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## Halal food manufacturing: A case study on successful Bumiputera entrepreneurs in Malaysia

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### Abstract

This study investigated the success factors that drive the success of Malay halal food manufacturers in Northern Malaysia, with a specific focus on the interplay between religiosity, entrepreneurial mindset, halal supply chain dynamics, and structural challenges. Despite various support and infrastructure development, Bumiputera participation in the halal sector remains disproportionately low. This research employed a qualitative case study approach and explored the experiences of two successful halal-certified food manufacturers from the states of Kedah and Perlis. Drawing from thematic analysis, the findings reveal that religiosity acts as a powerful motivator, shaping opportunity recognition and guiding ethical business conduct. These entrepreneurs demonstrated key traits such as initiative-taking, innovativeness, and resilience in their operational transition from home-based setups to halal and GMP-certified facilities. Nonetheless, they continue to face significant challenges, particularly in sourcing halal-certified raw materials due to rigid supplier requirements and the limited choice of local supply, which strains the halal supply chains. The study applied a three-tiered theoretical framework adapted from Kouakou et al. [1] to map their development process. The findings highlight that success in halal entrepreneurship results from strategic alignment between internal motivators, such as Islamic values and opportunity-driven behavior, and external enablers like government support and global market access. Conclusively, the study recommends improving access to halal certification, reducing raw material bottlenecks, and further empowering Malay SMEs in Malaysia's growing halal economy.

**Keywords:** Halal food manufacturing, Halal supply chain, Malay entrepreneurs, SMEs.

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**Transparency:** The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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## **1. Introduction**

Malaysia has consistently aimed to establish itself as a global leader in the halal industry. Despite comprehensive initiatives and robust infrastructure, the participation of Bumiputera entrepreneurs in halal-certified businesses remains disproportionately low. According to the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), as of 2023, only 39.6% of halal-certified companies were Bumiputera-owned, whereas non-Bumiputera companies accounted for 59% of these certifications [2]. This is particularly striking given that Bumiputera constitute approximately 63.3% of Malaysia's total population [3]. Government agencies have been continuously promoting and encouraging more Bumiputera entrepreneurs to be involved in the halal sector, both locally and internationally, but engagement continues to be low as concerns begin to grow. The Ministry of International Trade (MITI) is one of the most involved in such initiatives and has highlighted that only 30% of the 6,458 companies involved in the halal industry are owned by Bumiputera. Such a low number is alarming and could prove to be detrimental to achieving the economic agenda of a Bumiputera-majority nation such as Malaysia. Reacting to this alarming situation, urgent actions are needed to quickly find solutions and rectify the situation.

To date, various efforts, including financial aid, technical support, and consultations, have been offered to help Bumiputera entrepreneurs gain momentum in the halal sector [4-6]. All these continuous efforts are orchestrated towards increasing the number of Bumiputera business owners participating in the halal sector by enhancing their business acumen and encouraging their involvement in the industry at a greater pace. Despite these long-term strategies and efforts, the issue remains unresolved, and the results of these initiatives are far from satisfactory. Therefore, this particular issue still requires further attention, deeper understanding, and increased effort to resolve it. The conditions mentioned justify the need for this study to investigate the underlying factors contributing to the limited engagement of Bumiputera business owners in the halal industry and to propose strategic solutions to enhance their participation.

## **2. Literature Review**

By 2022, the halal global market was valued at USD 2.3 trillion and the sector is projected to continue growing to USD 7.6 trillion by 2032 [7]. This substantial growth is driven by the increasing global Muslim population, which continues to elevate the demand for halal products. Notably, economic advancements in Muslim-majority countries, particularly in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations such as Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), have significantly contributed to the expansion of the global halal economy. Additionally, emerging markets like China and India are poised for considerable growth in the halal sector due to their increasing Muslim populations. In China alone, the halal food market was valued at approximately USD 2.1 billion and is expected to grow by 10% annually [8]. The halal economy has diversified beyond food and beverage products, encompassing sectors such as halal logistics, pharmaceuticals, services, tourism, lifestyle, and cosmetics [9, 10]. The halal industry is poised to become a competitive force in global international trade, with seemingly limitless economic prospects for stakeholders.

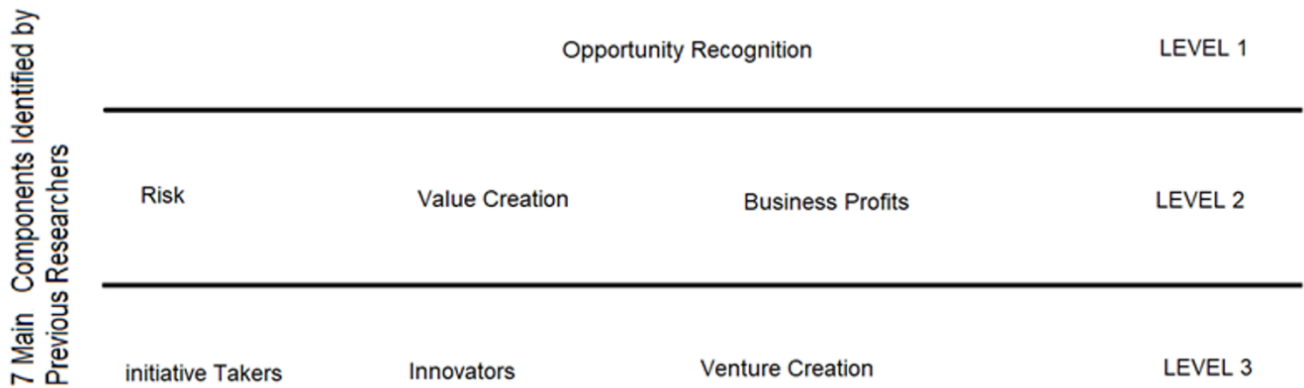
Despite various supports from the government, Bumiputera-owned businesses do not seem to be aggressively involved in the highly potential sector. Nevertheless, SMEs face several barriers, including knowledge gaps, financial limitations, and a complex certification system [11-13]. However, one aspect that differentiates between generic business and halal-related business might be the characteristics of the entrepreneurs themselves. The entrepreneurial mindset plays a key role in shaping business success. According to McGrath and MacMillan [14], entrepreneurs must be opportunity-driven, disciplined, and capable of mobilizing resources under uncertain conditions. These attributes are essential in the halal business landscape, where compliance with religious standards adds another layer of complexity [15]. The focus on Bumiputera entrepreneurs' involvement in the halal industry stemmed from the fact that the halal sector itself is based on a religious component in Islam, which is shariah compliance. However, based on previous research conducted on SMEs, there are distinct characteristics of SME entrepreneurs that might raise different and more complex issues when engaging in halal entrepreneurship [15, 16].

### **2.1. Theoretical Underpinnings**

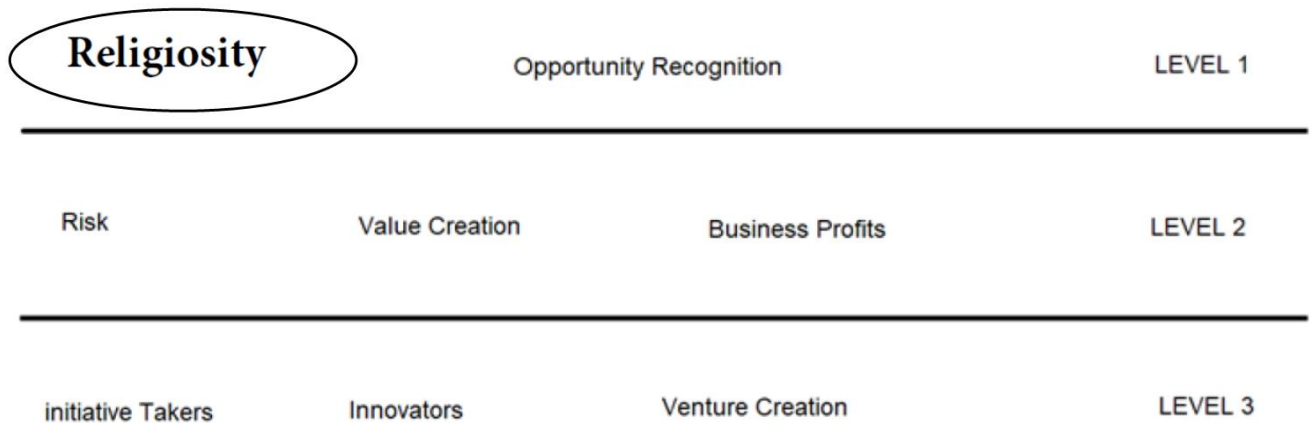
McGrath and MacMillan [14], Dinh et al. [17], Ngeek [18] and Davis et al. [19] have consistently identified five characteristics of the entrepreneurial mindset that are shared by both habitual entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs who are just starting out: identified five characteristics of the entrepreneurial mindset that are shared by both habitual entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs who are just starting out. These entrepreneurs constantly on the lookout for new opportunities are extremely disciplined in their pursuit of opportunities, only pursue the most promising opportunities, avoid becoming over exhausted in the process and their organizations by pursuing every possible course of action, are concerned with execution, and more specifically, with adaptive execution, and mobilize the energies of everyone who encounters them. However, these five habits are too generic to be used as the proposed standard during data collection; instead, a more strategically focused approach was explored. Thus, the thematic approach suggested by Kouakou et al. [1] was used as the basis for understanding the entrepreneurial mindset for this study. Kouakou et al. [1] is a more comprehensive framework encompassing a three-tiered theoretical framework that identifies seven main components deemed crucial to understanding the entrepreneurial development process, particularly within the context of opportunity-driven and value-based entrepreneurship, focusing on halal business owners. This proposition was based on their review of various academic articles, which combined studies of both the notion of entrepreneurship and the concept of entrepreneurial mindset from the perspectives of both theory and practice, including a variety of opinions and points of view from diverse scholars.

This first level of this framework represents the starting point in entrepreneurial behavior, in which individuals begin recognizing a viable market opportunity. It is the cognitive trigger that prompts individuals to consider entrepreneurship as a response to unmet needs or inefficiencies. The second level, or second tier, is where entrepreneurs must confront and

manage uncertainties, including financial risk, supply chain risk, or regulatory risk. In the case of this study, it could include the risk of non-compliance with halal certification. This level illustrates the strategic decisions made by entrepreneurs, post-opportunity recognition, and how ethical intent is balanced with the commercial necessity of value creation and profitability. The third and final tier of the framework is essentially the foundation of this framework. This level reflects the entrepreneurial action dimension, where business owners turn their thoughts and ideas into execution. The level emphasizes the behavioral traits and capabilities of the entrepreneur in converting opportunity into reality.



**Figure 1.**  
Theoretical Framework.  
**Source:** Kouakou et al. [1].



**Figure 2.**  
The Proposed Framework for Halal Entrepreneurs.

### 3. Methodology

This case study employed a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews with selected halal SME owners in Kedah and Perlis. A thematic content analysis was performed to identify recurring challenges and entrepreneurial traits. Two owners of halal-certified food manufacturing facilities were interviewed for this study. The details of the respondents are as stated below:

**Table 1.**  
Respondents backgrounds.

| Respondent (Current Position)   | Backgrounds of owners   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| A (Owners and CEO)              | A lady with a medical background and over 35 years of experience in the health sector. The factory was established in 2010, manufacturing healthy products such as breakfast cereals and energy/protein bars. The concept is similar to Atkins' Diet, except that the products are 100% halal.  |
| B (Owner and Managing Director) | The establishment of the company was in September 2011 with the status of a sole proprietorship. The owner was a graduate of a Master of Business Management from a university in New Zealand, who previously worked as the Chief Operating Officer with Royal Brunei Catering. Their main products are botanical mixed drinks, honey mixed drinks, and original honey. |

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1. Level 1 - Religiosity and Opportunity Recognition**

Respondents exhibited strong religiosity as a driver for halal entrepreneurship. One respondent, a former medical doctor, pursued halal snack production to address obesity and ensure religious compliance. Another cited the desire to offer Muslim consumers trustworthy herbal products, given the dominance of non-Muslim producers in that segment. Respondents A and B were also asked about the basis of their involvement and the motivation that drives them to pursue halal-based business and focus on halal products and markets. Respondent A shared how her personal experience of struggling with mobility due to obesity when she was younger and her occupation as a medical doctor, drives her towards looking for the best solutions to improve her own health. As she wants to reflect on her occupation as a medical doctor, she decided to lose weight and maintain a healthier lifestyle. In trying to do so, she was aware of the fact that there was a huge gap in healthy halal options in the Malaysian market to cater to such needs as hers. So, she decided to come up with her own inventions to fill this gap and started producing healthier snack bars and granolas for herself. As her own body weight also lessened, she shared the products with her own patients, and as a result, the products which were first sold to her patients began to garner attention, leading her to manufacture them in larger quantities at her own factory. This was the beginning of her mass production of the products.

Respondent B shared a similar story, but in his case, it was based on the experiences of his wife and brother, both suffering from health issues. The formulation of their first product was initially invented by the wife for her own use, made to address her health concerns. She experimented with various herbal remedies such as ginger and several types of local honey in combination. As her health improved, respondent B felt that his wife's invention might be able to find its own customers and a potential market niche. Consequently, they started producing their initial product at home on a small scale and began selling at local kiosks and exhibitions, especially those involving natural products. They received support and encouragement from local agricultural authorities such as FAMA and the Perlis state government. The respondent's extensive experience in the catering business further strengthened their motivation, especially when sales of the product began to attract larger market demand and bigger quantity orders. The demand was so high that they decided to move their home-based setup to their own small factory to obtain proper halal and food safety certifications and to increase their competitive edge. This finding also demonstrates how Islam, as an entrepreneurial religion, influences business practices and opportunity recognition among Muslim entrepreneurs [20, 21]. These respondents unanimously stated that, as Muslims, it is their obligation to produce halal products and to participate in the halal market. Such mentality and outlook are consistent with previous studies conducted on Muslim entrepreneurs by Ahmad et al. [22], Aziz and Chok [23] and Ismail and Ibrahim [24].

### **4.2. Level 2 - Risk, Value Creation and Business Profits**

Respondents A and B were also asked about risk, value creation, and profits regarding their motivation to be halal entrepreneurs. Halal business owners may perceive environmental risk, product quality risk, and health risk because of the possibility of contamination of halal products, as well as direct contact between halal products and prohibited haram ingredients and the mixing of halal products with prohibited haram ingredients. These elements of risk are basically the critical control factors that are embedded within the Halal Assurance System (HAS) that all halal-certified businesses must meet when they seek halal certification for their products [24]. Both respondents unanimously agreed that as Muslims, they felt compelled and obligated to comply with and ensure that their processes and products (including raw materials) meet the Shariah requirements, particularly the *toyyiban* aspect of halal, which includes avoiding any risk elements that could adversely affect their products and potentially harm their customers. They also reiterated that halal is more than just a business to them, as they are both financially stable even without income from their halal business. This further supports the notion that halal entrepreneurs often exhibit a desire to serve fellow Muslims and support the halal supply chain as Muslims [22].

Both respondents found it difficult to secure halal-certified raw materials from small-scale suppliers. This constraint limited their ability to obtain halal certification and access broader markets, particularly exports. According to Halal Development Corporation [25], only 21% of certified companies in Malaysia participate in the global halal value chain. This issue is widespread among small business owners in Malaysia and significantly impacts Malaysian halal entrepreneurs [26, 27]. Respondents reported similar incidents concerning suppliers' inability to provide halal certificates, especially when their order sizes are small. However, due to the compulsory requirement of using halal-certified ingredients, both entrepreneurs opted to either order in large batches, which would ease their companies' ability to receive halal certificates from the suppliers, or buy in small batches without the certificate provided by their supplier. In the case of larger batches, both respondents agreed that the impact of such practice is detrimental to their costing and financial ability as SME manufacturers. Conversely, the latter practice is a major non-compliance with their halal assurance system, risking the loss of their own halal certification. Both practices pose significant risks to their business sustainability.

### **4.3. Level 3 - Initiative Takers, Innovators, and Venture Creation**

However, despite the exponential opportunities in the market segment, without initiative from entrepreneurs, there will be no possible ventures or benefits to be gained. The process of transforming a novel concept of technology into a business that has the potential to thrive and attract investors is known as venture creation [24]. When potential entrepreneurs are looking for a company concept, they should pay close attention to everything that appears in the media related to starting a new enterprise.

Respondent A and her company have participated in many food promotions at various international trade fairs in East Asia and the Middle East. In 2015, she won the Gulf Food Awards in Dubai, under the category of Best New Halal Food Product. In 2016, she was also a nominee for SIAL Innovation. SIAL is the world's leading food fair, which takes place once a year in Paris. Her decision to join the Japanese market was influenced by the upcoming 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo. During the Olympics, Japan expects to host around 40 million visitors, with approximately eight million being Muslim tourists. She then contacted the Malaysian foreign trade office in Japan, requesting that they market her products to potential customers. Subsequently, she was introduced to a Japanese buyer experienced in the healthy living and nutritious food segments, who advised her to target premier and luxury hotels.

As for entrepreneur B, his products were his own creations to protect the well-being of his family members, some of whom suffered from fatal heart-related diseases. The combination of his previous experience in the food and beverage industry led him to invent home-based recipes based on local herbs. Unlike entrepreneur A, who has ventured into overseas markets, he, however, focuses on local markets due to higher awareness of his ingredients among local consumers. The entrepreneurial journey of Businessman B is marked by a proactive approach in navigating business development and expanding market presence. His early-stage decisions reflect the key characteristics of an initiative taker, someone who does not wait for opportunities to appear but actively seeks resources and support to improve and formalize business operations.

At the initial phase, despite operating from a home-based setting, Businessman B recognized the need for legitimacy and credibility in his food production process. This led him to seek advisory services from authoritative agencies such as the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI) Perlis and the State Department of Agriculture. Engaging with these institutions indicated his forward-thinking mindset and willingness to integrate value-added input into his venture's growth strategy. Rather than remaining within the comfort zone of small-scale informal production at home, he took the initiative to set up and equip a dedicated GMP-level production facility, ensuring it complied with international hygiene and safety standards, demonstrating innovative thinking and a commitment to best practices even at an early stage.

The turning point in his venture creation journey occurred in October 2015 when he participated in the HPPNK State-Level Expo through a booth offered by MARDI Perlis. This was not only his first public market engagement but also a strategic move to test and validate his product in a formal commercial environment. Exposure on such platforms provided vital market feedback and established visibility for the brand, aligning with the entrepreneurial process of opportunity recognition and exploitation.

By December 2015, his proactive engagement and outstanding performance at the state-level business expo had earned the company a nomination to represent Perlis at the National-Level SDSI Expo, a significant milestone reflecting external validation of his product quality and market potential. This trajectory illustrates the entrepreneur's natural progression from a small-scale innovator to a venture creator who effectively leverages institutional support, maintains compliance, and actively seeks new market channels.

## **5. Discussion**

This study explores the factors underpinning the emergence of successful halal business entrepreneurs among Malay SME manufacturers in Malaysia, emphasizing the interplay of various factors such as religiosity, halal supply chain dynamics, halal entrepreneurial traits, and the operational challenges faced by our local SME manufacturers. Based on in-depth qualitative data from interviews with two local manufacturers, the discussion draws upon theoretical frameworks to demonstrate how intrinsic religious values, opportunity recognition, and strategic innovation catalyze halal business growth and entrepreneur sustainability in the halal sector.

### *5.1. Religiosity as a Motivator in Halal Business*

Religiosity emerged as a dominant driver among the respondents, reinforcing earlier findings by Ahmad et al. [22]; Kalsoom et al. [20] and Altinay and Wang [21] that Islamic values significantly shape entrepreneurial behavior, decision-making, and market orientation for halal businesses. Among Malay entrepreneurs, the commitment to offering halal and *toyyiban* (pure, wholesome, and beneficial) products stems not only from consumer demand but also from a deeply held religious obligation to conduct business in a manner consistent with Islamic teachings.

This faith-driven approach plays a pivotal role in shaping the motivations and ethical boundaries of Malay entrepreneurs, particularly those in the halal industry. As noted by Wilson [28], Islam embeds commerce within a broader ethical and spiritual framework, where business is seen as a form of *ibadah* (act of worship) when conducted with sincerity, honesty, and social responsibility. This aligns with the experiences of the respondents, who based their entrepreneurial pursuits on fulfilling religious obligations rather than purely financial motivations. Their venture creation was driven by a spiritual-intentional alignment that not only shaped the formulation of halal products but also influenced the supply chain, customer engagement, and marketing strategies [21].

Malay entrepreneurs with strong religious convictions often perceive halal business not merely as a commercial opportunity but as a duty to serve the *ummah* (Muslim community). This intrinsic motivation encourages them to uphold higher standards of integrity, product safety, and transparency, particularly in areas like ingredient sourcing, production processes, and certification. As shown by Kalsoom et al. [20], such religiously motivated entrepreneurs also exhibit high levels of perseverance and resilience, especially when navigating challenges like regulatory compliance or limited halal-certified suppliers. Their religiosity becomes an internal compass that sustains them through market fluctuations, fosters customer trust, and enhances brand credibility.

Moreover, the pursuit of barakah (divine blessing) in income and enterprise is often cited as a long-term goal that shapes the moral outlook of halal entrepreneurs [24]. Success, in this context, is not narrowly defined by financial profit but by the ability to create value that is ethically sound, socially beneficial, and spiritually fulfilling. As a result, these entrepreneurs often enjoy sustained customer loyalty, especially within Muslim-majority regions, as their brands are perceived as authentic, principled, and aligned with shared religious values [29].

These findings highlight Islam not merely as a set of ritualistic obligations but as a holistic framework for business conduct. It shapes opportunity recognition, strategic behavior, and long-term venture goals, underscoring the notion of Islam as an entrepreneurial religion [20, 28]. The moral imperative to serve the ummah through halal offerings becomes a core entrepreneurial motivator that transcends profit orientation and redefines the metrics of success.

### 5.2. Entrepreneurial Traits and Venture Creation

These halal manufacturers exhibited key entrepreneurial traits such as initiative-taking, innovativeness, resilience, and strategic intuition. The entrepreneur's proactive engagement with international trade missions and global events demonstrated opportunity recognition driven by market intelligence and vision, thus indicating her capability to position herself as a high-impact innovator capable of translating Islamic ethical values into globally competitive products. Both manufacturing facilities evolved from home-based operations to GMP-certified factories, indicating their commitment to higher quality products that qualify for international markets and meet global safety standards. The progression of any SME entrepreneurs from home-based production to GMP-compliant facilities illustrates strategic entrepreneurial scaling while upholding halal assurance standards [22, 24, 27]. These trajectories mirror the process of venture creation, where initial ideation evolves through resource mobilization, compliance, and market engagement [24].

### 5.3. Halal Supply Chain and Operational Challenges

A recurring common issue among both entrepreneurs was the difficulty in sourcing halal-certified raw materials, a finding corroborated by Sorna et al. [26] and Tawil et al. [27]. Due to the inadequate number of halal-certified suppliers among SMEs and local halal businesses, these SMEs still depend on larger suppliers for access to halal-certified raw materials. However, larger suppliers demand higher order volumes to supply the ingredients and provide the related halal certificates. This limitation creates bottlenecks in the halal supply chain, impacting operational costs and increasing the risk of losing halal certification status. The dilemma of choosing between non-certified suppliers for financial feasibility and large batch purchasing to meet certification requirements reflects structural inefficiencies in Malaysia's halal ecosystem. While halal certification is compulsory for market access and consumer trust, its stringent requirements for a small local ecosystem like Malaysia may disproportionately burden SMEs. More research is needed to understand the complexity of the halal supply chain and how large suppliers use batch or order sizes to manage halal certificate availability. Despite these constraints, both respondents opted to maintain compliance with halal assurance systems, evidencing their ethical commitment over any potential compromises.

## 6. Conclusion

This study concludes that the success of Malay halal entrepreneurs can be attributed to a blend of internal and external critical success factors. Internally, a successful entrepreneurs have strong religiosity and Islamic values, which serve as guides in maintaining strong business ethics. Successful halal entrepreneurs also possess a long-term business vision and the ability to recognize opportunities and act adequately to achieve their business objectives. Additionally, they demonstrate high commitment to producing products of premium quality and adhere strictly to halal-toyyiban standards. Externally, successful halal entrepreneurs strategically seek support both financial and non-financial from federal government and state agencies to further explore markets for their products locally and globally. This strategy significantly enhances their presence in the halal market and provides various business opportunities, as entrepreneurs are included in trade expos worldwide, led by these agencies. These successful halal business owners also focus on strategic alignment, manufacturing products according to the latest consumer lifestyle trends, especially those sought after by health-conscious markets and halal product consumers. However, despite these success stories, further investigation and studies are necessary to understand the complexity of the halal supply chain and how large suppliers use batch size or order size to leverage halal certificate availability for their customers. Such practices could disrupt the already fragile local halal supply chain.

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