



FIFTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MARKETING AND RETAILING (5TH INCOMaR) 2015

## Halal Malaysia Logo or Brand: The Hidden Gap

Wan Rusni Binti Wan Ismail<sup>a</sup>, Mohhidin Othman<sup>\*b</sup>, Russly Abdul Rahman<sup>c</sup>, Nitty Hirawaty Kamarulzaman<sup>d</sup> and Suhaimi Ab. Rahman<sup>e</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Faculty of Hotel and Tourism, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

<sup>b</sup>Department of Food Service and Management, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

<sup>c</sup>Department of Food Technology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

<sup>d</sup>Department of Agribusiness and Information Systems, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

<sup>e</sup>Department of Management and Marketing, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

### Abstract

Halal logo is the most common graphic mark use for Halal Malaysia which is a symbol to indicate the product or business is certified Halal by JAKIM. This is also an indication that the product or business is Shariah compliance. The issue of whether Halal Malaysia is logo or brand has not yet being highlighted in any previous study. However, discussion on Halal logo is more predominant where Halal logo was found to have a significant impact on consumer's decision making but such findings merely scratch the surface on the importance issues of Halal branding. Using the qualitative in-depth interview, different findings have emerged pointing to the serious issues in relation to Halal Malaysia brand equity that need to be rectified immediately. Such a problem has never been discussed before because previous findings showed that consumers possess strong awareness toward Halal logo and Halal logo itself has become the main cue that determine consumers final decision making. This has lead to an illusion of strong brand equity which concealed the hidden problem and without proper acknowledgement such problem can lead to serious complication for instance equity dilution. Indeed, Halal Malaysia from logo point of view is very important in determining consumer's awareness and recognition but the issue is only focusing on the surface. On the other hand, brand offer wider perspectives which focus more on the underlying problem or opportunity because brand has value that require constant audit and maintenance in order to ensure its survival.

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Peer-review under responsibility of Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA

**Keywords:** Brand; Logo; Brand Equity; Halal Malaysia; Brand Audit; Brand Gap

\*Corresponding author. Tel.: 603-89468363; fax: 603-89423552.

E-mail address: [mohhidin@upm.edu.my](mailto:mohhidin@upm.edu.my)

## 1. Introduction

Halal certification was introduced to protect Muslims consumers through a comprehensive Halal Assurance System. Halal certification not only focusing on the materials or ingredients that goes into the product however the “Toyyiban” or wholesomeness concept that was applied will also scrutinize every aspect of productions. This is considered as the Halal certification strength, where sanitation and safety is also an important part of this certification which is not only important to Muslims but equally important for non-Muslim consumers and such important features are found to be important selling point to all consumers segment (Aziz & Vui, 2013). However, using Halal certificate to attract consumers as a marketing tool is not very practical thus, a symbol or logo that representing Halal Malaysia was introduced for that purpose which are now widely use in Malaysia and can be found in almost all Halal products packaging and displayed at various restaurants premises. The objective of this paper is to investigate the fundamental of Halal Malaysia brand equity based on Malay consumers' awareness toward Halal Malaysia brand cue.

### 1.1. Halal Logo

The issues on whether Halal logo can attract and influence consumer's decision are widely discussed in the literature (Abdul et al., 2009; Aris et al., 2012; Gornaz et al., 2012; Hanzee & Ramezani, 2011; Mohamed et al., 2008). All these studies suggest that Halal logo has becoming an indispensable marketing tool for Halal products which showed that consumers especially Muslims really take Halal issue seriously. To date, Halal Malaysia symbol that represent Halal certification from JAKIM is still regarded as logo by public. Unfortunately, many did not realize that there are really serious implications when important brand such as Halal Malaysia is continuously to be treated as a symbol or logo. Problem with positioning is one of the issues because if the brand proprietor only sees the brand as a symbol, imagined what consumers really think of this brand?

### 1.2. Logo versus Brand

There is a significant difference between logo and brand, according a dictionary of brand, logo refer to the logotype and trademark, on the other hand, brand can be defined as person perception of a product or service and also refer to the commercial reputation (Neumeier, 2004). From the definition clearly a logo only serves as visual cue and identification that is use by business organization to help consumers recognize and identify their product or brand. Even though, American Marketing Association (AMA) suggested that logo or symbol is synonym with brand but branding gurus such as Keller (2003) and Aaker (1991) suggested that brand carry meaning to consumers. This underlying meaning is translated into consumer's loyalty which in return will affect business organization image and bottom line. Previous studies focusing on Halal logo does not explain the current equity for Halal Malaysia because these studies focusing solely on the role of logo instead of brand (Abdul et al., 2009; Aris et al., 2012; Gornaz et al., 2012; Hanzee & Ramezani, 2011; Mohamed et al., 2008). Even though, consumers are found to respond positively toward Halal logo, however there is not enough information that can be used to identify current equity for Halal Malaysia and how consumers really feel toward this brand.

### 1.3. The Value of Logo and Brand

All brands including Halal Malaysia do have its own intangible value which also known as commercial value or equity and these values are reflected through consumer's awareness and loyalty toward the brand (Farquhar, 1989). Evidence from previous studies that suggest Halal logo can influence consumers purchase shown an indication of consumers loyalty, however brand cannot survive on its own and has its own life cycle where it can grow, mature and eventually decline (Bivainiene, 2010). Since consumer's perception is the key to determine brand equity, thus consumer's action can determine either make it or break for Halal Malaysia brand. The possibility for a strong brand to decline is very real in fact there is no brand that immune from competition attack and negative publicity (Pitta & Katsanis, 1995). In reality Halal Malaysia brand is really vulnerable compare to any other brands in the market because Halal Malaysia is not a single product brand instead it only offer Halal endorsement to other product brand.

As a result, this Halal brand can be found in every product that is being marketed as Halal. This co-branding strategy is very common between third party certification and other brand; however it can also lead to brand equity dilution especially when partnered with wrong brand (Pitta & Katsanis, 1995). Even though, the important of brand is highly documented but what is the value of logo? Logo is also important in branding because it represents the brand and act as visual and communication tool to the consumers. In fact, logo itself is considered as part of brand identity because it helps to communicate with consumer's thorough visual which transcend language barriers and international boundaries (Kohli & Suri, 2002). The value of logo lies on its design and aesthetic appeal which can help to produce instant recognition and consumers association with brand (Pittard, Ewing & Jevons, 2007). Obviously logo is essential part of brand but the function is more on the facade of a brand which is physical in nature, while brand involved with emotional elements that is intangible component that will determine brand equity.

#### *1.4. Brand Audit and Maintenance*

Brand requires audit and maintenance while logo does not. To ensure brand will continue to survive and prosper it is necessary for periodic audit to be carried out to determine brand current value. Changes in the market including changes in consumers preference for instance is often beyond any organization control (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). Regular audit is necessary to spot the changes in consumer's perception in order for imperative action to be taken before it's too late. Brand audit does involved cost; however it will provide crucial information for future brand management. Consumers' perception will not only provide crucial information in term of current equity but also provide essential information on how consumers will react in the future when facing a similar negative event. This piece of information will help brand proprietor to deal with the problem more effectively and efficiently. Depending on the situation brand maintenance can be either maintaining a status quo if the brand is doing well or as a salvation mode if dealing with a damaging situation. Occasionally bad press is inevitable however, how the organizations dealt with the aftermath can determine the future of the brand. This is when brand maintenance plays its role where strategies on how to correct and to turn around the situation need to be carried out effectively and efficiently.

#### *1.5. Brand gap*

Unfortunately, inconsistency does occur between organization expectation and consumer's perception and this is considered as a brand gap. Such condition exists when message that organization tries to communicate in brand identity and brand expression failed to reach its target audience (Neumeier, 2006). Information that failed to reach target audience can also cause by a lack of promotional effort and even when the information did reached its target audience, however lack of positioning still can create a brand gap. Brand gap can also occur when brand is constantly under attack with bad publicity in which can turn positive consumer's perception into negative. This brand gap is also responsible in shaping brand image or brand perception (Andreea, 2013).

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1 Instrument*

This study is a qualitative exploratory research which uses in-depth semi structure interview. When compared to questionnaire as a tool, interview is more powerful in eliciting native data which will allow for investigating people in greater depth (Kvale, 1996). Apart from that, interview also offers great value in term of enabling interviewees to "speak their own voice and express their own thought and feelings" (Berg, 2007: 96). This method is the most appropriate tool for customer based brand equity study because brand equity is a measure that is using consumer's perception and by allowing consumers to express their thought and feelings, the findings will help to solicit actual data that might not be able to obtain through questionnaire (Peltola, 2014).

### *2.2 Sample size*

Since this study employed a qualitative method therefore it is very common to use smaller sample size because the aim of this method is not to generalise the finding. Instead an appropriate smaller size sampling for a qualitative study is to determine whether the research question is adequately answered and in practice number of required subjects usually becomes obvious as the study progress and when the themes stop from emerging which an indication of data saturation (Marshall, 1996). This research involved 23 in-depth interviews which is more than enough because according to Crouch & McKenzie (2006) 15 to 20 participants is not only consider to be the most practical but at the same time help researcher to build and maintain close relationship which improve “open” and “frank” exchange of information. Furthermore, it will also overcome the problem that is related to biasness and validity that often associated with a qualitative research.

### 2.3 Sampling Technique

It is very common for a qualitative study to use purposive sampling due to its effectiveness in information rich cases but with limited resources (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling involves the process of identifying and selecting individuals that has the knowledge or experience with the phenomenon of interest (Cresswell and Clark, 2011). Since this study evolved around customer based brand equity thus consumers are the most appropriate informers for this study. Malay consumers are particularly the most appropriate informers for this study simply because of the important of Halal purchase and product consumptions because Malay is also synonym with Muslim population in Malaysia (Shafiq *et al.*, 2015). Therefore they should possess sufficient knowledge related to JAKIM, Halal logo and basic understanding of Halal concept which is really crucial in this study.

### 2.4 Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim manually using Microsoft Word with the help of Window Media Player. Analysis began with open coding that involved with large quantity of raw qualitative data obtained through verbatim process and initial coding is developed during this stage, this stage also known as data reduction process. Succeeding the open coding, second level coding is carried out to categorize the data into sub-theme using initial coding data in order categorize the data into a concept. Concept or categories are further analyze using axial coding to look for similarities and differences in the sub-theme to produce the final theme which will help researcher to draw a conclusion and the finding for this study (Silverman, 2010).

## 3. Result and Discussion

Through brand audit, HMB brand gap has been identify where the differences between brand expectation and reality has sink in. All brands come with the vision and in the case of Halal Malaysia brand’s vision is “to become an influential Halal Certification centre that is recognizes nationally and internationally”. In fact the most crucial part of brand equity is to create brand awareness which comprises of consumers ability to recognize the logo followed by consumers ability to associate it with a positive image. Unfortunately, despite of being introduced since 2003, Halal Malaysia Brand still unable to meet the objective because not all Muslim consumers were able to recognize the right logo, which implies that there are issues related to the promotional activities of this brand because it seems that the message has failed to reach its target consumers.

Female, age 55 from Selangor

*A lot of people they don't know... because there is no exposure, they need to advertise or come out with some sort of campaign... but make sure to advertise on the television, similar to hygiene campaign, they need to do it like that, they need to brand their Halal... “if you buy product buy product with Halal Jakim”... the basic features of Jakim Halal and what not.... why don't they put it on the television?*

Female, age 34 from Perlis

*I never seen they advertise on television... for instance this is Halal logo... they don't... why don't they advertise the real Halal, they should advertise on television everyday so that people become more alert but they didn't do it... this is supposed to be JAKIM's role.*

Male, age 22 from Perak

*Maybe they need to follow the latest trend, if a lot of youngsters today that are using smart phone why not they try to*

*come out with application so that they can update the application every month so that if we want to buy something we can simply check whether that particular product is in the list, sometime it's not even in the list, suddenly we heard all sort of things.. if there is an apps that can give you reminder is even better.*

The confusion among the informers between Halal logo are clearly shown and the reason why there are still informers that think that Halal logo 2 is the current Halal Malaysia logo is due to the words “Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia” used in the previous Halal logo even though this logo is no longer valid. In 2003, the old Halal logo design has been replaced with the new one where the word “Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia” has been replaced with the word “Malaysia” which offer better security features in order to avoid fraud and confusion among consumers (Jakim perkenal logo halal baru, 2003). Such change is necessary because this brand is not only catering for Malaysian market instead this brand is also use in almost all products exported to other countries (Ab. Rahman, 2004). Thus, the simplification of the logo design is necessary to make it more appealing and stand out in the international market. With the introduction of new Halal logo in 2003, there was an expectation that the earlier Halal logo that is still in the market will be slowly reduced and completely diminish at the end of the year 2004 (Ab. Rahman, 2004).



Figure 1: Halal Logo 1



Figure 2: Halal Logo 2

Female, age 34 from Perak

*I think this is the right logo (Halal logo 2), I don't really think much about the color but I know who issued it, they cannot simply use the logo that has Jakim on it right?*

Male, age 22 from Kedah

*The original Halal Jakim is this one, no 1, but maybe they already change the design, the most confident one is this one, no 2... because its written there Jakim and automatically we know its Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, right?*

Female, age 35 from Penang

*The other day someone has shown to me which one is the latest, I don't really remember... who show it to me the other day? Friend share with me the latest but... I don't really pay attention... look at this one, I think this with the word “Jabatan”.*

Female, age 34 from Kedah

*I always saw this one (Halal logo 2), I often saw the rest... but I'm not sure, but no 2 is more accurate because inside is written there “Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia. I'm totally confused, all are written Halal at the centre but that one (Halal logo 2) is the most accurate.*

It is obvious that the words “*Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia*” is used as a cue among these informers in their attempt to point out the actual Halal logo from JAKIM. Informers repeatedly use the word JAKIM and Halal logo simultaneously in this study which shows a positive sign that they are aware that JAKIM is the only body that was authorised to issue Halal certification in Malaysia. This is also an indication that JAKIM itself as a brand has strong positioning effect among informers where Halal and JAKIM is often associated concurrently. On the other hand, confusion among these consumers in recognizing the current Halal logo can also point to an assumption that these consumers really don't know the current Halal logo use by JAKIM. This will also lead to a notion on whether these consumers really look for Halal logo when they purchase their product. Looking at this scenario, another question raised is on how these consumers choose and purchase their daily food products because similar informers also claimed that they will always seek for JAKIM Halal logo every time they make their purchase.

Female, age 34 from Perak

*I will look for JAKIM Halal logo even though I used to purchase that product but still I will look for it.*

Male, age 22 from Kedah

*We need to look for Halal logo (Halal Jakim) especially on certain product (meat item), if there is Halal logo then only can buy.*

Female, age 35 from Penang

*For me... if looking for the Halal food.. I have to make sure that it is the right Halal endorsed by JAKIM.*

Female, age 34 from Kedah

*Halal... we have to look at the logo itself, isn't? Anyone can simply put Halal there... that's why we need to make sure that it is the real one (Halal Jakim).*

This finding has pointed to the existence of a brand gap in Halal Malaysia brand audit, where not all message has successfully reached its target audience particularly on the important part of the brand itself which is brand recognition. Similarly, Shafiq et al (2015) also found consumers were confused and unable to identify the right logo. Lack of knowledge is believed to be the main reason why consumers are guessing the right logo which can lead to serious consequences on brand equity. Even though, JAKIM has strong positioning, however if consumers themselves failed to recognize the right logo, it is really unfortunate for both consumers and the brand. Consequently, this consumers are clearly more vulnerable to fraud as they don't really know which is the real logo thus they might think a fake logo as the real thing and when such logo appear on the suspicious product, the negative impact will leave a negative mark on the real Halal Malaysia brand. In fact, the issues of fake Halal logo used by irresponsible business owner is also very common issue, which is the main reason why starting from January 2012 only one logo will be used in order to eliminate the confusion among consumers (Che Ahmad, 2012). However, the finding also inconsistent with the previous studies by Abdul et al, (2009) which suggest Malay consumers use Halal logo as an important cue in their purchasing decision. Thus the question remain on whether consumers really use Halal logo as a cue or the answer given to the researcher is the exactly what the researcher really expected to hear due to a subjective norm.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Halal Malaysia logo has become an integral part of marketing Halal products and services especially in Malaysia. However, the function of logo is merely as a visual cue that uses to represent something. On the other hand, brand is comprises of consumers belief, perception and consumers thought. Thus, without brand audit, it is almost impossible to know the current state of Halal Malaysia. Halal Malaysia has been around since 2003 and after twelve years it should be one of the most recognizable and established brands in Malaysia. Lack of consumer's awareness in relation to this brand is really serious and for the brand that has been around for many years, being stuck and still reaching for consumer's recognition is very critical. Ideally this brand should already reach the peak of its equity. JAKIM must be proactive in order to overcome this problem, a drastic measure need to be initiated on how this brand should be promoted because it is very obvious that the current practice is very ineffective. Consumers need to be educated on how to identify the right logo. Even though this task may perceive to be insignificant, it does possess

an important value which is reflected in JAKIM vision and mission to ensure that consumers will be able to recognize the Halal Malaysia Brand. This will also protect consumers' right by serving them Halal product that is prepared in accordance to Islamic principles. To understand the value of Halal Malaysia Brand is really crucial because as a co-brand to the other product, Halal Malaysia must offer some value to its partner and if there is no significant value offered by Halal Malaysia then there is no point of the synergy because such endeavour does involved cost. If consumers don't really recognize Halal Malaysia Brand as credible Halal assurance cue then there is no reason for co-branding and if the situation persists in future, consumers especially Muslims are the one who will have to pay the price.

This study has highlighted the important aspect of Halal Malaysia brand equity which pointed to a serious issue in relation to the Halal brand. Awareness is the most fundamental part of the brand equity, and its' also provides a clue on the current status of this brand. However, in order to achieve a higher level of equity, first a brand should be easily recognized by consumers. Many previous studies suggested that Halal logo were a main factor that determine consumers' decision, nevertheless this study found that Halal logo is not the only consideration that usually being considered by consumers during any of their Halal decision making process. This is very unfortunate for Halal Malaysia Brand because the logo itself should be the most dominant cue that consumers will look for during their decision making, this is also an indication of a weak equity that should be a concern to halal logo issuance authority, such as JAKIM. In fact, one of the focuses in the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016-2020) is to intensify halal awareness through fast information dissemination in order to further boost the consumers' confidence. Thus, the finding of this study is very significant in term of identifying the problem related to consumers' confusion and their inability to recognize the correct Halal Malaysia brand. Despite everything, the brand been around since 2003, and this is one of the issues that was least expected from this brand. This study somehow helps in better understanding of halal brand equity.

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