

# Halal food certification and business excellence: A conceptual paper

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## ABSTRACT

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The crux of this paper is to hypothesize that Halal food certification improves business excellence, by way of a conceptual framework highlighting the connectivity between both elements. There have been numerous studies focusing on Halal food certification and business excellence along different perspectives, yet there is a scarcity of research that explicitly studied both aspects together. As far as the methodological approach is concerned, analysis of various secondary sources related with the keywords and topic has been adopted. The paper takes the EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) model as the groundwork for discussion within the Halal food sector. Based on the literature review, it is propounded that Halal food certification can boost business excellence on the grounds of ethical leadership, holistic strategic thinking and planning, enhanced people management, fortified B2B partnership, effective logistics and supply chain management, and maximised accrued results (customer, people, society and business). The theoretical foundation of this study can support further in-depth research on both elements, and given its conceptual nature, the framework should be empirically tested.

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## 1. Introduction

The halal industry is one of the most growing industries in the world (Rahman et al., 2017; Elasmag, 2016) and this further affirms that it is gaining a strong foothold in developed economies. Driven by the boom in affluent Muslims population growth and the need for increased ethical consumption, especially within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Halal industry continues to draw considerable attention across all borders; academia, consumers, policy makers and undoubtedly businesses.

The concept, 'halal', which is not only confined to food anymore, has made the halal industry a new potential growth sector in the global economy (Azam & Abdullah, 2020). In fact, Ab Talib (2017) averred that a Halal certified product implies that the sourcing of raw materials, production, packaging and

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distribution have taken place in a clean and sanitary environment. According to Lim et al. (2020), Halal is a universal concept and is related to the values of safeguarding animal rights, and promoting healthy climate and social justice. Indeed, when the inner and outer aspects of halal are synchronised, a state of halal excellence can be achieved.

Meanwhile, both the business and scientific community have shown interest over the last decade for a new buzzword called business excellence. This “new” approach has evolved over the years from the foundations of TQM (Total Quality Management) to embrace the challenges, evolutions, aspirations and societal developments of the modern world. Initially, excellence was evaluated by products and services level of quality, then the perspectives changed to include the processes to produce and provide services (Alhabeeb, 2021). Eventually, with today’s economic, societal and consumer pressures, essential aspects such as ethics, consumer welfare, sustainability, employee development and environment conservation are viewed as lofty objectives by businesses. As such, achieving business excellence is seen as a panacea for corporates worldwide to tackle the changing global business environment. Meanwhile, Halal and its various aspects continue to be a highly popular research area, as testified by the growing bulk of literature. Many studies, both empirical and conceptual, have focused on Halal food certification and its benefits to businesses as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Studies on Halal food certification and its impact on business related aspects.

Author(s) (year)	Paper type	Findings
Ab Talib et al. (2017)	Empirical	The study showed that Halal food certification has a positive relationship with operational and financial performance. Overall, Halal food certification positively influences business performance.
Yusuf et al. (2016)	Conceptual	Halal certificate is a real defining market force and contributes to capture bigger market shares.
Ab Talib et al. (2016)	Conceptual	Applying the Resource Based View Theory, a Halal certificate can positively influence logistics performance through its tangible and non-tangible aspects.
Yusuf et al. (2017)	Case study	All respondents confirmed that Halal certification plays a positive role in increasing their business performance.
Giyanti & Indriastiningsih (2019)	Empirical	There were significant differences in all performance measures between non-halal certified SMEs and halal certified ones.
Salindal (2019)	Empirical	Halal certification significantly contributes to both innovative and market performance. Halal-certified and non-Halal certified companies have a significant difference in innovative and market performance.

Source: (Author’s compilation)

Therefore, the literature supports the view that Halal food certification can indeed positively influence corporate success and performance. On the other hand, this raises the question whether Halal food certification can positively contribute to business excellence as well. The literature review, however, equally reveals a paucity of studies covering these two concepts together. Hence, the present research aims at uncovering the possible link between Halal food certification and business excellence. The principal objectives of the paper are as follows:

1. To understand whether Halal food certification can positively influence business excellence.

2. To formulate the theoretical ground to show how Halal food certification can positively influence business excellence.
3. To propose recommendations on how to achieve cohesion between Halal food certification and business excellence.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 *Islam and the concepts of Halal and Haraam*

Islam as a religion enjoins its followers to use and consume only Halal products and abstain from Haraam ones. Halal is usually translated as permissible, good and lawful while Haraam is known to be impermissible, wrong and unlawful. Nourishment and its search are the most underlying human nature of all. Consequentially, Muslims are exponentially cautious of the food and beverage they consume so as not to tamper with the prohibitions. Islam advocates the need for Muslims to feed themselves with food and beverage only permitted by the Shari'ah (Islamic Law), in view to preserve their spiritual wellness and morality. Muslims find peace, serenity and moral composure whenever their food intake is congruent to Islamic teachings, and therefore, when Muslims eat non-Halal food, the heart will not be filled with tranquility (Alzeer et al., 2018). Arif and Ahmad (2011) clearly stated that Islamic law prohibits the consumption of any consumable hazardous food and drinks or those harmful to human beings. Both further strongly averred that in general, the prohibition of food is based on the aim of the purification of one's nature, and subsequently the food ingested takes a severe toll on one's moral character, uprightness, spirituality and inclination towards good deeds and sins. For this reason, Hanzae and Ramezani (2011) maintained that the halal concept (especially for foods) is truly from the farm to the table, and requires nutritious items prepared from permissible ingredients in a clean and hygienic manner.

### 2.2 *The global Halal industry and Halal food certification*

With Moslems (Muslims) population reaching 3 billion people, the Halal industry becomes one of the fastest growing businesses in the global market (Nurrachmi, 2018). This scenario was highlighted by Azam and Abdullah (2020) in their paper, "Global Halal industry: realities and opportunities", that the Halal industry today englobes personal care and pharmaceutical products, logistics, packaging and of course, finance. The core sectors of the Islamic economy represented an aggregate consumer spend opportunity of \$2.2 trillion in 2018, and is projected to grow to \$3.2 trillion by 2024 (Dinar Standard, 2019).

Additionally, the State of the Islamic Economy Report 2020/2021 pointed out that the main drivers of the Islamic economy are as follows: (a) demand-side drivers: 1) Large, fast-growing young Muslim population, 2) Islamic values driving lifestyle practices, 3) Digital connectivity and 4) Rise in ethical consumerism; (b) supply-side drivers: 1) Government regulations, 2) Intra-OIC trade growth, 3) Participation of global top brands and 4) National Islamic economy strategies. Moreover, Latif et al. (2014) emphasized on the continuously expanding Muslim world which represents a rich bubbling market of 2 billion consumers spread across 112 countries. As such, tapping into this globally emerging market represents a considerable fertile ground for international businesses to exercise new competitive approaches, and gear themselves towards greater integration into the Halal industry.

Undoubtedly, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused widespread disruptions across all sectors globally at varied degrees. Nevertheless, the future of the Halal food sector seemingly appears optimistic and propitious. In fact, as posited by Amalia et al. (2020), Halal food is creating interest amongst non-Muslims due to the embodiment of values such as animal welfare, sustainability and organic food. Similarly, due to the financial crisis, coupled with the worldwide sanitary havoc, there has been some growth in Shariah-

compliant trade finance as alternatives to conventional financing become more sustainable. Equally, Abdul-Talib et al. (2013) considered the exponentially growing global Muslim population as a major catalysis for firms to endorse export-oriented strategies in order to make a mark in important Halal sectors. Indeed, the halal industry has emerged as one of the largest and most lucrative consumer markets in the world (Ab Talib & Wahab, 2021), dragging economies and businesses in search of competitive edge.

Ab Talib et al. (2015a), however, maintained that operating in the halal market first requires that the entire production process, coupled with the inbound and outbound logistic activities, are in accordance with the principles laid out by Halal certifying bodies. This foundational prerequisite is guaranteed by a Halal Certificate which is a document issued by an approved Islamic organization certifying that the products meet Islamic laws and are usable by Muslims (Islam & Chandrasekaran, 2013) and it testifies that the products have been manufactured, stored, packaged and transported in ways consistent with the principles of halal supply chains. In fact, Rajagopal et al. (2011) considered halal food certification as a powerful marketing device to create uniqueness and differentiation amongst competitors. Similarly, Ab Talib et al. (2017) argued that certification is essentially a type of resources, deployed by food companies as a tool to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Furthermore, by way of the Resource Based View (RBV) model, Halal food certification can in fact be considered as a form of resource for firms to create new opportunities to tap into the Halal market and gain consumer trust. As highlighted by Ab Talib et al. (2016), the potential benefits of capturing new customers within the Halal market are luring to non-Muslim business owners as well, and indeed the reputational and image upgrade are considerable driving factors especially for larger multinational firms.

### *2.3 Business excellence*

As global companies dive deep head further into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, competition is grossly intensifying both across national borders and international frontiers. The need to differentiate from the flock and excel is ever more pressing, urgent and legitimate. Moreover, in the face of today's increasingly competitive environment, environmental change, and high international requirements to address green environmental issues, companies must also consider the sustainability of society and the environment (Fan & Chang, 2021). In fact, Madhavi (2018) viewed "sustainable excellence" as striking the right balance between dedication towards monetary success and pursuit of socio-environmental goals. In the same way, Rivera (2021) stressed on the need for businesses to leverage considerably on harmonizing the satisfaction of customers with that of other stakeholders, while safeguarding the interests of the society and the environment. In increasingly competitive business environments, business excellence models play crucial roles in organizational successes (Daniel et al., 2012). Both quality management and business excellence are programs and structures guiding organizations with principles and practices.

Meanwhile, Ionica et al. (2010) opined that business excellence is clearer and more pragmatic in its approach. Business excellence is "a long-term process, concerned with key strategic issues such as developing core functional processes, to be the best, to get people performing better, and to develop a quality framework in order to provide excellent customer service" (Ritchie & Dale, 2000, p. ?). The fundamental objective of business excellence is to achieve quality in order to gain serious competitive advantage and nurture a large customer base. In fact, Huq (2005) has defined quality as a changed effort that targets improvements in many parts of the organization, which eventually extends to increased competitiveness through customer retention and satisfaction.

As attitudes towards manufacturing change from inspection to prevention, there has been a consciousness that quality is cultivated from the very beginning in the production process to include the entire value chain activities, while emphasizing on the requirements of internal and external customers. This paradigm shift in thinking and quality understanding has brought to realization that quality is

eventually built by every task fulfilled by an organization. Therefore, the ultimate intent of achieving and sustaining quality is to attain customers' satisfaction by providing products and services and striving to limit defects and deficiencies; and optimizing the degree of excellence. As rightly put, "excellence is a journey and not a destination" (Madhavi, 2018, p. ?) and therefore achievement of quality is a never-ending process with strong commitment and efforts all along the way. Consequently, some governments developed their own national quality frameworks as a way to promote nationwide quality and excellence engagement as for a country to attract foreign investment and to increase its exports, the challenge is to produce and provide higher quality goods and services (Tan, 2002). For the last ten years, the award frameworks and award processes over the world have improved continually as the most current ideas on quality and excellence have been included (Daniel et al., 2012), and various comparative studies (Agariya et al., 2019; Dahlggaard-Park & Dahlggaard, 2006; Daniel et al., 2012; Tan, 2002) have provided reviews of major business excellence models and a summary of the criteria or requirements for excellence awards.

The awards are allocated by government statutory bodies based on the final selection by a panel of judges and examiners following site visits and rigorous assessments on target achievements. It has been well noted that the national quality frameworks developed by governments are influenced by various factors namely economic, social, cultural and the desire to be in line with world-class quality standards, as averred by Tan (2002). Some of the best-known national quality frameworks include: Deming Prize Business Excellence Model, EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) Business Excellence Model, Singapore Quality Award Model (SQA) and Australian Business Excellence Model (ABEF).

Besides, some Business Excellence models were developed by researchers in varying academic works, which include: Kanji's Business Excellence model (KBEM) (Kanji, 1998), Value based total performance Excellence Framework (Abdullah et al., 2012), An overarching framework of Business Excellence (Mohammad et.al, 2011) and An Agile Business Excellence Model (Dubey, 2016), amongst others.

Research on Halal food certification and its positive implications for business value is well documented, but its link with business excellence has yet to get more scholarly attention. As can be seen from the review of the literature, the concept of business excellence has a lot in common with that of the Halal concept. The latest research by Aziz (2020) focused on building a conceptual framework whereby Islamic leadership is sought to improve business excellence. However, his study considers Islamic leadership as the main independent variable, and hence is limited in scope. Besides, business excellence models have been widely studied in various sectors and industries, but have remained largely understudied in the Halal sector. Against this background, this paper is one of the very first to provide a conceptual overview on how Halal food certification can potentially enhance business excellence, thereby addressing in part a consequential gap in the literature. The theoretical foundations proposed in this paper serve to enhance the growing literature on the Halal concept, especially by onboarding onto another engrossing topic, business excellence.

### **3. Methods**

The objective of this paper is to propound a theoretical discussion, where it is proposed that halal food certification can in fact have a positive and contributive effect on business excellence. Being an exploratory study, the present research therefore relies heavily on secondary data collection which have been gathered from online scholarly repositories and several published academic works. To achieve the objective of this paper, an observational approach was employed in which the data collected dealt with issues such as Halal certification, Halal logistics and supply chains, Islamic Business Ethics, Global Halal industry, Business Excellence models and TQM (Total Quality Management). Thus, a synthesis of past and recent literature makes the basis for discussions and conceptual rendering in this paper.

#### 4. Selecting a business excellence model

Established in 1992, the EFQM business excellence model serves as a defining framework which aims to assess and build the proficiency of European firms in terms of quality management, wishing to qualify for the European Quality Award (EQA). Fundamentally speaking, the EFQM model is non-prescriptive in nature, but rather is viewed as a representative theory, where various approaches or techniques exist in order to achieve sustainable excellence. In fact, the EFQM model is an all-encompassing business framework integrating activities starting from input, process and output. The EFQM model for business excellence has 9 criteria or dimensions divided into two parts: enablers and results, as illustrated below in Figure 1.

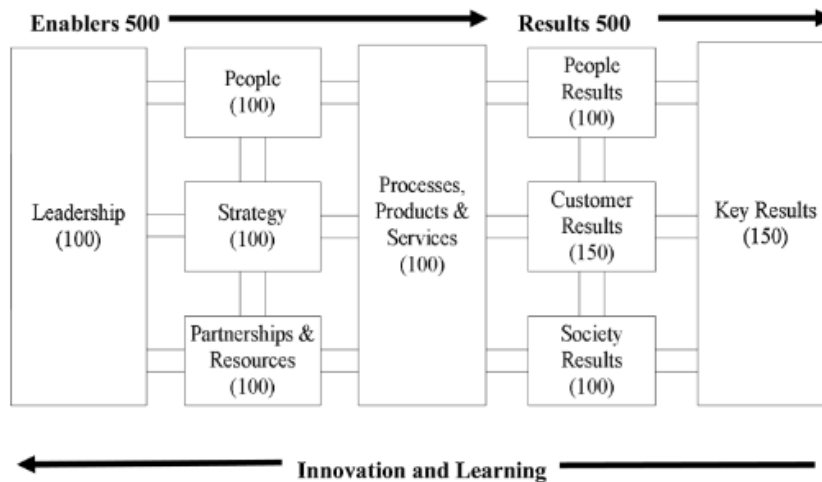


Figure 1. EFQM Model (Source: Liu et al., 2021)

The Enablers are the actions of the organization and the way they are done, and the Results criterion deal with the final achievements. The EQA criteria stress on several areas such as leadership, policy and strategy, human resources management, partnerships and resources, processes, customer result, human resources result, society result and key performance result (Daniel et al., 2012). An organization achieving excellence in the enablers will experience sustainable developments through improved customer, people, society and financial results (Dahlggaard-Park & Dahlggaard, 2006). The EFQM model is based on a score of 1000 marks supported by feedback on strengths and weaknesses of the organization, and those scoring above 650 are considered as toppers in the industry. Since its inception in the early 1990s, the EFQM model undergoes an annual review procedure and the Foundation highlights the fact that quality management must encapsulate all activities at all levels in an organization, and should strive to meet the expectations of all stakeholders. The 9 dimensions of the EFQM model have been designed in such a way that these are expected to espouse the context and conditions of any organization in any sector, structure, notwithstanding its maturity and size.

The EFQM model is the most widely-used model in implementing the TQM principles (Rivera, 2021) and it serves as a model for the development of other quality and excellence frameworks worldwide. The model gains much acceptability and application since it does not impose harsh and fast rules, but adopts a holistic approach to excellence achievement by harmonizing with other approaches, philosophies and

techniques. In other words, it remains generic, requiring little customization and hence is globally put to use by varying organizations in different industries. On the other hand, its non-prescriptive and one fits all approach is often criticized since it lacks effectiveness to meet sector specificities and modifications. Nonetheless, Dubey and Lakhanpal (2019) in their work, “EFQM model for overall excellence of Indian thermal power generating sector”, contended that the model is supported by empirical evidence for its applicability in diverse sectors notably private, government, health and education as shown in Table 2. Therefore, on reasonable grounds, the current paper adopts the EFQM model as a basis for the relevant discussions in relation to the Halal sector given its long withstanding implementation in varied sectors.

Table 2. Studies using the EFQM model in varied sectors.

Author(s) (year)	Paper title	Sector
Nabitz et al. (2000)	The EFQM excellence model: European and Dutch experiences with the EFQM approach in health care.	Health care
Kafetzopoulos (2019)	The relationship between EFQM enablers and business performance: The mediating role of innovation.	Manufacturing
Dubey and Lakhanpal (2019)	EFQM model for overall excellence of Indian thermal power generating sector.	Thermal
Medne (2020)	Sustainability of a university’s quality system: adaptation of the EFQM excellence model.	Education
Liu et al. (2021)	Should the EFQM Excellence Model be Adapted for Specific Industries? A Restaurant Sector Example	Restaurant

Source: Author’s compilation.

## 5. Linking Halal food certification (HFC) and business excellence (BE): The enablers

### 5.1 Halal food certification (HFC) and leadership

Zannierah Syed Marzuki et al. (2012) stated that a halal certificate at an “eating premise” means that the food has been prepared according to Islamic dietary laws and hence, it becomes a bearing of trust and consequently Muslims and other Halal consumers can confidently undertake their purchase decisions. The lucrative market that the Halal industry offers enables businesses to maximize their profit but they must also be socially responsible to the consumers (Ibrahim et al., 2010). Hence, businesses in possession of an HFC are expected to consider in high regards the essential canons of business ethics and standards. In fact, among non-Muslim owners of Halal certified food outlets, the inclination towards and observance of ethics and integrity is equally present as concluded by Zannierah Syed Marzuki et al. (2012, p. ?) in their case study whereby “Some non-Muslim respondents were very conscious of the halal standard because for them halal is a sensitive issue and they respected the Muslim religious dietary restrictions”. As such, owners of Halal certified businesses are enjoined to be leaders of ethics and trust, thereby being faithful to the essence of an HFC, so as not to cause distrust and suspicion within the Halal market. Ultimately, leadership is about ethics and excellence (Kouzes & Posner, 2010; Hosmer, 2007 and Solomon, 1992). Indeed, this is clearly evident within the Halal market where backlash is inevitable if Halal regulations are violated as consumers expect high moral and ethical standards, and halal excellence. Concomitantly, in their research, “Halal

Label and the Ethics of Business: An Analytical view from Producers”, Said and Elangkovan (2013) confirmed that most manufacturers and producers of halal products related their businesses to the ethical perspectives, particularly in the perspective of Islamic economy ethics.

As such, it can be proposed that being a Halal certified business owner, ethical leadership is fortified given that owners and managers need to endorse engagement in trust, honesty in dealings, trade ethics, integrity and welfare to reciprocate to the sensitivity of the halal market.

**Proposition 1: HFC positively influences leadership attributes and qualities.**

### 5.2 Halal food certification (HFC) and strategy/policy

The halal market has evolved tremendously into a globalized, widespread and transnational bulk of opportunities. Hence, Halal certified businesses cannot but incorporate a holistic, all-inclusive and extensive perspective to their strategic and policy-making processes. In fact, larger corporates operating in Halal markets, especially in Islamic countries, can face severe recriminations if they are found to tamper with the founding principles of being a Halal certified organization. As such, operators within the Halal industry should be particularly attentive to the interests, needs and requirements of various stakeholders for the wellness of the Halal ecosystem. Strategic thinking and planning by nature cannot be a standalone process, but it is the ability to learn from the environment while having an open mind, which is one of the characteristics of good management (Goldsmith, 1996). Besides, Izberk-Bilgin & Nakata (2016) highlighted that halal is closely tied to issues of fair trade, organic agriculture, animal welfare, food safety, and ecological economics, and that traditional sustainability and CSR values are similar to the tenets of halal. Thus, by embracing the principles of Halal, it opens the doors to a worldwide audience attracted to ethical consumerism. Evidently, several western fast food chains including Nandos, Burger King and Subway are opening more outlets that serve Halal products (Majlis, 2012), and the ‘crop-to-plate’ or ‘farm-to-table’ philosophy is gaining universal reach and accolade amongst consumers. Traditionally, literature on strategic thinking considers it to have elements such as vision for the future (Bonn, 2001; Kaufman et al., 2003; Bonn, 2005; Wootton & Horne, 2010), wholistic (Harper, 1991; Bonn, 2001), long-term attitude (Ghafarian & Kiani, 2010), and curiosity and discovery (Williamson, 1999). Correspondingly, operators and firms within the halal domain need to embrace a holistic meaning of halal (Izberk-Bilgin & Nakata, 2016) and adopt similar attitudes as demonstrated in the case of Nestle that has adopted the values of fairness, transparency, health and wellness, alongside its successful adoption of a strategic roadmap to capturing the global Halal market, while being a global Halal brand leader in that sense.

Based on the above discussion, it can be posited that given the multi-stakeholder reality of the halal industry and due to the significant growth opportunities offered by the Halal certification, strategic thinking and planning becomes more holistic, systemic and long-term.

**Proposition 2: HFC positively influences strategic thinking and planning.**

### 5.3 Halal food certification (HFC) and people

Halal certified firms undoubtedly have a considerable onus in safeguarding the interests of their customers, but equally bear the responsibility of undertaking fair workplace practices to upgrade the professional conditions of their employees. In fact, Halal certificates are awarded based on several criteria and organisational conditions, notably for workers, such as practicing good personal hygiene, wearing of decent and appropriate clothing at all times, prohibition of smoking in production areas, staff must be in good health and employees having adequate training in halal food production (Ab Talib et al., 2017; Latif et al., 2014). Halal certified firms, especially in the food sector, emphasize largely on the dual aspects of Halallan Toyiyiban (wholesomeness, pure and clean), since the requirement is not solely on Halal sourcing,



but equally, the production environment should not be smelly, repugnant and uncondusive to good sanitary and hygienic conditions. Indeed, safe, healthy and pleasant working environment is crucial for employee job satisfaction and engagement. Employees are generally attracted to an organisational culture which promotes innovation and development for their own personal and professional growth and individuals with better quality will achieve higher performance in achieving growth (Yusuf et al., 2016). In fact, the study by Salindal (2019) demonstrated that Halal certification has a positive effect on the innovative performance of Halal certified food companies in the Philippines and further added that Halal certified food companies and non-Halal certified food companies have a significant difference in terms of innovative performance and market performance. Additionally, the global marketing and product base expansion prospects offered by Halal certification are presently undeniable, and hence creates further opportunities for cultural exploration and professional advancement for operators and practitioners within the Halal industry. This optimism is supported by Azam and Abdullah (2020) who suggested that halal food companies could be multi-billion dollar, publicly listed enterprises through trade finance, working capital and capital expansion.

Consequently, it can be proposed that internal stakeholders at Halal certified premises enjoy clean, safe and healthy working environment as advocated by the principles of Halallan Toyyiban (wholesomeness, pure and clean), and benefit from personal progress and professional development by working in the world's largest faith-based market.

***Proposition 3: HFC positively influences People Management***

***5.4 Halal food certification (HFC) and partnerships & resources***

Halal consumption continues to grow worldwide and so is the demand among non-Muslim countries. The Halal industry is no longer confined to few Muslim majority countries or to a selected basket of goods, but is evolving across all borders and encompasses a wide range of consumables and services too. To this effect, the global Halal trade, scattered among multifarious countries, requires that the integrity of the Halal products is not tampered but is kept secured until it reaches the hands of the final consumers. In view of that, a Halal supply chain is vital in order to retain the halalness of products from the procurement stage to the consumption stage (Sarwar, 2021). The conventional logistics and supply chain management and philosophical approach has been adapted into the Halal industry to integrate the Islamic teachings of Shar'iah (Islamic legislation), so as to enable the monitoring of the movement of Halal food from its countries of origin to export destinations (Zailani et al., 2010). The growing body of research on halal supply chains (Ab Talib et al., 2015b; Khan et al., 2018; Lodhi, 2009; Zailani et al., 2010; Zulfakar et al., 2014) all emphasize on the multi-stakeholder nature of the halal industry. Talib et al., (2013) averred that collaborative relationships amongst logistics service providers, halal authorities, the government and other stakeholders are critical success factors (CSFs) for the implementation of Halal within the supply chain. Supportive of this is the definition by Khan et al. (2018, p. ?) of Halal supply chains as "A process-oriented approach, to manage the flow of material, information and capital; through strategic coordination & collaboration of stakeholders, as to create value to improve the performance of the Supply Chain, in such a way that Halal & Toyyib is extended from farm to fork". As a matter of fact, a fundamental concept of business excellence suggests that companies require longer-term, strategic and reciprocally useful partnerships with a variety of external partners (Daniel et al., 2012) in order to achieve constant value to all stakeholders. This view is supported by Tieman (2014) who maintained that vertical and horizontal collaboration through Halal supply chain providers and among companies within the same industry is critical to the maintenance of halal integrity.

As such, the ecosystem approach of the Halal industry is well grounded in theory and practice too. Indeed, partner collaboration, inter and intra-firm collaboration is enhanced since preserving the Halal

integrity and consumer confidence in the halal certificates is an industry-wide responsibility with concerted resource sharing.

**Proposition 4: HFC positively influences partnership mutuality and resource sharing.**

### 5.5 Halal food certification (HFC) and processes, products & services

Congruent to the approaches of Halal supply chain and logistics, business processes within the Halal industry are meant to be as flexible and responsive as possible to product and service delivery. This is so because, any tampering of Halal integrity through cross-contamination with Haraam items whereby the “halalness” of a product has been compromised or ambiguity amongst consumers has landed in, immediate corrective measures need to be taken since Halal is such a sensitive issue. With the spread of global Halal supply chains, there has been an emerging use of tracking and traceability systems which offer the ability to track food and food ingredients forward along the production chain (Zailani et al., 2010), thereby improving the visibility and receptiveness of Halal supply chain users whenever a case of contamination arises. As opined by Ab Rashid and Bojei (2019), such tracking and tracing technologies are useful tools to generate real-time information as the product journeys across the transportation chains. Real time data access and quick transfer of information across the halal supply chain amongst Halal logistics providers, contribute largely in improving the efficacy and robustness of the processes, product and service delivery. In a conceptual study by Ab Talib et al. (2016), logistics performance is considered from a Halal certificate perspective and they posited an enhancement of product quality through a Halal-dedicated transportation system and equipment, timely distribution without compromising Halal integrity, promising financial returns outweighing the costs and greater flexibility due to market expansion offered by Halal certification. As part of business excellence attainment, all excellence approaches concentrate on developing processes to comply with customer needs (Daniel et al., 2012) while adopting systematic and fact-based management of processes based on customer feedback, and within the framework of Halal supply chain processes, the needs and requirements of halal consumers lead the entire bandwagon.

Hence, it can be said that within the Halal sector, process management operates in an efficient and effective manner with diligent halal supply chains and logistics, coupled with traceability, tracking and information sharing, to ensure consistent and timely delivery of products and services.

**Proposition 5: HFC positively influences management of processes, product and service delivery**

## 6. Linking Halal food certification (HFC) and business excellence (BE): Results

Excellence involves providing value for all the critical stakeholders comprising customers, employees, suppliers and partners, the public and community at large (Daniel et al., 2012). Muslims by their religious principles are obligated to consume only halal foods. Nevertheless, the concept of halal consumerism is attractive to non-Muslims as well who feel that halal products are better for health and taste (Haque et al., 2015). Additionally, Abdul et al. (2009) asserted that quality management practices such as adopting halal certification can boost customers’ confidence and hence, can lead to their satisfaction. In the same bandwidth, Ab Talib (2017) mentioned that one of the external benefits of implementing HFSC (Halal Food Safety Certificate) is improved customer service, and that consumers’ trust and confidence will generate more eventual purchases. At the same time, HFC embodies the essence of faithfulness, ethics and trust that owners need to promote within their organisation, thereby triggering favourable working conditions for employees. From a societal perspective, halal is not only the way Muslims slaughter their animals but it also relates to the environment, sustainability, animal welfare and food safety (Golnaz et al., 2010).

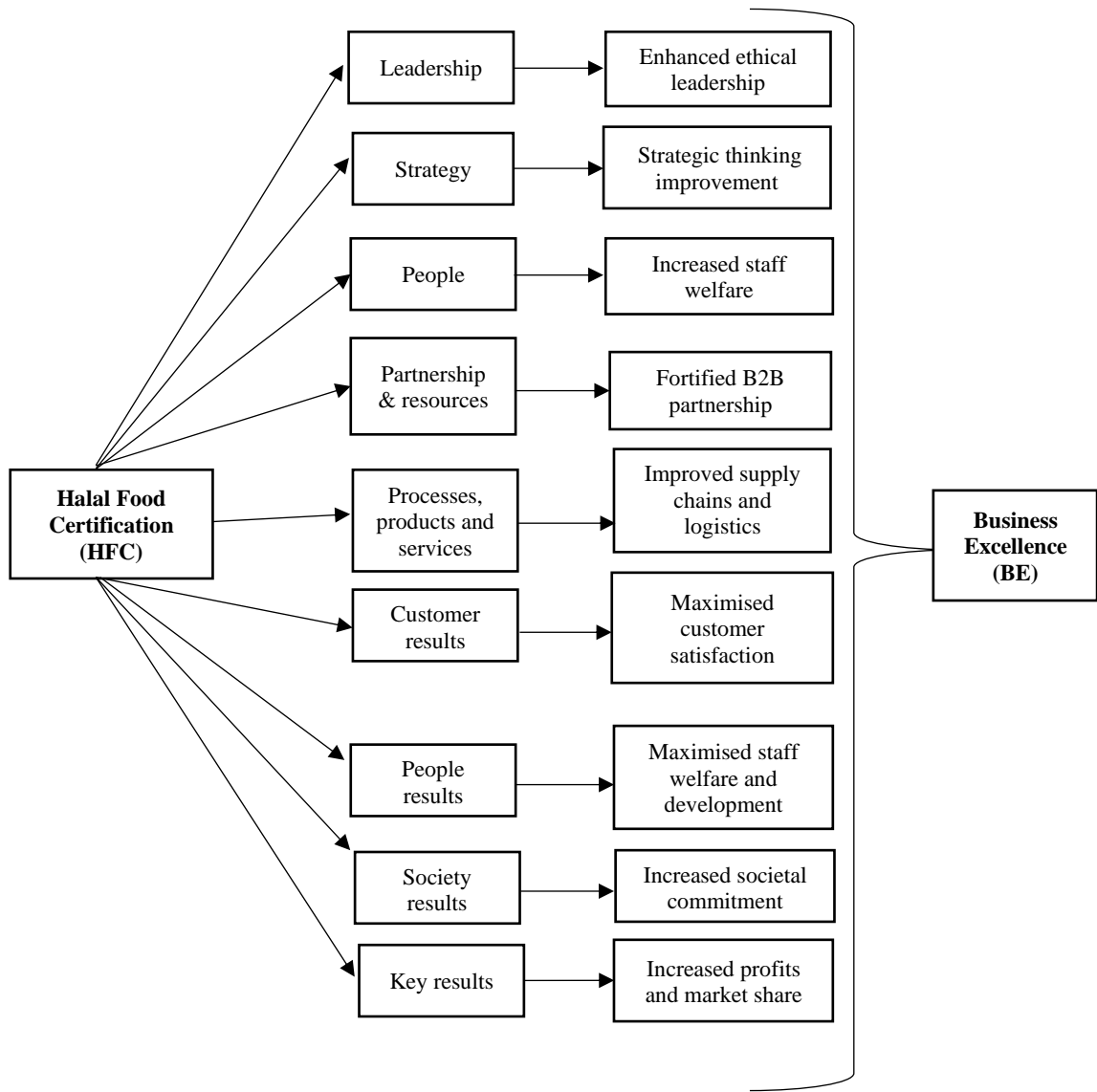


Fig 2. Proposed conceptual framework

Haleem et al. (2018) further emphasised that halal appeals to consumers who care about the origin of the products, fair trade, sustainability, cleanliness and humane animal husbandry since Halal products are based on the ideas of cleanliness, purity, safety and wholesomeness and a set of ethical values. Moreover, recent studies have analyzed the impact of HFC on business performance, growth and market potential which are the very core of what the criterion key results consist of. For instance, Ab Talib et al. (2017) has empirically shown that HFC has a positive and significant relationship with operational performance, which has a similar connection to financial performance. Hence, HFC contributes positively to business performance (operational and financial performance). Similarly, Ab Talib et al. (2016) explained that effective and efficient use of a Halal certificate in internal production processes can generate an upgrade in logistics performance which subsequently is reflected in increased market share, enhanced business innovation, coupled with high financial returns and satisfied customers. Concomitantly, Yusuf et al. (2016) averred that HFC helps to boost the development of Muslim nations as consumers and producers in the global market, given the marketing and branding potential of halal certification. Likewise, the study by Zailani et al. (2019) titled, “The influence of halal orientation strategy on financial performance of halal food firms”, concluded that the use of Halal materials and respect of proper Halal storage and transportation have a positive influence on financial performance.

As elaborated, it is expected that overall customer, people, societal and business results are improved as Halal continues to gain extensive appeal through positive consumer perception, and businesses see a rise in profitability and market share. Meanwhile, Halal is seen as enjoining practices of fair trade, ethical consumerism, animal welfare and sustainability, with the commitment to maintain healthy and sanitary working environment for production personnel.

**Proposition 6: HFC positively influences accrued customer, people, society and business results**

Following the relevant review of the literature above in connecting HFC and the components of BE, the conceptual model is depicted in Figure 2.

## 7. Recommendations

### 7.1 *Adopt a comprehensive and holistic approach to Halal*

The concept of halal and *toyyiban* as ‘wholesome’, as promulgated by Islam, promotes nutritious, clean and safe consumption. It is not for Muslims only, but it is rather a universal concept and it emphasizes on purity in substance and prescribes consumption of products closest to their natural state (Izberk-Bilgin & Nakata, 2016). The halal food certification should not be considered simply and only as a marketing tool and “targeting Muslims as ‘wallets to be drained’” (Izberk-Bilgin & Nakata, 2016). In the same way, Ab Talib et al. (2015a) highlighted that one of the greatest challenges in Halal food certification is the use of fraudulent and dubious accreditation, and consequently causing serious unrest and distress amongst Halal consumers and other stakeholders. As such, for HFC to succeed in promoting an ethics-driven leadership and management approach towards business excellence, the tenets of faith-based marketing in respect to Islamic consumerism such as religiosity, trust, welfare, purity and transparency should not be baffled by greed, treachery and fraudulence.

### 7.2 *Facilitate Halal awareness and understanding*

Ab Talib et al. (2015a) conferred that very often food companies are unfamiliar with Halal regulations and certification, and this further gets challenging as the institutional terrain of the global halal market is

complex (Izberk-Bilgin & Nakata, 2016). Besides, Latif et al. (2014) pointed out that Halal certifying bodies are growing in number in order to address the needs of the market stakeholders and consequently, the varying Halal requirements and standards in several jurisdictions can be severely cumbersome for Halal operators. Hence, dissemination of information on principles of Halal and the criterion for operating within the Halal industry is key in enhancing firm proactiveness and confidence when managing Halal supply chains. In fact, Borzooei and Asgari (2013) are supportive of Halal dedicated conferences and forums and further stated that these events create numerous opportunities for the country as well as helping to enhance local businesses and industries' awareness about various Halal perspectives and its advantages. Indeed, large scale promulgation of global Halal seminars and expert dialogue platforms can considerably improve the compliance of Halal operators to industry norms and standards, while avoiding consumer backlash in such a sensitive market. It is noteworthy mentioning that Halal smartphone applications (Halal Apps) are gaining popularity amongst consumers whereby they can easily verify the Halal status of various products through a dedicated Halal database or barcode scanning. Such innovative technologies are highly useful in regulating the Halal industry while promoting informed purchases.

### 7.3 Endorse a structural and systemic Halal approach

Integrating halal throughout the organization is essential to gaining a stronghold in the halal market (Izberk-Bilgin & Nakata, 2016). This implies that the halal philosophy should be present at the very core structural engines of business life line, including in the early stage of R&D, procurement and sourcing, logistics and supply chains, marketing, branding and customer service. The global halal market has created a new niche for itself in the international market space (Chebab et al., 2021), thereby implying that production occurs at global scales at different transnational locations.

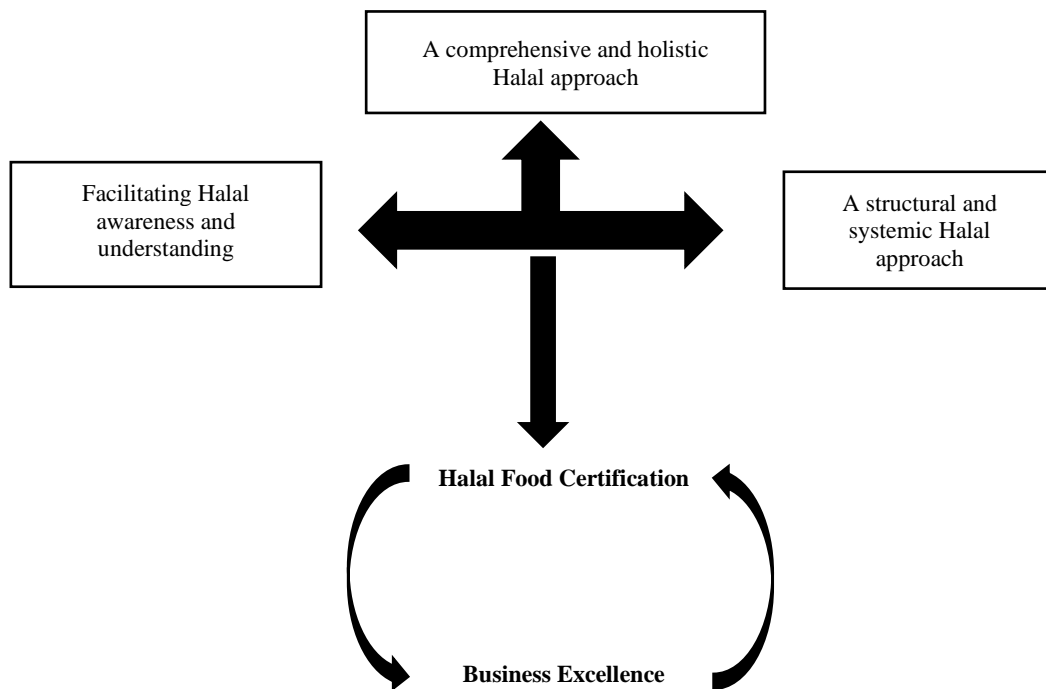


Fig 3. Areas of focus to harmonize Halal and Business Excellence approaches.

Consequently, this adds to the imperativeness for firms within the Halal industry to build and support internal Halal assurance systems, auditing and compliance management to ensure proper inbound and outbound flow of halal raw materials and finished or semi-finished products, which will change multiple hands while journeying worldwide to reach final consumers. Businesses are encouraged to set up intra-firm halal clusters or committees to oversee the whole halal system, as exemplified by the case of Nestle (Izberk-Bilgin & Nakata, 2016).

## 8. Conclusion

The discussions proposed in this paper aim at addressing the primary gap in the scholarly literature on Halal and organizational excellence. In fact, the present research is a first-hand attempt to study the possible connectivity between Halal food certification and business excellence, while highlighting the close relation between the two. To the author's best knowledge, business excellence models have not been studied from the lenses of the Halal industry, and thus the theoretical contribution of this paper can serve as a stepping stone for further in-depth qualitative and quantitative research. Moreover, given the multi-dimensional and qualitative nature of both Halal and business excellence, operators in both domains are encouraged to explore these two concepts further through exploratory case studies. Besides, it is highly suggested that academics, experts and practitioners work together to develop a business excellence model specific to the Halal industry which will effectively and efficiently match the realities of the Halal terrain while embodying Islamic values. Also, being a wholly conceptual paper, this research cannot ascertain explicitly that Halal food certification positively influences business excellence, hence the critical need for empirical studies covering these two subjects.

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