

Understanding of the Halal Certification Process among Business Actors in the Food and Beverage MSME Sector in Indonesia

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received November 18, 2024

Revised February 28, 2025

Accepted March 3, 2025

Keywords

Halal certification

Business actor

MSME

PPH companion

Self-declare

ABSTRACT

Background: The obligation for halal certification is regulated under Law No. 6 of 2023, with initial implementation targeting food and beverage producers, including Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME). In 2024, Indonesia has 65 million MSMEs, the majority operating in the food sector. Business actors' understanding of the halal certification process using the self-declare scheme needs to be examined to ensure a smooth certification process and to optimize the role of the Halal Product Process (PPH) companion. This study explores business actors' knowledge and experience regarding the self-declare halal certification process. **Method:** This study employed qualitative research with a narrative design. In-depth interviews were conducted with three purposively selected business actors in Nomporejo Village, Galur, Kulonprogo, between July and August 2024. The collected data were analyzed and presented narratively. **Results:** Findings indicate that business actors lack a clear understanding of the halal certification process through the self-declare scheme, particularly regarding certification objectives, process flow, and the involved parties. Their understanding of certification objectives is limited to business benefits, while they recognize only business actors and PPH companions were involved. Their comprehension of the certification process is restricted to document preparation, with the PPH companion handling all subsequent steps. **Conclusion:** This limited understanding affects certification effectiveness, as business actors rely entirely on PPH companions for technical matters. The government must strengthen the role of PPH companions, enhance educational efforts, and encourage business actors to take an active role in maintaining halal compliance to ensure a more effective and sustainable certification process.



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Introduction

Indonesia is a country with a large proportion of Muslim population (more than 80%) and the largest population in the world. Muslims' right of access to halal products certainly needs serious attention [1–3]. Halal certification is an effort to protect Muslim consumers who have an interest in the distribution of safe and halal products [4,5]. A Muslim's need for halal products should be supported by a halal guarantee, and this is business ethics for producers [1,2,6,7].

Regulations related to Halal Certification are contained in Law No. 33 of 2014 concerning Halal Product Guarantees [8]; Minister of Religion Regulation No. 26 of 2019 concerning Implementation of Halal Product Guarantees [9]; Decree of the Minister of Religion (KMA) No. 982 of 2019 concerning Halal Certification Services [10]; Government Regulation (PP) no. 39 of 2021 concerning Implementation of Halal Product Guarantee Sector [11]. These regulations have undergone adjustments in Law No. 6 of 2023 concerning the Stipulation of Government Regulations in Lieu of Law No. 2 of 2022 concerning Job Creation into Law, especially regarding Halal Product Guarantees [12].

Law no. 6 of 2023 contains the addition of article 4A, which stipulates that micro and small business actors have an obligation to be halal certified through a halal statement for micro and small business actors (self-declare) based on halal standards set by BPJPH (Halal Product Guarantee Organizing Agency). Administrative sanctions will later apply to business actors who violate this provision. This regulation regarding certified obligations has an impact on MSMEs (Micro, Small, Medium Enterprise), which in 2023 are reported to number more than 65 million [13]. The biggest challenge for micro and small businesses is that the number continues to increase every year, but many are not registered [14]. This regulation will be gradually and consistently implemented, beginning with the food and beverage sector [15,16]. The government provides facilitation in the form of the SEHATI (Free Halal Certification) Program for 1 million micro and small business actors, which will be opened starting in 2023 through the scheme self-declared [17].

Through the BPJPH, the government provides a Free Halal Certification (SEHATI) program with a limited quota of 25,000 for businesses that meet the self-declare requirements. However, as of February 2024, out of 64.4 million MSMEs in Indonesia, only 3.8 million are halal certified. For micro businesses in the food sector specifically, only 14% of the 28 million have been certified. The limitations of certification are due to the lack of human resources, halal auditors, PPH companions, and administrative obstacles such as the ownership of a Business Identification Number (NIB), which many MSMEs still do not have. Research shows that 35.1% of participants in the 2021 Halal Guarantee Workshop for the Department of Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises in East Java do not yet have a business license, and this figure is likely to be higher in rural areas. MSMEs find it difficult to compete in the market without a halal certificate, especially when facing mandatory halal regulations. This risks hampering market access, reducing competitiveness, and limiting export opportunities, thus potentially hampering the economic growth of the MSME sector in Indonesia [18,19].

Submission of the halal certification process for micro and small scale with scheme self-declare, meaning a halal statement by business actors regarding the halal status of their products [20,21]. The government, apart from facilitating with SEHATI, also prepares facilitators to accompany business actors in the halal certification process, namely by having a companion. Halal Product Process Assistance (PPH) is a resource prepared to provide assistance to business actors until they obtain a Halal Certificate [21,22].

PPH assistance is an activity that helps business actors fulfill the requirements for declaring the halal products they produce. The PPH companion is tasked with verifying the product's halal pledge during the process of declaration, ensuring that PPH complies with the provisions of the Halal Guarantee System (SJH) [21,23]. In a series of PPH activities, the companion is responsible for ensuring Halal products, including the preparation of ingredients, processing, storage, packaging, distribution, sales, and presentation of products [21]. A PPH Companion is a strategic position that provides assistance to business actors with diverse backgrounds. Assistance can

take the form of education, providing an understanding of the importance of halal certification to business actors so they can understand the urgency of halal certification [15,21].

The challenges in assisting micro and small business actors are related to diverse backgrounds, with weak ability to access technology, many do not yet have a NIB (Business Identification Number), weak understanding of the urgency of halal certification, etc. [20,24,25]. Competent PPH companions with integrity are needed to be able to overcome these various obstacles. The training given to PPH companions is, of course, not limited to technical skills in HAS but requires skills to be able to face all obstacles in the field well [21,26].

Another obstacle that is often faced is the perspective of business actors who only see this certification from the aspect of business profits, without understanding how big the responsibility of business actors is to fulfill consumers' rights to access halal products comfortably [1,2,27]. Even though the concept of applying for halal certification is free, the scheme is self-declared. The business actor promises that all production processes carried out from preparation to the user are guaranteed to be halal [21]. If the business actor's understanding is not complete, it will have an impact on the process of maintaining the halalness of the product in the future, or they will unconsciously contaminate the process with something that damages the halalness of the product [28,29]. This should be anticipated by PPH companions so that they can carry out their mentoring function optimally [21].

This research stems from the problem of a weak understanding of business actors, especially micro and small scale, regarding the halal certification process [20,24–26]. The existence of PPH companions is expected to help increase the understanding of business actors so that they can consciously pledge the halalness of their products to fulfill consumer rights as well as the interest of increasing business profits [2,4,26]. This study aims to explore the knowledge and experience of business actors regarding the halal certification process using the self-declare scheme.

Materials and Method

Qualitative research with a narrative design, based on data from in-depth interviews and observations conducted by researchers on three purposively selected respondents. Interpretive narrative data analysis. Probing techniques were used during interviews to obtain more accurate and in-depth information. The researcher conducted a data validity test through triangulation of data sources: local officials/head of the hamlet and PPH (Halal Product Process) companion through in-depth interviews.

The first data collection was an in-depth interview with three business actors to confirm their knowledge of halal certification and its benefits, what documents to prepare, how it works, and who is involved. This activity was carried out on August 10, 2024. The second data collection was carried out on August 18, 2024; separate in-depth interviews were conducted with the local hamlet head and PPH companion to confirm data related to business actors' understanding of halal certification.

The research respondents were three business people from Pandowan Hamlet, Nomporejo Village, Galur District, Kulonprogo Regency, who were selected based on the potential of the area as a producer of growol, a traditional food typical of Kulonprogo Regency. The respondents had growol-based food production businesses. Respondent 1 produced growol chips. Respondent 2 produced growol rice cakes. Respondent 3 produces growol brownies. The educational background of the respondents is equivalent to high school, and they are micro-scale business owners (turnover of less than 300 million rupiah in one year).

The research was conducted from July to August 2024 by conducting in-depth interviews and home visits and observing the environmental conditions of the respondents' homes. Observations were also made to observe the process of applying for halal certification, accompanied by a PPH companion from LP3H (Halal Product Process Assistance Agency) Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, Yogyakarta. The three respondents were business people applying for halal certification using the self-declare scheme through the SEHATI (Free Halal Certification) program.

To ensure understanding of the halal certification application process, we, as researchers, confirmed the respondents' understanding regarding: 1) What do you know about halal

certification, and what are the benefits? 2) What documents/requirements must be prepared when applying for halal certification? 3) What is the process for applying for halal certification, and who are the parties involved?

In-depth interviews were conducted by researchers with three respondents at each respondent's home. The researcher recorded the interview process, transcribed the recording, and then conducted an interpretive narrative analysis of all respondents' experiences regarding the halal certification application process. Observation data was presented narratively and used as supplementary information.

This research was conducted to optimize the potential of growol as a specialty food from Kulonprogo that is not found in other regions [30]. Growol is a naturally fermented cassava product, resulting in a food rich in prebiotics and probiotics that benefit health [31,32]. Researchers are working to make growol a commercial commodity that can be enjoyed by the broader community by fostering business people who have an interest in growol products. Growol can be processed into flour and then further processed into snacks rich in health benefits. Growol products can be in the form of noodles, cookies, cakes, brownies, and others [33,34]. The commercialization of growol is expected to promote local foods that can benefit health, economically empower and strengthen food security. This research received Ethical Clearance's number 044.3/FIKES/PL/IV/2024 on April 26, 2024.

Results

This research was carried out in Nomporejo Village, Pandowan Hamlet, Galur District, Kulonprogo Regency, which is currently pioneering the production of processed growol, considering that growol is a typical fermented cassava product from Kulonprogo Regency. There are 3 micro-scale business actors who are willing to become respondents and obtain Halal certification facilities with the SEHATI (Free Halal Certification) program through LP3H (Halal Product Process Assistance Agency) UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta.

The first business actor focuses on chip products, namely Growol chips with various flavor variants, which will be produced starting in 2023. Mrs. SWH, 34 years old and with a high school education, is the owner of this various chips business and started a business producing various chips in 2014. Marketing model What has been done is to entrust sales to several food stalls, angkringan, schools, and souvenir shops.

The second business actor has been a producer of various apem since September 2023. Current products include Javanese sugar apem and growol apem. The business owner is Mrs. FT, 44 years old, with a vocational school education background. Currently, sales of apem are based on pre-orders for special event snacks or snack box filling, in addition to selling them to several market snack sellers.

The third business actor is a producer of various brownies. Mrs. ST, 44 years old with a high school education, started her business in 2023. The brownies she produces include brownies made from wheat flour and brownies made from growol flour. The product is sold using a deposit system at several market snack sellers, and pre-orders for special events and snack boxes are accepted.

To ensure respondents' understanding regarding halal certification, researchers confirmed the following things: 1) What do you know about halal certification and its benefits? 2) What documents/requirements must be prepared when applying for halal certification? 3) What is the flow of applying for halal certification, and who are the parties involved in the application?

The results of in-depth interviews related to the question: 'What do you know about halal certification and its benefits?' The answers from respondents provide information that respondents understand the importance of halal certification in the context of fulfilling technical food qualifications, namely how the product is fit to sell and accepted by consumers. Respondents' understanding is not yet at the stage of efforts to fulfill marketing authorization standards set by the government to improve the quality of products sold and fulfill consumer rights.

The following are respondents' statements, which are the result of in-depth interviews by researchers:

*"That's so that uh...what...our production is brought to the shop, it can be accepted.....
In major retail stores, products without a halal certificate are not permitted for entry...
So that it sells, so that people can see that it already has a halal certificate, that's what I mean..."*
(Respondent 1)

*The conditions for a product now have to be there, right?
So that person knows, oh, this is halal... yes, how to make it, the tools, the ingredients...
Be more confident, which means if people ask you if you have a certificate, if you go anywhere
now, you'll be asked.*
(Respondent 2)

*Yes, that's the term, sis, for being recognized in the market.
In other words, when asked about our product, it is guaranteed to be halal.
I can let you know later that (logo) has been printed.
Cleanliness, for example, cleanliness in making and storing food, and yes, the ingredients...
In other words, if you leave it at schools and offices, then if you ask, it's there... it's there.
Yes, so that we can be more stable like that.*
(Respondent 3)

Next, the question was: 'What documents/requirements must be prepared in applying for halal certification?' The results of in-depth interviews provide information that not all respondents understand what requirements must be met for applying for halal certification. The respondent's statement regarding the documents that must be prepared is as follows:

*KTP and NIB with a product photo.
Well, the NIB used the product name and KTP and was emailed yesterday.*
(Respondent 1)

*Well uh besides the KTP, there is the NIB, the document.
Yes, the (production) process is explained.*
(Respondent 2)

Yes, we will make the product first, then we will have the NIB, and then we will take photos...
(Respondent 3)

In-depth interviews by researchers also explored: 'What is the flow of applying for halal certification and who are the parties involved in the application?'. All respondents were unable to answer this question correctly and did not even understand the certification application process at all. The three respondents mentioned the existence of a halal companion who could complete all matters related to the halal certification application process. Some of the respondent statements recorded by researchers are as follows:

*Later, when you have deposited all of it (the documents requested by the companion), leave it.
Yes, wait for news from the companion.*
(Respondent 1)

*You are asked to fill in the same form as the person registering.
Those involved are business actors and companions.*
(Respondent 2)

Not know...
(Respondent 3)

The interviews with the head of the hamlet and the PPH companion gave similar results, confirming that their understanding of the halal certification process was limited to the benefits as a business actor. They did not understand the administrative requirements for applying for halal certification, the flow of the certification process, or who was involved.

Discussion

Halal certification is the process of obtaining a halal certificate through stages to ensure that materials, production processes, and the Halal Guarantee System (SJH) meet established standards [4,24,25]. Halal certification provides benefits from 2 points of view, both from the perspective of consumers and producers or business actors. From a consumer's perspective, halal certification is an obligation for producers to provide the right to safety and comfort for consumers, especially Muslim consumers [1,2]. From the producer's point of view, halal certification provides many benefits, including: 1) increasing consumer confidence because there is a guarantee of safety and comfort when certified halal; 2) if consumers believe, it will increase sales; 3) increasing marketing expansion which will of course increase sales and profits for business actors [1,2,4,20].

The presentation of the statements of the three respondents provides an illustration that the respondents' understanding is still limited to the perspective of profits as business actors. Respondents do not understand how halal certification efforts are an effort to fulfill consumers' rights to obtain food and drinks that are guaranteed to be halal.

Observations during visits to production kitchens (all production kitchens owned by respondents were still mixed with household kitchens) explained that assistance was needed to ensure that the food production process (from preparation to serving) was guaranteed to be halal. Some of the respondents' houses were not suitable as production kitchens because they were located in open areas and close to pet cages. PPH companions need to ensure that all processes are not contaminated with animal waste or other materials that are not halal and endanger consumers [21,29,35].

Micro and small-scale business actors, when applying for certification using the self-declaration scheme, must really understand what must be prepared for applying for certification. Some of the files that need to be prepared include a business identity number. In this case, an NIB (Business Identification Number) is required [21,26]. Business Identification Number is a business registration number that shows that the business has been registered with the OSS (Online Single Submission). Many micro and small business actors do not yet have a business permit, so they take the first step by taking care of this permit [14]. To have a NIB, business actors must prepare a KTP (Resident Identification Card) and email specifically for data verification from OSS [36], then register online or come to the One-Stop Service Office in each district/city. The Business Identification Number can be printed directly with the assistance of an officer.

If the Business Identification Number is available, the process of applying for halal certification can be carried out through the SEHATI program [37]. To fulfill halal certification requirements, apart from Business Identification Number, respondents need to fill out a form online on the SIHALAL account. Filling out the form requires detailed recipe information with the ingredients used and the processing process, complete with photos of the product, equipment, and production location. The process of filling in the form online is fully assisted by PPH companions while ensuring that all processes, from preparation to presentation to consumers are safe and halal. PPH companions have a very important role at this stage in providing education and directing business actors so that all tools, materials, and processes are guaranteed to be halal [21,26,29,37].

Respondents received assistance from PPH companions to take care of Business Identification Number properly online. This is very helpful, considering that not all business people are familiar with documents online or by email. Meanwhile, coming to the One-Stop Service Office is hampered by the location being far from the city center. Filling out halal certification documents is also assisted by PPH companions, so business actors do not know in detail what documents need to be filled in properly online on the SIHALAL account. This is technically very helpful for

micro and small-scale business actors, but it will result in them not being involved much, so they will not understand in full and in detail what data must be filled in on the SIHALAL account owned by the business actor. However, conceptually, self-declaration is a personal statement from the business actor to be responsible for all production processes carried out [21,26,28].

The certification application flow starts with the preparation of complete certification documents, namely Business Identification Number and Resident Identification Card, as well as email (must be the same as the email used for Business Identification Number submission). Another thing that needs to be prepared is a record of the materials used, complete with brand, equipment used, production process, and packaging. These records must be accompanied by documentation in the form of photos of the finished product, ingredients, tools used, and the kitchen where it was produced.

After all the data is complete, the business actor (in this case, represented by the PPH companion) uploads all documents and fills in the form completely. The PPH Companion is responsible for ensuring that business actors are eligible to apply for self-declaration, verifying and validating the data, and continuing the application process to BPJPH. Next, the data will be verified by BPJPH, and a Document Receipt Letter (STTD) will be issued. Documents from BPJPH will be followed up by the Fatwa Committee to determine the halalness of the product. Finally, BPJPH issues a Halal Certificate [21,26].

In-depth interviews with 3 respondents confirmed that the presence of PPH companions really helps business actors in obtaining halal certificates. Respondents underwent all halal certification processes, especially the online data entry process in the SIHALAL account carried out by the PPH companion. This can be seen as a convenience for business actors, but on the other hand, business actors do not understand in detail what the contents of the form are online submitted as material for making an independent pledge (self-declare) related to the halal production process [21,26,38].

Business actors should fully understand the process of applying for halal certification so they can carry out the entire process independently. PPH companions function to accompany, educate, and ensure that all processes are guaranteed halal, so that self-declare really consciously submitted by business actors as a responsibility to fulfill consumer rights [1,21,39].

There are many micro and small-scale business actors with different social, economic, demographic, and geographic backgrounds, so their abilities to undergo the certification application process will also be different. Many micro and small-scale businesses experience difficulties in the procedures for applying for halal certification. These obstacles include mastery of information technology, limited knowledge and information, as well as obstacles in production infrastructure so that business performance does not meet production process standards, etc. [24–26]. Competent PPH companions really need to be able to resolve these various obstacles. PPH companions who have integrity are also very important because they are responsible for verifying and validating the data of the business actors they supervise. However, educational assistance will really help business actors to improve their knowledge and abilities in the halal certification process. Business actors who have good awareness will try to ensure that the products produced are guaranteed to be halal in terms of materials, tools and processes to fulfill consumer rights [1,26,28,39].

This study explores business people's understanding of halal certification with the self-declare scheme, which is mandatory for MSMEs according to government policy, in the hope of helping to improve compliance and the effectiveness of the certification process. This study uses a qualitative approach with data triangulation to maintain data validity, however, with a small sample size and limited locations. The dependence of business actors on PPH assistants has not been fully explored, so it is not yet known how effective the role of PPH assistants is in the halal certification process. The research has also not explored the factors that cause business actors' lack of understanding of the certification process.

Conclusion

In general, 3 respondents did not understand the halal certification process in detail, but technically, this was not an obstacle because the PPH companion could accompany the process from start to finish. Lack of understanding by business actors will have an impact on the effectiveness of the certification process because, technically, everything is borne by the PPH companion.

It is hoped that poor understanding can be improved with the presence of PPH companions. PPH companions ensure that business actors understand the halal certification process well so they can carry it out self-declare with full understanding, namely maintaining the halal process and production results as a responsibility to fulfill consumer rights.

Declaration

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank LPPM Unriyo (Institute for Research and Community Service at Universitas Respati Yogyakarta) for funding this research. We also thank the village officials in Pandowan Hamlet, Nomporejo Village, Galur District, Kulonprogo Regency who have given us the opportunity to collect research data. Finally, we would like to thank Mrs. Dwi Otik Kurniawati, M.Eng as the PPH Companion from LP3H UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, who has accompanied the MSME halal certification process that we have proposed.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest in conducting this study. This research, "Understanding of the Halal Certification Process among Business Actors in the Food and Beverage MSME Sector in Indonesia," was conducted objectively and independently. The authors have no financial, commercial, or personal interests that could influence the results, interpretation, or conclusions of this research. Furthermore, there are no affiliations with the halal certification institutions mentioned in the study that could potentially affect the impartiality of the findings.

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