

**ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF  
BUSINESS, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SMES  
(AIJBES)**[www.aijbess.com](http://www.aijbess.com)**THE APPLICATION OF THE THEORY OF PLANNED  
BEHAVIOUR IN DETERMINING HALAL CERTIFICATION  
ADOPTION AMONG SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED  
ENTERPRISES (SMEs) IN MALAYSIA**

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**Abstract:**

This study investigates the challenges and considerations related to Halal certification adoption among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Perlis, Malaysia, using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Halal certification, while voluntary, holds significant benefits for food producers by ensuring compliance with Islamic principles and building consumer trust. However, obtaining Halal certification involves meticulous documentation, evidence, and adherence to specific procedures from various sources. The TPB framework analyses several factors influencing Halal certification adoption, including attitude, Halal awareness, perceived behavioural control, and intention. In this qualitative study, data were collected through interviews with five SMEs engaged in food production in Perlis. The findings highlight that respondents recognize the importance of Halal certification adoption. Many express interests in obtaining Halal certification for their companies, driven by support from significant others and an appreciation of the advantages it brings to product quality and safety. Despite this positive inclination, SMEs encounter complexities in the certification process. This research aims to enhance our understanding of how Halal certification can contribute to SME growth. Additionally, the study proposes recommendations to enhance awareness and encourage Halal certification adoption among food producers.

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Halal Certificate Adoption, TPB, Intention

**Introduction**

According to Halal practices, the terms Halal in Halal food industry is not referring to ingredient solely, but it covers all aspects of Halal, quality, hygiene, and safety. While, from the perspective of Halal assurance, it is based on the divine teachings of the Quran and other Islamic laws that describe it. In addition, Wilson and Liu (2010), explained Halal as a concept which contains both phenomenon and noumenon, where the Halal products and services not only stretches across the world, but what is more important to help shaping Halal into a brand holistically. In fact, Shafie and Othman (2006) considered Halal industry is a new engine to drive the economy and also part of the marketing tools, while Latif (2017) stated that there are significant opportunities for investment and creation of global Halal foods. Realizing these significant factors led the Malaysian government to provide Halal confirmation in the form of Halal certificate with a Halal logo starting from 1994 (Hasan & Tanakijal, 2020). Halal certification provides an indication that the food produced by producers are guaranteed Halal by the responsible authorities, who made sure it is done according to a controlled procedure and systemically supervised. Starting from 2009, the Malaysian government decided that all Halal certification activities are conducted by Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM). Currently, Malaysian Halal certification is one of reputable certificate and has been acknowledge worldwide. This Malaysia's reputable certification has also made it as an ideal choice for businesses from other nations to access the international Halal market and such, the government has been urging local businesses particularly Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to utilize of the country's advantage in the global Halal industry (Hasan et al., 2020). Meanwhile, food industry business has also opened the door for SMEs in the extension of the market and the improvement of sustenance products. Therefore, SMEs should grasp this opportunity. Even though this scenario provides a good platform for local SMEs to increase effort in Halal standard, yet most of them are still reluctant to apply for Halal certificate. Malaysian government has offered a various incentives and effort been given in order to upgrade the SMEs in Malaysia especially related to Halal development. Surprisingly, this incentive only being utilized by companies that have established in the business for a long time. Economic Census (2016) shows that 80 percent of Halal certified companies in Malaysia are SMEs, and 75 percent of the SMEs failed in their first application towards Halal certificate due to lack of awareness and readiness. Other issues of Halal certification and the conduct of Halal practice compliance involving Bumiputera SMEs entrepreneurs such as SMEs are contributing only 32 percent in National Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (SME Master Plan 2012-2020). Due to this data, it shows that the behaviour of Bumiputera SMEs producers on Halal certification is at a very low level. On top of that, a statistic from the Economic Planning Unit and JAKIM, stated that less than 1 percent of Bumiputera SME entrepreneurs have Halal certificate. Despite that, the number of Bumiputera SMEs entrepreneurs with Halal certificates is also very small compared to non-Bumiputera SMEs entrepreneurs. This fact shows that entrepreneurs from non-Bumiputera's took the opportunity to acquire JAKIM Halal certificates which they acknowledge the benefits gained in the future by having Halal certification including expand their product market to Muslim consumers. Azmi et al., (2019) emphasized that most of the SMEs are still reluctant to apply Halal certificate and not seriously picture significance the power of Halal to gain competitive in local and global market. Due to the stated

issues above, the questions to ponder is why this phenomenon occur? What are the factors affecting the behaviour of Bumiputera SMEs in compliance with the JAKIM Halal standards?

Thus, due to the issues mentioned, this study is conducted in order to explore and analyse the Halal certificate adoption factors among SMEs food entrepreneurs in Perlis. Guided by Theory of Planned Behaviour, this study attempts to help identify the problems faced by SMEs in the process of applying Halal certificate and increase their awareness on the importance of Halal certificate for their business.

## Literature Review

### *Halal Certification*

Halal is a credence quality attribute, i.e., a product characteristic that cannot be evaluated or ascertained by the individual consumer, even upon or after consuming the goods (Rezai et al., 2012; Kamilah et al., 2017). Consuming halal food is one of Muslim's obligations as Allah announces:

*O mankind! Eat of that which is halal (lawful) [food which is good on earth], and do not follow the steps of Satan (devil)... (Quran chapter 2, verse 168).*

Obedience and devotion have made halal as a universal indicator for product quality assurance and living standards (Gillani, Ijaz, & Khan, 2016). The availability of halal products is an important requirement for Muslims. Therefore, it has become a necessity for the government to provide halal products, especially for countries with a majority Muslim (Anwar, Fahrullah, & Ridlwan, 2018). However, there is neither a worldwide authority on halal nor is there a consistent "Halal" trademark with over 15 halal logos in the world market although harmonization efforts have begun (Minkus-Mckenna, 2007). Thus, Muslim populations are making their presence felt socially and politically and are requesting for halal labelled food products (Riaz & Chaudry, 2004). The way of life for all Muslims regardless of where they live, is based on Islamic principles. For food, Islam decodes that food must be fit for human consumption in accordance with "halal" requirements of Syariah. However, how "halal" is assured requires the involvement of the country's regulations and regulating bodies under the jurisdiction of the country's law.

A Halal Certificate is an official document awarded to a food producer who has adhered to Islamic law and criteria in the manufacturing of Halal meals (Alharbi, 2015). Halal certifications are used to make Halal production more transparent (Van der Spiegel et al., 2012). According to Shahwahid et al. (2017), JAKIM and State Islamic Religious Council are the reputable Halal certification agencies in Malaysia, who will recommend and certified food, products and services as lawful and Halal according to definition of Halal Order, 2011. Previous study by Ahmad et al. (2017) looked at many aspects on Halal implementation, such as top management commitment, information and knowledge, proper assistance, training and education, supplier management, customer management, employee attributes, policy and procedures were all acknowledged as essential components in the Halal certificate adoption. For many years, people have discussed Halal issues especially relating to Halal certification. One of the arguments is that Halal certificates are required to demonstrate to consumers and purchasers that items are made using Halal production procedures and to assist them in selecting Halal-compliant products (Van der Spiegel et al., 2012). Throughout the case of international export, a Halal certificate can strengthen the product's marketability, particularly

in Muslim nations, resulting in increased sales and revenue for the company (Khan & Haleem, 2016). As a result, Halal production must be validated and certified to verify that food firms have satisfied the requirements in creating Halal goods (Van der Spiegel et al., 2012). Moreover, adopting Halal certificates will also lead to several advantages such as the products are guaranteed Halal and Tayyib in the form of food hygiene and safety, ingredients, equipment and utensils, packaging storage, processing, transportation and waste management. From the perspectives of manufacturers and marketers, both use Halal certification and logo as a way to inform and to reassure their target consumers that their products are Halal and Shariah compliant.

The impetus to establish Halal food certification, according to Ab Talib et al. (2014), comes from within an organization. However, various obstacles to applying this standard have been discovered, including a lack of employee enthusiasm, a high cost of implementation, complex manuals and processes, a lack of knowledge, and so on (Ab Talib et al., 2014). Even though Malaysia has formulated guidelines, standards and laws regulating the issue of Halal status, Muslim consumers still face problems in ensuring that the products they buy are genuinely Halal as they can rely only on the certification given by the authorities (Khairi et al., 2012; Shahwahid et al., 2017). On top of that, other challenges in Malaysia for Halal certification are explained in a study by Yildirim (2019) mentioned in the form of government-based applications of certification, the JAKIM is trying to control the Halal certification and the logo by questioning rationality of some products or services demanding to be Halal. Due to this, it shows that JAKIM had a lack of implementation of Halal safety and trust. The study also stressed that some of the ministers put forward that there seems to be a lack of assistance given to JAKIM by the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs. Based on the findings of the study by Ahmad et al., (2017) factors that affect the success of the Halal certification system are among others is lack of manpower and incompetent staff. Another study from Prabowo et al., (2015) mentioned the Halal certification process will be stalled when raw material used, especially meat-based products do not have the Halal logo. This matter makes it problematic for new applicants to apply Halal certification, making them reluctant to apply Halal certificates due to limited suppliers and abattoirs. Another problem highlighted is that Halal application process takes too long. Nordin et al. (2014) affirm these facts in their interviews with the industry players. In the same vein, Marzuki et al., (2012) interviewed a few restaurant managers who had experience undergoing the process of applying Halal certificate. The findings show that they must wait for the Halal certificate for quite some time. Even though Halal certificate manuals have been provided, the manual itself is complicated and cannot be easily understood. Thus, this study is conducted to investigate and explore the reasons why SMEs which are food sellers are reluctant to adopt Halal certification particularly in Perlis state.

### ***Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia***

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a significant role in the Malaysian economy which contribute 38% or more than RM500 billion to gross domestic product (GDP). In the early dependence phase, SMEs relied on the agriculture sector as the main source of the nation's income until today's economy shifted to manufacturing and services sectors. Some vital roles are played by SMEs as the engine of growth through employment opportunities, poverty reduction and by providing employment to poor and low-income workers especially in poor regions and rural areas and major sources of technological and product innovation. Despite that, they also provide their significant contribution in stimulating Malaysia's economic expansion and fulfilling the socio objectives. In Malaysia, SMEs are defined based on the

annual turnover or number of full-time employees. Beginning from 2005, a formal definition of SMEs endorsed by National SMEs Development Council (NSDC) is based on the annual turnover and number of full-time employees that have been used by ministries, agencies, financial institutions, and regulators involved with SME development programs.

### ***Challenges of SMEs in Halal Certification Adoption***

Although SMEs dominate the Malaysian food industry, most of them are still hesitant to apply for Halal certification. Anecdotal evidence from press reports suggests that many SMEs are hesitant to apply for certification because the process is costly, time-consuming, and burdensome to the business. Despite strict regulations by the Malaysian authorities on Halal Labelling, incidences of false labelling could mark the credibility of the Halal Label adopted by the relevant authority chiefly, JAKIM (Talib et al., 2010). Hamid et al. (2017) mentioned that the low level of awareness and lack of concern about the implementation of the Halal industry are the two major factors that justify the scenario of many manufacturers, especially Bumiputera who are still reluctant to apply for Halal certification. Among the reasons is that they have issues in fulfilling the requirement for Halal certification, they also believe that the process is expensive and complicated to become a Halal certified company. According to Ab Talib and Abdul Hamid (2014) Halal certification will affect the growth of the consumer's base, increase the numbers of consumers, and increase the revenue of the firms. Talib et al. (2010) discovered organizational readiness, customer pressure, and perceived benefits have significantly related with intention to adopt halal warehousing services and these elements have been identified as the drivers of adoption.

### ***Theory of Planned Behaviour***

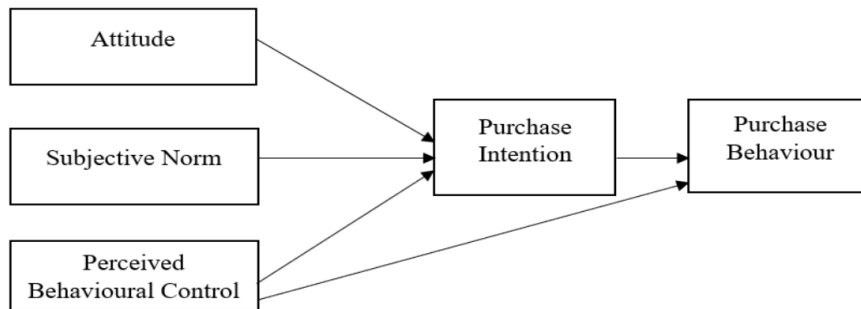
The TPB today is one of the most popular social-psychological models for understanding and predicting human behaviour (Ajzen, 2015) and it is considered as one of an eminent psychology theory (Varinli et al., 2016). According to TPB, a person's intention is guided by the three constructs, which are attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. Attitude is referred to the sum of beliefs about behaviour weighted by the person evaluations of these beliefs (Miller, 2015) while subjective norm is referred to the beliefs of people weighted by the importance of one attribute to each other opinions (Miller, 2005; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2006). Perceived behavioural control is the extent control over internal-external factors upon behaviour performance, whether it facilitates or restrains the behaviour (Abd Aziz et al., 2013). As a general rule, the more favourable the attitude and subjective norm with respect to engaging in the behaviour, and the greater the perceived behavioural control, the more likely a person will form an intention to perform the behaviour, then, intentions are expected to lead to performance of the behaviour to the extent that people have actual control over the behaviour (Ajzen, 2015).

Numerous studies have proven the applicability of this theory in predicting purchase intention across various industries, products and services (Shah Alam & Mohamed Sayuti, 2011; Jani & Han, 2011; Lada et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2012; Mukhtar & Butt, 2012, Omar, Mat, Imhemed, & Ali, 2012; Shaharudin et al., 2010). In order to focus on the SMEs entrepreneur's behaviour on Halal certificate adoption, this study uses the TPB framework as illustrated in Figure 1 which consists of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control.

However, it has been observed that an increasing number of studies has extended the TPB model by including new constructs (Jang et al., 2015; Maichum et al., 2016, & Read et al., 2013). Hence, this study has also included one variable, the Halal awareness, along with the

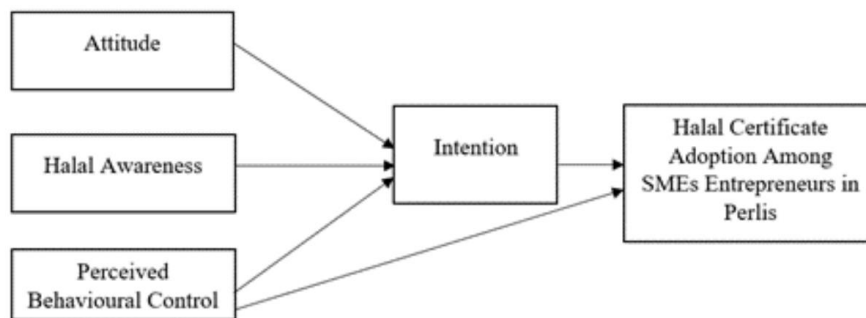


traditional TPB constructs to measure SMEs entrepreneur's intention and behaviour towards Halal certificate adoption as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 1: Theory of Planned Behaviour Framework**

Source: Ajzen, 1991



**Figure 2: Modified Theory of Planned Behaviour Framework**

## Methodology

This study is an exploratory research design that employs a qualitative approach. This study was divided into phases in order to achieve its objectives. To begin, a literature search was conducted to identify the issue of Halal certification adoption among SMEs. Then, an in-depth interview took place. Based on previous research, semi-structured interview questions had been developed. The researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with the SMEs owners who agreed to participate in the study, which were videoed and transcribed. This study's respondents are six Perlis-based SMEs that manufacture food and beverages. According to Sandelwski (1995), when the participants are from a homogeneous group, a small sample size is sufficient, and data saturation can be achieved after 6 in-depth interviews (Guest et al., 2006). Meanwhile, this research was carried out in Perlis because the Malaysian government declared Perlis as halal hub for food production under JAKIM supervision in 2010. Nevertheless, when compared to other states, the statistic shows that Perlis continues to contribute a low percentage of Halal food production. Furthermore, participants were chosen through census sampling because, according to data obtained from SME Corp in 2022, the total number of SMEs manufacturing food products in Perlis is six companies, so all SMEs in Perlis were chosen. Content analysis technique is used to examine all of the interview results. It is appropriate for systematically assessing the symbolic content of all types of recorded communications (Kolbe & Burnett,

1991). Themes emerged from the interview data and were coded using Holsti's (1968) approach. These codes were then organized into several categories, leading to the development of a new framework.

### Findings

In this study, the participants are small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) owners engaged in food and beverage production in Perlis. Out of the six initially selected respondents, only five met the criteria for inclusion in the study. The selection criteria included having a sales turnover of less than RM300,000 or employing fewer than five full-time employees, possessing production facilities (not home-based), and holding a minimum diploma qualification. Table 1 provides an overview of the products produced by these respondents.

**Table 1: Products Produced By The Respondents**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Product</b>
Respondent 1	Donuts
Respondent 2	Breads
Respondent 3	Cake and bakery
Respondent 4	Dim sum
Respondent 5	Cake and pastry

During the study, the participants were queried about their application for Halal certification for their products. Out of the five respondents, three had indeed applied for the certificate. It reflects an awareness of the importance of Halal certification in accessing broader markets, especially in regions where Halal compliance is highly valued.

### *Attitude and Intention to Halal Certification Adoption*

Research on Halal awareness and the intention to adopt Halal certification has been conducted over the past decade. Various factors influence food entrepreneurs' awareness and their inclination to seek Halal certification. These factors include knowledge of Halal practices, perceived benefits, and understanding of the certification procedures. The findings indicate that three out of five food producers in Perlis exhibit a strong awareness and intention to adopt Halal certificates due to their recognition of the advantages associated with having such certification. Further details regarding this factor are provided below.

*"We learn a lot about Halal while going through the certification adoption process. We are aware about the importance of having a Halal certificate and this certificate will benefit our business." (Respondent 3)*

*"Halal certificate and logo can increase our market and we manage to expand our business by instilling consumer trust in the products we produce." (Respondent 3)*

*"We are in the process of applying new Halal certificate due to new location of our business and placement of our products in supermarket." (Respondent 4)*

*"We are aware of the importance of having a Halal certificate and it will benefit our business and we intend to obtain a new Halal certificate. Products that have Halal certification issued by JAKIM will be a main attraction for consumers to purchase." (Respondent 4)*

Besides, Halal certificates are perceived to have benefits in increasing consumer confidence and competing with other producers and can play a role as promotional tools.

*“Halal certificates are expected to improve the performance of SMEs like us.” (Respondent 1)*

It can be concluded that these businesses are taking steps to comply with Halal standards, which could suggest a commitment to meeting the needs of Halal consumers.

### ***Subjective Norm and Halal Certification Adoption***

During the study, participants were queried about subjective norms factors related to Halal certification adoption. Specifically, they were asked about whether people important to them such as their family members, spouse or friends would encourage them to adopt a Halal certificate, whether they received approval for applying for a Halal certificate and their personal belief regarding whether they should adopt a Halal certificate. All respondents answered yes for all the three questions.

*“Yes, my family did encourage me to fulfil the requirements in the application process. They always help me in issues related to Halal requirements fulfilment.” (Respondent 1)*

*“Yes, my family and friends close to me helped me a lot in the process of expanding my business and obtaining the certificate.” (Respondent 4)*

This suggests that subjective norms, which refer to perceived social pressure to perform or not perform a behaviour, are likely to encourage Halal certification adoption among the participants.

### ***Perceived Behavioural Control and Halal Certification Adoption***

During the study, participants were asked about perceived behavioural control and its impact on Halal certification adoption. Specifically, they were asked about the safety and quality aspects of their food production. All respondents unanimously agreed that having a Halal certificate is crucial for confirming the safety and high quality of their products.

*“We believe that by having Halal certificate, our products are safe because we had followed all requirements related to Halal fulfilment.” (Respondent 2)*

*“Halal certificate is the license of quality and safety.” (Respondent 5)*

In summary, the participants' unanimous agreement underscores the significance of Halal certification in both safety and quality aspects of food production.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigates the challenges and considerations related to Halal certification adoption among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Perlis, Malaysia, using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Halal certification, while voluntary, holds significant benefits for food producers by ensuring compliance with Islamic principles and building consumer trust. However, obtaining Halal certification involves meticulous documentation, evidence, and adherence to specific procedures from various sources. The TPB framework analyses several factors influencing Halal certification adoption, including attitude, Halal awareness, perceived behavioural control, and intention. The findings highlight that respondents recognize the



importance of Halal certification adoption. Many express interests in obtaining Halal certification for their companies, driven by support from significant others and an appreciation of the advantages it brings to product quality and safety. Despite this positive inclination, SMEs encounter complexities in the certification process.

### Recommendations

As for the recommendations in enhancing the awareness and adoption of halal certification among food producers, the local authorities such as Jabatan Agama Islam or JAKIM should provide support services and improving market sensing. The food producers also should encourage their employees to learn more and understand the process of Halal food manufacturing in order to help comply with the requirements of Halal certification and contribute to the SMEs' success. For future studies, it is recommended that to conduct a quantitative study on establishing the measurement used in this study. Other than that, a longitudinal study also should be conducted to determine the effectiveness of Halal certification on SMEs performance before and after obtaining the Halal certificate.

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