

Implementation and Challenges in Maintaining Halal Certification: A Case Study of a Local Halal-Certified F&B Brand

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ABSTRACT

Halal certification is one of the essential needs for most food and beverage (F&B) companies due to the high demand for halal products from consumers, as well as a unique strategy for marketing tools in the halal market. While existing literature extensively investigates macro-level challenges such as baseline implementation costs, broad food safety integration and corporate brand crises, past studies have largely unaddressed the distinct, decentralized operational hurdles faced by localized, multi-outlet brands. This study aims to examine overall halal implementation practices and analyse the challenges in maintaining the halal status of the products. The data were generated using a dual-method qualitative approach, comprising semi-structured interviews and thematic document analysis. A total of three informants were selected from a purposive sampling method consisting of all Halal Executive personnel. The result showed that proper halal files are the key component in implementing and maintaining the halal status of the company. This study also revealed the challenges and solutions of each arising issue, such as virtual monitoring, difficulty in permanent Muslim staff recruitment, ignorance of training content by outlet staff, application delays by religious authority and others. Overall, this study benefits most of the halal industries in Malaysia, especially halal-certified F&B, in maintaining proper halal implementation and ensuring the product's halal status and its hygiene processes.

Keywords: Implementation; Challenges; Halal Certification; Food and Beverage (F&B)

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, halal certification has emerged as a valuable instrument for the manufacturing industry, serving as a vital requirement for Muslim consumers and elevating Malaysia's reputation as a premier global Halal hub (Hilmi et al., 2021). Halal certification provides consumers with assurance regarding quality and safety, while simultaneously aiding small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in market penetration. Furthermore, non-Muslim customers increasingly prefer Halal-certified products due to their perceived safety and lack of contamination, as these products are strictly regulated by Malaysian authorities (Saleh and Rajandran, 2025). However, despite these advantages, many manufacturers still face significant hurdles in achieving and maintaining certification due to complex regulatory compliance and high operational costs (Rofi'ah et al., 2024). This creates a gap between the high global demand for halal products and the actual capacity of local industries to fulfil these requirements efficiently. Addressing these barriers is essential if a major market sector is to truly profit from the Malaysian Halal certificate and solidify the nation's status as a global leader.

In general, halal certification for food and beverage (F&B) outlets falls under food premise scheme in accordance with Manual Procedure for Malaysia Halal Certification (Domestics) 2020 (MPPHM 2020). Halal-certified food and beverage outlets are also subjected to Malaysia Standard, MS 1500:2019 Halal Food – General Requirements (Third Revision). Another essential reference is Halal Assurance System (HAS). HAS is a mechanism that guarantees the Halal integrity during the processing stage, assuring Halal and high-quality food creation (Majid et al., 2015). In fact, HAS is built on three zeros: zero limit (no haram material is utilized in the manufacturing), zero defect (no haram product is created), and zero risk (no adverse risk should be incurred by the producer or firm).

In a halal-certified food premise, food handlers are the most critical figures, as their daily practices in preparing foods and beverages directly determine the sustained integrity and safety of the halal status (Othman & Md Nawawi, 2025). The food handlers involve directly along the supply chain, from receiving of raw materials from supplier, preparation and processing, till serving the customer on the table. They must know the basic knowledge of halal and safe practices in the outlet, such as placing stock properly on the pallet/ shelf, use of equipment or brushes away from animal hair sources, and label the product with the receiving date and opening date to avoid usage of expired date raw material during preparation of the product in the outlet. All these Halal and safe practices can be achieved through adequate training, which serves as a critical human capital initiative to prevent halal compliance failures and ensure the effectiveness of halal awareness within an organization (Al-Azmi & Hamid, 2025; Mohammad et al., 2025).

However, challenges arise when food handlers attend company-provided training but fail to engage with the content, often viewing it as a routine formality. These disconnects result in a lack of true operational competency, which manifests as critical errors during food preparation and the mismanagement of mandatory halal documentation (Mohammad et al., 2025). In fact, the F&B outlet could also be in a mess condition, since Halal Executive only conducts visual monitoring to see the actual condition of the outlet (Al-Azmi & Hamid, 2025). Another significant barrier to maintain Halal certification in the F&B sector is the acute shortage of Muslim personnel and the persistent difficulty in recruiting permanent Muslim staff, largely driven by high industry turnover rates (Saleh & Rajandran, 2025). Lastly, application delays by religious authority can also affect the normal process of halal certification (Arif et al., 2019). These are all important matters that need to be highlighted in maintaining halal certification,

so that no issue arises and ensure smooth implementation of halal certification in halal-certified F&B outlets.

Crucially, while existing research heavily explores macro-level compliance and individual consumer perceptions, the literature remains sparse regarding the unique operational vulnerabilities inherent to localized, multi-outlet retail F&B brands (Muslich et al., 2024). Most academic paradigms evaluate firms as single centralized entities, thereby overlooking the profound execution gap that occurs when a centralized Halal Executive attempts to enforce structural standard operating procedures across geographically scattered, high-turnover storefronts. This study advances the field of halal operations by shifting the focus from structural theory to the dynamic execution of real-world compliance. Specifically, it contextualizes how frontline human friction, virtual monitoring limitations, and localized human resource constraints jeopardize ongoing halal status retention. By evaluating these decentralized operational realities, this research fills a distinct empirical gap, providing actionable internal governance solutions tailored explicitly for multi-outlet retail environments navigating rigid regulatory frameworks.

LITERATURE RESEARCH

Halal Certification and Regulatory Framework

The term “Halal” is found in several interpretations. Halal originates from the Arabic word namely “Halla, Yahillu, Hillan, Wahalalan” which means allowed or permissible by the Shariah law (Nordin et al., 2021). Halal also refers to anything that is permitted by Islamic law and there is no obligatory legal document prohibiting it (Amrin & Amirullah, 2022). It is mandated under Islamic law. Its antonym is Haram, which implies illegal or banned where this definition of Halal also included further research (Nordin et al., 2021). The concept of Halal included not just food processing but also other factors. According to Isa et al. (2015), Halal practised in Malaysia includes not only religious concerns but also product consistency and cleanliness. Food production, for example, should adhere to good manufacturing standards that safeguard the food from being polluted and contaminated with non-Halal components. Halal certification is critical not just for food and drink, but also for overall Muslim daily life. In legal terms, halal aspect is translated and mentioned in the Trade Descriptions Act (2011), namely Trade Descriptions (Definition of Halal) Order 2011 and the Trade Descriptions (Certification and Marking of Halal) Order 2011. This act provides an explanation of the Halal and Haram of a food and consumer product (Buang & Hamidon, 2016) and declares Department of Islamic Development of Malaysia (JAKIM) and Islamic Religious Departments (JAIN)/ State Islamic Religious Councils (MAIN) as halal religious authorities in Malaysia.

Halalan Thayyiban Principles

The concept of Halalan Thayyiban considers all the benefits that food offers to humans on both a bodily and a spiritual level. In this context, the term "Halalan Thayyiban" refers to foods that are not only permissible for human consumption but also have the potential to improve the health of an individual (Fadzli et al, 2021). Moreover, a food is considered to be Halalan Thayyiban if it satisfies both criteria: first, the food must be Halal and come originally from a halal source; second, the food must be of high quality, as evidenced by the fact that it gives a person some benefit on those who consume it; finally, the food must be halal (Fadzli et al., 2021). The implementation of the principle of Halalan Thayyiban requires assessment is Halal considers both the physical and the intangible qualities of the meal. It is necessary for there to

be a high level of both quality and cleanliness in Halal food for it to be considered fit for human consumption (Fadzli et al., 2021). In addition, this idea is relevant throughout the whole process of producing the food, beginning with the initial processing of the ingredients, and ending with the packaging. This involves the process of preparing the food, producing it, and distributing it till it reaches the clients. It does not imply that the cuisine must simply be Halal, nice, delicious, flavorful, and pure to be considered *Thayyiban*. The meal must be safe and healthy to the body while at the same time causing no damage.

Halal Compliance for Food Premises

Food premises are directly involved with the food and beverage (F&B) sectors known as the hospitality industry. As stated by Barnes et al. (2022) define food premises as a location where food or drinks for human consumption or food or drink for humans are prepared. It involves producing, processing, storing, displaying, and operating disseminated items that were bought or offered for sale. Restaurants, food courts, a commercial kitchen, cafeterias, bakeries, cakes and pastries, fast food restaurants, canteens, restaurants and hotel kitchens, kiosks, catering services and F&B outlets are examples in the food premise scheme of halal certification. JAKIM/ JAIN/MAIN have been granted the ability to issue certifications certifying that food is Halal. These three halal religious authorities ensure all prerequisites outlined in the MS 1500:2019, MHMS 2020 and Malaysian Halal Management System Manual (MHMS) 2020 have been satisfied before Halal product is granted a Halal certificate. They are responsible for performing Halal conformity inspections by means of frequent monitoring, which include spot checks, inspections, or verbal contact with the firms that are engaged. During the post-certification phase, any modifications or issues found without permission from JAKIM lead to a non-conformance report (NCR), thus resulting in the suspension and cancellation of halal certificate.

Moreover, proper documentation is also considered as the main pillar of halal certification. All memos and emails from relevant departments are crucial, especially in any latest announcement distributed across various roles and responsibilities. In halal certification, standard-operating-procedure of internal halal audit, halal risk control, raw material control, halal training, traceability, HAS review, laboratory analysis and *sertu* need to be developed, especially for company that have more than two F&B outlets locally and internationally (JAKIM, 2020). Other than that, halal policy must be developed and implemented and must be shown publicly in the outlets. Any non-compliance in preparing and implementing all these documents will lead to NCR from the religious authority.

Operational Challenges and Human Resource Constraints

Challenges arise when food handlers attend company-provided training but fail to engage with the content, often viewing it as a routine formality. These disconnects result in a lack of true operational competency, which manifests as critical errors during food preparation and the mismanagement of mandatory halal documentation (Mohammad et al., 2026). In fact, the F&B outlet could also be in a mess condition, since Halal Executive only conducts visual monitoring to see the actual condition of the outlet (Al-Azmi & Hamid, 2025). Another significant barrier to maintaining Halal certification in the F&B sector is the acute shortage of Muslim personnel and the persistent difficulty in recruiting permanent Muslim staff, largely driven by high industry turnover rates (Saleh & Rajandran, 2025). Lastly, application delays by religious authority can also affect the normal process of halal certification (Arif et al., 2019). These are all important matters that need to be highlighted in maintaining halal certification, so that no

issue arises and ensures smooth implementation of halal certification in halal-certified F&B outlets.

As a result, business owners who wish to adopt the halal concept and seek for Halal certifications face challenges/issues in assuring overall compliance; NCR is one of the available alternatives that can ease in maintaining proper halal certification.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, a qualitative approach and a purposive sampling method were used. A total of three informants were selected, a majority of whom are Halal Executives in the company, chosen based on their expertise in the relevant matter, especially halal certification, as well as their academic background, working experience, and training. While a sample size of three informants is compact, this small cohort is methodologically justified by the highly specialized and niche nature of Halal Executive roles in the retail F&B industry. These professionals possess exclusive, deeply contextualized operational knowledge regarding internal compliance frameworks that cannot be captured through broad statistical sampling. Thus, data saturation was achieved through the depth and quality of insight rather than the quantity of participants. To address the ethical considerations of qualitative research, formal informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection, ensuring that their participation was completely voluntary and that their personal and corporate identities remained strictly confidential and anonymous.

To complete the objectives of this study, recorded online interview sessions were conducted, with each individual session lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The interview protocol consisted of four open-ended research questions, which were systematically developed by mapping them against the study's primary research objectives and aligning them with the compliance frameworks outlined in the Malaysian Halal Management System (MHMS) 2020. These questions focused on halal implementation practices and the challenges in maintaining halal certification in local halal-certified F&B outlets.

The generated qualitative data were examined using a rigorous thematic analysis framework to interpret the underlying patterns. The interview recordings were transcribed using Microsoft Word and the textual datasets were systematically coded using NVivo Version 12. Initially, ten explicit code indicators were generated to isolate recurring operational issues as shown in Table 1. Following qualitative coding procedures, these indicators were clustered and classified into five overarching themes for broader structural interpretation:

- i. Documentation and HAS Implementation Frameworks.
- ii. Human Resource Challenges and Turnover Dynamics.
- iii. Training Imperatives and Competencies.
- iv. Monitoring Limitations and Virtual Audit Constraints.
- v. Regulatory Interactions and Administrative Delays.

Table 1

Code Indicator

<i>Code Indicator</i>
A – Halal Training
B – Challenges
C – Actions
D – Compliances
E – Halal Certification
F – Communication
G – Staff Recruitments
H – Benefits
I – Non-compliances
J – Authority Fault

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The empirical findings generated from the three specialized Halal Executive informants reveal that maintaining halal compliance in a localized, multi-outlet F&B brand requires navigating complex structural, behavioural, and regulatory realities. Rather than isolating individual interview responses, the following discussion integrates these findings into five cohesive thematic domains, linking operational data directly to established theoretical models and empirical literature.

Documentation and HAS Implementation Frameworks

The core finding of this study underscores that the development and structured maintenance of halal files serve as the operational bedrock of the organization’s compliance strategy. Informant 2 explicitly noted that proper implementation of the Halal Assurance System (HAS) across both executive management and localized operations is necessary to address Halal Critical Points (HCP) throughout the product lifecycle. This is structurally synchronized with Informant 1’s practice of utilizing formalized vertical communication channels, cascading documentation directives from the Halal Executive to the Operation Manager, down to the Outlet Supervisors.

In a multi-outlet environment, decentralized compliance fails unless anchored by a centralized, rigorous filing infrastructure, which must satisfy all prerequisites outlined in MS 1500:2019 and the Malaysian Halal Management System Manual (MHMS) 2020. Furthermore, this operational requirement increasingly demands a shift from firm-level verification to network-level supply chain filtering. As Informant 3 highlighted, the Supply Chain Department must mandate that all raw material vendors provide valid halal certificates prior to product launches or face immediate rejection. This total supply chain integration proves that modern HAS models must function as holistic ecosystems rather than isolated, internal company checkpoints, aligning with recent assertions that sustainable compliance requires innovation transparency from "firm-level" to "network-level" operations (Yusof et al., 2026).

Human Resource Challenges and Turnover Dynamics

A prominent barrier identified by the informants involves meeting the mandates of regulatory staffing established by Malaysian religious authorities. According to the Malaysian Halal Management System (MHMS) 2020 framework, food premise schemes require a minimum of two local Muslim food handlers per active shift. However, Informant 1 highlighted an acute

structural challenge: headquarter-imposed budget constraints severely restricted the recruitment of permanent Muslim staff, forcing the brand to depend heavily on part-time local Muslim handlers. This reliance induces a volatile cycle of high employee turnover, resulting in regular shift-level non-compliances at individual outlets.

This systemic vulnerability relates directly to Organisational Behaviour (OB) models regarding employee motivation and resource allocation. To artificially satisfy regulatory audits, the firm is forced to adopt transient operational fixes, such as temporarily reassigning part-time Muslim employees to full-time shifts during official inspections. To address the root cause of this high turnover, the company initiated targeted financial interventions by offering higher location-based allowances such as highway rest-stop outlets to stabilize recruitment. This aligns cleanly with OB principles and empirical data demonstrating that competitive financial incentives and strategic allowances directly enhance employee retention, baseline motivation, and overall operational productivity in high-stress retail environments (Okoye & Ghapar, 2024; Pakadang et al., 2024).

Training Imperatives and Competencies

The data indicates a stark disconnect between training attendance and actual operational execution. Informant 3 revealed that a primary operational hazard is frontline staff training ignorance. Despite attending mandatory training sessions, employees frequently treat the material as an administrative formality, succumbing to workplace distractions such as scrolling through social media platforms such as TikTok and Facebook during instruction. This psychological disengagement triggers serious behavioural non-compliances at the store level, such as food handlers purchasing equipment (grinder cleaning brushes) from unauthorized local bakeries with unverified halal status, storing raw materials directly on the floor, and failing to execute proper First-In-First-Out (FIFO) inventory rotation. Under food safety standards specifically MS 1514:2022 Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) for Food, floor storage and poor FIFO rotation constitute critical non-compliances that fundamentally compromise both safety and halal integrity. In fact, exposure of raw material stock with any potential physical, chemical and microbiological hazard on the floor and improper FIFO system violate Clause 5.2.3 and Clause 5.3.4 provisioned under this guideline (Department of Standards Malaysia, 2022).

This dynamic can be analysed through Training Effectiveness Theory, which posits that training inputs only yield successful outcomes if they achieve cognitive retention and behavioural transfer. When staff treat training as a passive exercise, operational competency collapses (Mohammad et al., 2025). To combat this behavioural friction, the firm adjusted its approach by introducing mandatory post-training retrieval practices specifically requiring a passing grade on validation quizzes to verify knowledge transfer. In accordance with educational and cognitive research, testing actively builds long-term memory retrieval (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006). Furthermore, reinforcing these training outcomes through formal disciplinary mechanisms, such as issuing warning letters or implementing performance-based salary deductions, echoes organizational behaviour findings that structural accountability and clear sanctions are essential to sustain long-term operator compliance (Fauzan et al., 2026).

Monitoring Limitations and Virtual Audit Constraints

To manage a vast retail footprint, the Halal Department relies heavily on remote or virtual internal monitoring rather than continuous, in-person field inspections. Informant 2 detailed that internal audits are routinely managed via video-conferencing tools like Google Meet,

where critical documents including anti-typhoid vaccination slips, food handler certifications, and halal awareness training records are verified strictly through a camera lens.

This remote oversight presents a major operational risk, whereby it limits the Halal Executive's capacity to evaluate the authentic, real-time sanitary and structural conditions of the physical outlets, exposing the firm to severe miscommunication and hidden non-compliances. As noted by Al-Azmi and Hamid (2025), visual monitoring from afar often obscures actual premise conditions, leaving outlets vulnerable to unhygienic states. To counter these digital blind spots, the Halal Executive must rely on secondary confirmation protocols, requiring outlet staff to transmit real-time photographic evidence of food preparation areas. This challenge demonstrates that while digital tracking is scalable, it creates an ongoing tension between operational cost-cutting and the hands-on transparency required to protect absolute halal integrity at the retail frontline.

Regulatory Interactions and Administrative Delays

The final major operational challenge relates to administrative friction occurring at the intersection of corporate agility and state regulation. Informant 3 identified significant delays in processing halal applications and renewals by religious authorities, particularly when attempting to register additional menu items. Because multi-outlet local brands operate in a fast-casual market driven by rapid menu iteration, raw material adjustments, and seasonal product launches, these systemic delays disrupt standard corporate timelines and compromise marketing strategies.

This administrative bottleneck is heavily documented in the literature as a major impediment to online halal certification success (Arif et al., 2019). To overcome this bureaucratic drag, the Halal Executives must engage in labour-intensive communication strategies, including frequent follow-up phone calls and direct physical visits to regulatory offices to manually accelerate the review process. These dynamic highlights a critical macro-micro gap: while state authorities seek to protect absolute integrity through exhaustive validation, local retail brands require operational velocity. To resolve this friction, current industry advancements are shifting toward data-driven governance tools, such as JAKIM's implementation of the MyHALALINGREDIENTS platform. By digitalizing raw material pre-evaluation and reducing redundant ingredient reviews (JAKIM, 2020), such institutional platforms represent the future of mitigating the exact regulatory delays highlighted by this study's informants.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, ensuring Halal certification compliance within the food premise scheme, particularly for local F&B brands, is a strategic necessity that transcends religious obligation by guaranteeing product quality, safety, and hygiene. However, the operational challenges identified in this study such as high staff turnover, acute shortages of permanent Muslim personnel, and frontline training gaps clearly illustrate the broader academic problem: the critical friction between complex regulatory compliance and the actual operational capacity of local businesses. While global demand for halal products continues to soar, local industries frequently struggle to fulfil these rigid requirements efficiently due to high operational costs and administrative burdens.

This study directly addresses this research gap by demonstrating that a firm's capacity to overcome these barriers relies heavily on structured Internal Halal Governance rather than passive compliance. Our findings reveal that meticulous maintenance of central halal files and

proactive documentation serve as the primary mechanisms to mitigate regulatory bottlenecks and application delays. To bridge the capacity gap and ensure the long-term sustainability of a brand's halal status, top management and Halal Executives must move beyond periodic visual monitoring toward integrated digital tracking such as utilizing automated compliance tools and competency-based training frameworks that transform routine training into active operational habits. By highlighting these localized retail realities, this study provides a critical benchmark for both domestic and international stakeholders. Ultimately, addressing these multi-outlet operational hurdles is essential to empower local SMEs, allowing them to navigate the complexities of the global market efficiently, maximize the commercial value of the Malaysian Halal certificate, and solidify the nation's status as a global leader.

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