

# The Promotional Language of the Halal Food Industry: Some Preliminary Findings

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## Abstract

The global halal food industry which is currently expanding exponentially presents a huge potential for Malaysia to make her mark in this business sector. In achieving its goal to become a global halal hub by 2020, emphasis should not merely be placed on the production of the halal food products but also on its promotional aspect. Hence, this paper will highlight some preliminary findings on the linguistic features of the promotional discourse of halal food. The research, which was based on textual-linguistic analysis, utilised corpus-based technique and discourse analysis to examine one hundred written materials on halal food. The study revealed the importance of creative interplay of interdiscursivity and intertextuality which was evidenced in the lexical and phrasal constructions, discursive structures and visual representations in marketing the halal food. The findings also showed that despite the strong demands for halal certification, some local manufacturers did not display any certifications for their food products. The study provides some suggestions in improving the promotion of halal food which include certification issue and, infusion of cultural and socio-religio elements. In short, this preliminary study shows the importance of utilising the most appropriate language in conveying the idea of 'halal' as prescribed in the Holy Quran especially in gaining the trust of the consumers.

**Keywords:** Halal food; Halal food industry; Promotional language.

## Introduction

The halal industry is expanding exponentially all over the world. This industry is tremendously booming in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries alike. It has become a global phenomenon which is estimated to be worth around USD 2.1 trillion with USD 1.3 trillion generated from the halal food component alone and is forecasted to reach USD 1.9 trillion by 2023 (Global Islamic Financial Report 2018/19). Its rapid growth could be seen not only in terms of market penetration but also in the diversification of the products. A few years back, the main segment of the halal industry was confined to food and food-related products; however, currently, it has diversified to include other types of sectors such as health products, pharmaceutical, cosmetics, medical devices as well as the service sectors such as hospitality and tourism.

Currently, Malaysia is also one of the crucial global players in this industry. The Malaysian government has developed strategic and holistic initiatives as well as formulated relevant policies to create a halal ecosystem in the country. One of its significant agendas is to place Malaysia as a global halal hub by 2020. In achieving this goal the Malaysian government has established the Halal Industry Development Corporation

(HDC) in 2006 to oversee the improvements of halal standards and enhancement of its commercialization and branding (HDC, 2017). Besides that, recently the Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, has launched another strategic initiative to drive the growth of the Malaysian halal industry forward called 'be-Halal' (Landau, 2019).

According to the Global Islamic Financial Report 2018/19, in 2017 Malaysia achieved the Global Islamic Economic Indicator (GIE) of 127 and was ranked second behind United Arab Emirates (UAE) in terms of its global strength as a leader in the halal food industry. According to the Malaysian International Food & Beverage Trade Fair (MIFB) portal, to date, Malaysia has gained USD 43 billion from its exports of halal food and food products which made them the biggest component in the halal Malaysian market (Malaysia can Command the Halal Industry, 2019). With the aggressive initiative that Malaysia is undertaking to be the prime global halal hub where halal food is its biggest contributor, it is imperative that strong emphasis be placed on the promotional aspect of the halal food products in marketing them to the global communities. In short, focus must be given on utilising the appropriate linguistic terms in promoting 'halal' to the masses.

### Concept of Halal

In general, the term 'halal' which is an Arabic word encapsulates the meaning of 'allowable' or 'permissible' by the Islamic Law. Halal Malaysia, a government portal responsible on 'halal' matters, provides further definition of 'halal' as stated in its Trade Description Order, 1975 as follows:

*When the term is used in relation to food in any form whatsoever, in the process of trade or commerce as an aspect of trading or part of an aspect of trading for the referred food, the terms 'Halal', 'Guaranteed Halal' or 'Muslim Food' or any other terms that may be used to indicate or may be understood as meaning*

*to indicate as permissible to be consumed by Muslims and allowed in their religion for the referred food to be consumed, must therefore mean the following, that is, the food for which such terms are being used:*

Does not stem from or consists of any part of or item from animals that are forbidden to Muslims by Islamic law, or animals that have not been slaughtered according to Islamic law.

Does not contain any substance that is considered impure in Islamic law.

Is not prepared, processed or manufactured using equipment or utensils that are not free from impurities as defined by Islamic law.

That, in the preparation, processing or storage stage, does not come in contact with or is stored near any kind of food that does not meet the requirements of para(s) (a), (b) or (c) or any substances that are considered impure by Islamic law.

In the current context, the halal term has gained prominence beyond its religious compliance. According to the Global Islamic Financial Report 2017:

*the halal industry promotes values such as social responsibility, stewardship of the earth, economic and social justice, animal welfare and ethical investment. More importantly, the demand for halal-certified products among non-Muslim consumers have been on the rise as more consumers are looking for high quality, safe and ethical products.*

With all these values entrenched in 'halal', this research aims to find out how these values are being embedded and promoted in the advertising materials of halal products.

### Studies on Promotional Discourse

What is promotional discourse? According to Bhatia (2005) the most traditional form of

promotional discourse is advertisements “which is often viewed as a form of discourse intended to inform and promote in order to sell ideas, goods or services to a selected group of people” (p.2). With the current rapid advancement of technology, this discourse has metamorphosed into various forms such as promotions via websites, online applications and social media applications. Nevertheless, despite its continued change in form, its functions remain.

A close scrutiny of the literature on studies on promotional discourse reveals that to date the closest studies on the promotion of halal industry mainly focused on the language used in the tourism industry (Cook, 2001; Dann, 1996; Francesconi, 2007; Hatim, 2004a, 2004b; Kelly, 1998; Sulaiman, 2013). In terms of halal food products, majority of studies merely focused on the non-linguistics aspects of marketing and promotion of halal food products (Alserhan, 2010; Arham, 2010; Bohari, Hin & Fuad, 2013; Issa, Hamdan, Muda & Jusoff, 2009; Mohamed Yunos, Che Mahmood & Abd.Mansor, 2014; Rajagopal, Ramanan, Visvanathan & Satapathy, 2011; Wilson & Liu, 2010; Wilson & Liu, 2011) . To the researcher’s knowledge, there is a dearth of research which mainly focuses on the linguistics aspect of the promotional discourse in the halal industry specifically on halal food industry.

Hence, this study which utilised corpus-based technique and discourse analysis aimed to investigate the genre of promotional discourse in the existing halal food industry in Malaysia. This preliminary study specifically aspired to find out the common lexical terms used in the promotional materials of halal food products and how the lexical terms and rhetorical devices are exploited to build customers’ trust on the food products.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In framing the results of the study into a proper perspective, the study utilised the five dimensions of Halal Brand Personality

propagated by Muhamad Fazil (2015). This framework, despite its limitations, was deemed apposite at this preliminary stage of the study as it affords a simple ‘guideline’ in terms of the major elements of the ‘personality’ of products which are considered halal. These elements shall provide assurance of halalness to consumers and enhance the effectiveness of the screening process for halal products and services (Muhamad Fazil, 2015). Furthermore, the framework was chosen due to its bottom-up approach in illuminating those major elements, rather than a top-down approach. The five constructs were developed based on interview feedbacks gathered from experts from Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) and survey questionnaires of 135 officers from the Trengganu Department of Islamic Affairs. The bottom-up approach is considered most appropriate in this respect for it enabled the researcher to gather genuine, real and unpretentious input from the respondents who were in actual fact consumers of halal products.

Below are the descriptions of each dimension.

#### **Purity**

This element is based on the Islamic concept of *taharah* (purity) embedded in human beings’ natural temperament which emanated from the basis that all humans are born in a state of purity. Hence, Muslims will strive to safeguard the purity inherent in them by ensuring that they will consume products and engage only in activities which are considered *halalan toyyibban* (Man & Yahya, 2014). Purity provides a sense of certainty that the products and its production has gone through the proper procedure in accordance with the Islamic law. According to Mathew, Amir Abdullah and Mohamad Ismail (2014), halal products and services were also preferred by non-Muslims as they are deemed to fulfil the elements of being hygienic, safe and of good quality.

## Excitement

According to Maslow et al. (1970), excitement is a condition that is linked to elements such as dynamic activity, sociability and energy. Perceived excitement refers to customers' general opinion of the brand on the quality or excellence of the products which influence their purchase decision (Al-Harran & Low, 2008).

## Safety

According to the Black's Law Dictionary, safety is defined as the freedom from injury, harm danger or loss to personal property. It stresses that products or services do not present any harmful or hazardous consequences to consumers (Man & Yahya, 2014) and they comply with the Syari'ah law with good judgment (Rajagopal et al., 2011). The sense of safety will eventually create trustworthiness between consumers and producers or service providers.

## Sophistication

Sophistication means utilising a certain degree of innovativeness and revolutionary methods in delivering products to customers at every stage of the production process. It involves an enhancement of an outcome from simple or natural to a more cultured and refined state (Okazaki, 2006).

## Righteousness

Righteousness relates to the concept of submission, surrender and obedience in Islam (Halstead, 2004). It plays a crucial role in influencing consumers' behaviour towards a certain brand particularly so since their behaviour and attitude are shaped by their faith. Righteousness in the religiosity notion also has a substantial influence on consumers' behavior and attitude (Aris, 2012; Khairudin, 2013). Therefore, the religiosity of consumers has become a vital component in marketing, particularly in advertisements (Zain, 2004).

Besides the constructs of Halal Brand Personality, this study also analysed the promotional language against the values highlighted in the Global Islamic Financial Report 2017 which are social responsibility, stewardship of the earth, economic and social justice, animal welfare and ethical investment. Thus, there were 10 elements which became the foundation of analysis in this study.

## Methodology

In achieving the aim of this preliminary study, two methods of text analysis were used which were corpus-based approach and discourse analysis. A corpus of fifty promotional materials were compiled for analysis. They included online news articles and reports on the halal food industry from websites such as *Salaam Gateway*, *Halal Focus*, *The Halal Journal*, *DagangHalal* and *Food Navigator Asia*. All these materials, where necessary, were either converted from .pdf to .txt files using a free online conversion tool or were manually transcribed from picture files (.jpg/.jpeg) and printed materials into .txt files via TextEdit application. The text files (.txt) were analyzed using AntConc corpus analysis software that was downloaded from <http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software.html>. Besides that, analysis was also conducted on fifty promotional materials such as flyers, pamphlets, booklets, bunting and product packaging that were obtained from the Malaysia Halal Expo 2019 for Japan's Tokyo 2020 Olympics. It needs to be highlighted that the participants in the Expo were from the Malaysian small and medium enterprises. These second set of materials were analysed using discourse analysis.

## Results and Discussion

### The common lexical terms used in the promotional materials of halal food products

From the corpus analysis of fifty online news articles and reports, it was found that the word 'halal' most collocate with words that mainly

focused on providing a guarantee of the halal status of the food products. As indicated in Table 1, the words were ‘certification’, ‘certified’ and ‘accreditation’. These words occurred most frequently with ‘halal’ at 125 times from a total of 27,110 word token obtained.

Table 1: Frequency count of words occurring after ‘halal’

Word Collocate	Frequency
certification/certified/ accreditation	125
food	97
and	97
industry	96
in	82
to	80
products	70

The second most common word was ‘food’ (content word) and ‘and’ (function word) at 97 times. It is understandably so since the articles analysed were on halal food products. The same goes with the terms ‘industry’ which appeared 96 times and ‘products’ 70 times. Two other function words which appeared constantly with ‘halal’ were ‘in’ and ‘to’.

### Words and phrases

The findings above clearly showed that phrases that were most frequently used in halal related news articles and reports were halal certification, halal certified and halal accreditation. Other most used phrases in these data included ‘halal food’, ‘halal industry’ and ‘halal products’.

Whereas from the promotional material of the actual products collected, the words and phrases used reflected the values of halal as documented in the Global Islamic Financial Report 2017 and the Halal Brand Personality (Muhamad Fazil, 2015). A total of 16 brands used words like *suci* (clean), *bebas trans lemak* (no trans fat), *tiada pewarna tiruan* (no artificial coloring), *tanpa msg* (no msg), ‘no preservative’, ‘safe’

and ‘healthy’ to indicate the element of safety. Meanwhile, the element of high quality was represented by words like ‘certified’, ‘best selection’, ‘high quality’, ‘premium’ and ‘best’, which were used by 15 brands. Other elements that were displayed included convenience (‘on the go’, ‘ready to eat’, ‘hassle free’) and satisfaction (‘indulgence’, ‘delicious’) used by 13 and 11 brands respectively.

From a total of 50 items of promotional flyers, pamphlets, buntings and product packaging, it was found that 16% (8 items) of the product packaging displayed at least the halal logo. For both promotional flyers and buntings, only 56% (28 items) displayed either halal logo, quality certifications or combination of both. The remaining 28% (14 items) of the materials did not display any form of halal certification or other accreditations.

### Ways in which the lexical terms and rhetorical devices are exploited to build customers’ trust on the food products.

The product flyers, pamphlets and packaging collected in this study have shown a prominent finding where almost all of the brands use a mixture of different promotional approaches in a single material. This feature is a unique interdiscursivity which is an approach that combines different context-related styles and genres in a single text (Jianguo, 2011).

### Discursive structures and visual representation

Almost all flyers showcased a large and attractive display of their products together with their brand names strategically placed in a way that consumers would notice their brand and the quality of their products first before other information. Some of the examples are shown in the figures below. These brands were similar in the way they displayed their brand names and their tagline, followed by the halal

certification logo, that was directly placed close to the brand name and tagline as in Figures 1(a) and (b) or indirectly on the product packaging picture on the flyer in Figure 1(c).



Figure 1(a)



Figure 1(b)



Figure 1(c)

Further evidence that shows the use of varying lexical terms and rhetorical devices in attracting the consumers was when the brands focused on some unique features that would make them stand out from their competitors. For example, Figure 2(a) displays a brand's strategy in accentuating the 'effortlessness' idea by bolding the word 'easy', followed by an explanation on how easy it is to prepare a meal of their product in Figure 2(b). This is further emphasized in another statement at the bottom of the page that again highlights the ease of use of the product in Figure 2(c).



Figure 2(a)



Figure 2(b)



Figure 2(c)

Aside from integrating logo within the text, some brands chose to let their varied certifications speak for themselves. Since these certifications required the products and company to undergo thorough inspections, displaying all their credentials as in Figures 3(a) and (b) are proofs that the companies have achieved certain standard and upheld certain quality accorded by the certification they received. Figure 3(c) shows that some brand would also display their awards as an extra credit in gaining the trust from consumers. One brand in Figure 4, even advertised the concept of 'buy while donating' on their pamphlet and product packaging, where a certain amount of earning from every purchase of the product will be donated to charity.



Figure 3(a)



Figure 3(b)



Figure 3(c)



Figure 4

Furthermore, since these materials were collected at the Malaysia Halal Expo 2019 for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, the study noted that some companies as shown in Figures 5(a), (b) and (c) even went to the extent of translating their materials or included Japanese scriptures into their promotional materials to make their products accessible for the Japanese consumers. Besides that, the phrase *Healthy Frying Oil* in Figure 5(b) shows the creativity of the company in framing the English phrase using the Japanese orthographic system.



Figure 5(a)



Figure 5(b)

## Bunga Rose ブランドの始まり

1968年に「グライピサン」(バナナカレー)から始まり、創業者の一人は家族の生計を改善するために独自のスパイスを作成しました。

Figure 5(c)

Out of 50 promotional materials collected, 34 items were pamphlets, flyers, booklets, buntings and product packaging which focused mainly on food and beverages. The study found that 82.4% (28 items) of them utilised visual representations extensively to capture consumers' attention and convey information on their products where they displayed at least one certification logo. It was also found that 96.4% (32 items) of them bore the Malaysia halal certification logo. Among other certification logos that were displayed were HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points), MeSTI (*Makanan Selamat Tanggungjawab Industri*), GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice), *Buatan Malaysia* (Made in Malaysia), FDA (Food and Drug Administration) and UKAS (United Kingdom Accreditation Service) as shown in Figure 6.



Figure 6: Credential logos from various certification bodies

## Discussion

The corpus analysis of the online news articles and reports revealed that words with the highest frequency which regularly appeared with 'halal' were 'certification', 'certified' and 'accreditation'. All these words play a very crucial role in providing a sense of assurance to customers on the status of the food products. A

similar trend was also noted in the analysis of the pamphlets and food packaging. It was found that most of them used logos of various certification bodies such as Malaysia Halal, HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points), MeSTI (*Makanan Selamat Tanggungjawab Industri*), GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice), *Buatan Malaysia* (Made in Malaysia), FDA (Food and Drug Administration) and UKAS (United Kingdom Accreditation Service) to emphasise the quality and safety of the food products. These findings clearly indicate that some producers of halal food products are very serious in gaining consumers' trust on their products. Nevertheless, the study also found that there are Malaysian products which do not have any halal certification or other accreditations on their promotional materials as reflected in 28% (14 items) of the promotional flyers and buntings. On the same note, it was recently reported that 90% of the local SMEs owned by Bumiputeras have been found to have been in operation without halal certification (Omar, 2019).

Moreover, the discourse analysis done on the promotional flyers, pamphlets and product packaging revealed that almost all of the materials applied interdiscursivity in advertising their products. Integrating product images, brand taglines and displaying halal quality credentials are evidently central in the promotional language used by many of the brands. Varying styles of discourse presentation are utilised in a single material such as strategic placement of the brand, wordings and images, in order to capture consumers' attention at first sight. This approach is particularly focused on halal aspects in the forms of related words and phrases such as 'no preservative', 'safe', 'healthy', 'high quality', 'premium' and 'best'.

The study also noted the different outcomes between the corpus analysis and discourse analysis where the latter lacks the mention of the word 'halal' in comparison to corpus data. However, it is compensated by the emphasis on other aspects of linguistic which use interdiscursivity to deliver the same halal

information and its elements to consumers in a more attention-grabbing manner, considering the data set for discourse analysis consisted of promotional flyers, pamphlets, and product packaging.

Some of the products were seen to employ a unique facet of intertextuality in promoting their brands. Creative utilisation of cultural elements i.e. Japanese culture were found in the promotional materials. It is understandably so since the products were promoted for the halal Japanese market. Elements such as the Japanese orthographic system and Japanese language were embedded as part of the promotional language. This is seen as a very effective way in getting the attention of the target consumers because the intertextual elements in the advertisements will create psychological associations between the products and the customers' identity (Zulkifli & Ariffin, 2019).

Besides cultural elements, another approach used by the producers in gaining the attention and trust of the consumers is by integrating and accentuating an aspect of socio-religio responsibility in the food promotion. For example, Tisha's, a company that sells frozen bread, highlights on their product packaging that part of the profits from the sale shall be donated to the *asnaf*, which according to Islamic definition means groups of people who are eligible to accept monetary contribution in the form of *zakat*. Thus, it can be deduced that the producer is capturing the consumers' attention by highlighting that their act of buying the product is not merely fulfilling individuals' needs but also the needs of the Muslim society. Their choice of the word *asnaf* instead of 'the needy' further indicates a sense of them fulfilling a religious obligation. The psychological message then is that by purchasing the products customers get to enjoy halal food and simultaneously fulfill their religious obligation in donating part of their money back to the Muslim society. To further display their commitment, the company uses '#Tisha's Love Asnaf' as their tagline.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

This preliminary study uncovered a few significant issues in relation to the promotional language of halal products. Firstly, the evidences clearly indicate that majority of the halal food producers do give strong emphasis on the halalness of their products by using the halal logo and other certification credentials. However, it was also found that some companies did not display any kind of certification on their promotional materials. Hence, this study would like to suggest for all food products in Malaysia to go through the halal certification procedure so as to ensure that the products are not only safe to be consumed but also have gone through the stringent quality control process in their preparation. It is indeed imperative for products to have evidence of halal certification in gaining the trust of and increasing halal awareness among the customers.

On the certification issue, the study noted that majority of the producers do display various logos from different certification bodies on their products. Indirectly, it can be assumed that getting the different certifications from the separate bodies surely would have incurred some cost which may be subsumed in the price of the products. It is highly recommended that in order to save cost and time on behalf of the food producers, there is a need for an establishment of one main central authority to regulate and oversee the overall certification process in respect to halal products in Malaysia and also worldwide. It is suggested for JAKIM and HDC to take the lead in this matter.

The study would also like to suggest that halal food products which are meant to be exported to other foreign countries must integrate cultural elements of the receiving countries in their promotional materials as well as the food packaging. The creative manipulation of the cultural elements will become an attention-grabber for and psychological link with the international community. This will help the products to penetrate into the foreign

markets.

Moreover, the study opines that the promotional language of halal products should project an image that does not only reflect the halalness aspect but more importantly it should be able to convey a bigger message - a message that transcends beyond the elemental meaning of halal. The study found that the integration of socio-religio component in the promotional language as practiced by Tisha's (refer to Figure 4) is a clever means in disseminating the idea that the purchase of the products will ensure that one fulfils ones' individual needs as well as the social obligation as a Muslim.

Finally, the study would also like to highlight the need for a better framework that captures the fundamental elements of effective promotional language of halal products. It is strongly felt that the Halal Brand Personality is at the moment inadequate to carry such responsibility.

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