

Muslim Meranao Consumers on the Marketing Strategies for Halal Branded Food Products

ALDRICH JUNE B. CARAECLÉ

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4123-9283>

ajb6490.caraecle@gmail.com

Mindanao State University – Main Campus
Marawi City, Phavilippines

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ABSTRACT

Food consumption is very critical for Muslim consumers, as they have to consume halal products. For food companies to satisfy Muslim buyers and develop an effective marketing strategy, it is necessary for them to evaluate customer satisfaction. Thus, this study assessed the level of satisfaction of Muslim Meranao consumers toward the marketing strategies for halal branded food products. The study made use of descriptive survey research utilizing a researcher made a questionnaire, and the data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Applying purposive sampling, a survey was conducted to a total of 120 Meranao customers, which comprised of 40 Meranao fathers, 40 mothers, and 40 Meranao Ulama. The overall assessment of the three groups of respondents showed that Meranao consumers were not satisfied with the marketing strategies of food companies for their product, price, place, and promotion strategies, or the 4P's. The survey revealed that among the 4P's, promotion strategies got the highest mean score of 2.48, while price strategies had been found to have the lowest satisfaction with a mean of 2.26. The dissatisfaction felt by the consumers may signify problems on the existing strategies of the companies. The findings of the study will guide manufacturers in enhancing their marketing strategies to attain perfect compliance on halal business practices.

Keywords — Agricultural marketing, marketing strategies, halal food, descriptive survey, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The Halal industry is considered as the latest trend in the global market. With the Muslim population reaching 3 billion people, the halal industry becomes one of the fastest growing businesses in the world market (Nurrachmi, 2017). The industry covers a wide range of products and services coming from different sectors such as finance, tourism, service, transportations, and food. However, among the several categories of halal products, food is found to be the most in demand. As stated by Ismail (2015), food is an essential thing in human life, and thus, the market potential for halal food is very promising with Islam as the fastest growing religion in the world.

In the State of the Global Islamic Economy Report by Reuters (2014), the halal food market is labeled as one of the largest consumer markets in the world. Interestingly, global Muslim spending on food and beverages (F&B) has increased by 10.8% to reach \$1,292 billion in 2013. This takes the potential core halal food market to be 17.7% of the global expenditure in 2013 compared to 16.6% the year before. This expenditure is expected to grow to a \$2,537 billion market by 2019 and will account for 21.2% of the global expenditure. Moreover, based on the data of Pew Research Center (2017), the Muslim population was around 1.6 billion in 2010 and will be rising to 2.67 billion near the end of 2050 with approximately 29.7% of the overall total world population. It added that the interest for halal products and services likewise will be relied upon to increase exponentially as the inside guaranteed as of now, the value of the global halal market was over US\$3.6 trillion, and it is forecasted to be worth over US\$5 trillion in 2020. Thus, the study of Razzaque and Chaudhry (2013) concluded that the halal food market would continue to dominate the global food market due to Muslims have to consume Halal food regardless whether they live within Muslim majority or minority societies.

However, food consumption is the most crucial for Muslim consumers' basic needs since they have to consume halal products (Varinli, Erdem, & Avcilar, 2016). Hence, the vast opportunity for the food industry to serve the halal market is coupled with challenges in its operation. To satisfy the requirements of Muslim customers, food manufacturers must be halal compliance as this is the first rule of the game. This requires them to know deeply and strictly apply Islamic practices and principles on the development and implementation of their marketing strategies.

Considering the halal market, the marketing strategy of any food company has to cover every aspect important to Muslim consumers. Many elements have to be taken into consideration while setting the marketing strategy; those include the Islamic marketing mix or the 4P's, in addition to the cultural elements of the market. In connection to cultural factors, designing a strategy for the halal market requires a clear understanding of the Islam religion as it serves as the foundation of the halal business practices.

The development of an effective marketing strategy is a progressive company activity and achieve through continuous development, especially in serving a unique segment of customer like the halal market. It is believed that continuous improvement and success on the strategy applied to serve Muslim markets can be done by critically evaluating their satisfaction and understanding their feedbacks. Unfortunately, there are only a few researches that purely focus on measuring the satisfaction of Muslim consumers on the marketing aspect. Therefore, this study finds interest in assessing the satisfaction level of Muslim Meranao consumers on the strategies adopted for halal branded food products on the marketing mix or 4P's. This would help the halal food manufacturers identify the areas on their strategies that need significant improvements as well as sustain those areas that drive company success.

FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the study. As depicted in the diagram, the assessment of Muslim Maranao consumers toward the marketing strategies for halal branded food products is determined. The strategies considered in the assessment are focused on the marketing mix or also known as the 4 P's in Islamic perspective: the product, price, place, and promotion.

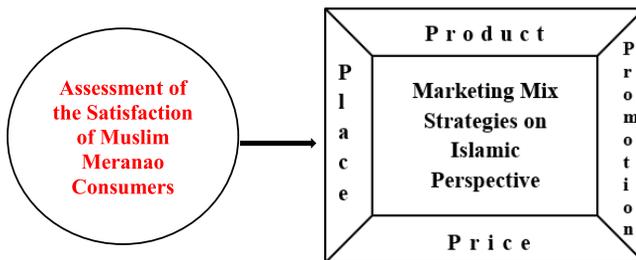


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Customer Satisfaction

The study of Ilieska (2013) emphasized that being familiar with the consumers' needs is of great importance to the company. She added that economic subjects accomplish their tasks in the process of reproduction and thus satisfy certain needs. The consumers are the focus activity of the company's marketing orientation. It is crucial to know the consumers' needs to achieve an optimal combination of both: the production factors and the disposal of products. Therefore, she concluded that the research of the consumers' needs and a measure of their satisfaction is of great significance.

A commonly accepted definition of 'satisfaction' is: 'Satisfaction is the consumer's fulfillment response. It is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under-or-over fulfillment. Failure to meet needs and expectations is assumed to result in dissatisfaction with the product or service. Depending on the context, the meaning of 'consumer satisfaction' may vary: Consumer satisfaction may relate to a particular feature or characteristic of a product or service, or it may relate to the product/service as a whole. In general, it is the satisfaction about the product/service as a whole that merits attention, since this satisfaction influences the consumers' future buying and consuming behavior (Ilieska, 2013). Notably, the understanding of customer satisfaction is vital in this study.

Marketing Mix in Islamic Perspective

The other component of the framework deals on the Islamic marketing mix. In the study of Ishak and Abdullah (2012), it is noted that the essential aspect of the Islamic marketing mix as a principle of value maximization is the core concept of adl or justice. They defined Adl or justice in Islam as 'just dealing' and 'fair play' for the wider welfare of the society or the consumers. Moreover, the principle offers a means to create a healthy business environment which protects both the consumers and producers. It dictates that under no circumstances do the marketers have unbridled liberty to exploit the consumers by way of fraud, deceit, and other illicit means. To commit unethical marketing practices is tantamount to injustice, and by the term, it negates the concepts of brotherhood and equality in Islam. After all, the sole aim of the Islamic marketing mix is to preserve harmony and provide order in society so that the rights of consumers and marketers are maintained and upheld.

According to Luthfi and Salehudin (2011), Islam views at commerce as an important source for a person to make a living and Muslims are encouraged to be involved in business activities as far as the generated income is legitimate and Islamic principles and ethics are considered in all aspects of the business. In this point, Islamic values and laws should be integrated to develop any halal marketing strategy by creating, communicating, and delivering Islamic values to customers (Hashim and Hamzah, 2014).

Halal is the central idea of Islamic marketing and has now become a universal concept. Halal is a term exclusively used in Islam which means permitted or lawful. There are no parties which can claim the food is Halal without complying with Islamic Law. Halal and non-Halal covers all spectrums of Muslim life, not limited to foods and drinks only, but also for safety, animal welfare, social justice, and a sustainable environment. Halal and *Toyyiban*, which means clean and wholesome portray the symbol of intolerance to hygiene, safety, and quality of food that Muslims consumed (Baharuddin, Kasim, Nordin, & Buyong, 2015).

In this study, Islamic marketing mix constitutes the 4Ps: product, price, promotion, and place. Discussion in each element of the marketing mix is also presented.

Product

As mentioned by Ireland and Rajabzadeh (2011), like any consumer worldwide, a Muslim would select products based on the quality, convenience, and very importantly, assurance of verification of certain religious guidelines. Based on the Islamic perspective, any related process and function should be executed within ethical boundaries set by Sharia. As such, the product can be considered as Halal (permissible or lawful, contrary to Haram) if it can offer essential benefits and values to consumers. Additionally, Najmaei et al. (2017) noted that market players are expected to operate in a morally acceptable manner. Thus, producers and marketers use a halal certificate to reassure customers to convince consumer about the integrity of the production process.

Halal certification is important to Muslim consumers. Thus, manufacturers that successfully received the certificate use it to establish trust in consumers and make them assure about the quality of products. Moreover, the study of Arham (2010) pointed out that Prophet Muhammad SAW avoided the mixing of low and high-quality products at the same place. Prophet Muhammad SAW considered not only positioning but also expounded weak points of products for every customer. Notably, he never covered any product weakness aspect from the customers.

Therefore, following the Prophet Muhammad SAW, information tag should attach and develop based on the content, ingredients including all aspects of the product (Najmaei et al., 2017). Per the Islamic approach, the production process should abide by the standards of the value and impact of the product upon the entire society.

Price

Based on the Islamic context, acquiring something simply without hard work is strictly forbidden. It is also not allowed to sell products at a price higher than the cost of inputs (Rosly, 2001). Al Serhan and Alobaitha (2013) stressed out that changing the price without changing the quality or quantity is considered as cheating as indicated in Islamic teaching. Moreover, the study of Saeed et al. (2001) in international marketing ethics from an Islamic perspective emphasized that profit maximization should not consider as a priority in marketing from Islamic practice. The study of Hassan, Chachi, and Abdul Latiff (2008) also highlighted relevant principles in pricing. The study indicated that Islam does not ban price controls and alteration to cover market needs. This would mean that Islamic ethics allows asking for higher prices as a result of natural insufficiency of the supply chain. Thus, the price should be adjusted to provide an advantage for buyers and in a way that not to harm sellers. Importantly, Islam also banned price discrimination among customers, as based on Islamic principle, all people are spiritually the same before God.

Place (Distribution)

Based on Islamic principles, distribution channels are not permitted to generate a burden for the final customer, in terms of higher prices and delays (Hassan, Chachi, & Abdul Latiff, 2008). The key purpose of distribution channels should be to create value and elevate the standard of living by delivering ethically satisfactory services. The study of Arham (2010) highlighted that in accordance with Islamic principles, sellers could not interfere or manipulate product distribution to earn more profits. Several studies (Arham, 2010; Saeed et al., 2001) also presented some vital components of place or distribution from an Islamic perspective which include the selection of an appropriate distribution channel, timely delivery, and proper segregation of Halal and non-Halal products in terms of storage and distribution.

Promotion

The last element is a promotion, which one of the main components of the marketing mix from an Islamic perspective. The study of Zakaria and Abdul-Talib

(2010) in marketing strategy by applying Islamic market-oriented cultural model, proposed establishing promotional activities that are ethically sensitive to the various cultural preferences. A study of Nafik and Ratnasari (2012) also presented that matching advertising to Islamic standards could establish better trust in higher Islamic knowledge consumers.

Significantly, the research of Abdullah and Ahmad (2010) which covered compliance to Islamic practices among businesses in Malaysia, highly recommended to avoid unethical and misleading behaviors as well as using women as objects to attract customers. As noted in the study of Najmaei et al. (2017), implementing such a marketing strategy that is commonly used in other non-Halal industry is not compliant with Islamic teaching.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study assessed the satisfaction level of Muslim Meranao consumers on the strategies adopted for Halal branded food products on the 4P's of marketing: product, price, place, and promotion. As the study considered three groups of Meranao consumers, the differences in the satisfaction level of the Meranao fathers, mothers, and Ulama on the marketing strategies for Halal branded food products were also determined.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study made use of a descriptive survey method. As cited in the study of Salaria (2012), the descriptive survey is a method of research which concerns itself with the present phenomena in terms of conditions, practices, beliefs, processes, relationships or trends. Thus, in this study, the condition of the marketing strategy adopted for halal branded food products are determined by measuring the satisfaction of Muslim consumers.

Research Site

The study was conducted at the Islamic City of Marawi, where the majority of the residents are Muslim Meranaos. The city is part of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao located in the South area of the Philippines. Remarkably, the city was a victim of the massive and bloody conflict between the ISIS-associated Maute Group and the Philippine government forces just last year 2017. The study was taken a year after the Marawi City siege.

Participants

The study considered the Muslim Maranao or Meranao as respondents of the study as they are labeled to be the largest non-Christian ethnic group in the Philippines, aside from the fact that they are living in the Islamic City of Marawi. Adopting purposive sampling, a survey was conducted to a total of 120 Meranao consumers. This number of respondents consists of 40 Meranao fathers, 40 mothers and 40 Meranao *Ulama* (*Muslim believers who have taken a higher level of education and have in-depth knowledge in Islamic teachings, beliefs, principles, and practices*). Meranao fathers and mothers were chosen as they are viewed to have more mature buying decision and extensive experiences in purchasing food products given their role as parents. While *Ulama* is selected since they are expected to give a more objective and reliable assessment given their expertise in the Islamic religion, which is the foundation of halal business practices.

Instrumentation

A researcher made a survey questionnaire was constructed and used to gather the needed data. The instrument contained a total of 34 statements on the marketing mix or 4Ps, 9 questions each for product, price, and promotion, while 7 questions for a place. These questions have been developed applying summative content analysis through in-depth literature review to initial illicit items and further confirmed by a draft questionnaire and pilot test. Studies of Abuznaid (2012) and Hejase, Hamdar, Orfali, and Hejase (2012) have highly contributed to the statements presented in the instrument. The respondents were asked to assess their level of satisfaction on the strategies adopted for Halal branded food products on the 4Ps of marketing using a four-point Likert scale. Corresponding to each item are the numeric scales with the matching qualitative equivalents: (4) Highly Satisfied means that the indicator statement is observed in almost all instances; (3) Satisfied means that the indicator statement is observed in the majority of cases; (2) Not Satisfied means that the indicator statement is observed in a few cases; and (1) Highly Not Satisfied means that the indicator statement is totally not practiced. To arrive at a certain interpretation of the scales in the instrument, the hypothetical mean range is also assigned: Highly Satisfied (3.26 – 4.00), Satisfied (2.51 – 3.25), Not Satisfied (1.76 – 2.50), and Highly Not Satisfied (1.00 – 1.75).

In order to guarantee the functionality of the questionnaire, validity and reliability tests were conducted. Using Pearson Product Moment Correlations, it resulted that all questions were less than 0.05 if sig. (2-tailed), thus the questions constructed are valid. Moreover, as shown in Table 1, the Cronbach's alpha is .906, which indicates that the questions used are good.

Table 1. Reliability Test

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of Items
.906	.911	34

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A survey was conducted to evaluate the satisfaction level of Muslim consumers on the strategies adopted by halal food manufacturers and/ distributors on their product, price, place, and promotion or 4Ps. The results of the assessment are shown in Table 2.

Based on the survey conducted, the overall assessment of the Meranao consumers showed that they are not satisfied with the strategies adopted for the product, price, place, and promotion for halal branded food products. The overall mean of the four elements of the strategies resulted not more than 2.5, which would mean that the consumers are not satisfied. Notably, among the 4Ps, it came out that price strategy got the lowest overall mean (2.26), then followed by product with an overall mean of 2.44. At a very slight difference, a place with an overall mean of 2.45 came next in the ranking, while promotion (2.48) got the highest evaluation, which almost reached the bracket for satisfactory.

Remarkably, indicators for price strategy, which contained nine questions were all assessed by the consumers not satisfactory. With 34 indicators or questions asked to the respondents, price indicator regarding the observance of false propaganda or publicity with regard to price, demand, and supply found out to have the lowest assessment (2.09) from the respondents. This may imply that consumers have observed misleading information and campaign which may hide the reality as to price, demand, and supply. This action may lead to unjust and overpricing, which are not favorable in the side of the customers. As highlighted in the study of Sergius Koku (2011), Islam prohibits false propaganda or publicity with regard to price, demand, and supply. Nevertheless, he added that Islam does not prohibit price controls and manipulations from meeting market needs. A study of Abdullah, Hamali, & Abdullah (2015) also stressed out that it is critical to have reasonable and ethical pricing for a product since it is the most sensitive issue when offering a product to a target market. They added that although there is no absolute ruling signifying how to charge customers for a certain product and service, prices should have ethical justification guided by Islamic principles such as justice.

Indicator under product strategy, which deals with the strict use of halal ingredients in making the product has been found to have the second lowest mean (2.12) among the indicators. This may connote that Muslim consumers have noticed or heard the use of non-halal ingredients on products labeled as halal. It should be noted by halal producers that the ingredients used in processing products are very important to Muslim consumers to consider a product to be Halal.

Table 2. Assessment of the Satisfaction Level of Muslim Consumers on the Marketing Strategies

4P's	Question Statements (Indicators for the 4Ps)	Mean (Fathers)	Mean (Mothers)	Mean (Ulama)	Overall Mean
P R O D U C T	1. Ingredients used are strictly halal.	2.20	2.33	1.83	2.12
	2. Final product can be warranted to be totally halal.	2.53	2.6	2.15	2.43
	3. Packages are labeled with proper information and halal label/logo	2.43	2.83	2.00	2.42
	4. Name of Allah is strictly not used in branding and labeling.	2.68	2.93	2.00	2.54
	5. The label of products provides accurate and sufficient information.	2.60	2.78	2.18	2.52
	6. The appearance of products does not cause any offense to Muslims.	2.48	2.58	2.05	2.37
	7. The packaging of the product is appropriate, proper and durable.	2.60	3.03	2.25	2.63
	8. Food products are guaranteed to be safe and cannot cause any harm.	2.50	2.98	2.13	2.54
	9. Food products endorse environmental protection.	2.43	2.83	1.93	2.40
	Overall Mean	2.49	2.76	2.06	2.44
P R I C E	1. Prices exhibit fear in God and consider the idea that God is the "pricer."	2.10	2.43	2.05	2.19
	2. Societal welfare approach is applied in setting prices.	2.25	2.7	2.08	2.34
	3. Prices reflect value maximization than profit maximization.	2.05	2.53	2.10	2.23
	4. Prices are observed to be all fair and just.	2.4	2.68	2.40	2.49
	5. Suggested retail price on a product is adopted.	2.28	2.5	2.03	2.27
	6. Change in price of the product is consistent with the change in the quantity or quality of the product.	2.23	2.53	1.90	2.22
	7. False propaganda or publicity with regard to price, demand and supply cannot be observed.	2.05	2.35	1.85	2.09
	8. Extortion at the expense of consumers is not practiced.	2.23	2.63	2.00	2.29
	9. Hoarding, manipulation of prices and restriction on trade are forbidden.	2.28	2.60	1.90	2.26
	Overall Mean	2.21	2.55	2.03	2.26

P L A C E	1. Storage, display and distribution of Halal and Haram food products are properly segregated.	2.35	2.58	1.83	2.25
	2. Supply of Halal food products is always available.	2.30	2.68	2.25	2.41
	3. Use of coercion in the marketing channel is not practiced.	2.60	2.68	2.15	2.48
	4. No manipulation has been observed on the availability of food product for the purpose of exploitation.	2.58	2.63	2.40	2.53
	5. The food products are sold with appropriate packaging.	2.50	2.98	2.33	2.60
	6. No burden has been observed in the distribution in terms of higher prices and delays.	2.43	2.55	2.13	2.37
	7. Food products are sold in not suspicious places.	2.58	2.65	2.33	2.52
	Overall Mean	2.48	2.68	2.20	2.45
P R O M O T I O N	1. All promotional activities are Shariah compliant.	2.45	2.70	2.00	2.39
	2. The use of women in any form of advertising is strictly not Observed	2.48	2.68	2.30	2.48
	3. Suggestive language and behavior in promoting products are strictly not used.	2.43	2.60	2.33	2.45
	4. Concealment of fact and information in the delivery of promotional tools are not practiced.	2.28	2.68	2.23	2.39
	5. Sexual appeal in any promotional programs is not observed.	2.55	2.58	1.95	2.36
	6. No swearing in the name of Allah in promoting products is noticed.	3.18	3.28	2.95	3.13
	7. No exaggeration of product attributes in the promotion of products is observed.	2.38	2.63	2.18	2.39
	8. All of the advertisements do not mislead customers.	2.25	2.63	2.10	2.33
	9. Deception in all the promotional activities is not observed.	2.43	2.60	2.00	2.34
	Overall Mean	2.49	2.71	2.23	2.48

Other indicators under product about appearance, packaging, labeling, branding/logo and endorsement of environmental protection were also evaluated not satisfactory by the consumers. With these results, manufacturers and/distributors should address these weak areas of product strategy as they are very influential in the eyes of halal markets. Hamdan, Issa, Abu, and Jusoff, (2013) investigated the influential factors in Muslim consumers' purchasing decisions of processed food products and determined that the features of processed food products, awareness of halal labeling, and knowledge about processed halal food products are the key variables.

In the case of place strategy, the indicator related to the proper segregation of the storage, display, and distribution of halal and haram came out to have the lowest mean (2.25) among the 7 indicators. This would imply that consumers have observed that halal products are not appropriately separated from haram

food items. There are other areas of place strategy wherein customers are not also satisfied which include burden in the distribution in terms of higher prices and delays, and availability of the supply of halal products. Abdullah, Hamali, and Abdullah (2015) emphasized that the distribution of products should be available and easy to find on the shelf together with the help of a salesperson. The study also noted that businesses must emphasize on offering convenience to the customers in delivering their product to the right customer, at the right amount and the right quality. Thus, their study highlighted that having the distribution that offers convenience to Muslim customers is critical to protect Shariah laws and to serve Muslims consumers in line with Islamic teaching.

Interestingly, all indicators under promotion except swearing in the name of Allah in promoting products were all assessed by Muslim consumers as not satisfactory. Indicator pertaining to the use of misleading advertisement found out to have the lowest mean (2.33) in the promotion. Deception in the promotional activities, the presence of sexual appeal, concealment of fact and information in the delivery of promotional tools, as well as in compliance to Shariah of the promotional programs were observed by the consumers, thus scored not satisfied. The study of Abuznaid (2012) noted that promotion of products should not allow any room to cover up promotional behavior or hide any defect in the products. He also emphasized that all forms and shapes of false assertion, overpraising products and attributing to them qualities which they don't possess, unfounded accusations and false testimony are prohibited.

As this study utilized three groups of respondents in equal representation, it came out that the assessment of the three groups of Muslim consumers varies. Using ANOVA (Analysis of Variance), it is found out that there is a significant difference in the satisfaction level of the Meranao fathers, mothers and Ulama on the marketing mix strategies. Notably, among the groups of respondents, Ulama has the lowest assessment for the product, price, place and promotion strategies. Muslim fathers followed the Ulama respondents to have an unsatisfactory evaluation of the 4Ps strategies of halal manufacturers and/ distributors. This result may indicate that both Meranao Ulama and fathers are more conservative on their assessment and have a high standard as to halal business practices. On the other hand, Muslim mothers are satisfied with the strategies adopted by the halal manufacturers and/ distributors based on their assessment. As presented in the table, they have the highest assessment on the product strategy (1.76), and then followed by promotion (1.71).

CONCLUSIONS

The Muslim Meranao consumers specifically the Meranao fathers and Ulama are not satisfied with the marketing mix strategies (product, price, place and promotion) applied for the halal branded food products. Thus, their assessment would imply that there are violations/problems/issues they have viewed as to the compliance of food manufacturers and/ distributors on halal standards.

Based on the findings of the study, Muslim Meranao fathers and Ulama as consumers have higher standards as of their assessment on the compliance of food manufacturers and/ distributors on halal practices and principles than Muslim Meranao mothers. Their assessment in the four elements of the marketing mix is interpreted not satisfactory, unlike with mothers. Hence, this may give an idea to halal producers and marketers on how they would best serve each of these groups of Muslim customers.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The findings of the study will give a good reflection to halal food manufacturers and/ distributors as to the status of the products they served to the consumers. Significantly, the study will serve as their guide in formulating and adopting a highly compliant halal strategy. The results of the study can also provide a good basis to halal authorities in making necessary changes and improvements on the existing halal standards, thereby meet the global halal requirements.

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