



A CONCEPTUAL PAPER FOR DEVELOPMENT OF HALAL FOOD SERVICE SYSTEM IN THAILAND



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ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 27 September 2018

Revised: 2 November 2018

Accepted: 6 December 2018

Published: 31 December 2018

Keywords

Halal certification
Halal restaurants
Food service quality
Thailand
Halal current trend
Tourism
Tourist

Halal certification for food service establishments is crucial when marketing them to the global travelers since the demand for Halal establishments is increasing every day. Many food service establishments are trying to be Halal certified because stringent Halal certification processes could give these establishments a competitive advantage which will result in higher revenue. Thailand has been receiving a high revenue from tourism industry. Meanwhile the food and beverage were the top five sectors that contributed 448 billion baht to the GDP in 2015. By having Halal certification, restaurants will be ensured Food Quality Standards that will guarantee the hygienic condition through implementation of GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice) and Halal certification. Nevertheless, currently the numbers of Halal restaurants in some areas are less than 20 establishments. This is not enough for visitors who wanted to consume Muslim foods. The main aim of this paper is to provide a literature review on Halal certification, thus proposing the conceptual framework on the opportunities of developing Halal Food Service system in Thailand. Finally, the findings will also provide recommendations on how restaurants' operators should strategize their business and focus towards acquiring Halal certification. These efforts could also help to better understand the current situations and efforts that could be carried out by tourism promotions bodies to promote these Muslim friendly locations to Muslim tourists around the world.

Contribution/ Originality: This study is one of very few studies which have investigated on Halal restaurants in Thailand. The authors provided the gaps that may contribute to improve a tourism industry in Thailand. Moreover, people who are interested to invest on a Halal catering would bring this to build a market strategy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The meaning of Halal is lawful, allowed and permitted to consume food agreeable to Al Quran. Therefore, Halal foods must be processed following Islamic laws and without Haram that the meaning is opposite Halal (Khalek and Ismail, 2015; Aslan and Aslan, 2016). Anything eaten or taken orally by the body, as a source of energy, defines the meaning of food and people usually consume meals three times a day (Mathew *et al.*, 2014)

hence, the market for food service sector such as restaurants can be expanded with Halal certification. Samori *et al.* (2016) stated that Halal tourism is a part of the new experience emerged from the growth of Halal business and the sectors which relate Halal tourism seem to be expanding. Not only Halal tourism service but also Halal restaurants must be operated according to the Islamic law (Shariah compliant). Moreover, the restaurant establishments are growing dramatically worldwide because most people prefer to consume outside food more than cooking at home and they have variety of choices in selecting restaurants (Gagić *et al.*, 2013; Meng and Choi, 2017). The growing relevance of food consumed at restaurants could bring a new opportunity for food service industry. Nevertheless, the majority of restaurants must have a genuine certification to present to the customers such as GMP, Halal certification, to confirm their value. Halal food should be prepared, processed and manufactured hygienically, hence, all categories of food must be non-toxic to consume and follow the Shariah (Khalek and Ismail, 2015). Moreover, the word “toyyib” is also mentioned together with Halal which means pure, good and healthy. Therefore, Halal food must not only be well prepared but will not harm the customers as well. Halal restauranters have to be aware of food forbidden by religion such as dead animals, flesh of swine, meat sacrificed for other than God or on which God’s name has not been mentioned and prevent contaminations with Haram food ingredients. However, restauranters should not only focus on the increasing 1.6 billion Muslim populations each year also non-Muslim community can also be a target for this market. The increasing concern on hygiene and health among consumers recently influenced non-Muslim consumer to have a positive attitude and acceptance towards Halal food (Mathew *et al.*, 2014; Wibowo and Ahmad, 2016).

Tourism industry in Thailand plays an important role in Thai economy and other businesses related to tourism can also expanded. Nevertheless, Thailand should also have various types of restaurants such as Halal restaurants, Western restaurants, Thai restaurants to support all type of visitors so that they can freely choose whatever restaurant they want. Meanwhile, Muslim tourist could be an interesting tourist group but Thailand has to provide more convenience facilities, such as restaurants, transportations to attract more Muslim tourists to travel to Thailand. Furthermore, food and beverage are the basic necessities that Thailand Tourism Council have to focus on, specifically the food service certification in order to guarantee the quality of food and service. The authors reviewed and synthesized the previous related studies in this article. Hopefully, the finding could lead to a better understanding on how to establish Halal restaurants in Thailand in order to fill the gap. Moreover, the finding will be a guideline for those who wanted to establish Halal restaurants targeting Muslim as well as non-Muslim visitors.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Food Service Quality

Food service quality is a significant success factor of restaurants (Sumaedi and Yarmen, 2015). All the businesses which are cuisines related have to guarantee the food service quality because this will affect the level of their customers’ satisfaction. The main factors which play a significant role in satisfying restaurants are employees’ behavior, atmosphere, food quality, and service quality (Medeiros and Salay, 2013; Alhelalat *et al.*, 2017; Han and Hyun, 2017). Moreover, restaurants’ employee could earn high tip by customers, if waiters or waitresses provide good service quality and the customers are satisfied (Brewster, 2015). The customers’ overall evaluation of their purchase and consumption experience of products or service can be referred as the meaning of customer satisfaction (Omar *et al.*, 2016). In addition to influence good service, tipping may also be one of the impacts to motivate a service operator to be more active. Measuring service quality was proposed by Zeithaml *et al.* (1988) which is an instrument’s name SERVQUAL that consists of five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance and tangibles. Medler-Liraz (2012) modified version of SERVQUAL to examine the relationship between service quality and tipping size, and the result shows a significant relationship in which customers who are satisfied will give more

tipping than customers who were not satisfied with the service. On another point, Alhelalat *et al.* (2017) looked at the effect of employee service behavior on customer satisfaction and the factor that affect the guests' emotion depends on the personality of the employee. Besides, a tool for measuring service quality in restaurant is known as the DINESERV scale and this tool was created by Stevens *et al.* (1995). However, Hanks *et al.* (2017) examine how the servicescape affect service quality by using the DINESERV scale and the investigation apply only three dimensions which are responsiveness, empathy and assurance. Nevertheless, hospitality and tourism in Thailand also have service quality but they were motivated by establishing 3 dimensions which are regionally, nationally, and globally that they applied to a signature of its own way for enhancing the service quality standard (Choovanichchannon, 2015). At the same time, Halal certification is a part of quality standards and has become The Central Islamic Committee of Thailand Offices' strategies to promote that Thailand as Muslim friendly locations for tourists around the world.

Table-1. Food Service Quality

Author (s)	Dimensions
Alhelalat <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Personal and function aspects of employee behavior
Baker <i>et al.</i> (2013)	The factor of wait time, quality of service and interaction process within customers
Mei <i>et al.</i> (1999)	Employee behavior, tangibles and reliability
Medeiros and Salay (2013)	The price, atmosphere, food quality and location
Omar <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy
Han and Hyun (2017)	The atmosphere, service and food quality
Andersson and Mossberg (2004)	elements food, service, fine cuisine, restaurant interior and good company
Gagić <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Food and beverage quality, the quality of service delivery, physical environment and price fairness

Source: (Mei *et al.*, 1999; Andersson and Mossberg, 2004; Baker *et al.*, 2013; Gagić *et al.*, 2013; Medeiros and Salay, 2013; Omar *et al.*, 2016; Alhelalat *et al.*, 2017; Han and Hyun, 2017)

Halal certification is a part of quality system for example, it must follow Islamic strict dietary rules and people who are involved with Halal restaurants such as managers, restaurant operators must understand about the Halal certification (Marzuki *et al.*, 2012). All these rules have been following the Shari'a law that is precisely describe the scope for human intervention which consist of food and drink, clothes, entertainment and the way of living (Asad *et al.*, 2016; Aslan and Aslan, 2016). The significant role of the wholesomeness of Halal certification overspreads over hygiene, cleanliness and quality in all supply chain, from farm to fork. Therefore, Halal restaurants should prepare, process and manufacture food according to Halal requirement and to be sure that Halal restaurant should be certified by Halal Standard Institutes in their countries (Khalek and Ismail, 2015). For example, Halal restaurant owners in Thailand who wanted to be certified have to submit the related documentation and the application and is overseeing by The Central Islamic Committee of Thailand. The restaurants who have been certified can show Halal logo on visible place (Figure 1). In addition, Halal operators have to be careful with their ingredients which not supposed to be carrion, blood, animal slaughtered without pronouncing the name of God on them, pork and alcohol as they are not accepted as Halal ingredients (Marzuki *et al.*, 2012; Samori and Sabtu, 2014; Aslan and Aslan, 2016).



Figure-1. Halal Logo, Thailand

Source: The Central Islamic Committee of Thailand (2017)

Previous studies by Marzuki *et al.* (2012) conducted on 33 restaurants managers to investigate the attitudes toward Halal certification in Malaysia and the findings claimed that the marketing revenue increased in operating Halal certified restaurant because the certification is perceived to have a positive factor on customers' trust. Therefore, having Halal status is an expediency factor to the market share and demand of Muslim and non-Muslim customers.

2.2. Tourism in Thailand

Tourism which is a part of service industry that takes essential roles in Thai economy. Almost all tourist attractions provide many accommodations such as hotels, residents, restaurants, souvenir shops and transportation to serve visitors. These facilities are considered as an important contributor to the industry that furnishes a source of income and tourisms also have been giving high revenue to Thailand (Piewdang *et al.*, 2013; Chaisumpunsakul and Pholphirul, 2017; Chulaphan and Barahona, 2017; Puagniyom *et al.*, 2017). The number of tourists visiting Thailand increased rapidly from 336,000 foreigners in 1967 to 14 million foreigners in 2015 (Puagniyom *et al.*, 2017). The Tourism Authority of Thailand reported that the 10th highest income source in Thailand received around 2,000 million per year in tourism receipts (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2016).

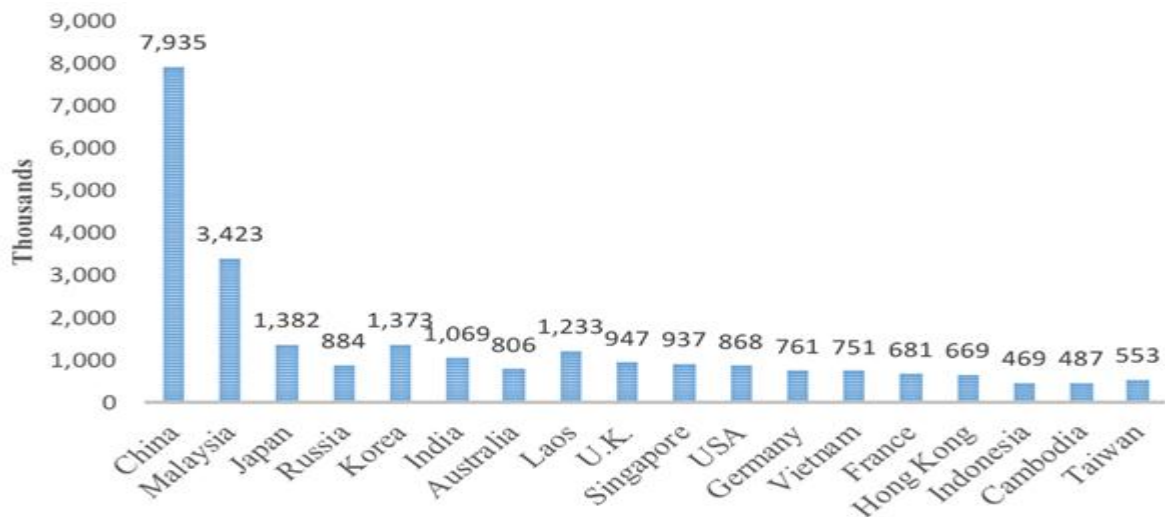


Figure-2. TTAT (2015): Country of Origin

Source: Department of Tourism, 2016

Figure 2 shows that the top three foreign tourists mainly are Chinese, Malaysian and Japanese. Nilnoppakun and Ampavat (2015) stated that the majority of domestic tourists who visited Thailand would like to have experiences related to arts and cultural events (64%) whilst the second activity are the local festival/ceremony (53.6%). In another viewpoint, Lertputtaraka *et al.* (2014) looked at the factors that influence Russian tourists travel

in Thailand were the beach resort that offers them a beautiful place to enjoy as well as the delicious Thai food. This shall bring an opportunity to establish more restaurant businesses.

Based on Figure 2, Malaysia is Muslim country that ranks, not only second, also among top 10 of Global Islamic Economic Indicator Score (Thomson, 2013). Nowadays, the world's Muslim population generally is large and may gradually increase to approximately 2.2. billion by 2030 or 26.4% of the global total (Henderson, 2016). Thus, Halal tourism is a new phenomenon that occurs from the increasing of Muslim population and become more valuable to the tourism industry (Chanin *et al.*, 2015; Samori *et al.*, 2016). The concept of Halal tourism has to develop service sectors such as hotels, restaurants, transportation and souvenir shops according to Quranic perspective (Chanin *et al.*, 2015). Marzuki *et al.* (2012) stated that the majority of Muslim can be encountered in many neighborhoods along with the Middle East, Central Asia, North and East Africa, Malaysia, Indonesia, China and Russia. Meanwhile, US\$20 billion was spent by Arab Gulf countries on vacations every year and Halal tourism could be expected to achieve US\$ 181 billion by 2018 (Thomson, 2013). Besides that, Malaysia and Indonesia tourists prefer to travel to Japan which has provided accommodation to attract Muslim tourists to enjoy the country (Samori *et al.*, 2016). Likewise, the Thai government has provided many facilities like mosques, accommodation and cuisine for Muslim tourists who want to visit Thailand. Therefore, attracting Muslim tourists can be an interesting strategy to increase tourism earnings.

2.3. Current of Halal Restaurants in Thailand

Thai food is very well known around the world and Thai government stated that Thai kitchen holds a global position as the kitchen of the world. Moreover, the ever-popular street food that is known to be cheap and can be found at street vendor stalls and can be considered as favorite to most tourists. The taste of Thai food is not only full-flavored but also most of the ingredients included are herbs such as lemon grass, lime leaf and galangal. Tom yumkung is the most popular Thai food in the world which also contains a variety of herbs. Nevertheless, majority of people do not have enough time to cook at home. Hence, some of them prefer to consume outside home and one of their choices is Halal restaurant. Islamic Committee of Thailand, consisting of experts, representatives from public and private sectors are called "Board of Halal Affairs". This committee have also established The Central Islamic Committee of Thailand to support and promote Halal business which adheres to Islamic law, as defined in Al Quran (Ismoyowati, 2015; The Halal Standard Institute of Thailand, 2016).

Halal restaurants were certified by The Central Islamic Committee of Thailand which must be guided by Islamic law (Shariah). More than 50% of population in ASEAN which are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam are Muslim; hence, restaurants being part of tourism industry has to support them. According to The Tourism Authority of Thailand (2015) the number of Halal restaurants in Thailand included 146 restaurants in the south, 306 restaurants in the central, 111 restaurants in the north, 7 restaurants in the east and 11 restaurants in the northeast; a total of 518 Halal restaurants (Figure 3).

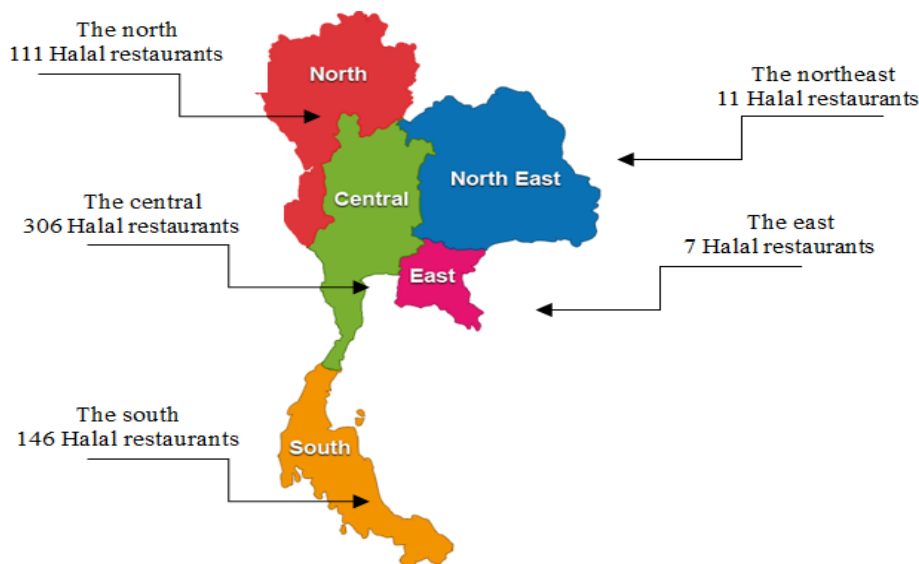


Figure-3. The number of Halal restaurants in Thailand

Source: TTAT (2015)

In the near future, The Halal Standard Institute of Thailand have strategies to encourage more non-certified Halal restaurants to be fully certified by training, advising and monitoring; in order to add value over 3500 stores nationwide (THSIT, 2017). The result could be better trust and satisfaction by the customers.

3. DEVELOPING CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF HALAL CERTIFICATION

The number of Halal restaurants in Thailand such as the northeast and the east are less than 20 establishments. This is not enough for visitors who wanted to consume Muslim foods. Thailand Tourism Council (2016) reported that the northeastern of Thailand is becoming increasingly popular amongst the travelers. Tourists are well-accepted that the level of service quality plays a potential role on tourists' satisfaction (Bouchon and Rawat, 2016). Therefore, food operators have to prepare the variety of foods to attract these new tourist groups. According to conceptual framework (Figure 4), three main factors that have ability and motivation toward Halal certification consist of food service outlets, Halal Standard Institute, Thailand and customer. The good relationship between all entities concerned is very important in contributing to the success of the Halal system implementation. The present study mentions four gaps that contribute to research questions. These are:

- What is the current concept and practice of Halal restaurant operators among Halal certified and non-Halal certified?
- What is the level of readiness among Halal restaurant operators especially the Halal certified and non-Halal certified?
- How Halal Standard Institute plays the role to establish the Halal Food Service System?
- What are the factors that influence tourists to choose Halal restaurants among Muslim and non-Muslim?

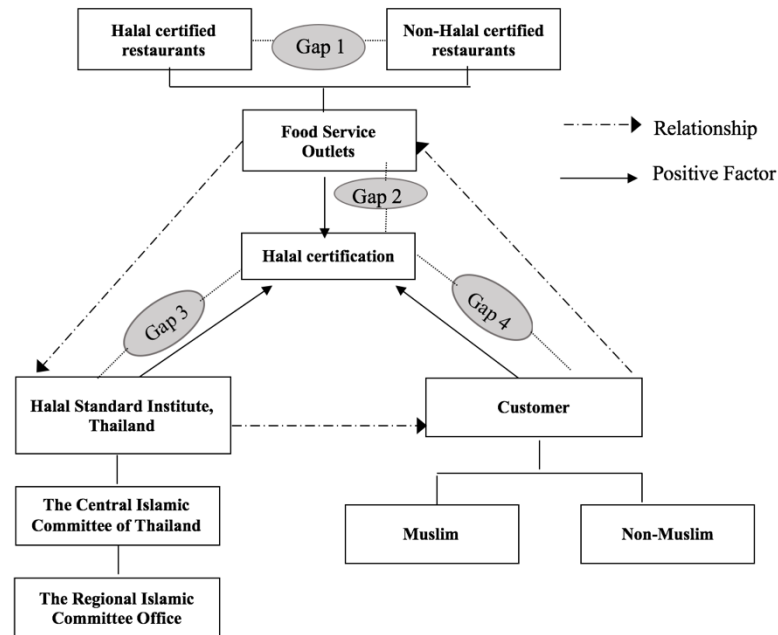


Figure-4. Proposed frameworks of various factors that influences Halal certification

Ayyub (2015) identified the factors such as acculturation, understanding about Halal, animal prohibition and quality of Halal certification could influence the perception of non-Muslims on Halal restaurants. Similarly, effort to promote the Halal restaurants to the new customer could be carried out on the quality of hygiene production as same as Muslim customers. It was noted that developing Halal food service system should also consider all of these essential factors. Therefore, future research should answer numerous questions to address the issues.

4. CHALLENGES AND FUTURE OF HALAL RESTAURANTS IN THAILAND

The Thai government has plan related to Halal food as their top priority in the five-year plan (2016-2020). This plan will further promote Thailand to be one of top five exporters of Halal product and service in the world. Moreover, many policies will be improved by the Thai government in order to catch up with Singapore and Malaysia (Choovanichchannon, 2015; Papangkorn, 2016). Tourism industry provides high income and more job opportunities in which the possible reason to have accommodation such as hotels, transportations and restaurants to acquire Halal certification. The service sectors of tourism industry need to be certified and improve its quality standard in order to attract more global visitors. Chulaphan and Barahona (2017) claimed that the tourism industry improves the percentage of employment, which represents 6.8 percent of total employment. Food service quality is one of the most important factors that will attract more tourists who are willing to pay and get satisfaction from the trip. Bouchon and Rawat (2016) reported that some rural areas of Thailand are lacking in management expertise service to implement Halal system. Therefore, Halal restaurants in Thailand have to be certified by Halal Standard Institutions to guarantee that they have not only the excellent hygiene condition but also get proper guidance. Moreover, food service industry is currently a significant contributor to rural economy in the form of purchased products and hospitality service. This may develop the rural area because local people could find jobs near their homes and reduce large migration of the population to urban areas (Puagniyom et al., 2017).

Halal restaurants have to pass five steps of certification process which is controlled by The Central Islamic Committee of Thailand. The process starts with a restaurant owner submitting the documents and the committee will check all the documents. The certification process is run by Halal committee until completion and owners can then display the Halal logo in a visible place (Food Information Center, 2017). However, some restaurants that are being operated by Muslim owner have not received any Halal certification yet. Therefore, The Halal Standard Institute of Thailand should persuade non-certified Halal restaurants to apply for certification. Halal restaurants

should be one of the essential businesses that offer opportunities for promoting a sustainable cultural tourism in Thailand.

Future study will be carried out by using qualitative research such as in-depth interview with restaurants' owners and operators who operated Halal as well as non-Halal restaurants. Both establishments should be taking the leading roles to go for Halal certification. Apart from that, the researchers must also talk to The Halal Standard Institute, Thailand on their strategy to encourage non-Halal certified restaurant participation. Hence, qualitative method such as phenomenological research is a suitable technique to explain or describe the current situation, expressed in stories and experiences in order to have a better understanding of the whole issue.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper proposed that Halal restaurants may gain more opportunities, in a way that restaurant owners should study, plan and prepare the basic requirements before establishing the Halal restaurants. The authors hope that the conceptual framework of this study will furnish valuable information to the restaurant owners who would inspire to apply for Halal certification for their establishments. In addition, restaurants operators could be trained on Halal restaurant system specifically on knowledge and awareness in order to inculcate the right understanding of implementing the system. For the purpose of future research, study should be carried out on the factors that affect the success of restaurants in achieving Halal certification. By doing so, finding of the future research could help to encourage more restauranters in Thailand to acquire Halal certification for their establishments.

Funding: The authors are grateful to The Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) for providing the funding to the first author.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Contributors/Acknowledgement: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

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