

Issues in Halal Packaging: A Conceptual Paper

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Abstract:

The paper aims to uncover the issues encountered on Halal packaging for Halal food products in order to ensure that not only the ingredients' Halal status should be considered but the packaging itself must also be included. The method used for this conceptual paper is based from literature reviews from journal articles, theses proceedings and conferences, books and online news which are related with the keywords and research area. Packaging is one of the crucial elements in logistics activities and to ensure the integrity of the Halal status for the contents and the packaging, activities such as production, preparation, storage and transportation should instil the Halal practices. The issues encountered on Halal packaging are Halal certification on the packaging, the Halal methods of product handling and Halal traceability of the packaging. There is a need for greater study on Halal packaging although a lot of researches solely done on the Halal ingredients or contents only. Further research, both empirical and non-empirical, must be done in order to uncover more issues pertaining to Halal packaging. Plus, the study only covers the food product packaging and neglects the types of packaged product such as cosmetics and pharmaceuticals.

Key words: Halal; Halal logistics; Halal supply chain; Packaging; Islamic culture

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INTRODUCTION

One of the factors that influence purchase decision is religious belief and identity as different religious groups prohibits certain foods to be consumed by the devotees (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). According to Simoons (1994) religion is one of the factors that limits food consumption, particularly meat consumption. For example, in Islam, swine meats and alcoholic beverages are taboos. Pork and beef are prohibited in Hinduism and Buddhism. Food consumed by Muslim devotees must be Halal. Halal is an Arabic word which translates permitted in English. As Muslims are more aware and knowledgeable about their food intakes, there is great demand for Halal products in the global market. The Halal food market is value for more than USD600 billion (Omar & Jaafar, 2011) and market population is more than 1.5 billion people and 70% of the Muslim market follow Halal standards (Minkus-McKenna, 2007). Furthermore, not only Muslims consumed Halal food products, non-Muslims too prefer Halal products (Abdul Aziz & NyenVui, 2012) because Halal food products are cleaner, healthier and tastier (Burgmann, 2007).

1. HALAL IN ISLAM

Muslims around the world must consume Halal food as part of their diet. Halal refers to Islamic principle that is part of Shariah and is mentioned in The Holy Quran. Shariah is the code of conduct or the way of life for all Muslims to follow and applies to every activity including eating. Halal is defined as permitted, permissible and lawful. The opposite of Halal is Haram (non-Halal) which means forbidden and unlawful, in the context of Islamic law. Halal is normally associated with food products but it is more than just concerning about food. Halal involves cosmetics products, pharmaceuticals products, services such as banking and finance and tourism. Every Muslim must adhere to the Islamic principles and every

product and services must not involve the use of non-Halal ingredients (carrion, blood, flesh of the swine, etc.), manipulating the environment and labor, and not harmful or intended for harmful use.

According to the Shariah law, Halal food must fulfill the following conditions: (a) does not contain any non-Halal parts or products of Haram animals or products or animals that is not slaughtered in the name of Allah and Shariah methods; (b) does not contain any ingredients that are considered najis (unclean); (c) safe and not harmful; (d) not prepared, processed or manufactured using tools or equipment that are contaminated or used together with non-Halal or najis; (e) ingredients or byproducts does not contain any human parts; and (f) during the process of manufacturing, preparation, packaging, storage or distribution, product must be physically separated between Halal and Haram products.

Pointing out condition (f), packaging of food products must also be considered and certified Halal in order to have a wholesome Halal product. This is because a Halal product does not only matters during point of consumption but it must cover the whole aspect of supply chain from the source of materials right until the final consumption. However, there are very limited studies done on Halal packaging. Talib *et al.* (2010) argued that some Halal packaging status is questionable as the source of packaging materials are from animals which the Halal status is doubted. Riaz and Chaudry (2004) and Talib *et al.* (2010) mentioned that during transportation, it is unnecessary to segregate between sealed Halal and non-Halal products. However, if the product leaks any substance such as meat juices, than it must be segregated. Soong (2007) in a study on Halal quality in food service industry have a different view that states during packaging and shipping activities, any food that does not meet Shariah law must be separated as the product is considered unclean. Hazair (2007) indicates that packaging of Halal product must maintain the aspect of Shariah such as image printed onto the packaging must not violate Halal concepts, images should not stir any unpleasant and cause sensitivity and clear and relevant information must also be made available such as recognized Halal logo.

2. CONCEPT OF PACKAGING

Packaging is defined as all products made of any material of any nature to be used for the containment, protection, handling, delivery, and presentation of goods, from the raw materials to processed goods, form the producer to the user or consumer (Prendergast, 1995). In other words, packaging is a material used to contain, protect and handle goods. According to Prendergast and Pitt (1996), the role of packaging can be divided into logistics and marketing. In a similar study, Johansson (1997) add another function of packaging, environmental function.

The role of packaging in logistics is to contain and protect the goods during delivery and distribution. It is also practiced to protect workers during handling goods such as chemical, liquid or loose products. In addition, packaging will eliminate or minimize the chances for damages, spoilage, misplacement or theft throughout the logistics activities. In the context of Halal, packaging will protect goods from any cross-contamination between Halal and non-Halal substance. Besides that, packaging also acts as a protection from any damages to the Halal product so that the Halal status is still intact. During transportation and distribution, packaging is used for segregating between Halal and non-Halal product either by using different carrier or different compartment in a same carrier.

The second role of packaging is marketing functions. Packaging is essentially used in marketing for the purpose of sales packaging, attracting final consumers as well as strengthening product's image. Packaging is the single most important factor in purchasing decision made at the point of sale (Gray & Guthrie, 1990). In the context of Halal, packaging involves certain elements such as Halal certification or logo, list of ingredients and product origin (Rezai *et al.*, 2012). In order to capture the global market especially the Muslim market, manufacturers, producers and retailers should emphasize on ensuring their products in the market are Halal certified. Halal logo is the most important aspect in determining whether a product is Halal or not and Muslims are very particular in ensuring that they purchase only Halal product especially food products. In a study done on factors influencing product purchase, Mohammad Nooh *et al.* (2007) found out that Halal logo is the most crucial element being considered before buying a product. Furthermore, consumer feels Halal logo is more significant than International Organization for Standardization (ISO) certification (Shafie & Othman, 2006).

According to Soong (2007), Halal product packaging must consist of name or brand of the product, minimum content in matric, name and address of manufacturer or distributor, list of ingredients, code number representing production batch and manufactured and expiry date and Halal logo from recognized certification agencies.

3. ISSUES IN HALAL PACKAGING

A research done by Shafie and Othman (2006) mentioned that the issues with Halal certification are the various series of Halal definition, issuance of Halal logo by private or individual authorities, the use of Quran verses or Arabic characters on food products and premises and the weak enforcement by responsible authorities in tackling fraud Halal logos.

As mentioned earlier, one of the most important elements of Halal food packaging is the Halal logo. Halal

logo will single-handedly influence the buying decision for Halal food products. This is because Halal logo does not only indicate that foods sold or prepared are in line with Shariah law, it also indicate that the food products are wholesome, clean and healthy.

In terms of Halal packaging, Halal logo is doubted as there are reports that non-Halal product (pork) is packaged and labeled as Halal (Hong, 2007). Furthermore, it had been found out that consumers are not very confident and in doubt with the Halal logo on food packaging although it is accredited by renowned accreditation authority such as from Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) (Mohamed *et al.*, 2008). As was reported in The Malay Mail on 14th September 2006, a famous bread producer in Malaysia was found guilty of using suspected ingredient in the baking process although the bakery had claimed that it uses 100% Halal oil and the product packaging was labeled with JAKIM's Halal logo. This shows that although the product packaging is labeled Halal, the legitimacy of Halal logo is still questionable.

Another issues with regards to Halal logo on product packaging, the Halal logo is doubted by consumers is because there are numerous Halal logo from various countries and certifying agencies. Currently there are about 122 active Halal certifying bodies, be made up of government, firms, mosques or Islamic societies (International Halal Integrity Alliance, 2011). Since there are no standardized Halal logo and Halal certification, consumers faced the difficulties in buying imported Halal products. In Malaysia, consumers have a piece of mind when it comes to purchasing Halal food products because there is only one government agency that control, regulate and monitor the Halal certification, which is JAKIM. Furthermore, with the establishment on Halal Industry Development Corporation (HDC) in 2006, the Malaysian Halal standards for food products (MS 1500:2009) strengthen the confidence of Halal logo on food packaging. Moreover, Halal logo on food packaging is important to consumers compared to other certification, for instance the ISO (Shafie & Othman, 2006).

Apart from Halal logo, product handling is also an issue for Halal packaging. The Halal status does not only consider the product ingredient, it also takes into account the supply chain and logistics aspects of Halal food products. For instance, during transportation and storage in warehouses, segregation between Halal and non-Halal food product must be highly practiced (Riaz & Chaudry, 2004). Furthermore, the tools to handled packaged food products must not be mixed together with the one used for non-Halal products. This is done in order to avoid cross contamination (Talib *et al.*, 2010).

Food packaging must not be made from non-Halal substance as it is considered najis (Soong, 2007). Although food packaging such as plastics, carton boxes or microwaveable containers seems to be safe from non-

Halal substance, the origin of materials used to produce the packaging are sometimes questionable. Animal-origin such as animal fats or gelatins are commonly found in the production of plastic packaging and the Halal status is dubious because there are no scientific ways to know whether the animal was slaughtered according to Shariah law. In the case of metal cans production, oils are used to assist in formation and cutting process. This oil can be derived from animals which again the Halal status is in doubt (Talib *et al.*, 2010). During packaging foods into plastics or containers, workers will use disposable glove to ensure good sanitation. However, the gloves' sources of origin at times are doubted as the gloves are made from animal substance that will lead to uncertain Halal status.

Halal packaging can involve the workers or human resource as well. This will ensure that the workers know what to do in order to avoid any Halal contamination. Riaz and Chaudry (2004) states that there should be at least one Muslim worker present during the preparation and packaging process in order to ensure maximum protection from non-Halal elements. According to Jaafar (2011), to reduce and minimizes the possibility of cross-contamination between Halal and non-Halal product and avoid any human mistakes, a specialized and dedicated group of workers should handle the Halal food production. In addition, this will add more confidence to the consumer and protect the Halal integrity of the Halal food product.

Halal traceability and tracking are commonly mentioned in the context of food product and ingredients. However, there is no specific study conducted pertaining to Halal packaging. Halal food product and ingredient alone does not guarantee the product is Halal if the source of packaging is doubted or contains non-Halal substance. Therefore, tracking and tracing Halal packaging either upstream or downstream in the supply chain, specializing on packaging should gain more attention. Traceability in packaging perspective, according to Meuwissen *et al.* (2003) definition is the ability to trace or/and track packaging flow in both fresh production and industrial distribution. Traceability indicates that the packaging is uniquely identified at critical points in the production and distribution process. The information of product flow is than systematically collected, processed and stored.

The issue with Halal traceability and tracking in the context of Halal packaging, in a study done by Anir *et al.* (2008) are (a) there is no real time Halal tracking. Limited number of countries provides web-based Halal information services that largely concentrating on the list of companies and food product that has valid Halal certification but none about the source of packaging. (b) The use of Halal certification logo on food packaging is violated as there are reports of fraud and misused Halal logo in the market. The fake Halal logo certification is provided by non-certified Halal certification authority or it is sold at a price. (c) There is no method to determine

whether the packaging came from the country of origin or otherwise as only the origin of the content of the product is mentioned.

CONCLUSION

There is a saying in the Holy Quran that “the Halal is clear and the Haram is clear. Between the two are doubted matters concerning which people do not know whether there are Halal or non-Halal. The one who avoids them in order to safeguard his religion and his honor is safe” (Al-Qaradawi, 2007). Furthermore, in an interview done by Tieman (2011) quoted “the Prophet cursed not only the one who drinks intoxicating drinks but also the one who produced them, the one who serves them, the one to whom they are served, the one to who the price of them is paid, etc.” This show that the degree of importance of keeping consumer product safe, not only during the point of consumption but also throughout the supply chain network from the source of material to the final consumer. Furthermore, mixing between Halal and non-Halal, the non-Halal will prevail thus it is a must for the industry players to ensure that there is no contact with non-Halal in any way possible.

Although great number of publication and study focuses on Halal food product and Halal certification, the element of packaging should not be neglected. Since packaging is one of the crucial activities in logistics especially during transportation and storage, packaging will have direct effect on the productivity, efficiency and overall cost in logistical operations. Therefore, the issues encountered by Halal packaging are in terms of Halal certification on packaging, Halal product handling during production, distribution and storage and Halal packaging traceability. Since this paper is conceptual, further research, both empirical and non-empirical, must be done in order to uncover more issues pertaining to Halal packaging. Plus, the study only covers the food product packaging and neglects other types of packaged product such as cosmetics and pharmaceuticals.

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