Abstract

Purpose – The paper aims to explore the development of the halal industry in Thailand. It endeavours to investigate the main factors behind the country’s success as one of the largest exporters of halal-certified foods and products in the Southeast Asian region, in spite of the fact that Thailand is a non-Muslim-majority country. Only 4.3 per cent of the 69-million population of Thailand is Muslims.

Design/methodology/approach – In articulating the issue objectively, qualitative research method was adopted. This paper used structured literature study by analysing various subjects of halal pertaining to Thailand’s halal sector. At the same time, several in-depth interviews with the corresponding halal authorities in Thailand, as well as site visits, were also conducted. We also undertook observations in several sites in Thailand to analyse the issue further.

Findings – Findings from the research show that the strong presence of Thailand in the global halal industry is because of its bustling tourism industry that helps to bolster the country’s halal branding, its uniformity of halal definition and standards and effective support to the local SMEs.

Practical implications – This research implies that the standardisation of halal in a country is imperative in the Muslim-majority or Muslim-minority countries. This study gives a benchmark for the non-Muslim-majority countries which endeavour to embark on the halal industry. Muslim-minority counties that envision to succeed in the global halal market could emulate Thailand’s approach in branding itself as a recognised non-Muslim-majority country in producing certified halal foods and products.
Introduction

Halal, an Arabic term which means permissible, is mostly associated with Muslim communities. It refers to foods and products that are produced according to the Islamic Law and contains no unlawful ingredients. The halal products also include cosmetics, medicine, pharmaceutical etc. Halal consumption has been a major concern for the Muslim community, especially in multi-religious and multi-cultural countries such as Malaysia and UK and European countries.

Halal, an exclusive term within the Muslim society, is a global phenomenon and is widely known in Muslim-majority and non-Muslim countries alike. In the Southeast Asian region, for example, a country such as Malaysia where Muslims constitute approximately 65 per cent of the total population, there has been increasing awareness from the producers to produce halal foods and products. Compared to the other countries in the region, such as Singapore and Thailand, where Muslims constitute less than 20 and 5 per cent, respectively, the trend of halal food production is more likely similar to that in Malaysia. This trend has been because of, among others, increasing demands from highly concerned Muslim consumers and increasing demands of halal-certified products from importers (Abu-Hussin et al., 2016). Looking into a broader horizon, in countries where Muslims are a minority, such as Thailand, Korea and Japan, halal consumption has also become a new trend. The trend could be argued as a reaction by the Muslim community to provide assurance that foods and products were fit for Muslim consumption and at the same time open up an economic opportunity to the community (Wilson, 2014).

Halal becomes a norm in a Muslim-majority country. This increasing trend of halal consumption and attention towards halal-certified foods and products:

Can be explained by the increasing economic, political, and cultural power of Muslims in Muslim-majority and minority countries as well as the emergence of a new middle class of Muslim consumers (Wilson et al., 2013).

In Malaysia for example, halal food consumption is widely accepted throughout the country regardless of religious background. Non-Muslims, although not obliged to consume halal, are well aware of and understand halal matters. This can be seen through the interest of non-Muslim producers to pursue halal certification for their products (Astro AWANI, 2019).

In the case of non-Muslim-majority countries such as Thailand, interest in halal foods and products has also been increasing. Although the Muslim population composes approximately 4.3 per cent (or equal to 2.94 million) of Thailand’s total population (CIA, 2018), Thailand has established itself as one of the major halal food producers in Southeast Asian countries. The country is among the top five of halal food producers in the region (Abdul, 2014; Ager et al., 2015) and has rapidly grown to become a globally recognised halal hub (Hamid, 2009). Thailand’s expertise in halal matters, including halal certification, halal assurance system and halal accreditation, have been recognised by Malaysia (Salama, 2011c), Pakistan (Salama, 2011a, 2011b), Brunei (Thailand eye joint projects to produce halal food, 2015), Japan (Marimi, 2017), Kuwait (Hamid, 2008; Salama, 2012) and Cambodia (Chea, 2017). This recognition is important, as it has significantly increased the halal trade between Thailand and these countries.
It is therefore interesting to explore the development of the halal industry in Thailand and to answer the following questions: How can the non-Muslim-majority country become the largest exporter of halal-certified foods and products in the region? And are they comparatively advantageous to produce halal products? The paper also seeks to explore the competitiveness and effectiveness of halal certification and governance in the country. This paper suggests that the excellent performance of the halal industry in Thailand is strongly because of two main factors: a centralised support by the government itself and unification of halal interpretation in foods and products. In answering all the questions and objectives, this paper begins with a discussion on the factors behind the emergence of the halal industry in Thailand, followed by the halal governance in Thailand. It then continues with a discourse on the challenges and prospects of the halal industry in Thailand to provide future direction for Thailand and other Muslim-minority countries to improve and strengthen the halal industry at local and global levels.

The emergence of halal industry: background and underlying factors

Interest in the halal industry in Thailand emerged as early as 1949 when there was a major concern about halal verification and authenticity of halal poultry products. Poultry products exported to the Middle East were rejected by some of the Middle Eastern countries because of non-compliance of animal slaughtering, as required in Islam. During this time, the status of halal for foods and products was solely judged by Muslim scholars' opinion without any authentication and verification processes. In fact, there is no certification or formal accreditation provided for the halal foods and products. If the products are verified as halal, they are mostly verified by local religious people. The verification was actually aimed to meet the needs of Thai’s Muslims in consuming halal products in a country where the majority of the population is Buddhist (Seubsantikul, 2017). It is also to foster confidence among Muslim consumers when buying Thai’s products. Since then, there has been serious effort to formalise halal verification and certification process. In 1999, the authority to issue halal certification was then given to Thailand’s Central for Islamic Council and the Provincial Islamic Council. This is to ensure the operation of halal affairs is fully administered by Islamic organisations (The Royal Act Concerning the Administration of Islamic Organizations B.E.2540, 1997).

Between 1997 and 2016, there had been serious efforts made by the Thai Government, as well as Muslim NGOs in Thailand, to establish halal certification and standards. They have succeeded in establishing halal certification body and had its own standard for halal industry. In 2002, Thailand Islamic Centre Committee succeeded in gaining the Government’s confidence and gained approval for the establishment of halal food hub in southern Thailand. This support was followed by financial allocation from the Government for the development of Halal-HACCP system in 2003.

At the same time, in 2003, the Halal Science Centre in Chulalongkorn University was founded. The Halal Science Centre (HSC), the first of its kind in the country, has served as a backbone for the halal industry in Thailand. With its unique facility and standard, halal status for food and products is set to be verified by halal inspectors supported by a scientific laboratory with a standard procedure before being judged by Islamic scholars.

Meanwhile, in 2009, the Islamic Centre Committee managed to issue the first Halal Management Rules that set the level and standards of quality assurance for halal products and the use of halal logo. The effort to establish halal certification and standard continues, in 2017 the country began to invest more in the halal industry by venturing information technology with halal industry. The digital technology, internet of things, cloud technology, e-commerce and many more will be linked with halal products, services and certification.
Halal governance in Thailand

The Central Islamic Committee of Thailand (CICOT)

The Central Islamic Committee of Thailand (CICOT) is a non-profit organisation that was established under the Administration of Islamic Organization Act B.E. 2540, A.D. 1997. The primary purpose of CICOT is to legislate and administrate Islamic religious affairs in the Kingdom of Thailand. In 2013, CICOT established The Halal Standard Institute of Thailand with the aim of developing the standards of accreditation for halal products.

At the national level, the responsibilities of the institute include: determining the application of Thai’s Halal Product Standards, assuring the standard is in accordance to Islamic principles and international standards, approving the use of standard halal logo on halal products, acting as Halal Accreditation Body (HAB) to accredit the Halal Certification Body (HCB) and coordinating and supervising units related to Halal Affair Operations for the effective operation of Halal Product Standards (Regulation of the Central Islamic Committee of Thailand Regarding Halal Affair Operation of B.E. 2552, Dahlan et al., 2013; 2009c). Meanwhile, at the provincial level, the process of halal certification and accreditation is assigned to the Provincial Islamic Committee, whereas any province that has no representative for halal certification is represented by officer from CICOT.

A Halal Executive Committee is appointed by CICOT, for which experts from various relevant fields in the halal industry are selected as members (Regulation of the Central Islamic Committee of Thailand Regarding Halal Affair Operation of B.E. 2552, 2009a). The role of the Halal Executive Committee, among others, is to improve the halal standards in Thailand. The committee also monitors the Halal Affairs Department and Halal Standard Institute of Thailand and assures they operate in accordance to Islamic principles and the committee’s regulations (Regulation of the Central Islamic Committee of Thailand Regarding Halal Affair Operation of B.E. 2552, 2009b).

Furthermore, it also plays an important role in promoting both the government sector and private sector to develop Thailand’s Halal Affairs Department to achieve international standards and cooperation with local and international halal organisations, and the International Halal Certification Body, to build credit and acceptance of Thailand Halal Standards (Rules The Central Islamic Council of Thailand On the implementation of entrepreneur certification and product certification and Fees B.E. 2559, 2009c).

Halal science Centre

To further strengthen and assist the administration of halal certification in Thailand, a separate research centre known as Halal Science Centre (HSC) was established in Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. The research centre is an independent academic institution that is attached to the Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, Chulalongkorn University. The main aim of the Centre is to lead the research, development and innovation of the halal science industry in the country. Being a science centre for halal matters, one of the roles played by the Centre is to conduct chemical analysis of the possibility of non-halal substances in halal products. In spite of its capability to determine the “halalness” of tested products, the Centre does not have authority to issue halal certification. Instead, it is CICOT’s role to accredit and certify the halal products.

At the same time, the HSC also provides training and consultancy in the halal industry to the local and international companies that are involved in halal science projects and research studies. To fulfil its role, the HSC has established a system known as the Halal Assurance and Liability Quality System (HAL-Q) (Dahlan et al., 2013). The HAL-Q is a quality-control management system for halal products. It was developed to ensure the production of halal-certified products comply with Islamic law and halal standards. The HAL-Q consists of two
major parts: first, Halal-GMP (Halal-Good Manufacturing Practice) and second, Halal-HACCP (Halal-Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point). The former provides guidelines for halal food manufacturing, while the latter is meant at identifying and analysing potential presence of prohibited items in halal products and carefully monitoring for any physical, biological and chemical contamination that possibly occurred along the supply and logistical chain which possibly damaging the integrity of halal products (The Halal Science Centre, 2015). This is the biggest challenge that needs to be addressed and executed in line with the HAL-Q system (Abdul, 2014). Through the HAL-Q system, the affected parties and the HSC will do auditing on relevant documents, as well as conduct interviews (over the phone) to ensure the validity of halal logo (Abdul, 2014).

Halal Standard Institute of Thailand

The Halal Standard Institute of Thailand (HSIT) is an official agency that is responsible for managing halal certificate issuance and its accreditation. The agency was established under the resolution of the Cabinet on 11 August 2003 (Aree, 2012; Priyakornkam, 2017). It is aimed primarily at establishing the halal standards, conducting research and providing training and courses related to halal matters in Thailand. The agency works with Thailand’s Islamic Centre Committee and the Government to establish halal food standards that meet Islamic law requirements, international standards and halal certification regulations in Thailand (Ahadi et al., 2015).

With this arrangement, the HIS is given the task of training individual and personnel with knowledge, capabilities and skills to support the manufacturing, marketing and exporting of halal products and services in accordance with international standards. The institute’s main objective is to build credibility and develop the trust of halal products and at the same time coordinate Thai’s halal standard with the global standards and organisations (Zain et al., 2017). Overall, the HSIT is responsible for the matters related to education, research and the development of halal standards in line with Islamic principles.

A way forward for halal industry in Thailand

Halal tourism industry in Thailand

Thailand has a strong tourism industry. In 2015, it was estimated that Thailand received 28 million visitors from all over the world who spent approximately US$42m in the country (Wanwisa, 2015). It is also reported that the travel and tourism sector in Thailand contributes approximately 31.7 per cent of Thailand’s GDP and provides 24.9 per cent of Thailand’s total employment. This lucrative sector contributes significantly to Thai’s economy and affects the Baht currency positively. One of the major strengths of Thailand’s tourism industry is the country’s natural assets which provide great opportunities for eco-tourism. Enriched with beautiful beaches, breathtaking sceneries, great topography and moderate climates, and surrounded by biodiversity and flora and fauna, Thailand attracts huge numbers of local and international tourists to experience and explore its very unique culture and nature (Saraithong and Chancharoenchai, 2011).

To further attract and accommodate Muslim tourists, the Thailand tourism agency has taken a step forward by providing Muslim-friendly facilities, including halal food and products. This helps Thai’s halal branding in the global market. It is reported that Muslim tourists from countries such as Malaysia and the Middle East are more comfortable while visiting Thailand because of the Muslim-friendly facilities provided by the Thai Government (Chanh et al., 2015; Mansouri, 2014; Sriprasert et al., 2014). These include Muslim-friendly hotels (Reuters, 2016), ICT facilities (Lefevre, 2015) and a wide range of prayer facilities and halal restaurants.
Thailand’s trade partnerships with its neighbours, which are Muslim countries, known as the Indonesia–Malaysia–Thailand Growth Triangle (Luxchaigul et al., 2016), have also led to a vast increase in Muslim visitors to Thailand. The record shows that in 2006, there were only 2.63 million Muslim visitors to Thailand, and amazingly in 2016, the number of Muslim visitors tripled to 6.03 million, which is 300 per cent increase in just 10 years, making Thailand the second most visited country by Muslims in non-member of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation nations (TTG Asia, 2017).

Branded as a halal and Muslim-friendly destination, Thailand is expected to earn trust of Muslim tourists, and the country is on the right track to be more visible in the global halal industry. As argued by Wilson and Liu (2010), halal could be a tool in promoting Islam to the global world. Portraying the country as a halal tourist destination is a vital strategy in strengthening Thailand’s presence in the global halal market.

Centralised support and standards for halal industry in Thailand

Thailand has a strong presence in the global halal market; it is the fifth largest producer of halal dietary products in the world and the largest in Southeast Asia, valued at US$6bn in 2014 (Paul, 2016). Halal food exports accounted for 20 per cent of Thailand’s total exports (Global Islamic Finance Report, 2014), with a 19 per cent average growth rate over five years. The ability of the CICOT, HSC and the HSIT to capitalise on the interpretation of halal in Islam and standardise the requirement for halal products within the nation explains Thailand’s strong presence in the global halal market. This is imperative to ensure the growth of the halal market, as without a uniform definition of halal at the country level, the market for halal products would be divided both internally and globally (Dubé et al., 2016a; Dubé et al., 2016b).

In the case of UK, for example, the halal-certifying bodies are divided into two different organisations: the Halal Meeting Committee and the Halal Food Authority (Fischer, 2005, 2016). These two NGOs have their own definitions and standards of halal, particularly in regard to the animal-slaughtering procedure. They have been in a conflict regarding the acceptance of pre-slaughter stunning process; both parties are arguing whether stunning is allowed. These different standards and interpretations consequently complicate the halal food producers and consumers. Other countries such as Malaysia (Ghazali and Sawari, 2014) and Singapore (Wahab et al., 2016), which are recognised as a leading countries in meeting global halal standards, carefully resolve any conflicting issue pertaining to halal matters. As a result, the countries provide a standard and unified definition of halal foods and products.

It is argued that divided interpretations and understandings of halal in a country would lead to the country’s poor performance and acceptance in the global halal market. Countries such as Turkey (Lever and Anil, 2016) and the UK are examples, in spite of the fact that these countries have quite significant numbers of Muslims and established halal-certification bodies. This demonstrates how essential it is to have consistent definitions and standards for halal in a country. Uniquely, Thailand, although having a minor population of Muslims, manages to have a unified definition of standard and practice of halal, and the unified definition is accepted by government agencies, as well as the community.

Strong financial and consultative support for small and medium-sized enterprises

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of the Thailand economy and contribute significantly to the country’s social and economic development (Charoenrat and Harvie, 2014). The SMEs sector is important for Thai’s economic development to accelerate its country wealth further. In 2012, there were 2.7 million SMEs in Thailand, which comprised 98.5 per cent of total enterprises in the country (Naoyuki et al., 2015). Given the
imperative role of SMEs in Thailand’s economy, efforts have been taken by the Government to converge between SMEs sector and the halal industry to unleash the full potential of the latter in the country. Among the government efforts to the SMEs that involve in halal business are financial support from the government as well as halal business consultation. This support is monitored by the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion, which is responsible for developing both the SMEs promotion master plan and promotion action plan (Turner et al., 2016).

The growth of SMEs in the halal industry in Thailand was further enhanced when the Government of Thailand pledged to allocate financial resources for various state agencies, totalling US$9.53bn. Out of the total allocation, US$3.78bn was distributed to the National Food Industry, which is responsible for enhancing the halal food technology, and THB 60bn was given to the Department of Industrial Promotion, some of which was then allocated to the Central Islamic Council of Thailand, HSC and HSIT to fund operations for halal food products (The Nation, 2015b). This would be advancing the so-called Triple Helix Network (Ueasangkomsate and Jangkot, 2017), a network-based approach that aims to strengthen the relationships and collaborations between universities, government agencies and industries to facilitate knowledge exchange and interactive learning.

This relationship will lead to the reinforcement of the halal industry in the local and global markets, particularly for halal SMEs. Thailand also began a few projects, such as the One Tambon, One Product program (Thailand PRD, 2015), an E-Commerce program (Ueasangkomsate, 2015) and multiple loans and financial support schemes (Ramcharran, 2017), that have had remarkable success in fostering the growth of SMEs in Thailand. These projects are anticipated to further strengthen Thailand’s presence in the global halal industry.

**Challenges and the future of the halal industry in Thailand**

*Restricted law enforcement of halal malpractice in Thailand*

Being a top producer of halal foods and products in the Southeast Asian region brings a good image for Thailand, and it now becomes a branding for the country. The recognition as one of the leading halal brand producers is believed to be because of the well-organised system established by the Thai Government. Nevertheless, it is argued that Thai’s recognition as a main halal food producer would be unsustainable with the absence of regulated law regarding the halal practice in Thailand. At the moment, there is no dedicated act for halal matters in the country. As a result, there are no serious penalties, prosecutions or even fines being imposed on those who exploit or abuse halal certification. The only possible action that can be taken for exploitation and abuse of halal certification is revocation of halal certification from CICOT, as stated in the Halal Affair Operation of B.E. 2552 (Buang and Mahmod, 2012; Rahman et al., 2011).

In 2017, it was reported that Thailand issued 16,000 halal certifications, with 6,000 certificates issued to halal food products (The Express Tribune, 2017). Considering the vast amount of halal certifications issued by the CICOT and the absence of regulated laws to prevent malpractice and misuse of halal certification, this perhaps could invite further exploitation and abuse of halal certification by irresponsible halal producers. Issues such as using fake halal logos (Dahlan, 2013), disregarding the halal standards, violating the requirement of maintaining the halal certification (Ab Talib et al., 2015) would ultimately weaken the projection of the halal brand image of Thailand.

In the case of Singapore, for example, the country manages to demonstrate the ability to regulate a strict policy and law for halal practice (Dahlan et al., 2013). Majlis Ulama Islam Singapore (MUIS), which functioned like CICOT, is granted prosecutorial power to charge
improper halal practices in the Singaporean Court. In addition, the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA) authorises MUIS to conduct investigations and unscheduled visits to halal-certified producers to ensure halal standards compliance (Wahab et al., 2016). Considering the fact that Singapore is a non-Muslim-majority country, its ability to prevent the misuse and misconduct of halal certification by prosecuting the offenders in its federal court is rather impressive. This could be considered by the Thai Government to further strengthen the halal industry in the country.

Network expansion of research and development
One way to boost Thailand’s image of halal integrity and to promote transparency is by expanding the network of R&D of the halal industry throughout universities in Thailand. Currently, the major player in halal R&D in Thailand is Chulalongkorn University, which is spearheaded by the HST and HSIT. Most of the studies conducted by local Thai universities concentrated on social experiments involving halal brand (Abadi et al., 2015; Ahmad et al., 2011; Chanin et al., 2015; Maichum et al., 2017; Sriprasert et al., 2014), signifying the difference in research levels in these universities.

In addition, the majority of articles discussing the practice of halal in Thailand are written in Thai language and only a handful of articles reviewing the halal practice in Thailand are available in English (Dahlan et al., 2013). This makes halal research in Thailand remain unexplored (Neio Demirci et al., 2016). Further expansion of funding to other local universities to do R&D in halal sector and multiplying English-written articles would produce more experts in the halal industry in various disciplines and enhance the debates on the improvements of halal industry in Thailand.

This strategy would increase the transparency and visibility of halal integrity and practice in Thailand, which in turn would improve the image of Thailand’s halal brand. In the case of Malaysia, for example, the country manages to boost the visibility of the halal brand and increase economic productivity by involving research activities in halal matters from multiple universities (Abdul Rahman et al., 2013). Higher education institutions in Malaysia share their expertise and do research in improving Malaysian halal industry from various perspectives including marketing, business, sciences, law, legal and etc (Abu-Hussin et al., 2015). The effort has been successful in the country, as Malaysia is now well recognised for the halal eco-system, as well as halal certification and accreditation (The Nation, 2015a).

Lack of involvement from Muslim producers
Although the total exports of Thai’s halal food recorded US$5.8bn in 2014, it is far behind Malaysia and Indonesia. According to Isra Santisart, Director of the Centre for Muslim World Policies, Thai’s export of halal food is shrinking, and he further argued that the main reason for the decline is the lack of confidence about the brand image of Thailand’s halal products (Ager et al., 2015). In spite of the fact that Thailand has a reputable halal quality control through its HACCP system, most of the halal producers in Thailand are non-Muslims (only 1 per cent of them are Muslims) (Paul, 2016). The lack of involvement of Muslim producers in producing halal products contributes to the diminishing level of confidence in Thai’s halal products image (Zamierah Syed Marzuki et al., 2012).

Muslims’ involvement in the halal industry, in all areas, including production, research, marketing and distribution, is argued as one of the factors to increase halal image in Thailand. Muslim producers are anticipated to ensure the integrity of the halal products, as they are expected to abide by the Islamic ethical code and their profound understanding of the halal concept aligns with the nature of halal standards and protocols (Wahab et al., 2016).
The practice of segregating halal and non-halal meat, the exclusion of alcoholic additives in foods preparation and the avoidance of doubtful ingredients (known as *syubhah*, uncertainty whether the ingredients are lawful or unlawful) are among the few examples of Muslim practices that are deeply rooted in their culture.

Because Muslim’s code of ethics is in line with the standards and practices in the halal industry, the involvement of Muslim producers in the industry will ease the implementation of halal standards in various levels of halal supply chains, including logistics, storage and distribution. This would help to maintain the integrity of halal foods and products and as a consequence would reinforce the image of Thailand’s halal brands.

**Massive burden carried out by halal-governing bodies in Thailand**

Perhaps the most effective initiative to further strengthen Thailand’s presence in the global halal market is by redefining the roles and responsibilities of halal authorities in Thailand. This action is important because the duties currently carried out by halal authorities in Thailand, particularly the HST and HSIT, seem to be overloaded, in contrast to halal authorities in other countries such as Malaysia. The CICOT itself is responsible for granting halal certifications for all applications, while the process of conducting halal laboratory tests and auditing are given to the HST and HSIT. On top of the halal laboratory testing, HST and HSIT are also responsible for halal standard inspections and auditing, halal training and consultancy, halal law enforcement, halal awareness campaign, promotion of halal brand nationally and internationally and allocation of potential partners for the halal brand.

While comparing the practice between Malaysia and Thailand, Malaysia attributes the tasks to specific agencies depending on the scope and specialisation; the campaign for halal awareness, the promotion of the Malaysia halal brand and the task of allocating potential halal partners are under the responsibility of the Halal Development Cooperation (*Nik Ahmad and Masron, 2012*); halal certification, enforcement, auditing and standard and inspections are exercised by the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs, as well as the Department of Religious Authority (JAKIM) and local state halal authorities (*Ahmed, 2008; Wahab *et al.*, 2015; *Wahab *et al.*, 2016); the halal laboratory and halal product research are assigned to JAKIM and a number of collaborating universities in Malaysia (*Ahmad *et al.*, 2011; *Samori et al.*, 2014), particularly University Putra Malaysia (*Universiti Putra Malaysia, 2014*), while educating and producing human capital for the halal industry is the responsibility of local universities such as International Islamic University Malaysia, National University of Islamic Science Malaysia, University Teknologi MARA and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (*Abu-Hussin *et al.*, 2015; *Hashim *et al.*, 2016; *Hashim and Shariffa, 2016; Ilyana *et al.*, 2016).

These specified and well-defined roles for each halal authority would assist the agency in delivering its roles efficiently (*Lever, 2016*). Evidently, this practice gives a positive result in Malaysia’s halal management system, and it is being recognised as a respectable halal global image. In the case of Thailand, the massive burden is passed on to the HST and HSIT, which causes them to lose their focus. It is also argued that they would deviate from their initial objectives.

**Conclusion**

Thailand, in spite of being a Muslim-minority country, is able to dominate the halal market in Southeast Asia while becoming the fifth largest halal producer in the world. This is achieved by the country’s strategy to become a global halal player, as well as a Muslim-friendly tourism destination. Apart from that, the country managed to unify the definition and standard of halal that becomes an advantage to the halal industry in the country. This
strategy advanced the implementation of halal practice within the country. These two factors, along with financial and consultative supports for its halal SMEs explain the reason why Thailand excels in the global halal market. This provides us the answer for the first and second research questions pertaining to the explanations of Thailand’s great achievement, as a non-Muslim country in the global halal market.

However, there are some issues that need further attention to improve and increase Thailand’s competitiveness in halal industry, as well as to further enhance the effectiveness of halal certification and governance in the country. Findings from this analysis are vital in answering the third research question in this article. One particular highlight is the lack of research network pertaining to the halal practice in Thailand. Such network is essential, as it will enhance the debate on how to improve the halal practice in Thailand, which in turn will increase the visibility and trust on halal practice in Thailand.

Another noteworthy improvement that could be initiated is by assigning focused governing bodies to cater to the multiples roles that are played by HSIT and HST. The current practice is that both HSIT and HST are overloaded with multiple objectives and tasks. It is suggested that each halal governing body in Thailand have more focus and concentration on specific objectives. This approach is believed to improve the performance of Thailand’s halal industry at the global level, and it is not impossible to overcome Malaysia as the world’s leading in halal certification and accreditation.

On the other hand, given the fact that Muslim participation in producing halal foods and products is only 1 per cent of the total halal market in Thailand, this paper concluded that the lack of Muslims’ involvement in the industry could tarnish the country’s image as a main halal player, especially in the long run. Muslim workers and producers are expected to have a deeper understanding on the practice of halal, as well as Islamic legal and ethical standard. Their participation in halal industry will help to speed up the implementation of halal practice in a company and at the same time increase the consumer’s confidence level to the products produced.

Given the advantageous strategies and room for improvement in Thailand’s halal industry as highlighted in this paper, it is hoped that it can serve as a guideline for other Muslim-minority countries to emulate the success of Thailand in the global halal market.

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Further reading

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