

# UNDERSTANDING MALAYSIANS BUMIPUTERA ENTREPRENEURS INVOLVEMENT IN HALAL BUSINESS: A CASE STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

This research investigated the involvement of Malaysia Bumiputera entrepreneurs in the halal business segment. Only 30% of halal entrepreneurs are Bumiputera, which raised concern among all stakeholders in the halal sector. The main objectives of this research was to determine what constitutes a successful Bumiputera halal entrepreneur. This research was done qualitatively, through case study on selected local halal entrepreneurs.

The findings showed that, among others business opportunity, risk, value creation, business profit, and religiosity are among the motives driving the involvement in the halal business. This study also identified several characteristics that are common among successful Bumiputera entrepreneurs such as confidence, altruistic motivation, visionary, passionate, and pragmatic decision-makers. The findings of this research indicated a new contribution which was religiosity as part of the entrepreneurial mindset among halal business entrepreneurs in comparison with other entrepreneurs. In conclusion, local entrepreneurs' involvement in halal business requires them to have several distinct characteristics which are similar to entrepreneurs from different sector, however when it comes to halal business the religiosity aspect of the industry became acutely important in propelling the drives within these business owners.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneur, Bumiputera, halal business, religiosity

## 1.0 Introduction

The government has called on for more Bumiputera entrepreneurs to venture into the halal industry as of their involvement is still low at the national and international levels. The prevalence rate of entrepreneurial activity in Malaysia is less than 2% of the entire population which is far behind comparable developing countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, and Argentina [1]. Statement from the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) had highlighted that only 30% of the total 6,458 companies involved in the halal industry are owned by Bumiputera. In a Bumiputera majority

nation, such a low number sent alarms to various government agencies and caused dire impact toward the Malay economic agenda. Bumiputera involvement in the halal industry needs to be improved quickly as halal products are synonymous with Islam, the religion of the Malay Bumiputera's. The enormous economic prospect of the halal economy is seen to strengthen the economic standing of the Malay entrepreneurs in the country.

The low participation of Malays in the halal economy was seen so crucial that in the 2017 budget, RM1.52 billion was allocated towards empowering Bumiputera entrepreneurs, with the main agenda to spur the development of the country's halal industry. All these significant efforts are seen as an orchestrated effort towards pushing the Bumiputera business acumen and increasing their interest and involvement in business ownership, particularly in the halal related sectors. In general, Bumiputera's are still lacking awareness when it comes to business compared to the ethnic Chinese. After various and long efforts from various government agencies, this issue remains unsolved and would require further in-depth study to understand the malaise involvement of the Bumiputera entrepreneurs, particularly in the halal industry.

This study was conducted to investigate the reason behind low participation of Bumiputera involvement in the halal entrepreneurship. In this research, study was conducted on successful Bumiputera halal entrepreneurs to investigate the drive behind their involvement in the industry, challenges that they face and their characteristics which led to their success. At the end of this research, several insights were discovered and could aide all the governmental initiatives which were to spur Bumiputera involvement in the halal businesses ecosystem.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Malaysia Halal Ecosystem

Malaysia has been named the best country in the world for halal tourism, medicines, and cosmetics. Malaysians were able to sell 32 billion halal goods abroad in 2012. This is compatible with Malaysia's Budget 2013, which offers a working capital of 200 million for small and medium-sized halal businesses to support the development of Malaysia's halal food sector (HDC, 2013).

Many Malaysian Halal Product firms are likely unaware of how to enter the worldwide market, despite the fact that Malaysia has made a start in global Halal markets and aspires to be the "Global Halal Hub." However, Malaysian manufacturers' penetration in the global market is relatively sluggish and limited. Malaysia businesses are well suited to churning out goods and delivering services that fulfil the requirements of Islamic faith, as the country has a mainly Muslim population. Malaysian food manufacturers are fully equipped with all incentives and benefits, including current policy, the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), the Halal Development Corporation (HDC), and others; however, Malaysia's contribution to the global Halal market is still low, at 1.07 percent, when compared to other countries [2]. SME entrepreneurs are critical to the development of the economy of a small nation like Malaysia since they account for a substantial share of commercial activity (National SME Development Council, 2013). Because halal business is complex, it is necessary to foster SME entrepreneurs' enthusiasm in halal entrepreneurship [3, 4].

In fact, Bumiputera enterprises are frequently claimed to be struggling to make a profit. According to [5], among the major variables influencing the performance of Bumiputera entrepreneurs in Malaysian small and medium companies include managerial inadequacies, marketing failures, and problems in getting financial help. Furthermore, some of the obstacles experienced by Bumiputera entrepreneurs, small and medium businesses (SME), include their restricted involvement in the worldwide market, a lack of trained employees, a problem marketing the product in supermarkets, and a lack of raw materials.

Similar to the study by [6], the variables that impact the success of local entrepreneurs include a lack of fundamental entrepreneurship, business capital restrictions, unfavourable attitudes in business, a lack of communication skills, and a lack of management. According to [7], in order to thrive in company, entrepreneurs must expand their relevant marketing expertise by attending seminars and programmes conducted by accountable government organisations. Furthermore, [8] conclude that a negative attitude toward halalpreneurship may cause SME entrepreneurs to lag in the market and miss out on halal global business possibilities.

### 2.2 The Halal Business Owner

Entrepreneurs are persons who acquire resources, create something new and distinct, and contribute value via creative ideas with the goal of growing individual wealth and developing them for the benefit of society (. Furthermore, entrepreneurs must be exposed to business possibilities and must broaden the market for halal products through sharing expertise and the success of halal entrepreneurs in a variety of business areas [8].

Halal entrepreneurs or halalpreneurs are those who are interested in creating and capitalising on opportunities created by kosher company growth. Halal entrepreneurship is a type of entrepreneurship in which halal is defined as a "entrepreneurial method for creatively utilising possibilities to attain economic advantages and societal fairness on an equal footing" [9]. Halal entrepreneurship has also been referred to as "halal driven entrepreneurship" and "halal focused entrepreneurship" by others. Halal entrepreneurship began with halal food and had since expanded to include non-food goods such as personal care, cosmetics, tourism, medicines, banking, financing, and other services such as hospitality and logistics.

### 2.3 Current Performance of Malaysia Halal Industry

There were 1,876 halal exporters in 2019, up from 1,827 in 2018, showing a 2.7 percent increase in growth. The majority of Malaysian exports are represented by 1,430 small and medium-sized businesses, accounting for little more than 75% of total size, with MNCs accounting for the remainder of total exporters [10]

Furthermore, the global value of Halal food traded reached USD580 billion in 2003, with a rising trend over the year. In 2010, a total of USD600 was accumulated. In 2009, there were around 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide, with 250 million Muslims living alone in ASEAN nations. However, there aren't many Malaysian International Halal Entrepreneurs who can compete in the global market. According to the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE), just 30 percent of the 11,000 firms registered for food production are allowed to enter the international market, which comprises of roughly 3000 companies. The remainder of the food firms are at ease marketing their products in the local arena. What is causing this situation?

### 3.0 Methodology

The case study technique was used in this study, and semi-structured interviews with the respondents were conducted with the participants. A case study is a method of addressing a research issue from a different perspective. In addition, it is capable of integrating both qualitative and quantitative information. A case study, on the other hand, was focused on qualitative material in order to provide a more in-depth picture of the subject being investigated [11]. According to [12], a case study is described as a way for gaining a comprehensive knowledge of a process, programme, event, problem, or activity via observation and discussion. In order to explain a point, it is necessary to provide a detailed and extended example. A case study research method excels in providing a more in-depth knowledge of a complicated topic or adding strength to what has already been discovered via earlier research [13]. It places a strong emphasis on in-depth contextual study of a small number of events or situations, as well as their linkages. Case study research method is defined by another researcher, [14], as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon

within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are utilised. As a result, any case study research offers an edge to one another in situations where some people do not have an effective experience when compared to others who have [15].

The instruments allow the respondents the freedom to express their views in their own terms. Through the interviews, the respondents can express their opinion and views freely based on their experience as they are not being assessed. Besides that, there are no correct or wrong answers to the responded questions. On top of that, a semi-structured interview design allows the researcher to prepare the questions or interview guides beforehand. Further, semi-structured interviews are usually constructed on a flexible procedure that offers a loose arrangement of open-ended questions to examine the experiences and viewpoints of the participants [16]. This enhances the effectiveness of conducting the interview session since the interviewer comes prepared and guided and will finally conduct the interview smoothly [17]. As a result, this research method has the advantage of the richness of data comparable to quantitative data.

Two respondents who are halal entrepreneurs were interviewed for this research and the interviews were conducted face to face at each business facilities over the period of 3 months.

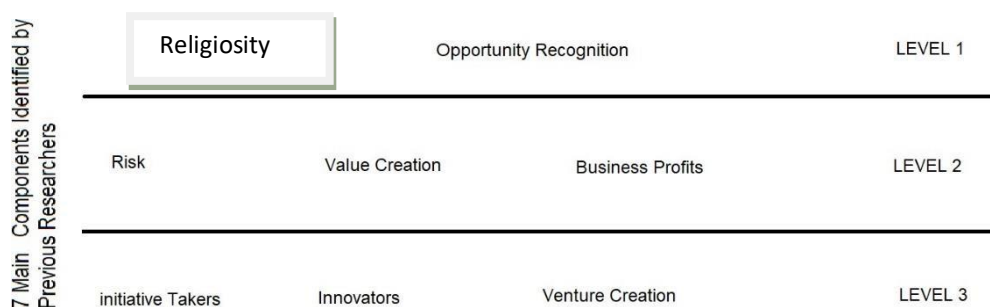
In order to describe halal entrepreneur in accordance to the framework, the researcher collected data through multiple sources such as interviews, internal documents and emails . Several interviews were conducted with both companies represented by their owners and founders of the companies. After describing the cases, the researcher compared the cases in order to explore similarity and differences between entrepreneur A and B. Then, the researcher sent the tentative results to all the interviewees. If necessary, the researcher added modifications to the results based on their feedbacks.

### 3.1 A Framework of Halal Entrepreneur

In this research, the characteristics and most importantly the mindset of the selected entrepreneurs were studied to get a deep glance into what drives them to be halal entrepreneurs. Focus is given towards understanding the reason behind the establishment of their business and why they are inclined towards halal-based business which is more challenging in term of operation and governance. It is not necessary to start a business in order to have an entrepreneurial mindset; rather, but it is important that a person uses the entrepreneurial way of thinking on a regular basis so that it becomes second nature to him or her.

[18] went on to identify five characteristics of the entrepreneurial mindset that are shared by both habitual entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs who are just starting out.

However, these five habits are too generic to be used as the proposed standard during data collection, instead a more strategically focus. Thus, the entrepreneurial framework suggested by [19] was used in this study as the basis of understanding the entrepreneurial mindset. However as suggested by [20], religiosity is an important



element in halal business especially in the perspectives of the business owners. The amended framework that was used in this study is exhibited in the following Figure 3.0

Figure 3.0 Research Framework

#### **4.0 Results and Findings**

##### **4.1 Religiosity and opportunity recognition**

###### **4.1.1 Religiosity**

Both entrepreneurs were adamant that they have the obligation to produce halal products and as Muslims, they believe that it's their duty to ensure that they participated in the halal market. Both entrepreneurs also highlighted how as Muslims, they want to ensure that their process and product including raw materials must meet the *toyyiban* part of halal and free of any harmful risk which could adversely affect their products and eventually affecting their customers. Both entrepreneurs mentioned how halal is more than a business to them, as they are both financially steady even without income from the business. They repeatedly mentioned the desire to serve fellow Muslims and support the halal supply chain in as Muslims.

###### **4.1.2 Opportunity Recognition**

Both entrepreneurs were asked about what motivated them to pursue halal business and to solely focus on entering the halal markets. Entrepreneur A answered based on her long experience as a medical doctor and emphasized how she herself faced obesity problems as her occupation does not offer much mobility while working and ended up with diabetes and joint problems. This is when she became aware that there was a lack of healthy options in the Malaysia market to cater to such needs. So, she decided to fill this gap and started producing healthier snack bars and granolas which help customers to lose weight significantly.

As for entrepreneur B, the formulation of the product was initially by his own wife who had several health issues and was dependent on herbal remedies such as ginger and honey concoction. As she experienced relief from her symptoms and began to feel healthier, she felt that her invention might be able to find its own customers and market niche. They started to produce their initial product at home and began to sell at local kiosks and exhibitions especially those involving natural products which was encouraged by the local agency such as FAMA and the state government.

#### **4.2 Risk, value creation and business profits**

##### **4.2.1 Risk and value creation**

Halal business owners may perceive environmental risk, product quality risk, and health risk because of the possibility of contamination of halal products, as well as direct contact between halal products and prohibited haram ingredients and the mixing of halal products with prohibited haram ingredients. These elements of risk are basically the critical control factors which are embedded within the Halal Assurance System (HAS) that all halal certified businesses must meet when they go for halal certification for their products. Both entrepreneurs highlighted how as Muslims, they want to ensure that their process and product including raw materials must meet the *toyyiban* part of halal and free of any harmful risk which could adversely affect their products and eventually affecting their customers. Both entrepreneurs mentioned how halal is more than a business to them, as they are both financially steady even without income from the business. They repeatedly mentioned the desire to serve fellow Muslims and support the halal supply chain in as Muslims.

##### **4.2.2 Business profits**

Both entrepreneurs recognized the financial gains that await them as they embarked into halal business. Malaysian halal exports contract by approximately

RM10 billion, falling from RM40.2 billion in 2019 to just RM30.5 billion in 2020. The global Halal market is expanding and will be worth USD 3.0 trillion by 2023. Many industry stakeholders around the world have seen a new window of opportunity because of this. Only 21% (or 1,876 companies) of the approximately 8,924 Halal certified companies export or participate in the global supply value chain. To meet the growing global demand for Halal products and services, Malaysia must prioritise the development of competitive, productive, and innovative enterprises in key Halal-promoted sectors.

Entrepreneur A has participated in many food promotions at various international trade fairs in East Asia and in the Middle East. Her decision to join the Japanese market came about because of learning that the 2020 Summer Olympics will be staged in Tokyo. During the Olympics, Japan expects to have around 40 million visitors, with approximately eight million of them being Muslim tourists. She then contacted the Malaysian foreign trade office in Japan, requesting that they market her items to potential customers. She was then introduced to Japanese buyers who was well-versed in the healthy lifestyles and nutritious food segments, and quickly targeted the premier and luxury hotels, which guaranteed high profits and continuous order of premium products from the company.

Meanwhile, entrepreneur B focuses more on local market as their herbal based products are more familiar to local markets and the halal status of such products are guaranteed to capture the majority Muslims consumer's segment. Aided by local agencies, they embarked on various marketing platforms which have aided their sales locally. As demands increase, they moved to a bigger production facility to expand their production capacity and widen products range.

#### **4.3 Initiative takers, innovators, and venture creation**

Both entrepreneur A and B are directly involved the development of their products from the start. Both initiated the product creation through personal experience that are translated into commercialized products that are marketed through experience sharing and testimonials. They identified the gaps in markets clearly and proceed to invent and produced their product to serve the niche market. Due to their personal involvement, consumers reacted positively by buying the products and further supported their market expansion. Both entrepreneurs are also actively innovating and creating new products from their own research and development activities to meet new market demand and expand their markets. As their business progress, they proceed to obtain food safety certifications such as GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice) in order to provide more guarantee to their customers beside the existing halal certification. By doing so, they elevated the quality and value of their products, ensuring it to not only reach local markets but able to meet export quality standard which enable these products to be sold overseas as well.

#### **5.0 Discussion**

Based on the thematic approach suggested by [19] as the basis for understanding the entrepreneurial mindset, the outcome of this research indicated that Bumiputera entrepreneur in Malaysia halal industry exhibited similar characteristics to entrepreneurs from different business type except for the additional issue of religiosity.

According to the findings of [21], the success of SMEs in Malaysia is heavily dependent on the qualities of the entrepreneurs as well as the external environment. As stated by the author, most small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the country possess the human attributes necessary for successfully operating their operations. Furthermore, [22] examined the personal values and characteristics of SME entrepreneurs in Malaysia and discovered that they have a strong sense of self-efficacy as well as an entrepreneurship orientation to their businesses. This means that small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) owners develop the human attributes that are critical for running successful SMEs in the country.



Based on the outcomes of this study, it can be concluded that from a management standpoint, the most interesting part of the implementation process is the actual implementation process itself. Successful business owners, employees, policymakers, and other private and public stakeholders all recognise that understanding success is one of the most important ideas in their respective fields. In addition, findings on the drivers of success are intended to give significant insights into how to improve the performance of halal SMEs and halal small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) owners. It is important to note at this point that one of the fundamental goals of management is to guarantee that the organisation is successful in executing various procedures in the most efficient manner possible, therefore allowing the company to progress toward success. On the one hand, it is the responsibility of the concerned managers to ensure that the procedures used for the implementation of halal SMEs are correctly understood and executed; on the other hand, it is the responsibility of the same managers to ensure that the business is operated in the proper environment and in the appropriate situation. That is to say, although managers must have adequate information and understanding about the different procedures and their consequences, they must also ensure that the desired results are achieved.

Typically, in business, an entrepreneur is someone who takes chances to develop something completely new and innovative. Those with an entrepreneurial mentality, on the other hand, are those who are willing to rely only on their own talents for their economic stability and to anticipate no chance until they first create value for others. "Nurturing an entrepreneurial mentality" in this study referred to the process of establishing a success formula for being an entrepreneur as well as cultivating an entrepreneurial attitude.

This research also pointed out several characteristics which both entrepreneurs possessed. The first one is high motivation in their ventures. Entrepreneurs are intrinsically driven individuals. Indeed, they work long hours to get their businesses off the ground and invest enormous sums of money and effort, often to the point of depleting their entire savings account to assure the success of their enterprises. They take on all this understanding that it is a high-risk endeavour in which they could lose everything, and that it could take months or even years before they see any return on their investment. Although they are dedicated to their work, they are well aware that their efforts may not be rewarded with financial gain in the long run. They, on the other hand, are not willing to give in to their dread of being unsuccessful. To stay with an endeavour for the long haul, it is necessary to have a strong sense of motivation, as well as a steely determination. Both entrepreneurs in this study are adamant about pursuing their dream halal ventures despite opposition. Although they are in their golden years and have established lifestyles, they continue to pursue an entrepreneurial life that is fraught with dangers and uncertainty.

The second characteristic is that they are highly passionate about their ventures. Another characteristic shared by these successful business owners is their enthusiasm. While the prospect of a lucrative financial reward at the end of the tunnel is appealing, these entrepreneurs appeared to be motivated more by a passion for their product or service as well as a desire to make a difference in the world. Throughout the interviews, both of them demonstrated a genuine desire to make a positive difference in the lives of other Muslims by improving the food supply chain. They are quite enthusiastic about contributing to the halal supply chain on behalf of their Muslim brothers and sisters. Because they are Muslims with sufficient resources, they took it upon themselves to engage in the halal economy, despite the fact that they were already well-off and lacked any financial reason to become business owners. Both entrepreneurs have developed their own products and are constantly conducting research and development to improve their offerings, all with their own funds.

Entrepreneurs who have a strong sense of passion or drive are more likely to persevere during difficult times when despair would otherwise set in. As a result,

despite the numerous obstacles they face, including financial difficulties, they continue to invest in their s that was found from this research is visionary. The most successful entrepreneurs have a clear vision of what they want to achieve, how they will achieve their objectives, and who they will need on their team to help them achieve their objectives. It functions as a compass, guiding people in the direction of opportunities that no one else has yet identified. They also have the capacity to communicate their goal in a way that both their employees and investors can comprehend. Entrepreneurs can find people with whom they want to collaborate by participating in networking events.

These entrepreneurs were successful in establishing important and fruitful networking relationships with government institutions such as MARA, MITI, MARTADE, FAMA, and MARDI, as well as private sector organisations. These collaborations helped them to leverage on and create global connections, which enabled them to export their product despite their SMEs status. They are grateful for this opportunity. This is a tremendously fruitful achievement for a local halal enterprise, particularly one of their sizes and capacities.

The fourth characteristics is confident or self-belief. Entrepreneurs cannot succeed unless they have confidence and self-belief in themselves. In both themselves and the products or services they provide, they must have faith in their abilities and abilities. The ability to maintain the course despite of challenges or discouragement will be enhanced if they have faith in their own capabilities. get. They also have the courage to take chances since, after all, they are confident in their ability to succeed. Both entrepreneurs that participated in the study exhibited these characteristics to a high degree. Since both were involved in other occupations and opportunities before to starting their own business, it is possible that their motivation is derived from the experiences they have garnered from those endeavours as well. Despite the evident difficulties they face, they remain confident and optimistic that the outcome of their endeavours will be well worth all the effort and difficulty they have encountered. Despite all of the problems they encountered along the way, both of them maintained their optimism and forge ahead, resulting in the long-term viability of their businesses, despite the pandemic effect on local SMEs.

### **6.0 Conclusion**

As the demand for halal products and services continue to rise in parallel to the increasing number of the Muslims population, halal entrepreneurship is increasing becoming the main agenda of Malaysia, wit it Muslim majority population. While the number of local Bumiputera involvement in halal entrepreneurship is still low, it is believed that more information and know-how are becoming more evidence through various studies on this subject matter.

During this research, the characteristics as successful Bumiputera halal business owners were also delved into through case study method. One glaring issues that must be delved further in future research includes the dependence of these ventures on government aid and support specially to increase production capability and export capability.

### **7.0 Limitation of Study**

The main limitations that could be observed during this study was the challenge faced in finding the right respondents. Various websites such as JAKIM Halal Directory and business list from SME Corp were used, however, there is no single list of halal SME business that could provide an adequate information that could be used as sampling frame for the study. This information is very crucial especially if further study through quantitative research need to be done in the near future. There should be a synchronized master list which contain all these information that could be referred to. Lack of such item also suggested that proper monitoring of the halal SMEs



performance might not be able to be done adequately and effectively by any of the halal business stakeholders.

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