

## Implications of Halal Product Certification For Small and Medium Enterprises in the Food Sector in Angkola Barat District, South Tapanuli Regency

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### ABSTRACT

This research investigates the implications of halal product certification for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the food and beverage sector across West Angkola and South Tapanuli Regencies. Using a qualitative case study approach, data was gathered from key informants, including the District Secretary, the Head of the Religious Affairs Office, a Halal Product Certification Process Facilitator (P3H), and MSME business owners, both certified and non-certified. The findings reveal that while MSMEs have a deep conceptual understanding of “halal,” which includes both Shariah principles and the concept of thayyib (good and clean), there is a significant gap between this understanding and the formal procedural knowledge required for certification. Despite government socialization efforts, many MSMEs are reluctant to apply for certification due to a lack of information, a perception of high costs, and time constraints. In contrast, proactive MSMEs are motivated by direct support from P3H facilitators, whose role proves crucial in bridging this knowledge gap. Halal certification brings tangible benefits to MSMEs: it boosts consumer trust and loyalty by serving as a mark of credibility and quality assurance, expands market access locally, regionally, and nationally, and indirectly encourages business owners to improve their business quality and professionalism. The study concludes that socialization alone is insufficient without intensive, personalized facilitation and assistance from parties like P3H. This direct support is essential for helping MSMEs overcome practical barriers and encouraging them to take proactive steps toward obtaining halal certification.

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## Introduction

The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector is a fundamental pillar of the Indonesian economy, contributing significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and job creation. The dominance of MSMEs in Indonesia's business structure makes them the driving force of the people's economy and a source of livelihood for millions of people. On the other hand, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia has a huge market potential for halal products. Public awareness of the importance of consuming halal products continues to increase[1], not only among Muslims but also among non-Muslim consumers who seek assurance of product quality, cleanliness, and safety. Studies also show that halal certification has positive consequences for the development of the halal sector and the Indonesian economy, especially in the culinary sectors[2].

In this context, the Indonesian government has shown a strong commitment to halal product assurance through Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 33 of 2014 concerning Halal Product Assurance (JPH) [3]. This law requires all products circulating in Indonesia to have halal certification, aiming to provide protection and legal certainty for Muslim consumers and encourage businesses to produce products in accordance with Islamic sharia standards [4]. The implementation of the JPH Law is crucial for MSMEs to be able to compete and expand their market share, both domestically and globally.

West Angkola Regency and South Tapanuli Regency, with a Muslim majority population, have great market potential for halal products. The local government has

facilitated various socialization and halal product certification programs for MSMEs, such as the Wirausaha Digital Berdaya (WIRADIBA) program and direct support from the Investment and Integrated Services Agency (DPMPTSP) to help business actors obtain a Business Identification Number (NIB) [5]. The way to increase the number of halal certificates in this industry is by improving the efficiency and accessibility of halal certification[6]. These outreach programs aim to increase business owners' understanding of the importance of certification, the obligation to comply with the JPH Law, and the consequences if products do not have halal certification . These efforts are also carried out to build the perception that certification is an easy process and to increase understanding that certification can improve product competitiveness [7], [8].



**Figure 1.** Socialization and Facilitation

However, despite comprehensive outreach and facilitation efforts, an interesting phenomenon was found in the field: many MSMEs in the food and beverage sector in the region still do not have halal certification. This phenomenon indicates a significant gap between government efforts and the response of MSME actors. This gap is also related to MSME actors' lack of understanding of the essence of halal itself, limited information, and cost constraints, which are often the main challenges in obtaining this certification. Other studies have also identified similar challenges, such as a lack of knowledge about the

certification process, low awareness of the importance of formal certification, and the perceived complexity of certification costs [9].

This study offers novelty by analyzing in depth the dynamics of MSME knowledge formation related to halal certification. In particular, this study highlights the central role of the Halal Product Certification Process Assistance Team (P3H), which interacts directly and intensively with business actors. Unlike mass socialization approaches, which are often ineffective, the P3H's role in providing personal assistance, from initial socialization to technical assistance, has proven crucial in bridging the gap between conceptual understanding and procedural knowledge. These findings provide new insights into more effective strategies for encouraging halal certification adoption among MSMEs, going beyond the mass socialization approach that has been used so far.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze in depth the implications of halal product certification for MSMEs (especially in the food and beverage sector) in West Angkola District, South Tapanuli Regency. This study will examine various aspects, ranging from the level of awareness among MSMEs, the obstacles encountered in the certification process, to the positive impacts that arise after MSMEs obtain halal certification. It is hoped that the results of this study can make a real contribution to the formulation of more inclusive and effective policies to encourage MSMEs to be more proactive in obtaining halal certification, in order to increase the competitiveness of local products and the economic welfare of the community.

## **Method**

This study adopts a qualitative methodology with a case study approach [10]. This methodology was chosen based on its ability to explore a phenomenon in depth and holistically, as well as to capture the subjective perspectives of participants. This study was conducted in West Angkola District, South Tapanuli Regency, which was specifically selected (purposive sampling) because it represents an area with significant halal market



potential but faces challenges in terms of product certification. To validate the findings, this study used purposive sampling in selecting informants. A total of nine informants, consisting of the Subdistrict Secretary, the Head of the Religious Affairs Office, the Halal Product Process Facilitator (P3H), and MSME actors who have and have not obtained certification, were selected to provide comprehensive data.

The data collection process was carried out using three main techniques: (1) in-depth interviews to obtain rich narrative data, (2) direct observation at MSME locations to verify practices and production processes, and (3) documentation studies to collect supporting data from relevant documents. Data analysis was conducted thematically through three systematic stages: data reduction (the process of selecting and focusing on relevant data), data presentation (organizing data into a structured narrative), and drawing conclusions (formulating findings based on data synthesis). To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, this study applied source triangulation (comparing data from various informants) and technique triangulation (comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation). In addition, member checking was conducted to validate the interpretation of the research results with informants, ensuring accuracy and consistency with the reality in the field.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **MSME Understanding of Halal Certification: Between the Concept of Halalan Thayyiban and the Knowledge Gap**

Based on data analysis, it was found that the level of understanding of MSME actors in West Angkola District regarding the essence of halal is complex, covering conceptual and procedural dimensions that are contradictory. On the one hand, conceptual understanding of halal and thayyib has been deeply internalized among business actors. They not only understand halal from the aspect of sharia compliance, but also as a broader concept, covering cleanliness, health, and blessings, in line with the command in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 168. This comprehensive understanding is rooted in informal religious education and a strong socio-religious environment, as emphasized by a misop trader, "Since childhood,

we have been taught that food must be halal and clean.” In addition, this view is supported by the Sub-district Secretary and the Head of the KUA, who see the halal label as a means of strengthening consumer confidence and business legitimacy in a Muslim-majority society.

However, on the other hand, there is a significant gap between this strong conceptual understanding and formal procedural knowledge regarding certification. Although socialization efforts have been made, the information does not always reach all business actors, as acknowledged by the Mie Tek-tek Trader who has never received direct socialization. This phenomenon is consistent with the Knowledge Gap Theory [11], which states that the flow of information is not distributed evenly, thereby widening the knowledge gap between groups that are exposed to information and those that are not. The “Widuran Fried Chicken” case [12] was an important turning point that raised awareness among some MSME players of the urgency of halal and thayyib certification, serving as a “stern warning” of the reputational and legal risks of ignoring standards.

### **Dynamics of MSME Response and Willingness to Obtain Certification**

A response is an answer, reply, or reaction[13]. The dynamics of MSME response to halal certification are highly diverse and influenced by their level of understanding and access to practical information. Data shows that informal channels, such as social networks and social media (Facebook and WhatsApp), are the main sources of information [14], while formal socialization from the government has not been fully implemented. These dynamics divide MSME actors in West Angkola District into two main groups:

#### **Proactive and Enthusiastic MSMEs**

This group, represented by misop traders and sarang balom traders, has a strong drive to pursue certification. They are motivated to obtain official certification, enhance consumer confidence, and expand their market, even aiming to position their products as “souvenirs from outside the city.” Direct support from the Halal Product Certification Process Companion (P3H) serves as the primary driving factor, shifting perceptions and encouraging

them to initiate the process, aligning with the decision-making stages outlined in Rogers' Theory of Innovation Diffusion (DOI). For them, this process is seen as an investment, not a burden.

### **Reluctant and Resistant MSMEs**

This group, such as Mie Tek-tek Vendors and Seblak Vendors, shows hesitation to obtain certification. The reasons are varied and consistent with previous studies[15],[16] namely: 1) Lack of Information and Access: Some MSME actors do not have access to formal socialization. For example, the Mie Tek-tek Vendor explained that he could not attend the socialization because he was busy selling 24 hours a day, while the Pancung Cake Vendor had never even heard of halal certification. 2) Cost Perception: The majority of actors who are reluctant to be certified unless it is free indicate that cost concerns are still a major consideration. This perspective is in line with Rational Choice Theory [17], which assumes that individuals make decisions based on rational considerations to maximize benefits and minimize costs. In this case, if the cost is considered burdensome, the decision not to seek certification becomes “rational.” 3) Practical Limitations: Time and distance constraints, as well as difficulties in filling out documents and understanding technical requirements, are significant practical obstacles.

### **Halal Certification Process Flow**

The process flow begins when MSME players begin to have an awareness of the urgency of certification. However, this awareness mostly does not arise independently. Research findings show that initiation occurs thanks to direct intervention from P3H, which proactively approaches MSME players. This approach provides personalized education, changing the perception of MSMEs that previously did not know or ignored product regulations. Mr. Iwan, a fried bread trader, admitted that he was unaware of the existence of regulations regarding halal labels until P3H came and provided a concrete explanation. This confirms that the formation of MSME knowledge in the field is more effective through direct interaction, not just through information disseminated in general. After initiation, MSMEs

that show willingness enter the administrative stage. This is where the role of P3H becomes very vital in facilitating the process, which has been procedurally established.

The flow that business actors go through to certify the halalness of their products with SEHATI (Free Halal Certificate) in detail is as follows: [18], 1) Initial Application Submission: Interested MSME players are accompanied by P3H to create an account on the SiHALAL system ([ptsp.halal.go.id](http://ptsp.halal.go.id)) and submit an application. This is the first step which is an obstacle for many MSMEs that have limited digital literacy. 2) Document Verification and Self-Declaration: P3H helps MSMEs complete all required documents, including the Business Identification Number (NIB) and product data. In addition, P3H verifies the self-declaration of business actors regarding the halalness of their products. 3) Field Verification: P3H does not only rely on documents, but also conducts direct visits to production sites. They examine in detail the raw materials used, the cleanliness of the equipment, the processing process, and packaging. This process is vital to ensure that the product and its entire production chain are free from unclean contamination and non-halal ingredients. 4) BPJPH System Verification: After the report from P3H is completed and declared valid, it is uploaded to the BPJPH system for further systematic verification. 5) Fatwa Hearing: The report that has been verified by BPJPH is then forwarded to the Halal Product Fatwa Committee, where scholars review and decide on the determination of the halalness of the product. This is the stage that provides assurance of Islamic law. 6) Certificate Issuance: If all stages are approved, BPJPH issues a halal certificate that can be downloaded by businesses. This certificate is formal and legal evidence of the halalness of their products.



**Figure 2.** Fried Bread,an MSME Product that is already halal-certified



## Discussion

### Analysis of the Dynamics of MSME Understanding and Response to Halal Certification

The findings of this study identify significant differences between two types of understanding held by MSME actors in West Angkola District: conceptual understanding and formal procedural knowledge. Conceptual understanding of the concept of halalan thayyiban (halal, good, clean, safe, and beneficial) has been deeply internalized among business actors. This understanding is not limited to the absence of non-halal ingredients, but also covers aspects of cleanliness, quality, and the blessings of the product. This is rooted in informal religious education and a social environment rich in religious values, in line with previous studies that emphasize that halal certification functions as a sharia-compliant business mechanism. However, the findings from this analysis also show a significant gap in the formal procedural knowledge required to obtain halal certification. Information about regulations and the certification process is often not distributed evenly, especially among business actors who have limited access or exposure to formal media.

This phenomenon can be analyzed theoretically through the Knowledge Gap Theory, which states that as the flow of information in society increases, groups with higher socioeconomic status tend to absorb information faster than lower-status groups. However, the findings from this analysis also show that this gap can be overcome through direct and personal intervention. The role of the Halal Product Process Companion (P3H) is very important in bridging this gap. P3H not only conducts socialization, but also provides proactive technical assistance in the field. This approach has proven effective in changing the perceptions of MSME actors and helping them understand the concrete benefits of certification, in line with the ceiling effect concept proposed by Thunberg [19]. According to Thunberg, an initially widening gap can be overcome if less-advantaged groups have stronger access and motivation, a condition created by P3H intervention.

The dynamics of MSME responses to certification also show two different patterns that can be explained using Rogers' Theory of Innovation Diffusion (DOI) and Rational

Choice Theory. Proactive and enthusiastic MSME groups view certification as a strategic investment. This positive response is in line with DOI [20], where MSMEs are motivated by clear benefits and supported by P3H interventions as agents of change. This adoption shows that the decision is not only a response to regulations but also the result of a belief that the innovation brings real benefits. Conversely, reluctant and resistant MSMEs show hesitation that can be explained through Rational Choice Theory. Based on this theory, individuals make decisions based on cost-benefit calculations [21]. From this perspective, the decision not to seek certification is considered “rational” if business actors believe that the costs involved—whether financial, time, or energy—are greater than the benefits they believe they will obtain. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which also identified perceived costs and lack of knowledge as major barriers.

### **Concrete Implications of Halal Certification for MSME Sustainability**

The findings from this analysis confirm that halal certification has significant positive and concrete implications for MSME business sustainability. Amid the exponential growth of the food and beverage industry in Indonesia, which also has the largest Muslim population in the world, the demand for halal products continues to grow exponentially [22]. In this context, halal certification plays a vital role in supporting business sustainability and serves as an undeniable sign of credibility, functioning as a signal of quality for consumers that the product has undergone a rigorous verification process. This can be explained through Signaling Theory [23], which states that in situations of information asymmetry, producers send credible “signals” to reduce consumer uncertainty [24].

Halal certification serves as a strong and reliable signal, providing consumers with assurance that products have undergone a rigorous verification process in accordance with standards set by the government and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) [25], thereby convincing consumers of the halal status of products [26]. The implications of this credibility signal have a comprehensive impact on business sustainability: 1) Increased Consumer Trust and Customer Loyalty: Halal certification significantly builds deep trust in the eyes of

consumers, providing a sense of security and eliminating buyer's doubts [27]. This is confirmed by the statement of Misop Trader, “ALHAMDULILLAH Bahat (Many impacts,” and Fried Bread Trader who reported that buyers “are now more confident because there is a halal stamp. They no longer have doubts.” This trust is invaluable because it is the main basis for customer loyalty, which ultimately drives business growth. 2) Increased Market Access and Turnover: With a widely recognized signal of credibility, MSMEs can penetrate larger and more competitive markets, becoming a “ticket” to broader markets at the local, regional, and national levels, including modern stores and e-commerce platforms [28]. This impact was confirmed by Sarang Balom traders who reported a significant increase in turnover and an expansion of their market reach to include orders from outside the city. 3) Improved Business Quality and Professionalism: The certification process, which involves detailed inspections by P3H, indirectly encourages MSME players to improve hygiene standards, raw material selection, and production processes. This is in line with the acknowledgment by Pedagang Sarang Balom that “the certification process also motivates us to improve quality and production standards.” These improvements, in turn, enhance brand image and positive business reputation, which indirectly impact turnover. In addition, the requirements to meet strict audit and verification standards indirectly compel business owners to implement a comprehensive quality concept [29], which ultimately strengthens the business foundation and increases competitiveness in the market. 4) Certification as a Long-Term Investment: Strategically, halal certification is not just compliance, but a crucial long-term investment for business growth and resilience. In the context of building consumer trust and avoiding fatal cases such as “Ayam Goreng Widuran,” halal certification is a strategic necessity. Without certification, MSMEs risk losing market share dominated by Muslims and facing a consumer trust crisis that can permanently damage their reputation and turnover [30]. Recommendations from Balom Nest traders reinforce this view: “This is a long-term strategic investment for business development. First, this certification will significantly increase consumer confidence... Second, it will expand market access... Third, this process encourages us to improve quality, hygiene, and production standards.” This

statement proves that halal certification has comprehensive positive implications for the sustainability of MSME businesses.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that halal product certification has significant implications for the sustainability of MSMEs in West Angkola District. Key findings show a striking knowledge gap between a strong conceptual understanding of the concept of *halalan thayyiban* and minimal formal procedural knowledge. This gap can be effectively bridged through direct and personal intervention from the Halal Product Process Assistant (P3H). Furthermore, halal certification serves as a strong signal of credibility, which ultimately has positive and concrete impacts, including increased consumer trust and customer loyalty, expanded market access and increased turnover, as well as improved quality and professionalism in business management. Overall, halal certification is not only regulatory compliance, but also an essential long-term strategic investment for the growth and competitiveness of MSMEs.

The findings of this study provide important theoretical contributions and practical implications for stakeholders. Theoretically, this study enriches the Knowledge Gap Theory by showing that gaps are not only caused by differences in access to mass media information, but also by a lack of proactive personal intervention. This provides empirical evidence of how the “ceiling effect” can be overcome through intensive P3H assistance. In addition, this study presents a more holistic insight by combining the Theory of Innovation Diffusion (DOI) and Rational Choice Theory, which shows that the decision to adopt certification is not only a linear process, but also the result of rational calculation. In practical terms, these findings confirm that mass socialization efforts are often ineffective; the most effective approach is through direct and personal assistance. Therefore, business actors are encouraged to view certification as a strategic investment, while the government and related institutions are advised to strengthen the role of P3H and simplify the administrative process of certification in order to reduce the barriers perceived by MSMEs.



## Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that the government and relevant institutions take several strategic steps to increase the participation and sustainability of MSMEs in the halal certification program. First, strengthen and expand the role of the Halal Product Process Assistant (P3H) by increasing the number of facilitators and providing adequate logistical support, especially in areas with minimal socialization. Second, simplify certification procedures and administration by reviewing and streamlining bureaucracy, as well as developing a more user-friendly digital platform or providing integrated services (one-stop service) at the sub-district level. Third, change the communication and education strategy from focusing solely on obligations to emphasizing the concrete and long-term benefits of halal certification (increased turnover, consumer confidence, and business professionalism). For further research, it is recommended to conduct quantitative studies, comparative studies, and long-term analyses to provide more specific and measurable data on the impact of halal certification on the sustainability of MSME businesses.

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