



Exploring Gaps in Halal Audit Procedures for Meat Products in Brunei Darussalam: A Qualitative Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Halal food is not only a religious requirement for Muslims but also encompasses the principles of purity, wholesomeness, and quality, as emphasised in the Holy Qur'an (2:168). The growing global demand for halal meat underscores the importance of ensuring both halal compliance and food safety. This study examines halal audit procedures in Brunei Darussalam, focusing on their role in assuring the safety and quality of local and imported halal meat products. Employing a qualitative approach through document analysis and literature review, the research identifies significant gaps in current halal audit frameworks, including the absence of clearly defined Halal Critical Control Points (HCCPs) and insufficient integration of food safety and quality assurance within audit practices. Challenges such as cross-contamination risks and inadequate segregation in the halal meat supply chain further complicate assurance efforts. The findings highlight that existing audit tend to emphasise religious compliance while adopting a passive approach to food safety, potentially undermining consumer trust. Recommendations include developing standardized audit frameworks incorporating CCPs, enhancing auditor training, and strengthening monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. This study provides a foundation for future empirical research and contributes to improving halal assurance systems to meet both religious and consumer expectations for safe, high-quality halal meat.

1. Introduction

The global demand for halal products has surged in recent years, driven by the rapid growth of the Muslim population, which reached 1.9 billion in 2019 and is projected to rise to 3 billion by 2060 (Lim, 2020). For Muslims, consuming food that is both halal (lawful and permissible) and tayyib (good and wholesome) is a religious obligation, as emphasised in several Qur'anic verses, including Surah Al-Baqarah (2:168, 2:172) and Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:4). These verses underscore that Muslims must ensure their food is not only permissible but also safe and of high quality.

Despite this clear guidance, concerns about foodborne illnesses (Sofos, 2008) and halal food fraud have heightened consumer apprehension regarding the safety and quality of halal meat products (Fuseini et al., 2017). While consumers can often verify the visible aspects of food quality, they may not be able to detect contamination or non-compliance with halal standards through sensory inspection alone. As a result, robust halal certification and audit processes are essential to assure both halal integrity and food safety.

Halal audits are a critical and complex component of the halal certification process, serving to verify compliance with documented halal standards and procedures (van der Spiegel et al., 2012). However, there is growing uncertainty about whether current halal audit practices—particularly in Brunei Darussalam—adequately incorporate safety and quality assurance alongside religious requirements. The challenge is further compounded by the complexity of the halal meat supply chain, which is susceptible to cross-contamination and other risks at various critical control points (Ruzulan et al., 2021) especially when products are imported from non-Muslim-majority countries.

In Brunei Darussalam, several guidelines and regulations govern the halal certification process, including the Halal Meat Act (Cap. 183), Brunei Halal Standard (food), PBD 24:2007, and Halal Certificate and Halal Label Order, 2005, and the guidelines. Nevertheless, the absence of a standardised halal critical control list and the ambiguity surrounding the audit scope—such as whether meat handling and transportation are fully covered—pose significant challenges for auditors and industry stakeholders. These gaps may hinder the effectiveness of halal audits in ensuring comprehensive safety and quality assurance for both local and imported meat products.

Given the lack of empirical studies examining how halal audits are conducted in Brunei Darussalam, particularly regarding their role in assuring the safety and quality of meat products, this study aims to analyse existing halal audit procedures and highlight areas for improvement. By critically examining existing halal audit procedures through a qualitative literature review, this research aims to identify gaps in current practices and provide insights that may inform the development of a more robust halal assurance framework. This framework would better align with both religious requirements and consumer expectations for safe, high-quality halal meat products.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design aimed at examining the halal audit procedures and their implications on the safety and quality assurance of local and imported halal meat products in Brunei Darussalam. Given the exploratory nature of the research and the absence of primary data collection at this stage, the study relies primarily on document analysis and library research to examine existing halal audit frameworks, standards, and related literature.

The main data sources include official halal certification guidelines, regulatory documents such as the Halal Meat Act (Cap. 183) of Brunei Darussalam, audit checklists, and relevant policies issued by the authorities. Additionally, academic journal articles, and previous research studies on halal audit practices, food safety, and halal supply chains were reviewed to provide a comprehensive understanding of current practices and gaps.

Documents and literature were systematically collected from government publications, academic databases, and reputable online sources, such as Google Scholars. Selection criteria focused on materials that specifically address halal audit procedures, food safety integration, and supply chain challenges related to halal meat in Brunei and comparable contexts such as Malaysia.

A qualitative document analysis approach was employed to interpret and synthesize the content of the collected materials. This involved thematic coding to identify key themes and patterns related to halal audit processes, the incorporation of safety and quality measures, and supply chain integrity issues. The analysis aimed to uncover gaps in current halal audit practices and to contextualize findings within broader halal assurance frameworks.

This study is limited to secondary data analysis and does not include primary data collection such as interviews or field observations. As such, the findings represent an initial exploration of halal audit procedures in Brunei Darussalam, intended to highlight areas for further empirical research.

3. Results and Discussion

This section critically examines the existing literature and regulatory frameworks related to halal audit procedures with a focus on their implications for safety and quality assurance in halal meat products. It begins by exploring how halal audits are conducted, highlighting best practices and gaps in integrating food safety within halal compliance. Subsequently, the discussion addresses the challenges and shortcomings currently observed in halal audit practices, particularly in Brunei Darussalam, emphasizing the ambiguous role of food safety in halal certification. Finally, the

significance of maintaining halal meat supply chain integrity is highlighted, with particular attention to risks such as cross-contamination, deficiency in monitoring and control within the halal meat supply chain by enforcements. Together, these themes provide a comprehensive understanding of the critical factors influencing halal assurance and underscore the urgent need for enhanced audit frameworks and regulatory oversight.

Discussion

Implications of Halal Audit Procedures on Safety and Quality Assurance

The literature on halal audit procedures, particularly from Malaysia, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how audits can uphold both halal integrity and food safety. Mohammad Nasran & Norhalina (2009) describe in detail the step-by-step process of halal premise audits, beginning with pre-audit preparation, followed by an opening meeting, document review, on-site evaluation, and closing meetings. Their work highlights the importance of systematic checklists that cover both halal and hygienic aspects, ensuring that auditors address critical points related to product, premises, and abattoir operations. Similarly, Mohd. Iskandar and Zuhra (2020) emphasise the complexity of halal audits within the certification process, noting that the audit phase is both critical and resource-intensive. They describe how digital innovations are utilised to enhance audit efficiency and explain the audit process, which is divided into document and site inspections, supported by a customised checklists designed for various certification schemes.

These studies illustrate best practices in halal audit procedures, particularly the integration of safety and quality criteria alongside religious requirements. However, the literature also reveals a significant gap: such detailed procedural clarity and integration of safety/quality are not yet evident in Brunei Darussalam's halal audit framework. While Brunei's Halal Meat Act (Cap. 183) and associated guidelines provide a regulatory foundation, they lack the explicit critical control point (CCP) lists and operational detail found in the Malaysian model. This absence poses risks that certain stages of the supply chain—such as handling, transportation, and traceability—may not be consistently or adequately addressed during audits, potentially allowing safety or quality lapses to go undetected.

Furthermore, as van der Spiegel *et al.* (2012) and Raheem & Demirci (2018) point out, the assurance of *tayyib* (wholesomeness and safety) is increasingly expected by both Muslim and non-Muslim consumers. Without clear CCPs and comprehensive audit checklists, there is a risk that audits may be less effective in safeguarding both halal status and food safety, ultimately undermining consumer trust. The insights from Malaysian literature thus serve as a benchmark and highlight the urgent need for Brunei to develop more detailed, standardised audit procedures that explicitly incorporate food safety and quality assurance.

Challenges and Gaps in Current Halal Audit Practices

The Halal Compliance Audit BCG 2 of Brunei Darussalam provides a checklist for halal auditors that includes prerequisites such as employee hygiene, premises, and equipment, all aimed at maintaining food safety and quality during production. However, despite these inclusions, there remains ambiguity about how food safety is integrated into halal assurance processes. Raheem and Demirci (2018) observe a growing trend of incorporating international food safety standards and general hygiene aspects into halal standards, which is significant for the global halal market. Yet, they question whether food safety holds a passive or active role within halal certification. A passive role implies minimal emphasis on food safety, whereas an active role would embed food safety as an intrinsic component of halal assurance, such as through the enforcement of Halal Control Points (HCPs). The authors highlight that despite the inclusion of food safety elements in standards, their practical integration into halal certification remains vague, leading to a predominantly passive approach. This situation is concerning because both Muslim and non-Muslim consumers often assume that the halal logo guarantees food safety, which may not always be the case.

Further, Fuseini, *et al.* (2017) emphasise that although the concept of *tayyib* (wholesomeness and safety) is theoretically part of halal, it often receives insufficient attention within the Muslim community and halal certification bodies. Many Halal Certification Bodies (HCBs) focus heavily on slaughter practices while neglecting other critical aspects of food safety, resulting in ambiguous halal food safety standards. Supporting this, Sirajuddin *et al.* (2013) point out that the failure of Muslim authorities to fully incorporate *tayyib* into halal meat production exposes significant safety gaps. For instance, Fuseini, *et al.* (2017) also highlight serious hygiene concerns among local Muslim butchers, such as lack of basic facilities for handwashing, improper clothing, and inadequate handling practices. This is echoed by reports like Huffington Post (2014), which note that while halal meat may ensure spiritual purity, it does not necessarily guarantee physical safety.

These findings reveal critical gaps in halal audit practices in Brunei and beyond, where food safety and quality assurance are not yet fully integrated or enforced within halal certification frameworks. Addressing these gaps is essential to meet consumer expectations and uphold the integrity of halal meat products.

Significance for Halal Meat Supply Chain Integrity

One of the critical challenges in maintaining halal meat supply chain integrity is the risk of cross-contamination. This issue has raised significant public concern regarding the halal status of food products throughout the supply chain (Teh Zaharah Yaacob *et al.*, 2016). Ruzulan, *et al.* (2021) identify cross-contamination as a major obstacle in Malaysia's

halal meat industry, emphasizing the complexity of the supply chain before products reach consumers. They relate this risk to the Islamic legal maxim 'iza ijta'ma' al-halal wa al-haram ghalabal haram', meaning "if permissibility and prohibition coincide, prohibition prevails," underscoring the strictness of halal requirements.

Teh Zaharah Yaacob, *et al.* (2016) further clarify that cross-contamination can occur at multiple stages, including processing, packaging, transportation, warehousing, and retailing. They define cross-contamination in two ways: direct contact between halal and non-halal products, and contamination through biological, physical, or chemical hazards. Given the complexity of potential contaminants, operators must possess both technical knowledge and Islamic understanding, particularly regarding animal handling and segregation protocols. Proper segregation of halal and non-halal products at every stage of the supply chain is therefore essential to prevent contamination and preserve halal integrity.

Consumer perceptions also highlight the importance of segregation. Alqudsi, S.G. (2014) found that Muslim consumers strongly favor complete segregation of halal meat from non-halal meat throughout the supply chain. The study revealed discomfort with practices such as shipping halal and non-halal meats together in the same refrigerated container, even if packaged separately. This contrasts with Brunei's current practices, indicating a need for clearer policies and communication to align with consumer expectations.

Another significant issue is the deficiency in monitoring and control within the halal meat supply chain. Demirci, *et al.* (2016) emphasize that enforcing halal regulations remains a serious challenge, particularly for companies operating outside the certifying country. After certification, companies may feel less pressure to maintain halal compliance, highlighting the limitations of third-party audits. Kotsanopoulos and Arvanitoyannis (2017) critique third-party certifications as providing only a "snapshot in time," questioning their effectiveness in ensuring continuous halal compliance. This underscores the necessity for ongoing monitoring and stricter enforcement by halal authorities to maintain supply chain integrity and consumer trust.

4. Conclusion

This study highlights critical gaps and challenges in the halal audit procedures and supply chain management of halal meat products, particularly in the context of Brunei Darussalam. The absence of clearly defined Critical Control Points (CCPs) and comprehensive audit checklists limits the effectiveness of halal audits in assuring both halal integrity and food safety. Current audit frameworks tend to emphasize religious compliance while insufficiently integrating food safety and quality assurance, resulting in a predominantly passive approach that may undermine consumer confidence. Furthermore, the complex halal meat supply chain faces significant risks of cross-contamination and inadequate segregation of halal and non-halal products, compounded by deficiencies in monitoring and enforcement. These findings underscore the urgent need for a more holistic and standardized approach to halal auditing and supply chain control to safeguard the safety, quality, and authenticity of halal meat products.

Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of halal audit procedures and ensure the safety and quality of halal meat products in Brunei Darussalam.

First, it is essential for authorities to develop standardized halal audit frameworks that explicitly incorporate Critical Control Points (CCPs). Such frameworks should provide clear, detailed audit procedures that address both halal compliance and food safety requirements. Comprehensive checklists tailored to the various stages of the halal meat supply chain—from slaughterhouses through to retail outlets—will help auditors systematically identify and manage potential risks.

Second, there is a need to enhance training and capacity building for halal auditors and supply chain operators. Training programs should emphasize the dual principles of halal and tayyib, equipping personnel with the necessary technical knowledge of food safety as well as a deep understanding of Islamic jurisprudence. This integrated approach will enable auditors and operators to effectively identify contamination risks and uphold the integrity of halal certification.

Third, regulatory bodies must strengthen monitoring, segregation, and enforcement mechanisms within the halal meat supply chain. Continuous and stricter monitoring is required to ensure that halal and non-halal products are properly segregated at all stages of processing, transportation, and storage. Enforcement efforts should extend beyond periodic audits to include real-time controls and follow-up inspections, thereby maintaining compliance and reinforcing consumer confidence in halal-certified products.

Finally, further empirical research is recommended to build upon the insights gained from this qualitative literature review. Future studies should incorporate primary data collection methods such as interviews and field observations to validate the current findings and explore practical challenges encountered by halal auditors and supply chain stakeholders in Brunei and comparable contexts. Such research will provide a more comprehensive understanding and support the development of more effective halal audit practices.

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