Halal Certification: A Viewpoint From Malaysian Restaurant Managers

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Abstract

This study focuses on halal certification from the viewpoint of Malaysian restaurant managers. The increasing demand of halal food from the Muslim and non-Muslim consumers has given a good indicator to the hospitality industry to have the eating establishments halal certified. A sample of 643 restaurant managers has been selected throughout Malaysia using systematic sampling. Questionnaires were distributed using mail survey and data was then entered to SPSS version 21 for further analysis. It is gathered from the descriptive statistics that cleanliness during food preparation, meaning of halal and halal certification is important when dealing with food in a Malaysian restaurant setting. The results indicated that restaurant managers have high expectations toward halal certification. Furthermore, halal certification does generate some benefits beyond religion that contribute to Malaysia's positioning as a tourism destination and global halal hub.

Keywords   Halal, Certification, Restaurant, Manager, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Malaysia is seen as a progressive Islamic country and portrayed as a good example where a single halal standard is being practiced nationwide (National Small and Medium Enterprise Development Council, 2006). This has a significant implication in the development of world halal food industries and market value enhancement to other products and services. Halal is defined as foods that are lawful for Muslims to consume, according to Islamic dietary laws as found in the *Quran, hadith* (books that recorded the sayings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad) and in the *fiqh* (jurisprudence) of the Muslim jurists. Here, halal does not only cover the religious aspects but it extends to all other matters of daily life that include clothing, relationship, leadership and dealing with business transactions to name a few. Most of the studies done on *halal* topics focused

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primarily on *halal* meat (Bonne and Verbeke, 2008; Martini and Chee, 2001; Waarden, 2004), perhaps also reinforcing the impression among non-Muslims that *halal* is only concerned with meat (Wan Hassan and Hall, 2003). However, *halal* applies not only to meat and poultry, but also to other non-food products, for instance, cosmetics and personal care products.

Alam and Mohamed Sayuti (2011) highlighted that the Muslim population is growing and Islam is the fastest growing religion both by birth and adoption. This fact shows that the market opportunities for halal food in particular is profitable together with the high demand from non-Muslim consumers that perceived halal food to be safe and healthy. Halal food is not merely on slaughtering but it is more than that. Past studies showed the mixture of findings in different halal perspectives such as in restaurant settings, tourism, traceability, slaughtering and consumer behavior (Ishak et al., 2015; Syed Marzuki et al., 2015; Syed Marzuki et al., 2014; Syed Marzuki and Abdullah, 2014; Syed Marzuki et al., 2013; Syed Marzuki, 2013; Syed Marzuki, 2012; Syed Marzuki et al., 2012a; Syed Marzuki et al., 2012b). Taking the demand for *halal* food that is growing inevitably, restaurant managers in Malaysia have expectations towards *halal* certification that will be examined in this study.

2. Literature Reviews

The increasing demand of halal food worldwide has given an indicator to the hospitality industry to change the status of eating establishment to be halal certified (Syed Marzuki, 2012). Furthermore, *halal* can also be considered as a universal food where it is consumed by the Muslims as well as the non-Muslims (Abdul Latif, 2006; Mohamed Nasir and Pereira, 2008), including in Malaysia (Al-Nahdi et al., 2009). As a result of growing globalisation of the food chain in terms of *halal* production, food safety, trade and consumption, Muslims are now increasingly demanding that *halal* products be certified in order to boost their confidence level and have 'peace of mind' (Shafie and Othman, 2006). This is significant as commercial food service sales relate heavily to the awareness of restaurant operators in fulfilling the needs and wants of their customers (Edwards and Meiselman, 2005), who also suggest that the interaction between the customer, service personnel and the service organisation is important for return patronage.

In general, customers have their own reasons for wanting to return to any restaurant (Dube et al., 1994). Although Muslims consumers are very much similar to any other consumer segments, in that they are demanding healthy and quality products, they are also demanding that the food or products must also conform to *Shariah* requirements (Al-Harran and Low, 2008). Furthermore, Muslim restaurant customers are like any other customers when eating out, as their desire for customer satisfaction and return visits to a restaurant are strongly influenced by food quality

(Dube et al., 1994). Islam has guided its followers on permitted and prohibited foods under Islamic dietary laws. All details concerning the rules have reasons behind them that could be found in the *Quran* and the *Hadith*.

It is important for a Muslim to consume safe food from the beginning of the food chain until consumption. In fact, all religions emphasize on food safety. Bonne and Verbeke (2008) noted that the impact of religion on food consumption depends on the religion itself and on the extent to which individuals follow the teachings of their religion. The concept of farm to table that is guided by the Islamic law must be adhered at all times by the Muslim followers. Therefore, it is important for the Muslims to know the source of food that they eat (Dahalan, 2008). In essence, Islamic religion inspired requirements that focused on spirituality is developed through many compositions and one of them is food. So, it is an indicator for food service industries to take the opportunity of this unique concept by labelling and displaying the *halal* certification properly as the consumers have the right to expect food that they eat to be safe and suitable for consumption.

3. Methods

This study has used mail survey method where 2080 questionnaires were distributed nationwide. A total of 643 restaurant managers responded that contributed to 31 percent response rate. The respondents were from three types of eating establishments; *halal* certified, non-certified but claim to serve *halal* foods and non-*halal* restaurants. Restaurants were selected using systematic sampling, where every fourth restaurant was selected from a list of 8320 provided by the Suruhanjaya Syarikat Malaysia/Companies Commission of Malaysia. This list included restaurants from all thirteen states within Malaysia and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. Respondents were from different age groups, races, religions and educational backgrounds, which provided some rich and unique findings in the context of this study. Furthermore, they signify Malaysia as a multicultural and multiracial country. A representative distribution of gender and ethnicities is advantageous to this study as it keeps bias to a minimum. Another factor is that most of the restaurant managers had good qualifications, which will have helped them to answer the questionnaires.

4. Results and Discussions

Descriptive statistics were used in order to further explain the characteristics of the three variables on perceptions of your own restaurant, perceptions toward *halal* certification in general and perceptions toward *halal* certification in Malaysia. In the output presented in Table 1 to 3, the information for each variable is summarized. There were many negatively skewed values in the

three tables which indicate a clustering of scores at the high end. Skewness is not an essential part in the analysis as the survey has a large sample of 643. This is supported by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) as "with reasonably large samples, skewness will not make a substantive difference in the analysis". Each of the constructs in this study was measured on five-point Likert scales, indicating the importance of each factor. Based on the questionnaire, the respondents were required to rate their level of agreement with statements using the scales ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

Table 1 indicates the results for perceptions of your own restaurant. It showed that the mean in ensuring cleanliness during food preparation was the highest with 4.66 and followed by ensuring cleanliness in the kitchen and in the dining area, with 4.63 and 4.61 respectively. A survey done on perceptions of Indian restaurants in Malaysia by Josiam et al. (2007) revealed that restaurant patrons in Malaysia are more demanding customers when it comes to hygiene and cleanliness. Thus, their findings support this study on that matter. The majority of the respondents strongly agreed that their restaurants ensured workers followed hygienic working practices with a mean value of 4.54, followed by maintaining a hygienic working environment where the mean value was 4.53. The restaurant managers were also aware that some customers placed high demand on *halal* foods. Due to that, they have taken actions in relation to some certification standard such as Malaysian Standard on *halal* food and HACCP. This has contributed to the mean value of 4.52. With that, the concept of *halal* food is for everyone that has been mentioned in many studies and articles (Abdul Latif, 2006; Mohd Yusoff, 2004; Muhammad, 2007).

Looking at food safety standards, the results suggested that restaurant managers strongly agreed that they prepared food according to the food safety standards as shown in Table 1. According to Mohd Daud (2004), the combination of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) and *halal* standard ensured the foods are not only safe but *halal*. This served as a basic requirement for food products and the food trade in Malaysia on the preparation and handling of *halal* foods. The results of this study rejected the statement made by Morrison et al. (1998), that mentioned food service managers are far more concerned with managing costs and optimising customer satisfaction than with HACCP procedures such as inspecting food suppliers' facilities or supervising the sanitising of work surfaces.

Efficient service has always been the subject matter in food service research due to its contribution to the competitiveness of a restaurant (Andaleeb et al., 2006; Carter et al., 2000; Josiam and Monteiro, 2004; Rodgers, 2005). The mean value of 4.51 is shown for efficient service that indicates for the necessity to serve quality foods with a mean of 4.49. Food quality played a significant role in the food service industry where most of the studies on customer loyalty in the restaurant industry emphasized the quality of food as the most important factor (Carter et al.,

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Perceptions of Your Own Restaurant

Questions	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std.Error
This restaurant...					
ensures cleanliness during food preparation	643	4.66	.56	-1.62	.10
ensures cleanliness in the kitchen	643	4.63	.62	-1.99	.10
ensures cleanliness in the dining area	643	4.61	.62	-1.69	.10
ensures that all workers follow hygienic working practices	643	4.54	.63	-1.49	.10
maintains hygienic working environment	643	4.53	.63	-1.22	.10
prepares food that is according to the food safety standard	643	4.52	.66	-1.40	.10
emphasizes efficient service	643	4.51	.63	-1.31	.10
serves quality foods	643	4.49	.67	-1.38	.10
ensures safe food handling during the food supply chain	643	4.49	.64	-1.26	.10
emphasizes employee friendliness	643	4.48	.70	-1.55	.10
ensures cleanliness of restrooms	643	4.38	.82	-1.30	.10
welcomes routine inspection from related authority	643	4.31	.72	-.97	.10
have taken actions due to related certification standard	643	4.15	.97	-1.02	.10
is aware that there are some customers that demand *halal* foods	643	4.13	.99	-1.30	.10
emphasizes on the convenience of location	643	4.07	.78	-.65	.10
serves healthy options	643	4.06	.85	-.94	.10
emphasizes atmosphere	643	4.04	.79	-.69	.10
emphasizes value for money	643	4.00	.81	-.62	.10
serves cultural familiar food	643	3.85	.93	-.68	.10
serves food that meet all religious dietary prohibitions	643	3.47	1.17	-.43	.10
serves local and international cuisine	643	3.38	1.26	-.44	.10
prepares food according to the religious dietary restriction of the owner	643	3.32	1.27	-.32	.10
meets the religious values of the owner	643	3.32	1.20	-.35	.10
serves food that meet some religious dietary prohibitions	643	3.22	1.12	-.23	.10
serves international cuisine only	643	2.72	1.17	.42	.10
serves local cuisine only	643	2.57	1.13	.53	.10
Valid N	643				

2000; Clark and Wood, 1998; Johns and Howard, 1998). A similar mean value of 4.49 is also shown in ensuring safe food handling during the food supply chain.

Table 1 also confirmed that the respondents emphasized employee friendliness and having clean restrooms with mean values of 4.48 and 4.38, respectively. Within this context, respondents felt that routine inspection from related authorities is important and welcomed such actions, with a mean value of 4.31. In addition, they have taken actions to conform to some of the standards recommended by the authorities including *halal* standards and procedures with a mean value of 4.15. Thus, it reflected that food hygiene is an ultimate factor to be considered by food operators in order to provide foods that are safe and suitable for consumption (Hashim, 2004).

Restaurant managers were also aware that there are some customers who demand *halal* foods even though they are operating non-*halal* restaurants. The mean value of 4.13 indicated that they knew of the increasing demand from the Muslim and non-Muslim customers. Emphasizing the convenience of location had a mean score of 4.07. *Halal* compliance can be considered new among hospitality industry players in Malaysia which suggests further academic contributions in one aspect due to the paucity of published research or studies that highlight this particular *halal* compliance (Zailani et al., 2011). It is emphasized that food consumption and selection is closely linked to religion which has acted as a powerful motive before purchase takes place.

Convenience of location seems to be an important factor in a study by Blum and Harrah (1996) and therefore supports this study. The mean value of 4.06 suggests that serving healthy options is of prime importance. Rodgers (2005) supported the findings when he claimed that restaurant chains have been following nutritional trends and are promoting healthy offerings on their menu. The findings of this study showed similar results with Habib et al. (2011), which found the choice of eating establishment was determined by its location. A strategic location that offers easy accessibility and convenience are the main criteria for choosing a place to eat. Despite those criteria mentioned above, the *halal* status is perceived as a very important factor to all Muslim respondents in their study.

In another aspect, respondents viewed that ambience will give a competitive advantage in order to retain the business (Soriano, 2002, p. 1058) as cited: "Today, the most important thing is design and concept". The mean value for emphasizing atmosphere was 4.04. Another factor is value for money where the result was similar with the studies done by some researchers who highlighted price as a contributing factor for return patronage (Andaleeb et al., 2006; Kivela, 1999). Here, the mean value was 4.00. Another study on perceptions of Indian restaurants in Malaysia revealed that South Asians put great importance on "value for money" and "price" (Josiam et al., 2007). Therefore, South Asians are more price-sensitive in dealing with the price of food.

Most of the respondents agreed that they served culturally familiar food given the mean of 3.85.

The same result was gathered by Josiam et al. (2007) where they stated that it is important to serve a culturally familiar food as it reflected the identity of the country and customers will feel themselves at home. It is common in Malaysia and around the world that some restaurants will have its own market segmentation and target market. Thus, these eating establishments serve foods that meet some religious dietary prohibitions. According to Dindyal and Dindyal (2004), many facts have been provided that point to religion playing an important role in many societies and it is considered one of the most guiding roles in food choice and consumption. However the findings show that the restaurant managers were unsure whether the food they served met some or all religious dietary prohibitions with a mean value of 3.22 and 3.47, respectively, as there were three types of restaurants that took part (*halal* certified, *halal* claimant and non *halal*).

However, most of the restaurants that have been selected served both local and international cuisine with a high mean value of 3.38 as the Malaysian government has aggressively promoted the country as a *halal* hub centre (National Small and Medium Enterprise Development Council, 2006). Therefore, restaurant owners and operators are thriving to cater for this call. As a result, restaurants in Malaysia operate with an increasingly more ethnically and culturally diverse customer base of locals and tourists (Josiam et al., 2007).

In another context, participants agreed that their restaurants prepared food according to religious dietary restrictions and that they met the religious values of the owners with a mean value of 3.32. Taking the Muslim restaurant managers or owners as the example, it is expected that the Muslim customers can find *halal* food easily either by identifying the ethnic origin of the seller and the menu that shows the availability of food choices being offered which are *halal* in terms of their definitions. This is supported by Shafie and Othman (2006) that pointed out that the Malaysian government is concerned in applying the religious principles and values. It is at the same time to support the majority Muslim population that consider purchasing *halal* products as well as *halal* food for consumption (Al-Nahdi et al., 2009). On the other hand, the majority of the respondents disagreed that they served international cuisine only as the mean value is 2.72 when answering some questions on the type of food being served in the restaurant. Interestingly, a low mean value is also indicated for the question on serving local cuisine only with 2.57.

Perceptions toward *halal* certification in general have raised many interesting and new findings. The results showed that respondents perceived that *halal* certification meant that all food sources are *halal* certified with a high mean value of 4.41. Due to this factor, it stimulated the confidence level among the Muslim customers with the mean value of 4.40. Being a *halal* certified restaurant means that it conforms to the *halal* standard (4.39) thus ensuring trust (4.37). Here, trust has been the main subject matter in academic research on *halal* foods and its certification (Abdul Latif, 2006; Al-Nahdi et al., 2009; Dahalan, 2008). As mentioned in the earlier chapters, *halal* food is a

sensitive matter to the Muslims. A Muslim must have no doubts on the food which he considered as *halal* or else the food will fall into *haram* or prohibited to be consumed.

The restaurant managers also perceived that *halal* certification has a positive impact on customer satisfaction (4.30) where it contributed to increased demand, particularly from the Muslim customers (4.30) and provided customers with the peace of mind during the dining experience (4.29). Similar to trust and confidence level, having peace of mind is an essential part during the dining experience. Restaurant managers felt that *halal* certification relates to peace of mind with a high mean value of 4.29. Thus, this study is supported by (Bonne and Verbeke, 2008; Mohamed Nasir and Pereira, 2008). It is gathered from their findings that Muslim customers will not have doubts when they trusted the food served in an eating premise. Thus, they will feel confident to consume the food. This showed that the Muslims in particular demonstrated that *halalness* is a critical issue to their lives. In fact, the importance of *halal* certified restaurants is a serious concern for all Muslims (Al-Nahdi et al., 2009). Apart from that, Johns and Howard (1998) have found out that emotional comfort as a new determinant in their study. It is proven that the spiritual aspect of the customer is indeed important to patronage a restaurant.

Not only that, the findings reflect that most of the respondents believed that *halal* certification benefits everyone who visit their eating premises with a mean value of 4.28. It is not only the food that matters but a *halal* certified eating establishment in one way or another can generate a harmonious environment where Muslims and non-Muslims can share the same food and eat at the same table (Mohamed Nasir and Pereira, 2008; Wan Hassan and Hall, 2003). Although there are several issues with respect to defensive dining (Mohamed Nair and Pereira, 2008), where devout and practising Muslims might find themselves in an uncomfortable situation when dining publicly (in restaurants, food courts and individual stalls) and possibilities might occur and conflict with Islamic dietary restriction, the findings revealed that the act was not to separate the Muslims and the non-Muslims. In relation to this, it is seen as a combination process not to exclude anyone in a halal certified restaurant.

In another aspect, *halal* food must come from *halal* food preparation and *halal* food supply chain. Restaurant managers from *halal* certified and *halal* claimant restaurants agreed that they trusted their suppliers with the mean value of 4.23. Raw food such as meat and poultry must come from *halal* suppliers that conform to the *halal* standard in terms of the slaughtering process. The results suggest that the demand from Muslim customers will rise whenever a restaurant is *halal* certified. As a result, their confidence level will simultaneously increase.

The literature showed that *halal* certification has certain attributes and Table 2 reveals that they have high mean values apart from trust that has the highest mean value among them that is 4.37. The remaining attributes were hygienic (4.17), safety (4.17), food quality (4.12), healthy food

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Perceptions Toward *Halal* Certification in General

Questions	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
I think halal certification in restaurants...					
signifies all food sources are *halal* certified	643	4.41	.80	-1.46	.10
increases confidence level among the Muslim customers	643	4.40	.81	-1.59	.10
signifies conformance to *halal* standard	643	4.39	.74	-1.33	.10
signifies trust	643	4.37	.80	-1.38	.10
has a positive impact on customer satisfaction	643	4.30	.79	-1.10	.10
increases demand from the Muslim customers	643	4.30	.84	-1.23	.10
provides customers with peace of mind during the dining experience	643	4.29	.80	-.99	.10
benefits everyone	643	4.28	.89	-1.34	.10
relies on trust on the suppliers when purchasing the food items	643	4.23	.81	-1.13	.10
signifies hygienic	643	4.17	.93	-1.17	.10
signifies safety	643	4.17	.91	-1.17	.10
signifies food quality	643	4.12	.99	-1.25	.10
signifies healthy food	643	4.07	1.00	-1.13	.10
signifies authenticity	643	4.00	.93	-.87	.10
signifies taste genuity	643	3.94	1.00	-.86	.10
gives competitive advantage over non certified *halal* restaurants	643	3.93	1.04	-.78	.10
acts as a marketing strategy tool	643	3.91	1.01	-.97	.10
is a trademark establishment	643	3.88	1.04	-.82	.10
attracts the tourism market	643	3.85	1.01	-.65	.10
increases confidence level among the non Muslim customers	643	3.61	1.03	-.32	.10
increase demand from the non Muslim customers	643	3.56	1.02	-.28	.10
Valid N	643				

(4.07), authenticity (4.00) and taste genuity (3.94). Mohd Yusoff (2004) also emphasized that in order for the manufacturers to comply with *halal* certification, they are obliged to act responsibly to maintain the *halal* status of the food they produce. Furthermore, cleanliness and hygiene are closely related, and cover personal hygiene, attire, equipment and working environment. Pang and Toh (2008) in their study on the hawker food industry in Malaysia, discovered that hygiene is very important in Islam where some parts of the body must be cleaned before a prayer. In fact, this ablution process takes place almost every time before a Muslim performs his daily prayer.

Restaurant managers who have been selected in the mail survey strongly agreed that *halal* certification signifies safety. It is gathered from the findings that with *halal* certification, a restaurant will ensure that the food is not only *halal* but also safe for consumption. The results are supported from the literature on the importance of certification that is related to safety (Mohd Yusoff, 2004; Riaz and Chaudry, 2004). Pang and Toh (2008) in their study have revealed a unique finding where the emphasis on body cleanliness and hygiene by some Muslim hawkers may have a significant effect on the higher food safety performance standard of this religious group as compared to others. As highlighted by Abdul Talib et al. (2008), *halal* matters recognized safety and quality assurance. Therefore, it ensures the *halal* products are also clean, safe and well taken care of together with good presentation and served everybody appropriately and in good quality.

Halal certification is seen as a source of competitive advantage (3.93) over non-certified *halal* restaurants. Therefore, marketing plays a vital part in order to attract the customers particularly the Muslims where the restaurant managers agreed that *halal* certification acts as a marketing strategy tool with a mean value of 3.91. The study by Al-Nahdi et al. (2009), suggested that marketing communication tools need to be employed in order to advertise and promote a *halal* restaurant. It is also to highlight that the eating premise with *halal* certification follows the Shariah principle. With the trademark establishment, *halal* certification has gained many opportunities domestically and internationally. A mean value of 3.88 suggests that, *halal* certification is accepted by the respondents as a way to gain confidence and build trust not only in the food service but also in the tourism industry. Malaysia has taken a proactive step by introducing multiethnic foods to the locals and tourists (Josiam et al., 2007) whereby the respondents perceived that *halal* certificate could be a way of appeal to the Muslim tourists from the Middle East and other parts of the world with a mean value of 3.85.

Respondents were not certain as to whether *halal* certification could generate a confidence level and demand among the non-Muslims with both means showing 3.61 and 3.56 respectively. However, Muhammad (2007) has reiterated that *halal* food is for the Muslims and non-Muslims. The fundamental aspect for Muslims to consume is to search for *halal* food as it is their responsibility to ensure that the food is according to the Shariah principle (Wan Omar et al., 2008)

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for Perceptions toward *Halal* Certification in Malaysia

Questions	N	Mean	SD	Scenes	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
I believe that other restaurant managers think of *Halal* Certification in Malaysia...					
as an important aspect in the food service industry	643	4.25	.87	-1.19	.10
as adding value to their restaurants	643	4.10	.83	-1.05	.10
is familiar to the local people	643	4.08	.85	-.97	.10
is gaining acceptance from the local people	643	4.07	.83	-.90	.10
as a signal of trust to the related local authority in approving domestic food products	643	4.02	.79	-.77	.10
as a signal of trust to the related local authority in approving international food products	643	4.01	.80	-.61	.10
as a way to increase the number of customers	643	3.99	.92	-.86	.10
is a regulation to promote standardization	643	3.78	.90	-.59	.10
is gaining acceptance from the foreign people	643	3.73	.93	-.38	.10
is a better standard compared to other South East Asian countries	643	3.72	.93	-.42	.10
takes too much time in getting the approval	643	3.42	1.05	-.22	.10
costs a lot in getting the approval	643	3.27	1.04	-.09	.10
creates some bureaucracy in getting the approval	643	3.24	1.00	-.07	.10
is to cater for the Muslim customers only	643	3.02	1.26	.06	.10
is a standard that is difficult to maintain	643	2.72	1.08	.17	.10
is a standard that is difficult to follow	643	2.71	1.08	.19	.10
Valid N	643				

. Not only that, the whole concept is to promote cleanliness in all aspects of a person's life. On the other hand, *halal* food can be considered as a universal food (Abdul Latif, 2006). As such, it can be consumed by both Muslims as well as the non-Muslims. Zailani et al. (2011) mentioned that Muslims are required to take *halal* food because *halal* is not only merely allowable but also signify cleanliness, safety and quality assurance where the product must be prepared in hygienic, safe and being scrutinized in ensuring that the food is from trusted *halal* sources.

This section is on what other restaurant managers think of *halal* certification in Malaysia. It is shown in Table 3 that *halal* certification is an important aspect in the food service industry where the restaurant managers have indicated a high mean value of 4.25. It is indicated that respondents felt that their counterparts perceived the *halal* certificate as adding value to their restaurants where the mean value is 4.10. The study on defensive dining in Singapore conducted by Mohamed Nasir and Pereira (2008) shows similar result with this study in relation to familiar to the local people when 20 Muslim respondents who have been interviewed mentioned that they would search for the MUIS *halal* certificate when deciding on a place to dine at public places.

Apart from the *halal* certification attributes that are mentioned in Table 2, other restaurant managers also believed that restaurants should display *halal* certification at certified *halal* eating premises as food industry is very much concentrated on consumer orientation. The result of this study is supported by Habib et al. (2011) in their research on fast food consumption where *halal* status is one of the major influential factors for fast food purchasing and consumption in Malaysia although their study took customers as their sample. In contrast, this study chose restaurant managers as the respondents and the results were meaningful and covered many opinions and expectations from different perspectives either from the fast food or the non-fast food providers.

Halal certification requires every aspect of life to comply with the *Shariah* principle. The studies by Al-Nahdi et al. (2009) and Dahalan (2008) raised the concern of Muslims in Malaysia that they consider the concept of *halal* as an ultimate factor to consumption. It is also gathered that restaurant managers are aware that local people are looking for *halal* certificates before deciding to enter an eating premise, as they are familiar with it. This is shown with the mean value of 4.08. Moreover, restaurant managers believed that the local people are accepting the *halal* certification displayed at certified *halal* eating outlets depicted by the mean value of 4.07 in Table 3.

In another context, respondents perceived that other restaurant managers thought that *halal* certification acts as a signal of trust to the related local authority in approving domestic (mean value of 4.02) and international food products (mean value of 4.01). Respondents also believed that *halal* certification is one of the ways to increase the number of customers (mean value of 3.99) and a regulation to promote standardization (mean value of 3.78). The promotion of *halal* foods to attract the foreign people particularly the Muslim tourists from the Middle East has somehow

contributed to the expectations of the respondents. They expected that other restaurant managers would perceived that *halal* certification would be accepted by the foreign people with a mean value of 3.73. Additionally, it is also believed that *halal* certification is a better standard compared to other South East Asian countries where the mean value is 3.72. As the *halal* program started in Malaysia during the early 1980s, the country also has formal procedures to approve a *halal* certifying organization as well as act as one of the major voices in *halal* recognition (Riaz and Chaudry, 2004). Since then, as a pioneer in the development of *halal* food products and certification, Malaysia has been undergoing *halal* food industry revolution due to the lucrative potential in the global market.

Several questions on time, costs and bureaucracy in getting the *halal* certification were asked in the survey and showed low mean values of 3.42, 3.27 and 3.24 respectively. A low mean value also indicated (3.02) when respondents thought that other restaurant managers expected that *halal* certification is to cater for the Muslim customers only. The restaurant managers were also unsure whether their counterparts perceived that *halal* certification is a standard that is difficult to follow and maintain resulting with low mean value of 2.71 and 2.72 respectively. Othman et al. (2006) as cited in Zailani et al. (2011, p. 7) mentioned that while compliance with *halal* requirements are considered to include considerable costs and investments particularly during initial stages and it is against sound business strategy and a poor allocation of firm investment that generally generate negative returns to shareholders. However, many scholars believe that these initiatives are no longer a threat but a business opportunity and even a source of sustained competitive advantages. Due to the pertinent value, the result of the present study showed a consistency on the issue of costs.

The Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) and the state religious departments are the competent authorities being responsible for *halal* certification in Malaysia. In order to issue a *halal* certificate for products exported to Malaysia, the body issuing the *halal* certificate must be listed on the country's approved list. For example, 40 organizations issue *halal* certificates in the U.S. but only 16 have been approved by JAKIM (JAKIM, 2010).

5. Conclusions

It is gathered from the descriptive analysis that the results showed that restaurant managers involved in this study have high expectations toward *halal* certification in terms of its cleanliness, trusted *halal* sources, attributes, competitive advantage and importance in the restaurant sector. Here, success in the implementation of *halal* certification can be attributed to conforming and maintaining to the *halal* standard. The fact of the matter is, Muslim customers like any other consumer segments seek healthy, safe and quality food. Most broadly, the food must also conform

to *Shariah* requirements. Al-Harran and Low (2008, p. 43) highlighted the term "patronising attitude" between the producer and the buyer where quality *halal* products must be supplied as the demand for *halal* food is another rising global trend.

Whatever it takes to achieve it, the selected restaurant managers agreed that *halal* certification is an important aspect in the food service industry especially in the restaurant sector as more people can be influenced to patronize eating establishments that have it. They also reasoned that a restaurant could offer better service in terms of convenience and ample space compared to hawker stalls and food courts. The growing demand in *halal* food, the launching of the *halal* hub concept, and the increasing number of Muslim tourists to Malaysia have led the restaurant managers to have high expectations toward *halal* certification with respect to improved business competitiveness while not neglecting the fundamental aspect of conforming to the *halal* standards. In order to further explain the expectations of restaurant managers toward *halal* certification in Malaysia, Chapter Eight will highlight on the discussions with respect to the findings.

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