

## HALALAN TOYYIBAN UNDERSTANDING: A CASE OF MUSLIM STREET FOOD VENDORS IN SHAH ALAM

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**Abstract:** *Street vending provides a means of economic development and provides jobs which help lessen poverty. A benefit of street-food vending is that it may be a source of inexpensive nutritional food to the customers while it is also a source of income for the underprivileged vendors. However, if it is not handled correctly it may have terrible consequences in terms of health, hygiene, safety and reputation of street food business. For instance, without proper guidance to street food vendors this may result in food poisoning for the consumers and give bad reputation to the street food vendors. As a Muslim country, it is easy to find Muslim street food area in the city. However, the concern of halalan toyyiban foods is still unclear. This study was intended to assess street food vendors understanding of halalan toyyiban in food handling practices and also to recommend ways in which street-food vendors could be assisted in order to understand the halalan toyyiban aspects of handling food. To accomplish this, observations and in-depth interviews were conducted amongst six informants of whom street food vendors, six food handlers (assistants) and three officers in halal industry, public authority and health and environment inspector. The results revealed that mainly food handlers (assistant) take part in this business from beginning until the end of the operations. Most of the assistants are non-Malaysian citizen (foreigner; Indonesian). They work as a means to earn living to relieve poverty. Other identified issues are related to quality and health, safety and hygiene and halal and Islamic beliefs. It is recommended that the training of street-food vendors be a priority not only on food handling practices but also in halalan toyyiban aspects. There is also a need for the public authorities to monitor closely on the operations of street food business so that the license given to the vendors is not been jeopardize by letting the street food area to the non-citizen.*

*Keywords: Street Food, Halal, Toyyiban, Vendors, Food handling Practices*

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## **Introduction**

Street vendors provide easy access to a wide range of goods and services in the public spaces of cities around the world: from fresh fruits and vegetables to building materials; garments and crafts to consumer electronics; prepared food to auto parts and repairs. Official statistics show that street vendors make up between 2 and 24 per cent of total urban informal employment in African, Asian and Latin American cities. Their activities generate demand for formal and informal suppliers, create jobs for porters, guards, and transport operators, and generate revenue for local governments. (IEMS, 2014). Street food in Malaysia has a potential to be part of tourism attractions. It sells various types of local kueh, noodles and rice which represent the food culture of multiracial races in Malaysia.

Malaysia is a Muslim country where it is easily to find and get halal food. However, is halal food represent the good and clean food is a big question mark. Halal is not only the ingredients is halal but it must comprise with hygienic and proper food handling from beginning until it is served to the plate. Based on previous studies shown that many cases of foodborne illness are due to improper food handling happen in street food due to poor personal hygiene among the food handlers since street food is an off-premise outlet/open space, there is no proper wash basin drainage and sewage system, and the foods are also exposed to flies and stray animals that scavenge for leftover foods. Thus, there is a needs and motivations for street food vendors to implement halalan toyyiban food handling practices to give a good image and reputation of Muslim and also Muslim country which understand and apply the concept of Islam in halalan toyyiban. Besides that, many of the food items that are sold are unhealthy in terms of portion size, energy-density, and high content of saturated fat, trans fats, salt, and sugar. In a country experiencing a growing obesity epidemic, the nutritional contribution of street foods is not contributing to the health of the population. Secondly, the majority of vendors exhibited poor food hygiene and safety practices which need to be addressed by the health authorities in order to protect the public from microbial contamination (Jillian Hill, 2018).

Therefore, consumers nowadays are so much concerned and always be aware of what they eat, drink and use. The awareness of the Muslim and non-Muslim consumers describes their perception and cognitive reaction to products or foods in the market. As such, their awareness is an internal state or a visceral feeling by way of sensory perception towards the products/foods they used or consumed (IEMS, 2015). Given the significance role of awareness about halal in the life of Muslims and their obligations to be Shariah compliant; this paper will address the importance and needs to implement halalan toyyiban food handling practices among street food vendors in Malaysia.

## **Background of Street Food**

Street food is defined by FAO as ready to eat food and beverages prepared or sold by vendors especially in street and other public places (WHO, 2015). Street vending is a global phenomenon and the most visible aspect of the informal sector. Like other informal sector, street vending is characterized by low level of income, easy of entry, self-employed and it involves large number

of people. In cities and towns thought the world millions of people, earn their living by selling wide range of goods and service on the street. Despite a general belief that street vending will recede as economies develop and income rise, it is actually on increase in many places (Jaishankar, 2016). The major challenge faced by the street food vendors is maintaining the cleanliness and hygiene of the food sold in the highest level (Samapundo, 2016, Kok & Balkaran, 2013, Alimi, 2016).

As it related to halalan toyyiban food safety at street food, Saadan, (2013) stated that awareness of halalan toyyiban in Malaysia especially Muslim is still at low level. Some of the Muslims food operators selling halal food without concerning the toyyiban aspects and letting the premise, restaurants and stalls at improper and unhygienic conditions. It is contrarily different from what Muslim teach regarding halalan toyyiban (Sinar Harian, 2016).

### **Method**

This study, first and foremost, examined the knowledge gap about food handling and halalan toyyiban issues amongst street-food vendors and food handlers. Investigating the knowledge gap is consistent with the view that in qualitative research there is no standard procedure to achieve all the expectations and needs of all, and it is all depends on the research purpose and research context (Mason, 2002). The qualitative researcher seeks to understand the depth and breadth of a topic area through rigorous study of phenomena by critically selecting participants, studying those participants thoroughly, and continuing data collection until no new themes emerge during data analysis (Susan W. Arendt, 2012). Based on this reason, qualitative study is the best method that can achieve the purpose of the study.

Since the topic of the study, which is understanding food handling practices based on halalan toyyiban among street food vendor is still new, the employment of a qualitative research design for this study will help researcher to explore and discover the topic area in great depth. Incumbent of the qualitative study approach, this study used small sample to see the phenomenon holistically and comprehensively. The sample purposely selected and location had been determined. Then study focused on gaining insight that would guide the researcher in drawing up guidelines for vendors' understanding about food handling practices and its association with halalan toyyiban. Initially, all the interviews with street food vendors is conducted at home while interviews with food handlers (assistant) and officers held at their office. Additionally, observations of street food vendors 'surroundings, disposal of waste and cleanliness were conducted and recorded in the researcher's journal and also photograph.

Specifically, data was collected from the 12 street vendors and food handlers. Participants were purposively selected which researcher had built rapport and having prolonged engagement with the informants. Interviews were conducted in Malay - a language spoken by the street vendors in the study area and a bit of Indonesian language whenever the food handlers which is Indonesian could not understand the Malay language. This was found to be ideal because it allowed the participants to provide their own understanding of the food handling practices and halalan toyyiban more freely. Secondly, the researcher made use of an audio tape recorder in combination with a phone camera as all participants gave their consent to the use of technology. The use of these taped recordings as data collection methods ensured the capturing of as much of what was discussed as possible. This method also gave the researchers an opportunity to seek clarification on issues they

did not understand themselves. Typical questions in the interviews assumed a format such as ‘Talk to me about your experience in this business of street food vending’ were included. There was forty (40) questions in eight (8) categories were included. Categories were, personal details of street vendors, academic qualifications of street-food vendors, involvement in street-food vending, involvement in street-food handling, facilities used by street-food vendors, views of street-food selling by vendors, training in street-food handling, ideas of a successful business venture, practice of food handling (purchasing, storing, holding, preparation, packing, personal hygiene and cleaning) and lastly, understanding and opinion towards halalan toyyiban.

Furthermore, in order to validate what the vendors and food handlers indicated, researcher had interviewed three (3) officers which is one from Shah Alam Municipal council under sections of licensing (*pelesenan penjaja*), one is halal officer from JAKIM and one is Public Health Inspector which is from Department of Health. They were included in the research because of their involvement with city street vendors. These officers were asked questions regarding the experiences and challenges of street-food control and their opinion towards halalan toyyiban implementation. All these activities were carried out in order to give a voice to street vendors and, based on that, to recommend training programmes that would help improve their situation, barriers and challenges in street food business.

### **Data Analysis**

Discussions were conducted in the language of the interviewees. This was done because it was convenient to quickly verify with the participants whether what was recorded indeed represented their opinions. This also allowed for the researcher to internally validate the process by ensuring that the information provided was accurately captured, and correct. All the recordings that is suit the theme were translated into English. The validity of this process was ensured by asking a Language Practitioner to transcribe and translate the recorded information. The different responses were initially sorted, coded and analyzed for relevant and compatible themes (Maykut and Morehouse 1994).

### **Findings**

#### ***Demographic Profile of Informants***

The study included six (6) informants whom were vendors of street food, six (6) informants is food handlers. These informants will give primary data in order to get the information regarding food handling practices and its association with halalan toyyiban. While the other three (3) informants is officers from Shah Alam Municipal council, Public Health Inspector from Department of Health and Halal officer from JAKIM had been interviewed to get the secondary data. The demographic data obtained from the informants revealed the following information: there were 3 vendors (50%) females and 3 (50%) males. Four of them have highest academic qualification is SPM (Malaysia Education Certificate) and the other two is certificate and diploma. While six food handlers (assistants) is from Medan, Madura and Surabaya. Their ages ranged between 16 years and 50 years. All of the demographic profile of informants was summarized in table 1.1.

Informants	Street food business	Location	Origin
<b>Street food vendor 1 (SFV1)</b> <b>Food handler 1 (FH1)</b>	Laksa	Section 19 Shah Alam	Penang Medan, Indonesia
<b>Street food vendor 2 (SFV2)</b> <b>Food handler 2 (FH2)</b>	Nasi ayam goreng kunyit	Section 18 Shah Alam	Johor Medan, Indonesia
<b>Street food vendor 3 (SFV3)</b> <b>Food handler 3 (FH3)</b>	Cendol and rojak pasembor	Section 18 Shah Alam	Penang
<b>Street food vendor 4 (SFV4)</b> <b>Food handler 4 (FH4)</b>	Nasi ayam and variety of beverages	Section 25, Shah Alam	Selangor
<b>Street food vendor 5 (SFV5)</b> <b>Food handler 6 (FH6)</b>	Various types of kuih, noodles and nasi lemak	Section 17, Shah Alam	Perak Medan, Indonesia
<b>Street food vendor 6 (SFV6)</b> <b>Food handler 6 (FH6)</b>	Various types of noodle with specialty in mee celop	Section 18, Shah Alam	Kelantan Madura, Indonesia

### *Location of The Study*

Location of the street food is determined in Shah Alam in several section that consists of 6 stalls. It is located at the busiest area where lots of people doing business nearby. The street food area located nearest to the banks, clinics, shopping malls, shops and restaurants. All of the stalls are provided by Shah Alam Municipal Council and known as Kiosk MBSA. All of the stalls provided by the Municipal Council will be situated at the street/pedestrian walk street side. The operation hour for the kiosks is from morning until late at night. It was a fixed stall that have a counter top and roofed. It also provides storage cabinet under the counter top. The location and stalls are shown in the picture 1.1 below.





**Picture 1.1: Some of The View of The Street Food Area in Shah Alam**

### ***Knowledge of Food Handling and Association with Halalan Toyyiban***

There are several questions had been asked during the interview. Based on the findings results, the majority of participants (street vendors) indicated food handling practices on the following aspects: obligation to local authority rules and regulations, food preparation; stock control; purchasing; health and safety measures in relation to food. As for halalan toyyiban they indicate their understanding based on three elements; halal, hygiene and safety and honesty in Islamic belief. The concept of halalan toyyiba must be understood by Muslims as halal is not enough but it must also be good and harmless. Halal and good, pure and clean food will increase the taqwa and the value of one's worship. Prayer of Muslims also depends on the type of food eaten. (Yusof al Qardawi, 2009, Mufti Wilayah, 2016). Al-Quran has numerous injunctions instruction Muslims to choose and consume food and drinks. There are many legal evidences about halalan toyyiban in the Holy Quran. the use of word “طيب” related to the acceptance of the particular deeds. Meanwhile, it is linked closely with the purity of one’s heart in doing something (Yusof al Qardawi, 2009).

Besides, in surah al-Baqarah verse 168, Allah says in the Quran about consuming everything what He create that lawful and good. As Muslims, consuming halal and toyyib products is an order from Allah SWT and it is an essential part of Islamic faith. Besides that, the meaning of halalan toyyiban as stated by Wan Amir, (2016) which he found in his research that halalan toyyiban consist of six prnciples as referring to many kitb munfasir. That was 1) halal, 2) accepted by purely and prosperous soul, 3) hygiene, 4) nutritious, 5) safe and 6) syubhah free. Based on these principles, findings of these research had created three themes from the principles which is halal, hygiene and safety and honesty and Islamic beliefs.

### ***Honesty and Islamic Beliefs***

Finding of the results also indicate that, Islamic belief also become part of their knowledge in halalan toyyiban. They practice Islamic belief and integrate with their daily practice in street food business. It was concise by;

SFV1:

*I will ensure my assistant which is food handlers to perform solah. It will create my trustworthiness if someone perform solat they will be scared to do the sins and will be honest and scared to steal the money. If they steal the money and send money to their family it will consider as haram money.*

FH4 from Medan,Indonesia

*Early in the morning, my boss instructed me to wash and clean the chicken and vegetables with proper and thorough wash using flour and recite doa and sholawat towards prophet as a Muslim. All items have to wash until it is really clean.*

SFV 5 at her stall in Section 17 Shah Alam concise that:

*I won't sell those food which is not tasty. I will ensure those food to sell to the customer is similarly like what I cook for my family to eat. I will feel bad selling those food which is not tasty and quality and take people's money. I would rather been loss rather than heard the customer's complaint.*

All of the participants have showed their honesty and Islamic beliefs in practicing halalan toyyiban in food handling practices.

### ***Halal***

For the part of halal, the vendors are really concern about the slaughtering and halal logo. They will ensure all the chicken and meat that they buy is halal and it must get from the Muslim seller and for the dry products must have halal logo to guarantee the product that they choose is halal. It is indicated by

SFV4 from Section 25 Shah Alam:

*I will buy chicken at the market. People at the market already know me since I've been their regular customer. I don't trust buying chicken at Tesco or NSK. This is because I see the people handling chicken at those outlets is not local people. Either it is properly slaughter or not. I don't have confident in that.*

It is also supported by SFV1 that she stated the following:

*I will check the pack of noodle that I want to buy either there is halal or not. Last time someone send me pictures about improper handling of the noodles. I feel scared because it is dirty and prepared not by our people. There is no halal if not produce by our people.*

### ***Safety and Hygiene***

Food hygiene require steps and procedures that control the operational conditions within food establishment in order to produce safe and hygienic food for human consumption. The Malaysian Standard on Halal Food (MS 1500; 2004) complies with the international standards of Good Manufacturing Practices and Good Hygiene Practices and prescribe practical guidelines for the food industry on the preparation and handling of Halal food based on quality, sanitary and safety Considerations and serves as a basic requirement for food products and food trade or business in Malaysia (Siti Noor Ashikin and Quamrul Hassan, 2016). Thus, Bakar (2017) also stated about ensuring halal and clean food whereby he stated that, standards used by the Qur'an for nutrition are halal and good (toyyib) or in Arabic word is *halalan toyyiba*. The concept of halalan toyyiba must be understood by Muslims as halal is not enough but it must also be good and harmless. Halal

and good, pure and clean food will increase the taqwa and the value of one's worship. Prayer of Muslims also depends on the type of food eaten. If the food comes from unlawful or bad things, then of course God will not give them their prayers. This is the seriousness of safety and hygiene that been instructed from Allah to us. Based on this research,street food vendors and handlers know and understand some of the principles. It is concise that;

SFV 5 mentioned:

*I will tell my assistant to make sure they come to work with appropriate appearance and must be clean. I don't like seeing my assistant untidy coming to work. It will reflect customers perception and will make customer felt bad. If we are not clear how can we ensure the food we prepare will clean.*

SFV1:

*I will always prepare lots of kitchen towel because we don't have water supply here. If our table is not clean, it will come lots of flies. I will use spray 'seraiwangi' in order to prevent flies and will ask my staff to wipe the table.*

SFV3:

*Yes indeed. We have to ensure our food quality in terms of cleanliness. It cannot be dirty because it will potentially make others having food poisoning. If there are a people who report, it will make us down.*

Based on the understanding, researcher can say all of the street food vendor's informants has limited and less understanding in the meaning of good food handling and deliver that a good food handling must have a good personal hygiene by the food preparer, work area also must be clean. However, based on researcher's observation at the stalls and at home, that is contrary with the data been gather in the interview. Picture 1.2 is some of the pictures during observations.



**Picture 1.2: Pictures of Food Handling During Operations**

### ***Barriers and Challenges in Street Food Business***

It was an unfair judgement to the street food business due to the hygiene and food contamination. Since the location of the street food business is at the sidewalk near to drainage system, it is hardly to maintain the real cleanliness and hygiene. Furthermore, the facilities provided is not facilitate



the business to make a proper way. It is supported by many previous researches. Many previous researches on street food is study deeper about food contamination and poor personal hygiene among the food handlers since street food is an off-premise outlet/open space, there is no proper wash basin drainage and sewage system, and the foods are also exposed to flies and stray animals that scavenge for leftover foods (Samapundo, 2016, Alimi, 2016, Kumar, 2016 and Faridah et al., 2015).

It is also supported by SFV1 that she stated the following:

*It's really difficult because we need to bring our own water sources. Normally I bring 2 big bottles. The water is used for wash the spoon and fork. We use plastic on top of the plates so that plates are not dirty and do not need to wash.)*

SFV4 also pointed that:

*Public authority is only known to compound and to take all our stuffs without thinking that they give us a place without proper facilities. I'm being a vendor for a long time almost 15 years and I know the public authority character.*

SFV1:

*People love to dine in here. I always put tables and chairs so that it will reduce waiting time for the customers to dine in. Minicipal council will warn me since doing that will make the surroundings area looks messy. They will pick up all the stuffs into their truck.*

SFV3 also had propose the proper facilities to the municipal council but the result is disappointing him:

*'We have proposed proper facilities but the municipal council give us other choice by replacing us to other places. However, that area is a remote area and far away from crowd like this place. It will make our business turn down if we follow them.*

*Besides that, from the perspectives of food handlers FH2 and FH3, they feel that lack of number of helpers make them hard to take a rest and perform their solah. They say that:*

*I don't have ample time to go for solah since there is no others to take care of the stalls. In fact, I am not clean and don feel comfortable to perform solah. I've been working since early in the morning and does not stop.*

All in all, there are some barriers that make the street food vendors and their helpers to implement proper food handling practices that is based on halalan toyyiban. Lack of facilities, improper area and lack of staffs and musolla is far from the premises make them hardly implement halalan toyyiban practices. There must be some winning situations between street food vendors and municipal councils in a way to help them overcome the barriers and to implement good food handling practices based on halalan toyyiban.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has outlined the understanding of food handling as it associates with halalan toyyiban. Principally the importance of the training of street-food vendors on halal, safety and hygiene and Islamic principles in business was also indicated. In addition, it should seek to provide

opportunities to street food business to acquire the knowledge, values, and attitudes, in a way to protect and improve their food handling practices. Finally, overcoming the problems of street needs joint cooperation of government, consumers and vendors themselves in order to improve and sustain their street food business.

### **Recommendations**

Street-food vendors have a serious impact on an environment in which they work. They may affect the planning of a city, together with its resources. It is recommended then that the training of street-food vendors be a priority for city officials. This is because if vendors are untrained in food hygiene and sanitation operate and sell their wares then they may cause untold harm to others. The purpose of educational programmes should be to make street-food vendors, and all concerned with informally vended food, more aware of food hygiene and sanitation, as well as technological aspects of street-food vending and consumption. It is only through training and the subsequent monitoring of the situation that street-food vendors can be integrated into and considered a responsible part of a city's food supply system. Since, this is regarding Muslim street food vendors, there is a need to educate them about halalan toyyiban practices.

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