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Research Paper

Analysis of Halal Certification System Value Chain in Brunei: A Comprehensive Ecosystem Perspective

Siti Majidah Rahim*[1,2], Nor Surilawana Sulaiman[1,2]
[1,2] Faculty of Halal Science and Sustainable Tourism,
Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali, Brunei Darussalam

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Abstract

Halal certification is crucial in ensuring that food, beverages, and other products comply with Islamic principles, thereby enhancing consumer trust and promoting global trade opportunities. In Brunei Darussalam, halal certification is regulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) and the Halal Food Control Division (HFCD) as the secretariat. Despite the comprehensive system in place, challenges persist in ensuring its efficiency and adaptability to meet industry needs. Investigating the value chain of the halal certification system in Brunei is crucial for identifying gaps and enhancing the system's effectiveness. This study aims to explore Brunei's halal certification system by examining its key processes, stakeholder roles, challenges, and inefficiencies within an ecosystem perspective. It provides a comprehensive framework that maps stakeholder interconnections within the halal certification system. The research adopts a qualitative approach, analysing past literature and conducting interviews with experts in the field. The study develops a comprehensive framework for Brunei's halal certification ecosystem by mapping roles, identifying issues, and synthesising findings. The study identifies relevant agencies involved in the halal certification process, such as MoRA, the Brunei Darussalam Food Authority (BDFA), the Department of Agriculture and Agrifood (DOAA) under the Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism (MPRT) and the Royal Customs and Excise Department (RCED) under the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE), as well as industry players and regulatory body. It highlights key issues, including procedural bottlenecks and limited coverage for the cosmetics and pharmaceuticals industry. This study offers policy-relevant insights for improving halal governance, institutional collaboration, and certification efficiency in Brunei Darussalam. The findings may assist regulators and halal industry stakeholders in formulating strategic initiatives to strengthen the resilience, transparency, and global competitiveness of Brunei's halal certification ecosystem.

Keywords: *Brunei Darussalam, Ecosystem, Halal Value Chain, Halal Certification System*

INTRODUCTION

Halal certification plays a pivotal role in ensuring compliance with Islamic principles and confirms the cleanliness (Sulaiman & Abdullah, 2022), safety, and quality of products for Muslim consumers (Rahman & Balushi, 2022), thereby enhancing consumer trust and fostering global trade opportunities (Warto & Samsuri, 2020) based on morals and spirituality (Oktaviany, 2024). It serves as an ethical business practice and a form of consumer protection, assuring that products are permissible for Muslim use (Ramlan & Nahrowi, 2014). This is particularly significant in Brunei Darussalam (hereafter referred to as Brunei), as halal certification has positive implications for establishing and solidifying its status as a leading halal hub. The country recognises the importance of a stringent halal certification system in maintaining its reputation and upholding the integrity of halal products. Hence, as His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah Ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Haji Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Sa'adul Khairi Waddien emphasised, the Brunei government has a responsibility to control and monitor halal-related matters to ensure compliance

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with Allah's commands in the Quran and Sunnah (Ibrahim, 2022).

In Brunei, the Halal Food Control Division (HFCD) under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) is responsible for managing halal certification processes exclusively (Sulaiman & Hashim, 2021). On May 26, 2017, the government introduced mandatory halal certification for all food-related businesses, with penalties for non-compliance (Tajudeen & Abdul-Rahman, 2019). This regulation affects a broad range of industries involved in human consumption, especially restaurants, food factories, and home-based food businesses. Applications for halal certification are processed through HFCD. Beyond the application process, businesses must also meet additional key requirements, including appointing at least two halal supervisors who are responsible for ensuring that employees adhere to halal standards and procedures to maintain excellent food quality and premises (Abdullah et al., 2023) and undergoing thorough audits and inspections. These measures ensure adherence to the highest standards of halal compliance, thereby strengthening trust in Brunei's halal certification system.

A critical research gap remains in studying the halal certification system from an ecosystem perspective, as no single agency manages the certification process in isolation. Effective implementation requires collaboration among multiple stakeholders to address gaps and improve system efficiency. The halal certification system operates as a dynamic ecosystem rather than functioning in isolation, with its effectiveness relying on the interplay between various stakeholders and their interconnected roles (Noordin et al., 2014). This ecosystem perspective, rooted in the strategic ecosystem approach, offers a biological metaphor for organisation and highlights the importance of work alliances and alliance-based competition (Walners-Teow & Kay, 2005). Popularised by management consultants, this approach emphasises the significance of collaboration and shared responsibility in addressing complex challenges. Each stakeholder in the halal certification system ultimately shares the fate of the network, regardless of their individual strength, underscoring the necessity of a cohesive and resilient system.

Waltner-Teow and Kay (2005) emphasise the importance of governance, monitoring, and management in sustaining such systems, advocating for methodologies that analyse stakeholders and translate their narratives into rich pictures, conceptual models, and system diagrams. These tools enable stakeholders to visualise and address the system's complexities across multiple perspectives and scales, thereby necessitating a comprehensive perspective on the halal certification value chain framework. Mapping the interconnections between these stakeholders highlights the complex web of relationships that underpin the halal certification value chain. Halal auditors and certification bodies play a crucial role as intermediaries, conducting site inspections, verifying documentation, and ensuring adherence to Islamic principles. Their work supports the regulatory framework established by government bodies while also addressing the operational needs of private enterprises. End consumers, as the ultimate beneficiaries of the system, play a vital role in driving demand for halal products, thereby influencing businesses' commitment to certification and compliance. The ecosystem approach helps to frame these relationships, emphasising alliance-based solutions that contribute to the network's overall sustainability.

Collaborative governance is essential for the efficient functioning of this ecosystem, emphasising the importance of shared responsibility and cooperation beyond the Halal Food Control Division. As Waltners-Teow and Kay (2005) suggest, adaptive ecosystem approaches that integrate governance, monitoring, and management are crucial for ensuring the system's resilience and sustainability (Rahim & Hashim, 2025). While HFCD oversees the certification process, the active involvement of other actors, such as industry players, non-governmental organisations, and academic institutions, is vital in addressing challenges, fostering innovation, and ensuring system resilience. Joint efforts can improve public awareness campaigns, develop technological solutions for traceability, and streamline compliance processes for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). By

embracing a collaborative and adaptive ecosystem approach, the halal certification value chain system in Brunei can ensure sustainability, enhance transparency, and strengthen consumer trust, ultimately supporting the nation's ambition to become a global hub for halal products (Sulaiman & Abdullah, 2022).

Therefore, investigating the value chain of Brunei's halal certification system through an ecosystem lens is essential to ensure its sustainability and effectiveness in meeting global halal standards. This study explores Brunei's halal certification system by identifying its key processes, understanding the roles of its stakeholders, and uncovering the challenges it faces. The research highlights inefficiencies within the certification process and proposes actionable insights for improvement. A comprehensive framework is developed to map the entire ecosystem, clearly outlining the roles of key contributors and their interconnections. By positioning halal certification as an interconnected ecosystem, this study contributes policy-relevant insights for strengthening governance, coordination, and certification efficiency in Brunei.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Importance of Ecosystem Perspectives in the Governance of Halal Certification

Adopting an ecosystem perspective in Halal certification governance is crucial because it acknowledges the interconnectivity of diverse actors, processes, and external factors that collectively influence the system's efficiency, credibility, and sustainability. Unlike siloed approaches that focus narrowly on compliance or regulatory enforcement, an ecosystem lens emphasises the interdependence of stakeholders, governments, certification bodies, producers, logistics providers, consumers, and even international trade partners in creating and sustaining value. For instance, effective governance requires alignment between Brunei's centralised regulatory framework under MORA and the operational realities of SMEs, which often struggle with high compliance costs and technical barriers. An ecosystem perspective also emphasises the role of enabling infrastructure, such as digital traceability systems or consumer education campaigns, in fostering trust and ensuring transparency throughout the value chain. Furthermore, it underscores the need for adaptive policies that balance doctrinal rigour with market demands, particularly as Brunei seeks to position itself as a regional Halal hub amid competition from Malaysia and Indonesia.

From an ecosystem lens, the Halal certification system in Brunei can be viewed as a complex network of actors, policies, and infrastructure. Ngah et al. (2021) argue that effective Halal ecosystems require synergy between government, industry, academia, and civil society. Brunei's centralised model ensures doctrinal compliance but risks inefficiencies, as noted in critiques of its top-down governance. Conversely, Indonesia's multi-stakeholder approach, involving the Indonesian Ulema Council/Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) and private certifiers, strikes a balance between agility and accountability (Amalia et al., 2021). Similarly, studies on Malaysia's halal ecosystem highlight the importance of collaborative governance involving certification authorities, industry players, and supporting institutions to enhance responsiveness and ecosystem resilience (Ngah et al., 2021). These comparative findings suggest that while Brunei's centralised approach offers strong regulatory consistency, broader stakeholder engagement may improve adaptability and operational efficiency. Emerging themes in the literature stress the role of digitalisation (e.g., blockchain for traceability) and consumer trust-building in strengthening ecosystem resilience (Iranmanesh et al., 2021). For Brunei, integrating these innovations while preserving cultural authenticity remains a significant challenge, necessitating comprehensive research on policy adaptability and stakeholder engagement across the entire ecosystem.

Thus, viewing Halal certification through an ecosystem perspective ensures holistic, context-sensitive strategies that harmonise Brunei's cultural values with its aspirations for global Halal

leadership. Without holistic governance that bridges these gaps, Brunei risks falling behind regional competitors, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, despite its strong doctrinal foundations. The literature on Halal certification systems reveals limited insights into Brunei's unique ecosystem. Table 1 is a summary of previous studies and their limitations in addressing Brunei's value chain challenges:

Table 1. Halal Certification System in Past Study

Author(s)	Year	Focus/ Scope	Main Idea	Research Gap
Kifli	2019; 2023	Bureaucratisation of Halal Certification	This research examines the regulation and practice of Halal in Brunei, with a focus on the Halal certification process and the impact of the Halal Certificate and Halal Label (Amendment) Order 2017 on local food and beverage businesses, particularly Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).	Further research is needed to assess the impact of the 2017 amendment on MSMEs and explore ways to support these enterprises in complying with Halal certification requirements.
Sulaiman and Hashim	2021	Halal Certification Value Chain	Value Chain in the Certification System and Challenges	Lacks analysis in terms of ecosystem perspectives
Suhairom et al.	2022	Brunei's Certification Bottlenecks	Identifies high compliance costs for SMEs and fragmented coordination	Focus on the challenges in Brunei's halal certification
Ibrahim, N.H.	2022	Halal Policy in Brunei Darussalam	Implementation of Halal certification should not be merely based on the standards and procedures established, but also on the need to uphold the values of Shariah and Halal spirit (Government agencies)	Focused on the Halal Authority and Laws in Brunei Darussalam
Sulaiman et al.	2022	Effectiveness of the Halal Certification Process	The main focus is on the effectiveness of halal certification from the community's perspective.	Recommended a framework for maintaining the effectiveness of the halal certification process
Sulaiman and Abdullah	2023	Brunei's Halal Certification Development	Discussed the development of a halal certification system from its establishment until the current system	Mainly focused on the halal certification standard operating procedures (SOP)

Author(s)	Year	Focus/ Scope	Main Idea	Research Gap
Ismail et al.	2024	SME's Perspective on the Benefits and Challenges of Halal Certificate Application	The study examines the benefits and challenges encountered by Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Brunei when pursuing Halal certification.	The study highlights a need for strategies to expedite the certification process and improve the global recognition of Brunei's Halal certification.

Source: Developed by the Authors

Existing literature extensively covers Halal certification in larger markets but offers limited insights into Brunei's unique ecosystem. A comprehensive analysis of its value chain, from regulatory rigour to global market integration, is critical to inform strategies for enhancing competitiveness and sustainability. This review emphasises the significance of empirical studies on stakeholder collaboration for Brunei to establish a robust position within the global Halal economy.

A synthesis of the studies presented in Table 1 indicates that previous research has primarily focused on regulatory frameworks, certification procedures, operational effectiveness, SME challenges, and legal dimensions of halal governance. While these studies provide valuable insights into specific components of the halal certification system, they generally examine these elements in isolation and offer limited understanding of how actors, institutions, governance mechanisms, and supporting infrastructures interact as an integrated ecosystem.

Accordingly, the novelty of the present study lies in its application of an ecosystem lens to analyse Brunei's halal certification system. Rather than focusing solely on certification procedures or regulatory compliance, this study examines the interconnected relationships among government agencies, certification authorities, industry stakeholders, supporting institutions, and governance structures across the halal value chain. This ecosystem perspective provides a more holistic understanding of value creation, coordination challenges, institutional interdependencies, and opportunities for sustainable improvement within Brunei's halal certification landscape.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study was conducted in Brunei, focusing on the governance and operational dynamics of the halal certification ecosystem. Adopting a qualitative exploratory design, the research combined a systematic literature review (SLR) and semi-structured interviews to examine the halal certification value chain in Brunei from a comprehensive ecosystem perspective. Qualitative design was considered appropriate as the study aimed to explore in-depth experiences, institutional practices, governance mechanisms, and stakeholder perceptions regarding the halal certification process.

The study utilised purposive sampling, whereby participants were intentionally selected based on their direct involvement, expertise, and professional experience within the halal certification ecosystem in Brunei. Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research to obtain rich and relevant information from individuals who possess specialised knowledge related to the research topic (Campbell et al., 2020; Tajik et al., 2024) The selected participants were considered capable of providing comprehensive insights into operational challenges, policy implementation, institutional coordination, and ecosystem sustainability. Specifically, participants were selected from key institutions directly responsible for halal certification governance and implementation, namely the Halal Food Control Division (HFCD) and the Brunei Islamic Religious Council (BIRC), due to their central roles in policy execution, certification administration, and

regulatory oversight.

A total of 2 participants were involved in this study. The participants consisted of representatives from various institutions directly related to the halal certification ecosystem, as shown in Table 2, and were interviewed using the questions shown in Table 3. The professional positions and years of experience of the participants further justified their inclusion, as both possessed direct operational knowledge and decision-making responsibilities within the halal certification system. The inclusion of participants from multiple institutional backgrounds enabled triangulation of perspectives and strengthened the comprehensiveness of the findings regarding the halal certification value chain ecosystem.

Table 2. Background of Interviewee

No.	Affiliation	Position / Period of Working in the Halal-related Industry	No. of Interviewees	Date of Interview
1.	Halal Food Control Division (HFCD)	Food Officer - 7 years	One (1)	30/9/2024
2.	Brunei Islamic Religious Council (BIRC)	Head of the Halal Secretariat - 3 years	One (1)	26/10/2024

Source: Developed by the Authors

Table 3. Interview Questions

Question Number	Interview Questions
1	Can you describe the process for granting *halal* certification or approval to food establishments in Brunei Darussalam?
2	How does your agency handle cases of non-compliance or violations of *halal* standards?
3	What measures are in place to ensure transparency and accountability in your agency's operations?
4	How do you stay informed about emerging trends and challenges in the halal food industry, and how does this information influence your regulatory approach?
5	What are the primary challenges or obstacles your agency encounters during the certification process?

Source: Developed by the Authors

Data collection was conducted between September 2024 and October 2024. The defined data collection period ensured consistency in capturing institutional practices and regulatory conditions within the same operational timeframe. Semi-structured interview sessions were conducted either face-to-face or through online meeting platforms, depending on participant availability and institutional arrangements. Each interview session lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes. The duration of the interviews provided sufficient opportunity for participants to elaborate on organisational processes, implementation challenges, and stakeholder interactions within the halal certification ecosystem. The semi-structured interview format allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences, institutional practices, and perceptions of the effectiveness, challenges, and sustainability of the halal certification system in Brunei. All interviews were conducted in English and Malay, depending on participant preference and were audio-recorded with participant consent to ensure accuracy in transcription and analysis.

The interview data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships (Braun, 2013; Ahmed et al., 2025) related to halal governance, institutional coordination, certification procedures, digitalisation, compliance challenges, and value chain integration. The coding process involved several stages, namely familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, theme categorisation, and refinement of themes to ensure consistency and interpretative validity. During the familiarisation stage, interview transcripts were repeatedly reviewed to gain a comprehensive understanding of participant perspectives. Subsequently, initial codes were generated to identify meaningful concepts and recurring issues. These codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories that reflected key dimensions of the halal certification ecosystem, before being refined and validated to enhance analytical coherence and interpretative rigour.

Furthermore, to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, the study employed several strategies, including data triangulation, participant validation, and direct participant quotations. The use of verbatim interview excerpts enabled the authentic representation of participant voices and strengthened the scholarly rigour of the study. Furthermore, participants from different institutional backgrounds were selected to ensure diverse perspectives and reduce potential bias in the interpretation of findings.

In addition, the peer-reviewed articles, government reports (e.g., Brunei Halal Standards PBD 24:2007), and policy documents published between 2015 and 2024 were sourced from reputable databases. The primary objective was to evaluate the efficiency of Brunei's Halal certification value chain through an ecosystem lens and identify bottlenecks in centralised governance, thereby formulating a framework for the Halal certification ecosystem.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Halal Certification Process in Brunei Darussalam

The Halal certification process in Brunei is centrally governed by HFCD under MORA (Sulaiman & Abdullah, 2023), ensuring adherence to Islamic principles and national standards. The process begins with the submission of an application, where businesses (both local and foreign) must provide detailed documentation, including company registration, product ingredients, and manufacturing processes, to demonstrate compliance with the Brunei Halal Standards (PBD 24:2007). This is followed by a rigorous inspection phase, during which MORA-appointed officers audit production facilities, supply chains, and storage systems to verify that all materials and practices comply with Shariah requirements, including the absence of haram (forbidden) substances and risks of cross-contamination.

Upon successful inspection, the applicant may proceed to apply for the Halal Label, which requires additional scrutiny of packaging and labelling to ensure transparency for consumers. Certification is valid for three years, provided that periodic compliance checks and random audits are conducted to ensure ongoing maintenance of standards (Kifli, 2023). Imported products must also undergo similar scrutiny, with certification granted only after verification by MORA. On the other hand, before being granted a permit for importation, imported fresh halal meat must undergo evaluation by three government agencies: Animal Quarantine Services, Ministry of Primary Resources & Tourism (MPRT), HFCD of MoRA, and Food Safety & Quality Control Division (FSQCD), Ministry of Health (MoH) (Khalid et al., 2018; Sulaiman & Hashim, 2022). Starting November 23, 2023, the Brunei Darussalam Food Authority (BDFA) assumed the roles of FSQCD, particularly in relation to food importation to Brunei (BDFA, 2023). Essentially, no Halal meat importation or supply is allowed in Brunei without the approval of relevant authorities, including the Brunei Islamic Religious Council (BIRC) (Ibrahim, 2022). Regarding importation purposes, slaughterhouses must be recognised by BIRC before importation (Ibrahim, 2022). Thus, this

constitutes an essential element of Brunei's government's initiative to strengthen the halal industry's ecosystem, safeguarding the public interest, particularly that of the *Muslim* population.

Figure 1 illustrates the process of halal certification in Brunei. The applicants obtain the application form from HFCD and submit it, along with the required documents, to HFCD. The HFCD will review the applicant's form before conducting audits. Upon approval, the business receives a halal certificate or halal permit. The MORA aims to process applications within 45 days if all conditions are met (Azney, 2017). Businesses also must maintain halal procedures and undergo surveillance audits. Strategically, Figure 1 demonstrates how multiple stages of review, inspection, and approval are integrated to safeguard halal integrity and strengthen consumer trust. At the same time, the figure highlights potential procedural bottlenecks arising from sequential verification processes, manual documentation requirements, and multiple layers of approval that may extend processing timelines.

> *"The Halal Food Control Division serves as the secretariat to the Islamic Religious Council and is primarily responsible for processing halal certification applications. In terms of applications, we are working hard to expedite the halal certification process to address delays, and we are currently managing them. We also collaborate with other agencies to continuously revise our policies so that the implementation of certification is more structured and efficient." - (Food Officer, 2024)*

> *"Our critical task is to meticulously review these submissions to ensure accuracy, completeness, and proper order before they proceed. This includes verifying key details such as issuance and expiry dates on halal permits and certificates, which are crucial for restaurants and companies, and ensuring no calculation errors. Altogether, from the day we receive it from HFCD until the applicants receive their certification, it must be within 44 working days if there is no non-compliance/NCR. After verification, we consolidate the applications into a formal decision paper. This paper is then submitted directly to the Minister (acting as the YDP/NYDP) for final endorsement. This submission includes the attached report from the HFCD. Once ministerial approval is granted and communicated to the Syariah Director (the Halal Secretariat head at JHES), we begin preparing the approval letter and the official certificate. We then arranged for the Secretary of the Islamic Religious Council of Brunei (MUIB) to sign manually. We notify the successful applicants and ensure they collect their certificates and complete the payment process within the mandatory 30-day period as stipulated by the halal certification order." - (Head of the Halal Secretariat, 2024)*

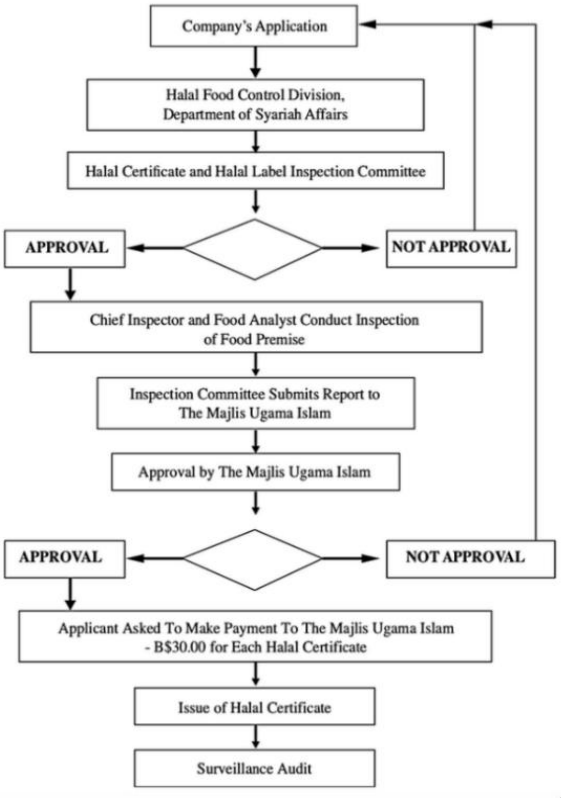


Figure. 1: Halal Certification Process in Brunei
Source: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2016

Actors of the Halal Certification Process

As discussed by Sulaiman and Hashim (2021), the certification process involves multiple actors, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Actors in the Halal Certification Process

Actors	Responsibilities
Administration Staff	• Handling application forms, supporting documents, and certificate fees
Secretariat of Halal Certification (HFCD)	• Halal Certification and Halal Label Inspection Committee • Examine and verify the application form and supporting documents • Issue Halal Certification
Auditors	• Examine the product ingredients based on technical and Shariah perspectives • Premises inspection • Prepare inspection reports • Committee of Internal Pre-meeting Halal Certification
Inspection Committee	• Committee of Internal Pre-meeting Halal Certification • Pre-approval of Halal Certification • Submit report/ presenting halal applicants to MUIB
Halal Certification Panels (MUIB)	• Decision-making in Halal Certification - approval or rejection

Source: Sulaiman & Hashim (2021)

Furthermore, according to Yaacob and Mahalle (2020), several agencies have also made concerted efforts towards realising the enforcement of the halal industry, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Other Relevant Government Agencies

Types of Foods	Other Government Agencies
Processed food products	Import & Export Unit, Food Safety & Quality Control Division, Ministry of Health
Subsidized goods	Supply & State Store Department, Ministry of Finance
Halal meat products	Animal Quarantine Services, Ministry of Primary Resources & Tourism Halal Food Control Division, Ministry of Religious Affairs Food Safety & Quality Control Division, Ministry of Health
Non-halal meat products	Food Safety & Quality Control Division, Ministry of Health
Bottled water	Industrial Development Unit, Department of Energy & Industry, Prime Minister's Office
Health supplements and Traditional supplements	Department of Pharmaceutical Services, Ministry of Health
Fresh whole fish and fish for rearing	Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture & Agrifood, Ministry of Agriculture & Tourism
Fresh crop commodities and seeds that can be planted, grown, or cultivated	Department of Agriculture & Agrifood, Ministry of Agriculture & Tourism
Local food manufacturers	Department of Agriculture & Agrifood, Ministry of Agriculture & Tourism

Source: Yaacob and Mahalle (2020)

Several government agencies in Brunei have played a crucial role in enforcing the halal industry, particularly in ensuring compliance with the halal certification process. MORA, through HFCD, is responsible for overseeing halal certification and ensuring that food products, especially halal meat, meet the stringent halal requirements. Additionally, the BDFA, which assumes responsibility for the FSQCD, collaborates closely with the HFCD to regulate food safety standards, including the inspection of both halal and non-halal meat products.

> *"In the context of halal development, we have been working with local agencies such as BDFA and MPRT, as well as international organisations, to facilitate cooperation and share updates. We work closely with various organisations depending on the situation. For instance, we collaborate with BDFA during audits. If we find issues such as rodent infestation, we refer the matter to them for follow-up. We also work with RCED, particularly on operations involving raw halal meat. Key entities include the Mufti office, MPRT, and, within MoRA, specifically BIRC. We also collaborate with ABCi, especially for home-based businesses. Collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MoH) is essential for laboratory analysis, such as when we find suspicious items during an audit or need to provide samples for public complaints. Furthermore, when reviewing standards, particularly for food, we require collaboration with PDS, SABLIs, and even academicians. It is crucial to*

incorporate all relevant perspectives to ensure our standards are comprehensive and up to date." - (Food Officer, 2024)

The enforcement of the halal certification process also involves MPRT, specifically through Animal Quarantine Services, which ensures that imported halal meat products comply with Brunei's halal regulations. Furthermore, the BDFA regulates processed food products, ensuring they meet halal certification standards before being distributed in the local market. The Ministry of Finance and Economy, through the Supply & State Store Department, monitors subsidised goods to ensure they align with Brunei's halal policies. Beyond food products, various other agencies contribute to maintaining halal integrity within the industry. The Department of Pharmaceutical Services oversees the regulation of health supplements and traditional medicines, ensuring that only halal-certified products are approved for consumption. Meanwhile, the Department of Fisheries under the Department of Agriculture & Agrifood (DOAA), along with MPRT, ensures that fresh whole fish and fish for rearing are free from contamination and comply with halal standards. The same ministry is also responsible for regulating fresh crop commodities and local food manufacturers to ensure halal compliance in agricultural practices and food production.

Additionally, the Industrial Development Unit under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) regulates bottled water production, ensuring that it meets both halal and safety requirements. These concerted efforts by multiple agencies reflect Brunei's commitment to maintaining a robust halal ecosystem, ensuring that all food-related sectors, from production to distribution, adhere to the highest standards of halal compliance. The integration of these agencies enhances the enforcement of halal certification, thereby ensuring consumer confidence in the authenticity of halal products within the country. However, the involvement of numerous agencies also requires effective inter-agency coordination to minimise duplication of tasks and administrative delays. Without sufficient coordination mechanisms, procedural bottlenecks may emerge despite the system's comprehensive governance structure

Halal Certification Ecosystem Value Chain

The halal certification process in Brunei operates within a structured value chain that integrates various government agencies, regulatory bodies, and industry stakeholders. From an ecosystem perspective, this value chain ensures that halal compliance is enforced at every stage of the certification process, maintaining the integrity of Brunei's halal industry.

Enforcement and Governance

At the highest level, the enforcement of halal compliance in Brunei is managed by multiple government agencies, each playing a distinct yet interconnected role. HFCD, under the Department of Shariah Affairs, MORA, serves as the central authority responsible for overseeing halal certification, ensuring that businesses and products comply with strict halal regulations. Other key enforcement bodies include the DOAA and the MPRT, which monitor halal compliance in the agricultural and livestock sectors. Additionally, the BDFA ensures that food safety standards align with the requirements of halal. Legal governance is further strengthened by the Islamic Legal Unit, MORA, which provides Islamic rulings on halal-related matters, and the Attorney General's Chamber (AGC), PMO, which ensures the legal framework supports halal industry regulations. Additionally, the National Standards Centre, in collaboration with the PMO, establishes and maintains standards for the halal industry. At the same time, the Royal Brunei Customs and Excise Department, in conjunction with the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE), plays a crucial role in monitoring the import and export of halal-certified products. Together, these agencies form a robust enforcement network that upholds the integrity of Brunei's halal industry.

Halal Certification Process as a Value Chain

The halal certification process in Brunei follows a structured value chain, ensuring that halal standards are met at every stage. The process begins with the submission of an application, where businesses provide relevant documents to HFCD for initial review. Following this, an oral and written test is conducted for halal supervisors to assess their knowledge of halal laws and compliance requirements. Once applicants pass the test, the inspection and auditing phase takes place, where a team of auditors, including Shariah officers and technical officers, conducts a thorough examination of business operations, facilities, and supply chains to verify adherence to halal guidelines.

After the audit, the Inspection Committee convenes to review the findings and assess whether the applicant has met all halal certification requirements. If compliance is confirmed, the BIRC, under the MoRA, grants the official halal certification. Businesses are then required to complete the payment process before collecting their halal certificate. This structured certification process not only ensures that halal standards are upheld but also strengthens public confidence in halal-certified products.

Supporting Elements in the Halal Ecosystem

Beyond the certification process, several supporting elements contribute to Brunei's halal ecosystem. Businesses seeking halal certification must first obtain relevant licenses and regulatory approvals, such as a Business Registration Certificate from the MoFE, a Halal Meat Import Registration from the BDFA, and a Development Approval from the Authority for Building Control and Construction Industry (ABCi). These requirements ensure that businesses operate within a legal framework that supports halal compliance.

The role of research and development (R&D) is also critical in advancing halal industry practices. Local universities, such as Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD), Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA), and Universiti Teknologi Brunei (UTB), actively contribute to halal-related research, innovation, and education, thereby improving halal certification methodologies and standards. Additionally, health and food safety regulations are enforced by the BDFA and the DOAA to ensure that halal-certified products meet strict hygiene and quality control standards.

Another key component of the ecosystem is Shariah law and Islamic governance, which ensure that halal certification aligns with Islamic principles. The State Mufti Office and the Ministry of Religious Affairs play vital roles in issuing fatwas (Islamic legal rulings) on halal matters and maintaining religious compliance within the halal industry. Moreover, financial institutions provide funding, grants, and investment opportunities to support halal businesses, enabling them to expand and maintain their halal certification. These interrelated elements form a comprehensive ecosystem that sustains the halal industry in Brunei.

Figure 2 illustrates the comprehensive and updated halal certification system value chain in Brunei.

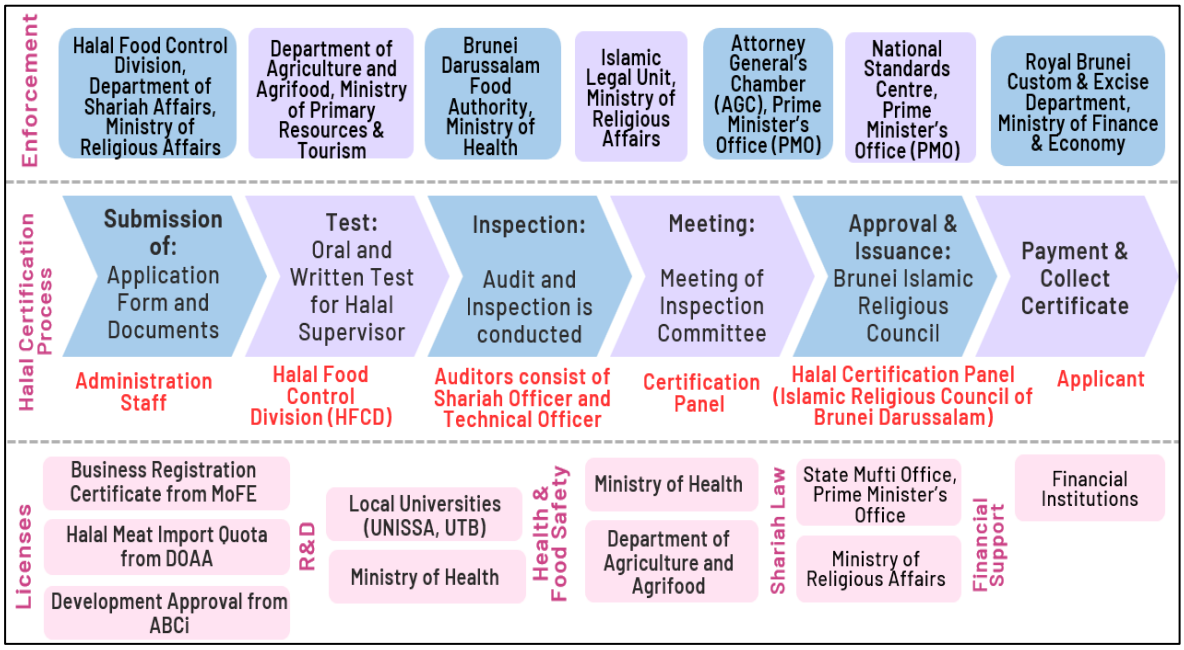


Figure 2. Halal Certification System Value Chain - Ecosystem Perspective
Source: Developed by the Authors

Figure 2 demonstrates how governance, certification, licensing, research and development, Shariah oversight, and financial support are interconnected within a single ecosystem. The value chain perspective highlights how each component contributes to strengthening consumer trust and maintaining halal integrity throughout the supply chain. Furthermore, the integration of BDFA's expanded regulatory role within the ecosystem reflects the government's efforts to enhance food safety oversight and improve coordination across halal-related institutions.

By examining the halal certification process from an ecosystem perspective, it is evident that halal compliance in Brunei is more than just a regulatory mechanism; it is a multi-stakeholder framework designed to support the entire halal industry. The enforcement of halal regulations, the structured certification process, and the integration of licensing, R&D, food safety, Shariah governance, and financial support all contribute to a resilient and sustainable halal ecosystem. This holistic approach not only ensures that halal standards are met but also strengthens consumer trust, enhances international market competitiveness, and promotes economic growth. Through the collective efforts of various government agencies and industry stakeholders, Brunei continues to position itself as a global leader in the halal sector, reinforcing its reputation as a hub for halal excellence. Nevertheless, the ecosystem also reflects characteristics of centralized governance, where critical decisions and approvals remain concentrated within a limited number of institutions. While this arrangement supports consistency and regulatory control, it may also create operational dependencies that affect responsiveness and processing efficiency when workloads increase.

Challenges in Halal Certification Ecosystem Value Chain

However, several issues have been identified that hinder its effectiveness and efficiency. From the applicant's perspective, there are struggles with unclear or evolving guidelines, which make compliance difficult. Inconsistent adherence to Halal standards often arises due to complacency following certification, as well as the misuse of Halal logos or the use of expired certifications in the market.

On the internal officer's side, limited resources and manpower constraints significantly slow down processes. At the same time, manual processing and extensive documentation requirements lead to delays in both application processing and renewal requests. Furthermore, the lack of automated systems and technological advancements exacerbates these issues, leading to inefficiencies and errors throughout the certification process. From the interviews, participants reveal that the integration of technology in the certification process has been discussed but is still in process. These findings indicate that procedural bottlenecks are not solely caused by regulatory requirements but also by operational constraints associated with manual workflows, fragmented information management, and the dependence on sequential approval procedures.

Despite widespread awareness of the halal certification process, some small entrepreneurs remain reluctant to apply for certification due to various challenges. One of the primary concerns is the unclear regulatory framework, which makes it difficult for businesses to navigate the complex requirements and procedures involved in obtaining halal certification. Many small enterprises, particularly micro-businesses and home-based food producers, lack the technical knowledge or resources to fully comply with the necessary guidelines, making the process seem overwhelming. Additionally, cost concerns pose a significant barrier, as halal certification involves expenses related to application fees, compliance audits, facility modifications, and continuous monitoring. These financial burdens discourage small businesses from formalising their halal status, limiting their access to a broader market and reducing consumer trust in unverified products.

To address these challenges, the study by Suhaili et al. (2022) recommends that HFCD collaborate with relevant government agencies to monitor compliance and establish new laws that strengthen enforcement of halal certification. Implementing a more structured and transparent regulatory framework would help simplify the process for small businesses, enabling them to participate in the halal market without incurring excessive financial or administrative burdens. Furthermore, stricter enforcement of halal certification would protect the interests of Muslim consumers by guaranteeing that products in the market adhere to halal integrity standards.

A robust halal certification ecosystem is not merely a regulatory system but an evolving framework that requires continuous research and development (R&D). Ongoing scientific advancements, policy improvements, and technological innovations play a crucial role in enhancing the efficiency, reliability, and accessibility of halal certification. Investing in R&D-driven improvements, such as the digitalisation of certification processes, blockchain-enabled halal traceability systems, and scientific methods for halal verification, can further strengthen the halal assurance framework. Additional innovations, including automated e-submission portals, integrated digital certification databases, and real-time monitoring systems, may further reduce administrative burdens and improve transparency across the halal certification value chain. This ensures that halal certification remains relevant, globally recognised, and adaptable to emerging industry challenges, ultimately fostering a resilient and sustainable halal ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study explores the key actors involved in the halal certification process, identifies the challenges faced throughout the system, and provides a comprehensive framework to map the ecosystem. Additionally, the study highlights two critical recommendations: leveraging technology to automate the halal certification process, thereby reducing manual errors and accelerating efficiency, and enhancing public awareness campaigns to improve understanding and compliance among stakeholders. These measures aim to establish a robust, transparent, and efficient halal certification system that supports sustainable growth and credibility.

The study also contributes to the existing halal certification literature by offering an integrated ecosystem perspective that connects regulatory institutions, certification bodies,

industry participants, and consumers within a single analytical framework. By synthesizing stakeholder interactions and operational challenges, the findings extend current discussions on halal governance and provide a practical reference for policymakers, certification authorities, and industry practitioners seeking to improve system effectiveness and stakeholder trust.

From a policy standpoint, the findings carry urgent implications for national and international standard-setting bodies. Regulators should prioritise the creation of interoperable digital infrastructure, such as blockchain-based certification registries or centralised e-submission portals, to reduce duplication of effort and enable cross-border mutual recognition of halal certificates. Furthermore, public awareness campaigns must move beyond generic promotional messaging toward targeted stakeholder education, including training modules for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) on documentation requirements and consumer-facing transparency tools (e.g., QR code verification).

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

Despite the comprehensive approach taken in this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study was based on a relatively small pool of interview participants, which may limit the breadth of perspectives captured across the halal certification ecosystem. A key suggestion to strengthen this research is to include quantitative analysis and more in-depth interviews with halal certification applicants, which can provide richer insights into the challenges they face. Additionally, the dynamic nature of the halal industry presents a challenge in maintaining up-to-date insights. Given the continuous evolution of halal regulations, certification standards, and global market trends, some findings may become outdated as new policies and technologies emerge. Future studies should adopt a longitudinal approach to track changes over time and evaluate the long-term effects of halal ecosystem development initiatives.

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