halal Research And Training (Inhart), Int. Islamic University of Malaysia.	UIAM Inhart - Public body	Asst. Professor
Consumers' of Penang (CAP)	Non-Profit Government Organization	NGO, liaison person
Islamic Center, University Science Malaysia	Internal university's authorization	Chief Assistant Director

Results and Discussion

Through thematic procedures involves, the study summarized the findings from the interview process conducted to demonstrate the significant perspectives of halal-related issues from the experts. Table 2 presented below:

Table 2: Experts' findings on halal-related issues

Issues	Verbal Data	Initial Codes	Themes
Issue 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Numbers of fake logo cases reduced ▪ The word 'fake' familiar at ground ▪ Term 'unauthorized' much suitable ▪ Many types of the fake logo in the market ▪ "Fake" term usually discussed in western countries ▪ The use of "fake" term rarely happen in Malaysia ▪ Apply unrecognized halal logo- most suitable ▪ Illegal halal logo usage is frequently happen ▪ Apply halal logo without JAKIM acknowledgement 	Feedback on "fake" terms	Misunderstanding of "fake" halal logo usage
Issues 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Religious belief will become certainly important in guiding peoples' purchase pattern – as one of the best options to reduce curiosity. ▪ As a Muslim, it has become a part of the religious principles and requirements in seeking haleness as been declared through hadith and Quran with the obligations allowed to do and not do ▪ Those having a religious knowledge will be much aware, particular and cautious during food selection, thus guides them to look for alternative or methods to check on products' status with responsible authority", and "they usually will reach authority by asking certain questions typically on product's status 	Religious influence	The religious factor most relevant

Issues 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Many people are taking granted on the product' status, simultaneously on the halal logo and its certification. ▪ Muslim entrepreneurs merely take granted on the product status and tend to give many excuses to the policy and procedures endorsed by the authorities ▪ Many cases showing by the consumer, whose generally ignore the product's status, take granted to the information received, consume a product with fewer concerns of its haleness status, or perhaps at least the efforts to improve their understanding 	Gives excuses, ignore product status	Consumers' taking granted
Issue 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The revised Malaysia halal logo with the added text "Malaysia" and "Jakim", not only helping in differentiating the fake with the genuine logo, furthermore increase the feelings of safety and guarantees to consume the product. Thus, when it comes to the international halal logo, consumers will likely to put preference such as the halal logo must be from a trusted authorized body which recognized by JAKIM, and must be categorized as Islamic countries 	Put logo preferences	Country of origin
Issue 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The ingredient details with scientific terms and terminologies are confusing, misrecognized and unfamiliar. At worst, there is no specific ingredient handbook to be used as a reference to easily recognized the applied ingredient terms in general; hence it's material authenticity, its origins of natural and chemical ingredients. 	Not enough info on the ingredient	Lacking knowledge on ingredients' info
Issues 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Many products in the recent market apply the words "Halal guaranteed", or "Muslim-made product", or "Pure and Clean" at their package, or some other cases they are using an Islamic symbol such as mosques, green colour, or applied Islamic text as brand's name such as "Ibrahim". 	Islamic clues usage	The attraction of Islamic clues

- Similar cases can found with the application of Quran phrases or sentences at food premises in Arabic form, or the word “Bismillah” which is generally can be practised with the approval of the authority.”

Discussion

Issue 1. The misunderstanding of the usage of “fake” term

Issue 1 in Table 2 above highlighted the different terms used to signify halal logo status. The misunderstanding to the keywords used from “fake” halal logo or “unauthorized” halal logo demonstrated the comparisons of views and feedback from the scholars, academician, and researcher in the halal field of study, with the experts’ group typically engaged or occupied with authorities’ body especially JAKIM and Islamic councils. Experts wisely responded to the term usage by saying that there is an enormous meaning of “fake” halal logo to represent the study, yet subjective to justify.

Roshadah (2019) indicated, there are two types of issues on halal logo usage. First is by implementing the endorsed halal logo from JAKIM, while the manufacturer is not an official certificate holder – which can be assumed as fake halal logo usage. And meanwhile, the other issue is they endorsed their halal logo version by doing some changes or modified the halal logo not as approved by JAKIM – which can be assumed as uncertified halal logo usage. Therefore, it can be considered that the existing of the fake halal logo in the recent market is applicable, yet, the numbers of them are getting decreased.

Experts observed, most cases associated with the illegal halal logo usage, by applying the halal logo without JAKIM’s acknowledgement. A few of them described it as putting unrecognized halal logo- which most suitable and relevant. In reality, there are many cases reported about this issue. However, most of the feedback exposed on their claims that the term used is irrelevant to be used in Malaysia (Malik, 2019), which does frequently happen in non-Islamic countries such as in the US, etc. Experts argued that the issues of information delivery, failed to reach the manufacturers, or perhaps they ignore information due in chasing selling purposes and marketing strategy, could be a reason.

The fussiness process in seeking the certification, long period to earn the certificate, failed to reach information and financial constraints, are mostly highlighted as excuses (Faizal, 2019). Nevertheless, the issue of halal logo misused is officially declared in the halal guideline and protected by Trade Description 1975 (Roshadah, 2019). There is also a significant concern highlighted by the experts to the amendment of halal logo JAKIM with the added text of "Malaysia" and "JAKIM" which is helpful to differentiate the genuine halal logo of Malaysia with the other international halal logo.

Zyad (2019) explained, with the rising numbers of imported goods and products recently, has making ease the recognition process for international halal logo, which is acknowledged by JAKIM, thus immensely helping to reduce the doubts and purchase conflict, and the detection of halal logo misused. Furthermore, the indication of the halal logo certified by the authority is helpful to increase public awareness. They were agreed by Syed Shah Alam (2011) that social pressure had influenced consumers' decisions to have halal consumptions, thus boost their priorities, preferences, and needs, especially for halal food products.

Relevantly, most of the consumers are relying on the halal logo to gain assurance, more particular, and do consideration further before any purchase decision-making. Hence, the issue of having a genuine halal certification must be crucially enhanced the concerns of them in satisfying their consumers. Syed Shah Alam (2011) dictated, attitude, social norm, and perceived control has significance on the intention to purchase or consume halal food. This has implied the meaning that the aim of halal food purchasing compromised before making an actual purchase.

Issues 2. The religious factor is the most relevant

The religious issue falls in no two, as presented in Table 2 above. Religious provides a foundation for one's subjective belief system (Ysseldyk et al., 2010) and behavioural intention (Soliman and Wilson, 2017). As mentioned by Muhamad et al., (2016), consumers with more excellent religious knowledge remarkably influence in the marketplace, abiding by religious teachings to engage in the marketplace behaviours (Muhamad and Mizerski, 2013) thus affecting the intention of buying

halal products (Shah Alam and Mohamad Sayuti, 2011). Nevertheless, religion able to shape a person's thinking and attitude based on the value they uphold (Borzooei et al., 2013); hence, this raises the intention of using the halal logo during the purchasing process (Nazlida et al., 2017).

These shreds of evidence supported the findings conducted in 2019, as experts revealed the impact of religious inputs to promote consumers' understanding and their behaviour towards the halal logo, thus enable in determining halal food shaping and eating patterns. As a Muslim, it has become a part of the religious principles and requirements in seeking haleness as been declared through hadith and Quran with the obligations allowed to do and not do, said Zyad (2019). Hence, the impact of religion will likely develop as a reference and guideline for a Muslim, as Islam has provided specific guidelines and principles for the consumption of goods and services (Norhayati Zakaria and Abdul Taib, 2010). Moreover, it pertains to a fundamental strength that must be achieved while handling an issue of halal. It also strengthens the definition of halal itself as closely associated with the demonstration of hygiene, safety, and quality aspects, thus aligned with Islamic values, rules, and principles.

Consuming the halal logo is a religious driven behaviour (Nalida et al., 2017). As eloquently stated by Faizal (2019), those having a religious knowledge will be much aware, particular, and cautious during food selection. This scenario will guide them to look for alternative or methods to check on products' status with the responsible authority. They usually will reach authority by asking certain questions typically on the product's status in the form of email, formal letter, observe website or phone call, to earn clarification and explanation. This is proven that religiosity is the most important cultural forces and influences on consumer behaviour (Delenar, 1994), including consumers' eating habits and food purchasing behaviour (Fam et al. 2004).

Bonne et al. (2007) mentioned the impact of religion on halal consumption depends on the religion itself, to which extend individuals interpret and follow the teachings of their religion. This implies the ideas on consumers' preferences are closely associated with the value of their surrounding religion (Assadi, 2003). Azira (2019) stated religious belief would be undoubtedly important in guiding peoples' purchase pattern – as one of the best options to reduce curiosity. The booming cases on the suspicious ingredients cause to considerable time checking on food labelling, to gain assurance and ensure it is free from doubts. The more pious they are, the more time they spend on it (Jusmaliani and H.Nasution, 2009).

Issues 3. Consumers' taking granted

During finding collection, as shown in Table 2 above, most of the experts were sharing similar opinions and views to summarize the characteristic indicated by Muslim consumers. Based on their experiences dealing with several numbers of them, they came up with an assumption, that there are many of them are taking granted on the product's status, simultaneously on the halal logo and its certification. D.H Diana Ag. Damitet. et al. (2017) mentioned some consumers take granted for the halal word or the halal logo without questioning its authenticity. Experts expressed that non-Muslim entrepreneurs also compromise the importance of having certified halal logo. At the same time, they claimed it is part of the strategic plans to penetrate the market, which potentially gives benefit.

Moreover, Non-Muslim entrepreneurs seen halal as a continuous profit income, have better awareness in applying a certification and show their efforts to reach the consumer. Meanwhile, Muslim entrepreneurs merely take granted on the product status and tend to give many excuses to the policy and procedures endorsed by the authorities (Roshadah, 2019). Faizal (2019) mentioned, they frequently demand assistance during the processes and sometimes refused to apply the certification. Hadijah (2019) added, the same cases with the attitudes showing by a consumer, whose generally ignore the product's status, take granted to the information received, consume a product with fewer concerns of its haleness status, or perhaps at least the efforts to improve their understanding. While the credibility of the halal logo may be perceived differently, this has signified their awareness level, which is importantly needed to be improved.

Issues 4. Country of origin

Likely said, consumers perceived the halal logo differently. Furthermore, while the different levels of trust and confidence in halal certification logos originating from different countries (Leong and Muhamad, 2014; Rios et al., 2014), the adequate knowledge and information are needed to choose the right and certified halal logo. As discovered in Table 2 above, findings from the experts revealed, that the country of origin on the halal logo, which intentionally clarifies product status, does matter in delivering the assurance of the product's halalness.

According to (Zyad, 2019), the Malaysia halal logo with the added text "Malaysia" and "Jakim," not only helps to differentiate the fake with the original logo, however, may increase the feelings of safety and guarantees to consume the product. Meanwhile, when it comes to the international halal logo, it must originate from the trusted authorization of body that recognized by JAKIM as a

specific preference; and must be categorized as Islamic countries. It was due that the international halal logo is quite different, and typically coming from unfamiliar councils or authorities.

However, a consumer will typically assume that Muslim population countries likely have strong intense to apply Islamic practices and follow their beliefs. And consequently, it will enhance consumers' further trust when relying on them and their products. As advantages, labelling information on the products' package does affect consumers' selections and their products' patterns. The term "Made in....." information does determine the haleness of the product (Muhamad and Dahari, 2010), and it's also helpful to find its credibility by inferring to the given information.

The previous study indicated that the halal logo provides an effect from its country of origin, determine consumers' credibility and trustworthiness. Highlighted by Ziad (2019), the sufficient information gained throughout social media on the halal issues will contribute to knowledge, specifically on countries of origin information. Thus, consumers may use their understanding regarding a logo's country of origin to pass judgment on the quality and standard of the certification (Leong and Muhamad, 2014). Consequently, it will be sufficient while deciding on purchasing.

Issues 5. Lacking knowledge of ingredients' information

The ingredients information which typically depicted at the product package has significant meaning to be used by consumers during the purchasing process. Its play role as a food labelling providing with adequate information generally, in the certifying product status. As mentioned by Kreuter (1997) and Wandel (1997), consumers with a high preference for healthy and safe food do change their food and nutrition behaviours as a result of their keen interest in the packaging information. Thus, ingredient labelling plays a significant role in communication in delivering the product's content, especially the nutritional inputs provided on food labels.

As shown in Table 1 above, unfortunately, consumers perceived the ingredients' content insufficiently. Experts expressed, the ingredient details with scientific terms and terminologies are confusing, misrecognized, and unfamiliar. At worst, there is no specific ingredient handbook to be used as a reference to quickly recognized the applied ingredient terms in general; hence it's material authenticity, its origins of natural and chemical ingredients as well (Zhari, 2019). Supported by The Asian Food Information Centre (AFIC), consumers admit their low level of knowledge towards scientific information on the food ingredients. It has raised more significant

concerns to improve the existing methods to ensure the delivery of this information will be well-perceived, understandable, and comprehensive.

Hence, as suggested by Abd. Latif et al. (2015), it should function as a user-friendly tool with easy terminology for better usage and practical consumption. The information will extremely beneficial to serve as an initiative for stepping out of the fake issue. Thus, Zhari (2019) indicated, the halal apps called “verifyhalal” are beneficial to prove the authenticity of the information. However, the acknowledgement of ingredients and its information crucially must be highlighted as a basic understanding of halal issues. All the experts agree on the suggestion in utilizing the approach introduced by the authority while delivering the ingredient information. However, further studies must be exclusively carried out by all of the parties to ensure the information clarity and its originality, will be well-perceived and accepted.

Issues 6. The attraction of Islamic clues

Halal logo Malaysia is specifically endorsed to signify the haleness of the product, which aligned with the Islamic rules and principles. However, consuming the halal logo is not only perceived as a religious issue, moreover interconnected within massive paradigms in the context of sustainability, environmental awareness, food safety, and animal welfare (Baizura Badrudin et al. 2012).

As shown in Table 2 above, unfortunately, the definition of halal itself has been manipulated by entrepreneurs. Based on the observation, many products in the recent market are using a specific mark or language at their products' package to inform their product's status. For examples, those products with the absent of halal certification have applied the words “Halal guaranteed,” or “Muslim-made product,” or “Pure and Clean” at their package, or some other cases they are using an Islamic symbol such as mosques, green colour, or applied Islamic text as brand's name such as “Ibrahim” – to highlight their haleness. Its referred to as one of the marketing strategies to generally inform that Muslim peoples can consume their products, thus creating an attraction for product's selling purposes (Faizal, 2019).

There is a clause stated in the Trade Description 2011 to the implementation of language to signify products' haleness, whereby it should be emphasized and strictly follows by entrepreneurs. Faizal (2019) added similar cases found with the application of Quran phrases or sentences at food premises in Arabic form, or the word “Bismillah” which generally can be used with the approval of the authority. In whatsoever methods practised, the concerns of highlighting the meaning of product status aligned with Islamic sentiment is relevantly showing the degree of entrepreneurs'

awareness in attracting consumers' attention for their marketing strategy. Entrepreneurs need to employ effective and efficient market strategies based on consumers, competitors, and the environment; therefore, all strategies must be aligned with Islamic values and considerations (S.M.Sharif and Nurul Akma, 2014).

Past pieces of the literature indicated some excellent views from non-Muslim consumers, who are currently conscious and alert, thus being particular in selecting Islamic labelled indication as to their preferences. The level of peoples' awareness in finding halal is increasing and reflects as consumers' power. Thus, this has led to the high demands on the halal product, which assuming that the indication of the halal logo, respectively has tackle consumers' mind and boost their purchase intention (Faizal, 2019).

The study highlighted consumers' perceptions towards halal-related issues, which closely-associated with intending to do halal purchasing. As it's managed to demonstrate the purpose of the study, a conceptual model developed as figure 1 below. The key issues that arose through the interview process were a term of "fake" halal logo, the religious factor, taking granted, COC, lacking knowledge on ingredient and the attraction of Islamic clues. Experts emphasized these critical issues as sufficient to express consumers' perception and understanding.

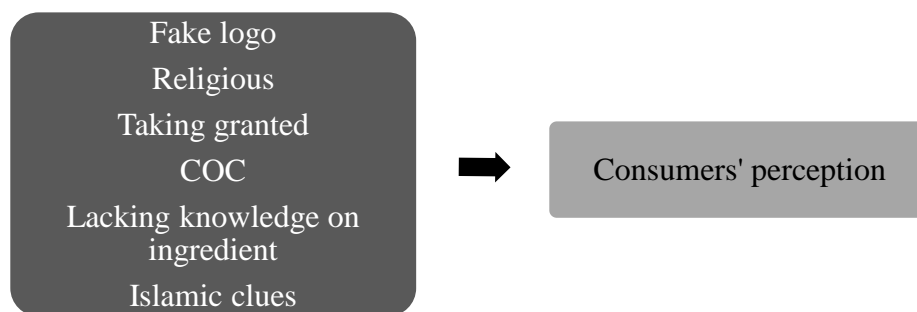


Figure 1: Conceptual model on halal-related issues from experts' perspective

The discovery of these issues are not only illustrated the consumers' perception of the halal-related issues, moreover also managed to propose an alternate efficient solution to the authorities. The strategy in strengthening the reputation of the halal industry must able to compromise the level of

consumers' understanding and acceptance. Thus, this study aims at an in-depth knowledge of these issues; hence few ideas can be underlined and require attention, as below:

- i. The conflict with the term “fake” halal logo is said to have a different meaning, yet subjective to be explained. Although this issue has received limited attention in the literature, experts stated that the term use should be coordinated with the intention of its consumption. Many circumstances should be refined to apply the term, especially in consumers' daily routine accurately. Furthermore, the authorities have to be more responsible in actively informs the audiences of the truth behind the story, objectively to avoid any confusion and information battles. While the conflicts have sufficiently impacted the consumers' perception, sooner or later its might entirely affects the function and role of this indication. Lots of previous scholars demonstrated the repetition of this term in their publication, citation, journal or articles, etc. which widely been used. Few scholars are Zakaria et al. (2017), Shafiq et al. (2015), Che Ahmad (2012), Zailani et al. (2010), Mohd et al. (2008), and Utusan Online (2007). It's argued by the experts to disagree with the use of this term by observing the recent cases and situation, which is irrelevant and subjective yet requires further explanation. A well-constructive plan and strategy to clarify the conflicts are hugely needed. The regulatory bodies of government agencies should be more particular and pay serious attention to distribute the proper info and evidence to clear up this mess.
- ii. The issues of taking granted and consumers' lacking knowledge appear as common dilemma while discussing on the halal-related issue, which is impactful and challenging. It may leave consumers with permanent confusion and doubts, thus remain to have purchase conflicts. The labelling which declared to be informative failed to reach their target consumers. The advertisement for halal products should be increased on the media to strengthen the role of advertising in promoting halal products towards Muslims (SS Saabar and SB Ibrahim, 2014). Hence, the government, with collaboration from the non-government organizations should provide more campaigns on halal products, take serious initiatives to educate audiences the awareness on halal products, and more sufficient campaigns should be increased and initiated (Z. Zakaria et al. 2017).
- iii. The sophisticated attention must directly arise from the institution of the family. Parents and family guidance play an essential role in educating their children about Halal guidelines and certification, hence the need to inform on the importance of consuming Halal food (Z. Zakaria, 2017). Supported Z. Zakaria and Mohd Nasir (2018), family members must influence and consistently give guidance on halal food because it is the role of a Muslim family to educate their family members, especially

the younger ones. Also suggested by Z. Zakaria and Mohd Nasir (2018) to teaching a better understanding of halal food, the Malaysian Ministry of Education should take the necessary steps to increase knowledge and awareness on halal food in the existing Islamic Studies subject especially for young Muslims at school levels. This is because contents on halal food are not taught in the Malaysian education scenario. The religious knowledge will soon be enhanced, slightly influence their attitudes and behaviour, thus extremely leave implications on the intention of their halal purchasing.

Conclusion

The results from this study and published data support this conclusion, and crucially, the quality of the halal awareness campaign in Malaysia needs to be improved. The study has set out to explore consumers' perceptions of halal-related issues based on experts' perspectives, has been achieved; however, there are an overwhelming need and scope need to be highlighted. The critical contribution of this work is the solution it provides to the idea of delivering the information and updates on halal-related issues, also reveal several gaps and shortcomings, which must be sufficiently acknowledged and identified. From the managerial views, the collaboration within halal agencies in this country firmly required to take serious initiative in delivering halal awareness and its sufficient contents. There is a suggestion to conduct rigorous auditing and inspections which follow halal standards and procedures that will also be crucial to enhance the credibility of halal certification by JAKIM. In the context of halal awareness, this study has specifically revealed empirical evidence on the consumers' perceptions and their feedbacks while responding to halal-related issues exclusively. Furthermore, it would also be interesting to modify the methodology described here to gain numerical data as a finding; thus, more detail analysis can be demonstrated. Most importantly, the experts in their valuable thoughts and views have successfully contributed into increment to the literature in a similar scope of the study, hence expected to be meaningful for academicians and researchers for their further particular fields or research engagement.

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