

COMPLETION REPORT

Japan halal food market, is it necessary? Comparative study with leading halal food industries, Malaysia and Thailand

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The objectives of this research are to draw comparisons of halal activities and interests among the three countries, Japan, Thailand and Malaysia. Firstly, the research examined Japan possible niche, hurdles and challengers in the halal food business from various perspectives. Secondly, the research examined the perspectives of Japanese, Thais and Malaysian consumers in their respective countries' capability/prospect to lead the halal food industry.

Niches, hurdles and challengers of countries propagating halal

Briefly, Malaysia and Thailand have had connection with Islam way back to the late 1500s, this means they have been exposed to Islamic ways, including halal foods for many centuries. While the official accreditation of halal body in both countries have also been in existence for few decades. With regard to Japan, Muslims have been mentioned to have arrived in Japan as far back as 1868, that is, during the era of Japanese Renaissance. However, unlike Malaysia and Thailand where Islamic teaching has been continuously propagated and expanded, Islamic teaching in Japan has been fragmented due to the division of Muslims by national and ethnic origin, language, sectarian tendency, socio-economic background, and location. Further, unlike Thailand, although it is a Buddhist state, but the Thai government has entrusted Islamic matters to a body recognised by the Muslims called Sheikul Islam. While in Japan the matters of Islam, not until 2013, has never received government interest. Matters on Islam have been individually managed by religious teachers (mostly are not Japanese national).

Thus, rather interesting to note though Japan has been exporting foods for Muslims consumption using halal specifications (such as Aji No Moto since 1960s) yet capability of producing halal was not publicised until of late. Thus as of 2014, when survey for this research was conducted, many respondents have not heard of the word 'halal' this also means they have no inkling to the meaning of halal.

The government of Japan immediate challenge is to reach out to its homogenous society, to be aware of halal and to understand the constituent of halal. Thus far, the research sees creating halal awareness could takes time. This is because religious orientation in Japanese are diverse, some practice multiple religions and there also those who have no religious belief. While among the Muslims, many are without Islamic education. The Muslims in Japan, especially the second generation children who comes from mixed marriages (non-Japanese Muslim with Japanese women, non-Japanese Muslim women with Muslim Japanese men and the children of Japanese Muslims in general) have minimal Islamic religion reference point. There is no official Islamic school in Japan, though there are thousands of Muslim children who needed Islamic education. This means in the immediate future Japan will have to depend on Muslims from other countries (currently is Malaysia) to promote its halal. For example, Japanese fund manager Inspire Corp has set up a fund in partnership with the Malaysian state-owned fund manager Permodalan Nasional (PNB) to help Japanese companies get halal certification and build sales networks in Muslim countries.

Perspectives of Japanese, Thais and Malaysian consumers in their respective countries' capability/prospect to lead the halal food industry

Ninety percent of Thais' respondents have heard of halal and 70% could explain the meaning halal. Among Malaysian respondents, all claim have heard of halal and almost 90% could explain the meaning of halal. In Japan, from the total 162 respondents, only 15% have heard of halal and 95% of these individuals are Muslims of Pakistani, Indian and Indonesian origin. These individuals (except the Indonesians) also believe in Japan's ability to become a leader in halal food production. The basic reason given is Japanese highly acclaim cultural, ethical value and level of cleanliness. According to the member of Masjid Jamil Yoyogi Uehera : "The Japanese has culture but there don't have iman (faith). The Muslims have iman but they have no culture".

In light of this trust, Japan could be a trusted name in the halal market. However, to be sustainable, the government should pull more citizens involvement in promoting Japan halal initiative. The first initial step should be creating awareness toward exposing Japanese to the meaning of halal.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

1. Is integrity sufficient to sustain the enhancement of halal food industry? : Comparative Study of Three countries, Thailand, Malaysia and Japan. The National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) Fourth International Conference on Advancement of Development Administration 2015, at NIDA, Bangkok Campus, Thailand, on May 28-30, 2015.
2. Challenges in the Administration of Halal Food Industry by Non-Muslim Countries: Comparative Study of Japan and Thailand. Asian Group for Public Administration (AGPA), in Seoul, South Korea in September, 2-4, 2015.

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

Articles have been submitted to these journals for review:

1. Journal of Agribusiness Marketing
2. Int. Journal of Economics and Management

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)