

# Halal Hub: Towards Empowering the Halal Economy

Sharifudin Md Shaarani, Hisham Bin Sabri\*, Nur Ainna Ramli, Muhammad Nizam Awang

*Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia*

Email: [hishams@usim.edu.my](mailto:hishams@usim.edu.my), [nurainna.ramli@usim.edu.my](mailto:nurainna.ramli@usim.edu.my),

*\* Corresponding Author*

## Abstract

**Purpose:** The rapid progression of the economic sector in Malaysia, especially the increasing demand for halal products and services, has become the focus of consumers, suppliers, small and medium entrepreneurs, and authorities. The study emphasizes on the Development of the Sabah Halal Hub in the development of the local economic sector. It is also capable of dissecting various other sectors, especially job opportunities and the supply of raw materials. towards producing a sustainable economy in the future. the Sabah Halal Hub provides guidance to entrepreneurs in terms of modus operandi and compliance with Malaysian Halal certification. Therefore, this study aims to identify the challenges and opportunities encountered by the entrepreneurs in the strategic development of the Halal Hub in Sabah involving the business management of entrepreneurs based on Malaysian Halal certification, and to the added value of the Hub can contribute to the consumption of various halal products (product varieties) based on the Halal Hub platform.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The methodology used in this paper is a qualitative method through library research by referring to theses, journals, newspaper data, and also scientific books that are related to this paper. In carrying out this study, a series of methodological steps were followed to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the analysis. Qualitative methods were chosen because they allow researchers to delve deeper into complex issues through detailed observations and textual analysis.

**Findings:** The results of this study will present a conceptual model of choice for entrepreneurs based on field studies and surveys conducted.

**Research limitations/implications:** This study only focusses on the Sabah Halal Hub.

**Practical implications:** The establishment of Sabah Halal Hub plays a crucial role in empowering the halal economy by providing the necessary infrastructure, services, and support to ensure the production, certification, and distribution of halal products. The Hub facilitates compliance with halal standards, enhance the credibility of halal certification, and help entrepreneurs navigate the complexities of the halal market.

**Originality/value:** The research is valid in developing of entrepreneurship eco-system with the support of halal hub. In this light, understanding these critical components of halal hub is very important for the benefit of halal current business. Therefore, the implementation and execution of the halal hub will have an impact on the state government of Sabah, halal authorities, academicians and business industry players oriented towards Malaysian halal certification.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurs, halal hub, halal certification

## Introduction

The concept of halal in Islam refers to everything that is permitted or allowed according to Islamic law. The term “halal” is used to refer to food, drinks, behaviour, and financial transactions that comply with Islamic teachings. Halal emphasizes adherence to religious principles, cleanliness, and health, and involves a certification process to ensure compliance with established standards. This principle also includes prohibitions against the consumption of pork, alcohol, and any form of usury (interest or profit that is forbidden in Islam). Thus, the concept of halal in Islam plays an important role in determining the lifestyle, diet, and economic activities of Muslims.

## Scriptural Evidence Related to the Concept of Halal in Islam

يَتَأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُلُوا مِن طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لِلّٰهِ إِن كُنْتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿١٧٢﴾

O you who have believed, eat from the good things which We have provided for you and be grateful to Allah if it is [indeed] Him that you worship. (Al-Baqarah 2:172)

وَلَا تَأْكُلُوا مِمَّا لَمْ يُذْكَرِ اسْمُ اللّٰهِ عَلَيْهِ وَإِنَّهُ لَفِسْقٌ وَّإِنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ لِيُوحُونَ إِلَىٰ أَوْلِيَآئِهِمْ لِيُجَدِّ لَكُمْ وَإِن أَطَعْتُمُوهُمْ إِنَّكُمْ لَمُشْرِكُونَ ﴿١٦١﴾

And do not eat of that upon which the name of Allah has not been mentioned, for indeed, it is grave disobedience. And indeed do the devils inspire their allies [among men] to dispute with you. And if you were to obey them, indeed, you would be associators [of others with Him]. (Al-An'aam 6:121).

## The Concept of Halal Hub

The concept of a Halal Hub refers to a center or institution dedicated to facilitating the production, distribution, and certification of halal products. The Halal Hub aims to provide the necessary infrastructure and services for producers to ensure their products comply with halal principles. This includes facilitating the certification process, developing standards, providing training, and enabling collaboration among stakeholders in the halal industry. The Halal Hub can also play a role in promoting halal products and building consumer trust in the authenticity and halal status of products.

## Strategies Towards Establishing a Halal Hub

To facilitate the establishment of a Halal Hub, several strategies have been devised to achieve this goal, including building partnerships between producers, certification bodies, and regulatory agencies to ensure standard compliance and support the halal ecosystem. Unlike other states in Malaysia, the Sabah State Government has established a department called MUIS Halal Hub which is responsible for overseeing, auditing, and managing halal-related matters in the state. Entrepreneurs who wish to obtain halal certification for their products must deal with MUIS Halal Hub. JAKIM is only responsible for approving applications and issuing halal certificates after all processes are carried out by MUIS Halal Hub. As a modern Islamic country with an open economy, Malaysia has a competitive advantage in the development of the halal industry. The expanding network of Muslim consumer demand for halal products, goods, and food has further boosted this industry not only in Malaysia but also worldwide (Al' et al., 2015).

The next strategy is to provide education and training programs for producers, distributors, and entrepreneurs to enhance their understanding of halal compliance and business management. Sabah is known for its multi-ethnic and multi-racial population, commonly referred to as Bumiputera or Indigenous people, consisting of at least 35 groups speaking more than 50 languages and at least 90 dialects. According to the 2020 Malaysian Population and Housing Census, approximately 69.6% of Sabah's population is Muslim, while the rest are non-Muslims. This indicates that among producers, distributors, and entrepreneurs, there are non-Muslims who need education and training programs to enhance their understanding of halal compliance and business management. Even Muslims themselves require such programs to further solidify their understanding.

Additionally, strategies to develop integrated production, storage, and distribution facilities that meet halal and field safety standards have been outlined towards establishing the Halal Hub. Entrepreneurs in Sabah have dreams and ambitions to expand their businesses, but limitations such as insufficient facilities, limited storage space for raw and dry materials, distributors not meeting halal standards, and lack of awareness about field safety hinder them from realizing these ambitions. These constraints result in suboptimal product output and lower-quality products. Therefore, three Halal Hub models have been introduced for entrepreneurs to choose from to mitigate these constraints: Centralized Facility, Shop House, and Satellite Halal Hub.

Furthermore, strategies for marketing and promotion have been devised to strengthen the marketing and promotion of halal products, including leveraging digital technology to expand market reach. In this regard, assistance from marketing experts and IT specialists is needed to achieve the objectives of this strategy. With marketing expertise and technological assistance, local products can penetrate international markets through various online platforms such as Shopee, Lazada, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and others. For example, a local product marketed online received an overwhelming response from buyers, generating RM1.19 million in just 3 minutes and 39 seconds through the TikTok Live platform. This proves that a solid marketing strategy leveraging online digital technology can yield significant results.

Moreover, international collaboration is seen as one of the strategies towards establishing a Halal Hub by developing partnerships with international institutions to enhance recognition and trust in local halal certification. According to the chairman of the World Halal Forum (WHF), Khairy Jamaluddin, one reason why the halal industry cannot grow faster, despite

increasing demand for halal products worldwide, is the lack of consensus on halal standards (Mahyeddin et al., 2012). Each country has its own certification body, leading to disagreements on animal feed, slaughter methods, packaging, logistics, and other issues. Indeed, all market sectors, from intergovernmental agencies to the smallest traders, have recognized the need for a global halal standard recognized by all importing countries. The Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) stated that Malaysia is actively collaborating with nine countries for the development of the halal sector globally as of June 30, 2022. The Deputy Minister of International Trade and Industry, Datuk Lim Ban Hong, at that time said the countries are Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Russia, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. The Halal Hub is seen as an agent for entrepreneurs to participate in such international programs so that local certification is better known worldwide.

Through the application of these strategies, Halal Hub can become an effective centre to facilitate the production, certification, and distribution of halal products, as well as help the growth of the halal industry as a whole as well as develop the local halal economy, especially in the state of Sabah.

### **Research Methodology**

The methodology used in this paper is a qualitative method through library research by referring to theses, journals, newspaper data, and also scientific books that are related to this paper. In carrying out this study, a series of methodological steps were followed to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the analysis. Qualitative methods were chosen because they allow researchers to delve deeper into complex issues through detailed observations and textual analysis. In addition, a bibliographic study was chosen because the existing sources provide a variety of perspectives and relevant data for this research. By combining these two methods, it is hoped that this paper can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic discussed.

### **The Role of Halal Hub in Assisting Entrepreneurs**

The role of the Halal Hub in assisting entrepreneurs includes facilitating certification, which helps entrepreneurs in the halal product certification process, aiding them in meeting halal requirements to expand potential markets. Entrepreneurs need guidance in document preparation, advice on planning for product processing areas, and other requirements set by the authorities. This is because most local communities, especially entrepreneurs in Sabah, are not well-versed in the requirements for obtaining halal product certification. Therefore, the role of the Halal Hub is to guide them through and complete the requirements and other necessities to ensure entrepreneurs successfully obtain halal certification for their products.

Additionally, the Halal Hub also plays a role in providing entrepreneurs with access to production, storage, and distribution infrastructure that meets halal standards. It is undeniable that every entrepreneur has dreams and targets they wish to achieve in commercializing their products while maintaining the quality of halal products from halal sources to be marketed to consumers without doubt. However, not all dreams can become reality due to challenges and constraints faced by entrepreneurs, such as limitations in production infrastructure, storage, and distribution that meet halal standards. Therefore, the Halal Hub is seen as a platform to provide solutions to help illuminate the path for entrepreneurs to overcome these constraints with the assistance of other agencies.

Furthermore, the Halal Hub plays a significant role in assisting entrepreneurs by providing education and training programs to enhance their understanding of halal principles and help them optimize the production process. Entrepreneurs must adopt the mindset of seeking knowledge and take advantage of the opportunities given to them to learn all about halal principles so that they can be applied to optimize the production process. The local halal product market has seen a surge in demand due to the boycott of products supporting the atrocities of Zionist Israel. Malaysian society, especially Muslim consumers, are now focusing on local brand products as their choice to replace previous products as a form of jihad. Therefore, the potential for local halal products to grow further is no longer a concern. Hence, halal entrepreneurs should seize the opportunity to gain the knowledge provided by the Halal Hub to assure consumers that local products can stand on par with foreign products.

Moreover, the Halal Hub also plays a role in helping entrepreneurs market their halal products, expand market reach, and build consumer trust in the halal status of their products. As time progresses, the development of digital technology cannot be outpaced by humans. The emergence of various online technologies today would surely astonish our ancestors if they were still alive. In the 1970s, who would have thought that people could shop just through a smartphone without stepping outside their homes? Now, there are various platforms that can be used to market halal products, such as Shopee, Lazada, TikTok, Instagram, and others. Therefore, through these platforms, entrepreneurs can market halal products more widely with the guidance and instruction provided by the Halal Hub.

The Halal Hub also plays an important role in facilitating connections between entrepreneurs and relevant parties in the halal industry, enabling beneficial collaboration and knowledge exchange. The market and demand for halal products are not only growing in one country but globally. This can be evidenced by the collaboration between Malaysia and other countries such as Indonesia, Japan, China, Singapore, and Bangladesh in successfully organizing the Malaysia International Halal Showcase (MIHAS) since 2004 until now. MIHAS is a robust marketplace for international and local players to seize opportunities beyond halal food, including halal pharmaceuticals, medical devices, finance, fashion, personal care and cosmetics, technology, and Muslim-friendly tourism. Therefore, entrepreneurs under the Halal Hub have the opportunity to gain halal knowledge through such programs.

Thus, the Halal Hub can act as a primary facilitator for entrepreneurs to enter and grow in the halal product market through a solid explanation of the important roles played by the Halal Hub.

### **Challenges of Halal Hub**

Implementing a Halal Hub presents several challenges for businessmen, which can impact their ability to effectively produce, certify, and market halal products. Some of the challenges are as follows:

#### ***Compliance with Halal Standards***

Ensuring that products meet stringent halal standards is a significant challenge. Businessmen must adhere to detailed guidelines outlined in documents like the Malaysian Halal Certification Procedure Manual (MPPHM) and the Malaysian Halal Management System (MHMS). Non-

compliance can lead to the withdrawal of halal certification, which can severely impact business operations and reputation.

### *Credibility of Certification*

Maintaining the credibility of halal certification is crucial. Businessmen must ensure that their products are halal certified and tradable for the international or export market.. This involves rigorous processes and can be a differentiating factor in both domestic and global markets. A credible certification can open up new market opportunities, while a lack of it can hinder growth.

### *Consumer Awareness and Trust*

Increasing consumer understanding and trust in halal products is another challenge. Despite the official religion being Islam, not all products in the market are halal. Businessmen must educate consumers about the importance of halal certification and the reliability of their products. This is particularly challenging in diverse regions like Sabah, where there are many non-Muslim consumers and businesses.

### *Infrastructure and Logistics*

Access to appropriate production, storage, and distribution infrastructure that meets halal standards is often limited. Businessmen may face challenges in finding facilities that comply with halal requirements, which can affect the quality and safety of their products. This limitation can also hinder their ability to scale operations and meet market demand.

### **Collaboration and Partnerships**

These issues are very crucial components in the successful implementation and operation of a Halal Hub. These collaborations help ensure that the entire halal ecosystem functions smoothly and efficiently. Here's a deeper look into how these partnerships work and their significance:

#### *Collaboration with Certification Bodies*

Halal Hub needs to work closely with halal certification bodies like JAKIM in Malaysia or MUIS in Singapore. These bodies provide the necessary certification that assures consumers of the halal status of products. The collaboration involves:

- **Ensuring Compliance:** Regular audits and inspections to ensure that all processes meet halal standards.
- **Streamlining Certification:** Simplifying the certification process for businesses, making it easier and faster to obtain halal certification.
- **Training and Education:** Providing training sessions for businesses on how to maintain halal standards.

#### *Partnerships with Government Agencies*

Government support is vital for the success of Halal Hubs. Partnerships with government agencies can provide:

- **Regulatory Support:** Ensuring that halal regulations are in place and enforced.

- **Financial Assistance:** Grants, subsidies, and loans to help businesses upgrade their facilities to meet halal standards.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Building the necessary infrastructure, such as halal parks and logistics centers, to support halal businesses.

#### *Collaboration with Industry Players*

The Sabah Halal Hub facilitates collaboration among various industry players, including producers, suppliers, and distributors. This collaboration can lead to:

- **Supply Chain Integration:** Creating a seamless supply chain that ensures the halal integrity of products from production to consumption.
- **Shared Resources:** Pooling resources for research and development, marketing, and distribution.
- **Innovation and Development:** Joint efforts in developing new halal products and technologies.

#### *International Partnerships*

Global collaboration is essential for expanding the reach of halal products. This involves:

- **Trade Agreements:** Establishing trade agreements with other countries to facilitate the export and import of halal products.
- **International Certification:** Working with international halal certification bodies to ensure that products meet global halal standards.
- **Global Marketing:** Participating in international trade shows and exhibitions to promote halal products.

#### *Academic and Research Institutions*

Partnerships with universities and research institutions can drive innovation and ensure that halal standards are based on the latest scientific research. This includes:

- **Research and Development:** Conducting research on new halal products, processes, and technologies.
- **Educational Programs:** Offering courses and training programs on halal standards and practices.
- **Consultancy Services:** Providing expert advice and consultancy services to halal businesses.

#### *Consumer Engagement*

Engaging with consumers is crucial for building trust and ensuring the success of halal products. This involves:

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Educating consumers about the importance of halal certification and what it entails.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Creating channels for consumers to provide feedback on halal products and services.
- **Community Involvement:** Involving the community in halal-related events and activities to build a strong consumer base.

In a nutshell, effective collaboration and partnerships are the backbone of a successful Halal Hub. By working together with certification bodies, government agencies, industry players, international partners, academic institutions, and consumers, Halal Hubs can create a robust

and efficient halal ecosystem. This not only ensures the integrity and quality of halal products but also helps businesses expand their reach and compete in the global market.

### ***Innovation and Product Development***

Encouraging innovation while maintaining halal integrity is a delicate balance. Businessmen must continuously develop new products and improve existing ones to stay competitive. This includes upgrading packaging, refining recipes, and responding to consumer feedback. However, ensuring that these innovations comply with halal standards adds complexity to the process.

### ***Global Market Access***

Penetrating global markets requires understanding and navigating different regulatory environments. Businessmen must adapt to various international standards and consumer preferences, which can be resource-intensive. Additionally, leveraging digital platforms for global reach requires expertise in e-commerce and digital marketing.

### ***Education and Training***

Many businessmen lack in-depth knowledge of halal principles and regulations. Providing education and training to enhance their understanding and capabilities is crucial. This includes understanding the legal and procedural aspects of halal certification, as well as best practices in production and marketing. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated effort from all stakeholders involved in the halal ecosystem. Halal Hubs can play a pivotal role in providing the necessary support, infrastructure, and guidance to help businessmen overcome these obstacles and succeed in the halal market. By fostering collaboration, promoting education, and supporting innovation, Halal Hubs can empower entrepreneurs to thrive in the era of globalization.

### **The Role of Halal Hub in Facing the Era of Globalization**

The era of globalization presents various opportunities and challenges for the halal industry. On one hand, globalization opens up wider market access for halal products. On the other hand, globalization also increases competition and the complexity of global supply chains. The Halal Hub can play an important role in helping the halal industry face the era of globalization. One way is by enhancing the competitiveness of the halal industry by strengthening the halal value chain. The Halal Hub can help halal industry players improve the efficiency and quality of their products by providing integrated services and infrastructure while increasing access to global markets. The Halal Hub can assist halal industry players in promoting and marketing their products to global markets through e-commerce platforms and international networks, and further developing halal products and technology. The Halal Hub can support research and development of halal products and technology to enhance the competitiveness of the halal industry.

Additionally, the Halal Hub can strengthen cooperation and partnerships by facilitating collaboration among halal industry players. The Halal Hub can facilitate cooperation among halal industry players in various countries to improve the efficiency and competitiveness of the halal industry and build international networks. The Halal Hub can help build international



networks among halal industry players, academics, and governments to strengthen cooperation and development of the halal industry (Zakaria et al., 2022).

Moreover, the Halal Hub plays a role in increasing awareness and understanding of halal in facing the era of globalization by providing education and training. Many entrepreneurs still do not fully understand the concept and regulations of halal. This is evident when there are still entrepreneurs who openly use statements such as “guaranteed halal,” “pork/alcohol-free,” “Muslim-made,” “Bumiputra products,” and any statements implying that the product has received halal certification from an authoritative body (Farah Mohd Shahwahid, 2015). The Halal Hub can provide education and training to halal industry players and consumers about the concept of halal through courses, halal camps, and field demonstrations conducted by halal experts, whether from the halal industry itself or qualified and experienced educators from higher education institutions. This can also promote Islamic culture and values. The Halal Hub can be a platform to promote Islamic culture and values not only to Muslim entrepreneurs but also to non-Muslim entrepreneurs.

### **Examples of the Role of Halal Hub in Facing the Era of Globalization Based on Locality:**

#### ***Halal Development Corporation (HDC) Malaysia***

HDC, also known as the Halal Industry Development Corporation, was established on September 18, 2006, as a result of the aspirations of the then Prime Minister, Dato’ Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, to make Malaysia a leading international halal hub. HDC is a corporation established to develop the halal industry in Malaysia comprehensively and systematically. Among the functions of HDC is to take steps that will influence the development of the halal industry to enable companies marketing halal products to merge with the global market, develop and promote the Malaysian halal brand, and promote the concept and services of halal products throughout Malaysia.

In its early stages, HDC was involved in the management and issuance of halal certification. However, this responsibility was returned to the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) to allow HDC to focus on efforts to develop the halal hub at the international level. This decision was the right action to take as HDC’s role proved to be more effective when it focused on developing and succeeding in the halal industry. HDC is responsible for ensuring the integrity of halal standards, maintaining the best quality, and providing solutions that meet the demands of Shariah principles and commercial industries. Therefore, HDC’s focus is related to the development of the halal industry itself and not involved in law enforcement issues.

According to its CEO, Datuk Seri Jamil Bidin, since 2010, HDC has overseen more than 100 projects with an investment value of RM8 billion through various industry development efforts. HDC has provided comprehensive assistance to Malaysian and multinational producers, distributors, retailers, entrepreneurs, researchers, and investors to penetrate the growing global halal market. HDC’s efforts are seen in capacity building, market access, branding and promotion, and access to financing. Additionally, HDC has helped more than 700 local halal companies go global through the Halal Business Transformation (HBT) Program with hypermarkets and multinational companies, including Parkson, Aeon Jusco, Giant, Aeon BIG, Felda D’ Saji, LuLu, and Angkasa, recording business transactions worth RM850 million. Furthermore, through the Halal Park concept, HDC has continuously facilitated the growth of

Malaysia's halal industry in a halal-oriented business community built on shared property, providing infrastructure service support.

HDC's latest efforts are to drive and facilitate the growth of key halal industry clusters or sectors such as specialized processed food clusters, halal ingredients, cosmetics and personal care, and livestock. The potential development of these clusters is crucial to making the halal segment a new source of economic growth for the country. Considering all of HDC's achievements since its establishment, it provides a bright opportunity to realize Malaysia's aspiration to become a Global Halal Hub by 2020.

### *Singapore Halal Hub*

The Singapore Halal Hub plays a crucial role in promoting Halal products and services in Singapore and internationally. Here are some of its key functions:

- **Certification and Standards:** The Hub develops and administers Halal certification standards, ensuring that products and services adhere to Islamic dietary laws.
- **Training and Education:** It provides training and education programs to businesses, individuals, and government agencies on Halal principles, standards, and practices.
- **Research and Development:** The Hub conducts research and development activities to support the growth of the Halal industry.
- **Networking and Collaboration:** It facilitates networking and collaboration between Halal businesses, government agencies, and international organizations.
- **Marketing and Promotion:** The Hub promotes Singapore as a Halal hub and supports the marketing of Halal products and services.
- **Policy Development:** It advises the government on Halal-related policies and regulations.

Overall, the Singapore Halal Hub serves as a central platform for the development and promotion of the Halal industry in Singapore.

### **Conclusion**

The establishment of Sabah Halal Hub plays a crucial role in empowering the halal economy by providing the necessary infrastructure, services, and support to ensure the production, certification, and distribution of halal products. These hubs facilitate compliance with halal standards, enhance the credibility of halal certification, and help entrepreneurs navigate the complexities of the halal market. By fostering collaboration among industry players, regulatory bodies, and certification agencies, Halal Hubs strengthen the overall halal ecosystem. They also play a significant role in educating and training entrepreneurs and consumers about halal principles, thereby increasing awareness and understanding of halal products. In the era of globalization, Halal Hub is instrumental in helping the halal industry compete on a global scale. They support research and development, promote innovation, and leverage digital platforms to expand market reach. Through international partnerships and networks, the Halal Hub enhances the global recognition and trust in halal certification. In overall, the Halal Hub are pivotal in driving the growth and sustainability of the halal economy, ensuring that halal products meet the highest standards of quality and integrity, and empowering entrepreneurs to succeed in the global market.

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