Establishing a Global *Halal* Hub: In-Depth Interviews

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the requirements needed for a country to establish itself as a global *Halal* hub. In this regard, this exploratory research paper uses a semi-structured in-depth interview to obtain the perceptions of *Halal* experts about the requirements for establishing a *Halal* hub. The results of the study indicate that human capital, media, research and development, events, country's capability, public and governmental support, marketing strategy, and infrastructure comprise the vital requirements. Furthermore, from the perceptions of the experts, public and governmental support, marketing strategy, and human capital are the three most important requirements. Since this paper is an exploratory study, it provides some insights of the three experts on the establishing of a *Halal* hub. In addition, a quantitative study is an appropriate approach to implement the findings of this study empirically and to determine the effective components to establish a *Halal* hub in those countries that desire it. A practical implication of this study is the opening of a new window for any country that aspires to be a *Halal* hub. In this matter, this paper presents the key considerations in establishing a *Halal* hub for *Halal* certification bodies, companies and marketers involved in the *Halal* business. Moreover, this research attempts to influence the perceptions and attitudes of people of the country on the desirability of becoming a *Halal* hub, followed by a discussion on the development of a national brand. When the contribution of its people is high, a country stands the best chance of achieving its goal. Finally, this study is one of the first to seek the perceptions of experts about vital requirements that a country should pay more attention to if it wishes to establish a global *Halal* hub.

Keywords Halal, Global Halal hub, Human capital, Branding strategy, Public and governmental support

1. Introduction

With the rapid growth in *Halal* markets worldwide, some countries are moving quickly to establish themselves as *Halal* hubs (Temporal, 2011). The operational meaning of the word 'hub' in the context of this study is 'center', 'nucleus', 'core', or 'critical mass'. It is a word commonly used by many sectors such as transportation, finance, communication, education, and fashion (Knight, 2011). Besides, a hub can be formed as a specific zone, city, state, or country. As Muslims make up a considerable segment (23%) of the world's population, catering to this massive market of over 1.5 billion people is very significant (Temporal, 2011). To satisfy the needs of this market based on values, principles and Islamic practices, many countries in the world are making considerable investments to become *Halal* hubs (Alserhan, 2010). For example, Brunei has set its sights on becoming a *Halal* hub and a major player in the global

Halal industry by producing and certifying *Halal* food, and catering to the worldwide market for premium-quality *Halal* products. In this manner, Malaysia is also moving towards becoming a *Halal* hub mostly in the food industry through the efforts of various agencies such as Standards and Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia (SIRIM), Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) and Halal Industry Development Corporation (HDC) (Salman & Siddiqui, 2011; Husain et al., 2012).

Notably, attaining the *Halal* hub status will trigger a Nation Brand Effect (NBE) for a long time (Temporal, 2011), which helps to differentiate and establish a global identity (Dali et al., 2009). Such a distinctive global position will be a catalyst for the growth of local companies, provide substantial gains in benefits and enhance the credibility and wholesomeness of the *Halal* image in the marketplace (Othman et al., 2009; Noordin et al., 2009). Furthermore, a *Halal* hub will create opportunities to penetrate the *Halal* market on a global scale (Dali et al., 2007). Growth of the *Halal* market is estimated to be at a rate of seven percent annually (Lada et al., 2009). This lucrative market currently generates about USD 1.5 trillion a year from trading of *Halal* products, particularly in the food industry, and Muslims contribute USD 632 billion annually to this market (Alserhan, 2010). As such, building a global *Halal* hub can be an essential economic strategy (Othman et al., 2009) to exploit the benefits of a currently lucrative market that is expected to continue growing.

In line with this thinking, it is expected that the global *Halal* hub will have major impacts on the strategies implemented by the governments setting up such a hub (Othman et al., 2009). It appears that a hub can reflect a national plan and priority for a country to be recognized as a center (Knight, 2011). Many countries, especially western, have already established their identity and strength in certain areas (Temporal, 2011), but in countries that are involved in *Halal* production, particularly Muslim countries, there is no strong evidence of this yet. For instance, the Malaysian government designed a plan to support its *Halal* industries to become a global *Halal* hub based on the Second Industrial Master Plan (1996-2005) (Nawai et al., 2007). However, it has not yet achieved this position and Malaysia is still striving to establish this important position with its Third Industrial Master Plan (IMP3) (2006-2020) (Ohno, 2009). Achieving a *Halal* hub position does not only require focusing on the *Shariah* regulations and the whole food supply chain (Talib et al., 2008; Othman et al., 2009), but also requires concentration on other areas.

Whilst previous studies of how to become a *Halal* hub addressed the *Halal* standard guidelines on supply chain and assurance systems (Shaari & Arifin, 2010; Talib et al., 2008) and marketing and business strategies (Othman et al., 2009; Nawai et al., 2007; Muhammad et al., 2009), the clearly special needs required to establish a hub remains somewhat vague and indistinguishable from various other angles. Thus, this paper will attempt to identify the vital requirements that together must be present to attain the *Halal* hub status by employing semi-structured in-depth interviews. Filling this gap in the literature is important for a few reasons: first, to seize the opportunity to enhance and upgrade the national image and enhance the country's intangible assets; second, to have an obvious strong bearing on the country's competitiveness and sustainable economy; and lastly, to create a clear, simple, and distinguishable perception among diverse audiences.

The purpose of this paper is to discover the different requirements for establishing a global *Halal* hub. In addition, the paper identifies the most vital requirements that a country should

focus on in particular. Thus, this study offers a valuable opportunity for researchers to understand different aspects of establishing a global *Halal* hub and moving towards the development of a strong nation brand. The rest of paper is organized as follows: the research method that describes the interview procedure. Data analysis of the study follows in the next section. The discussion section interprets the results and outlines implications of the findings from the in-depth interviews. The paper ends with a conclusion, indications of the limitations of the research and makes recommendations for future research.

2. Methodology

In this study, a qualitative research method was taken. Qualitative research method helps the researcher to understand a process from the points of view of participants and discover their in-depth insights (Vinten, 1994). The researchers selected three experts in *Halal* via purposive sampling, which is helpful in obtaining information from a specific target group (Sekaran, 2006), and limited to those people who can provide the required information to the researchers. In the present study, a semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted because it is a preferred method and the most widely-used interviewing format for qualitative research capable of providing rich and in-depth information about the experiences of individuals (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The persons interviewed were identified as those with expertise in *Halal* and who are currently active in *Halal* research and consultancy. Moreover, these experts were chosen from different disciplines within the *Halal* field including *Halal* standards, *Halal* certification processes and procedures. In addition, they were directors in their field and willing to share, based on their reputation in the *Halal* industry and *Halal* research. Before the interviews were conducted, a background search was conducted of the existing publications of the selected experts. These were gathered and studied to confirm the credibility and trustworthiness of selection. These experts were chosen from the following positions and organizations: Director General of the *Halal* World program of the Islamic Chamber Research and Information Center of the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Iran), Head of the School of Industrial Technology and Center of Excellence for *Halal* and Food Research, and a member of the *Halal* committee of Selangor in *Halal* technique committee at national level (Malaysia), and consultant of the Center of Islamic Thought and Understanding (Malaysia).

2.1 Procedure of Interview

In this research, prior to conducting the interviews, the researchers developed an interview guideline (Table 1). Also, the questions for the interview were relevant to the phenomenon being studied. The self-developed interview questions were in two parts: the first part covered the experts' perceptions about vital requirements for a country wishing to become a *Halal* hub while the second part asked experts to specify the most important requirements. All of the interviewees were interviewed face-to-face and the language used was English. Before interviewing the respondents, the researchers gave some background information of themselves and also the purpose of the study. All interviews were recorded on a digital recorder - to allow the researchers to transcribe, better analyze for accurate interpretation - since all the respondents has given their consent. A semi-structured interview format with either an individual or group can take between 30 minutes and several hours to complete (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In this study, interviews ranged from 40 to 60 minutes in

length, averaging about 45 minutes each. Following the completion of each interview, contents from the transcripts were grouped by similarities as patterns emerged. In the interview, "the number of required subjects usually becomes obvious as the study progresses, as new categories, or explanations stop emerging from the data" (data saturation) (Marshall, 1996). In this research, interviews were done with three respondents as they had reached data saturation. This was discovered when all the findings from respondent No.1 to respondent No. 3 seemed to be similar. In this study, experts were chosen from different areas including Islamic philosophy and theology, food engineering and science, and *Shariah* & Law. The interviewees were knowledgeable in their field and supported by their academic or job position. Accordingly, using different sources of data/information (Thurmond, 2001) can enhance the validity of the study (Sekaran, 2006). In qualitative research, several ethical and legal issues should be taken into account. For this study, before proceeding with data collection, all selected experts were informed through an email about the purpose of the study. Also, respondents were informed that an interview might take between 30 and 60 minutes. A copy of the interview questions was sent before the actual interview date to the interviewees who had requested for it. All interviews were conducted only when potential subjects volunteered to participate in this study.

2.2 Data Analysis

The process of data analysis involved identifying categories and sub-categories in the semi-structured in-depth interview transcripts with the *Halal* experts. The constant comparative method developed by Suter (2012) was used for data analysis as it allowed the researchers to identify core categories by focusing on three different types of coding: open, axial, and selective. The open-coding process assists the researcher to make a meticulous line by line analysis to identify and name the concepts expressed by the interviewee in each transcript as well as compare and cross-check data of transcripts with each other (Suter, 2012). The analysis of data in this stage depends on the researchers' creative abilities as much as upon their technical expertise. Moreover, in this research, the data analysis process and data gathering were done simultaneously. The process of data analysis for interviews began after the first interview. During the axial coding process, a set of procedures whereby data are related together in new ways after open coding enabled the researchers to capture relationships between categories and sub-categories (Suter, 2012). Finally, the process of selective coding also reflects the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories to form a storyline that describes what happens in the phenomenon that is being studied. In this study, the researchers could identify the core categories of data that emerged from the coding process, including the emergence of sub-categories and then proceeded to arrange them into a hierarchical form independently. Hierarchical coding process allows researchers to break the main categories into sub-categories (Saunders et al., 2009) in order to create a greater differentiation.

3. **Results**

3.1 What are the country's requirements for establishing a Halal hub from the experts' perception?

In this study, the experts shared their experiences and knowledge about important requirements to establish a *Halal* hub. After several repeated coding sessions eight main categories were formulated based on the dialectics of the data. The categories were human capital, media, research and development, events, country's capability, marketing strategy, infrastructure, and public and governmental support.

3.1.1 Human capital

Human capital development is vitally important for a country's success in establishing a *Halal* hub. The linkage between development of human capital and success in establishing a *Halal* hub implies a need to provide training courses, which should include a particular set of knowledge, skills and values, which different groups of people should acquire pertaining to *Halal*. Thus, the following four sub-categories of target groups for training emerged from the experts' views that include: expert level, industrial level, academic level, and general level. The expert level of training extends to the knowledge and experience obtained at the advanced level for those who wish to be a *Halal* auditors and consultants. These experts should be qualified and skilled in *Halal* principles. In this context, the first expert emphasized the auditing system and training of personnel for this purpose to audit the *Halal* process according to *Shariah*-compliance and standards as well as protecting it from non-*Halal* ingredients. The expert believed that for each stage of the *Halal* process, from supplier to retailer, there should be a different auditor with specific skills because every part needs particular expertise. For instance, in the *Halal* food process, both interviewees Numbers 1 and 3 differed in their opinions on the auditing process regarding acceptable procedures in the preparation of food based on *Shariah*-law, raw materials and additives analysis, manufacturing practices, laboratory requirements, and conforming to *Halal* certification documents with defined standards. The idea of having skillful people to audit various approaches and realms of *Halal* (food, non-food and services) will assist countries and institutions to set appropriate targets. The expert related the case of one ship that imported edible vegetable oil for one Iranian *Halal* producer. This company bought clean and *Halal* oil, but it was contaminated in the ship's warehouse due to a lack of an auditing system or the absence of a knowledgeable person to implement the defined standards of *Halal* logistics in the country of origin.

   Moreover, at the industrial level, for entrepreneurs who intend to set up a *Halal* company, it is necessary to develop various modules to train personnel in the area of *Halal*. Furthermore, making a module of required skills and knowledge is necessary for some companies that tend to change their processes in the production of their *Halal* products. For instance, it is crucial to know about the principals of *Halal* which have established certification requirements, *Halal* food regulations, *Halal* process inspection, level of standard additives, and equipment requirements. A case in point is the condition of the equipment used. The third interviewee explained that companies must be aware of the need for cleanliness of the machinery because it is an important part of *Halal* food production. Similarly, he related the case related to *Halal* food regulations in a company in Malaysia which used additives above and beyond the standard level in the food preparation process. Although the additives were *Halal* and permitted, using

more than the standard amount of additives was not only harmful - when the food is consumed and interacts with the body to cause health problems - but would create problems for the *Halal* products and negatively affect their purity. Food that is harmful to human health is not considered *Halal* (Khattak et al., 2011).

The third perspective on human capital focuses on the academic level. This view emphasizes the need to design different courses on *Halal* at the university to achieve scientific expertise since *Halal* has created a new realm of non-food products and services such as cosmetics, personal care products, pharmaceuticals, banking, tourism, and logistics. Therefore, academic study will enhance in-depth understanding of *Halal* and acquiring sufficient knowledge related to *Halal* will help ensure these sectors remain in the *Halal* enclave. To illustrate this, the first interviewee mentioned that some managers of *Halal* companies had no basic knowledge about *Halal*. He related the case of a manager who did not know exactly which types of meat were considered as *Halal* according to *Shariah*-compliance in his inspection of one company. Finally, the last sub-category pertains to the general level, which mirrors a number of different training modules for various people in the country like family members, social groups, children and the less-educated. For example, the third expert believed that: "it is necessary to have one educated person in each family to train other family members (Muslim and non-Muslim families) and increase their knowledge about different approaches and advantages of *Halal*." Enhancing awareness among family members increases the demand for *Halal* products, so the manufacturers will be motivated to produce these types of product. The first respondent also mentioned the need to have a systematic education policy for children to enhance their awareness about *Halal,* which it is not confined only to the slaughtering process based on *Shariah*-law or alcohol and pork free products. The implication is that lessons on *Halal* should be introduced in primary school.

3.1.2 Media

Media are an extensive source of information for a range of people. Data from experts' insights suggest two main groups of media, namely, electronic media and print media. Electronic media consist of TV, radio, Internet and satellite. Print media include newspapers, magazines, posters, pamphlets and brochures. These media can transfer useful information by focusing on a wide range of topics which broaden the horizon of knowledge about *Halal*, training and advertisement. In addition, media can play an important role in creating public awareness about different aspects of *Halal* as well as altering the public perspective (different target groups such as Muslims and non-Muslims).

As an illustration, the first interviewee explained the role of media as an effective mediator in changing the attitude of people in the desired direction and establishing a *Halal* culture in society that will help put the country firmly on the road to becoming a *Halal* hub. He mentioned Iranian government's decision to set up a *Halal* TV channel in the near future, that will be designed to show different programs such as training related to *Halal* as well as present various programs that conform with the *Shariah*-law auditing system to satisfy the spiritual needs of Muslim audiences. He also suggested that the TV channel could provide opportunities for local businesses to penetrate the Middle East markets through advertising. As a final point, Expert Number 3 recommended billboards as an effective visual and text advertising medium to increase public knowledge about *Halal* benefits and *Halal* organizations. Likewise, the second

interviewee highlighted the role that different organizations involved in *Halal* could play by publishing *Halal* newspapers or magazines to inform people about the latest *Halal* news.

3.1.3 Research and development

Today, *Halal* is required for and covers a wide range of products in the marketplace (Wilson & Liu, 2010), so research and development (R&D) is one of the important factors in *Halal* that could impact significantly on the future of the *Halal* market trend. In accordance with the views of the experts, *Halal* needs in-depth research and development in different areas such as logistics, regulation of *Halal* processes, high quality standards, technology, laboratory analyses, and close scrutiny of raw materials.

Enhancing product and process research and development will help to expand the number of *Halal* products as well as eliminate doubt about some products. According to Mahathir (2012), *Halal* R&D will assist Malaysia to achieve its vision to be a global *Halal* hub because it identifies new potential for *Halal* in both products and processes. He also pointed out that the aim of the Malaysian government is to establish Malaysia as a leading *Halal* R&D center. Regarding the effect of R&D, Expert Number 1 mentioned that the main ingredient of one type of antibiotic (*Erythromycin*) is lard (pig fat), which is an ingredient not approved from the Islamic perspective. One Iranian company, after 11 years of research was successful in replacing lard with Colza oil. This breakthrough research has helped the Muslim pharmaceutical market immensely and this company's products are now in high demand by Muslim countries. Moreover, enhancing collaboration in R&D between research institutes and universities in every country that wishes to become a *Halal* hub is extremely important to overcome the challenges faced by *Halal* industries. In elaborating on this, Mahathir (2012) referred to the collaborations between HDC in Malaysia and its strategic partners like universities and some other research institutes. Lastly, the second interviewee also explained the role of HDC in Malaysia regarding the design of many useful *Halal* programs. She also indicated that the *Halal* R&D should focus on needs beyond just *Halal* products and cover different approaches of *Halal* in order to achieve global success.

3.1.4 Events

Events are characterized based on the experts' perceptions as follows: seminars, conferences, exhibitions, or product launches. These *Halal* events produce a range of benefits for the host country. During an event, a variety of activities like face-to-face contact with *Halal* experts, and industry representatives, developing marketing communications programs, showcasing the latest R&D outcomes, introducing the country's potential resources, growing trade, capacity building through access to other international industries, and strengthening the position of the country or industries, which can occur while training can be conducted. Besides, these events create numerous opportunities for the country as well as help to enhance local businesses and industries' awareness about various *Halal* perspectives and its advantages. For example, events provide a positive impact on producers and inspire them (Muslim and non-Muslim) to participate in this lucrative world market with the *Halal* certification.

3.1.5 Country's capability

Location of the country in a specific region and natural resources are strengths to support a country's desire to become a *Halal* hub. Natural resources include favorable weather

conditions, adequate and convenient supplies of water, wood, oil, and fertile soil, all of which facilitate farming activities and different kinds of energy. For instance, the first interviewee emphasized that a temperate country with its four seasons is able to produce different products in each season compared with a tropical country like Malaysia that has constant weather. Having different resources also helps a country to obtain supplies of raw materials easily and available energy allows makes it possible to produce different products. Furthermore, these resources affect the business environment within the country and also the quality of life of the people. Moreover, location of country in a region impacts positively on the accessibility to suppliers, consumers and other markets. In this way, Expert Number 1 indicated the advantage of Iran's strategic geographic location in the Middle East as a major advantage for Iran due to accessibility to two seas and different neighboring markets such as Turkey, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

3.1.6 Marketing strategy

Successful marketing strategies create market opportunities. All three experts emphasized that marketers should consider this a significant factor. The second interviewee indicated that *Halal* should not be confined to the *Shariah*-regulation only, but needs to go beyond the religious context. Furthermore, she highlighted the importance of key aspects of marketing such as packaging, pricing formulation and branding strategy for *Halal* products. Expert Number 1 mentioned that *Halal* branding is in its infancy and marketers and scholars should discover various make the effort to discover various other dimensions of *Halal* branding. He also explained that establishing a *Halal* hub needs *Halal* brand awareness. This strategy enhances the consumers' awareness and motivates industries to place greater emphasis on *Halal* co-branding. Currently, for example, McDonald's in Singapore, after obtaining the *Halal* certification, it saw an increase of eight million customers in a year (Lada et al., 2009). Additionally, as a co-brand in the future, Wilson and Liu (2010) suggested that a global organization could create a corporate division by utilizing the term *Halal.* For instance, they indicated that "emerging future practices may yield names such as: *Nestle´ Halal, Innocent Halal, British Airways Halal, or Cobra Zero Halal beer*." Finally, reasonable prices, attractive packaging and branding strategy are significant factors for successfully establishing a *Halal* hub because these factors can enhance marketability of products in diverse markets, boost image in meeting consumers' needs, and increase market share.

3.1.7 Infrastructure

According to the experts, proper infrastructure is functionally important because it facilitates the production and distribution of *Halal* products to various markets. Transport infrastructure like roads and bridges is also essential to develop *Halal* logistics service. In fact, a well-developed infrastructure influences the *Halal* products' capacity and availability to the local, regional and global market effectively. Yet another key component of infrastructure is schools and universities. The second and third interviewees emphasized that social infrastructure like religious schools and universities are important structural elements in order to implement *Halal* modules and increase knowledge and awareness of *Halal* requirements among different segments of the target population. Lastly, Expert Number 1 highlighted the role of religious

schools in promoting *Halal* awareness in Iran that train not only the local students but also more than 10000 students from other Muslim and non-Muslim countries.

3.1.8 Public and governmental support

All experts were serious about: the need for governmental support and hardworking people inside the country, which is one essential prerequisite to integrate and implement other requirements. Additionally, Expert Number 1 mentioned that the attitude of people is very important to establish the *Halal* hub because people negligence could create opportunities for competitors. Figure 1 shows the details of all findings.
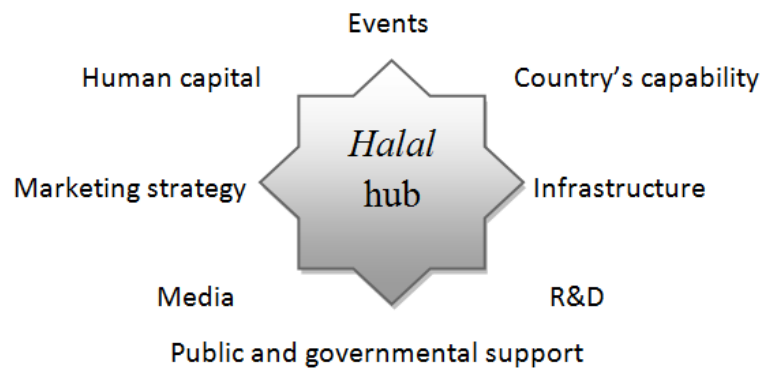

Figure 1. Vital requirements to establish a *Halal* hub
Source: Original

3.2 What is the most vital requirement from the perception of the experts?

Each of the points of the octagon (Figure 1) indicates a different vital requirement which together with other requirements adds up to what is required to establish a global *Halal* hub. The most important requirements based on the experts' perceptions are as follows: the first expert believed that a country should not only consider the vital requirements such as human capital and infrastructure but also should establish relationships with different countries worldwide. The mutual benefit of relationship enables a country to overcome different challenges such as economic issues to promote local industries and attract more businesses from other countries as well as strengthen the country's identity. Then, the second expert emphasized that without a powerful and positive reputation, a country cannot compete on a regional basis. Branding strategy for *Halal* products is a critical factor because it can prove to be an asset for a country and help enhance its good image and provide a sustainable competitive advantage in the marketplace. Finally, Expert Number 3 mentioned human capital as the most important resource which mirrors intangible but essential values such as skill, ability, knowledge and behavior of the people. In this context, he stressed that government and private organizations must provide an opportunity to unearth human talent and support fresh graduates by creating jobs in the area of *Halal*.

4. Discussion

Developing a *Halal* hub should be based on the potential resources, values, and attitudes of people and the governmental units that exist in any country. The results of this study have led to the construction of an octagon of vital requirements to establish a global *Halal* hub. The results show that human capital development, events, marketing strategy, infrastructure, media, public and governmental support, country's capability, and R&D are all significant requirements. Human capital development is one of the important requirements of the global *Halal* market competition through the development of appropriate training for different target groups. For instance, from an academic perspective, qualified people are necessary starts for sustainable human capital development at all levels of the organization and society. Indeed, human capital development will help drive nation trading and be an engine of economic growth. Furthermore, events regionally or internationally are important because they can make a favorable impression and project a positive image for a country. Events allow countries to present themselves in several ways. Marketing strategy creates great opportunities to increase the benefits, gain competitive advantage, and penetrate new and different markets. Berry (2011) indicates that there is competition among countries in Asia, such as Indonesia, China, India, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Malaysia and Arab Emirates in the area of *Halal*. In this context, for example, Othman et al. (2009) specified that success in this competitive market could be achieved when corporations discover the needs of consumers.

Furthermore, product and market development should be considered by *Halal* producers to reach out to the global *Halal* market. Products and market development assist *Halal* industries to present new *Halal* options (food or non-food categories) and secure new markets. Regarding market development, Temporal (2011) points to five SMEs in Malaysia which are preparing to ship their *Halal* food products worth some RM 600,000 (USD190, 000) to the UK to be sold at 180 Tesco stores. In addition, without extensive and efficient infrastructure, it will be impossible for many countries to significantly achieve their goals. Alserhan (2010) mentioned that many countries in the world, both Muslim and non-Muslim, are making considerable investments to become regional *Halal* hubs by providing manufacturing centers. For example, Brazil and New Zealand, by building elaborate chicken and lamb slaughtering facilities, try to access the largest *Halal* lamb and *Halal* chicken markets.

Additionally, media affect individuals and society in many ways: the Internet, television, radio, newspapers, books, and magazines. A country can use these media to influence a people's thinking, emotions, or behaviors directly and indirectly. Establishing a successful *Halal* hub needs immense efforts by a society because the authors believe that identifying a country as a *Halal* center must involve a national level effort that considers the emotion of the people. In this respect, media have an important role to play in transforming this belief into reality. In addition, R&D is important because it is like an umbrella which covers the use of new technology, producing new products, identifying appropriate ingredients and providing a deeper understanding of *Halal* from a religious perspective. Moreover, a *Halal* hub is not simply coming up with a nice logo or increasing the number of certifications, but it needs much deeper basic and applied research. The notion of a country's capability is premised on the understanding that a country uses different resources and transforms them into specific abilities. These generated abilities will help enhance the degree to which the country will be able to exploit the existing and potential opportunities in the global market. Furthermore, with

public and governmental support, a country can attain the status of a *Halal* hub and send a positive message about the country to consumers around the world. Finally, a *Halal* hub brings the highest benefits to people by giving them dignity, robust business relations with the world, indisputable international recognition and wealth creation.

5. Conclusion

In this research, an attempt was made to identify the main requirements from the perceptions of experts to establish a global *Halal* hub. Furthermore, the study tried to highlight the most important requirements that countries should consider to be a *Halal* center. In answering the two research questions, this research conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with three *Halal* experts. The key findings of the first research question led to the development of the octagon of requirements. Human capital with four layers, including expert level, academic level, industrial level, and general level; media with two sub-categories namely, electronic and print media, R&D, events, country's capability, marketing strategy and infrastructure comprise the important requirements. Besides, public and governmental support is necessary to integrate these requirements and put them into practice. Finally, from the experts' perceptions regarding the answer to the second research question, the policy of the governmental units to maintain and strengthen good neighborly relationships and promote mutual understanding with these countries as well as with other countries by extending cooperation, is essential. Moreover, marketing strategy and human capital development are considered as the most critical requirements for countries that wish to establish a global *Halal* hub.

5.1 Limitations and future research

This research faced limitations that contributed to a lengthy duration for the data collection. The researchers had to wait for four months to identify, locate and arrange suitable times to meet with the experts. Although the sample size was deemed acceptable, increasing the number of experts would have allowed the researchers to conduct a more accurate analysis. A non-probability sampling method was used in this study. Future studies could identify other important components in establishing a *Halal* hub and explore details of every aspect of the requirements in this research. Moreover, evaluating the effects of these requirements on the country's image and global recognition can be investigated. In conclusion, the lack of success in attaining the *Halal* hub position, particularly in Muslim countries, could also be identified by focusing on these requirements. It is crucial to have an in-depth understanding of and to identify the *Halal* industrial managerial viewpoints about these requirements to attain *Halal* hub status.

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