



How to cite this article:

Mustun, I. Z. K. (2022). D Enhancing Buyer-Supplier Relationship in The Halal Fast Food Sector in Mauritius: The Role of Trust. *International Journal of Islamic Business*, 7(1), 32-50. <https://doi.org/10.32890/ijib2022.7.1.3>

ENHANCING BUYER-SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP IN THE HALAL FAST FOOD SECTOR IN MAURITIUS: THE ROLE OF TRUST

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Received: 5 April 2021

Revised: 29 April 2022

Accepted: 13 May 2022

Published: 30 June 2022

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to investigate whether trust is present between Halal fast food outlets and their Halal certified suppliers, while assessing its influence on their relationship. Online questionnaires were distributed to a sample of Halal certified fast-food outlets and restaurants in Mauritius. Descriptive and correlation analyses were then carried out. The findings show that trust does exist between the two partners concerned. At the same time, trust is seen to have a positive relationship with all the variables within the buyer-supplier relationship, namely: commitment, communication, satisfaction and long-term orientation. Also, the overall results infer that Halal food certification principles are generally being respected by Halal certified suppliers, which explains the high trust levels between them and the Halal fast food outlets they supply. Concomitantly, Halal food certification in a way contributes to better buyer-supplier relationships due to strict Halal food security and handling practices which inspire trust and confidence. The study presents a unique case in a Small Island Developing State (SID) and is one of the pioneering research on the Halal food sector in Mauritius. Despite the contribution of this research to the literature both conceptually and empirically, the small sample size, affects to some extent the generality of the findings. For this reason, more qualitative research in the form of interviews and surveys with Halal Certifying Bodies (HCBs) need to be done to acquire deeper understanding on rampant issues such as Halal frauds, Halal logo tampering and consumer trust on the Halal food certification system.

Keywords: Halal food certification, Halal logistics and supply chains, Buyer-supplier relationship, Halal food industry, Mauritius.

INTRODUCTION

Background of study

Mauritius is a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) situated in the Indian ocean, which since its independence in the 1960s, has travelled a long way to achieve the status of a paragon of economic and social stability in this part of the world. Despite hosting a minority Muslim population, the island boasts three Halal Certifying Bodies (HCBs) which undertake Halal food certification for local and imported food products, slaughter houses, cold storages and food outlets, while bearing the onus of safeguarding the interests of the Halal food sector. This is principally achieved by maintaining trust and confidence in the Halal ecosystem at all times. In other words, Halal food enthusiasts and Muslims should uphold high level of confidence that the food they purchase is Halal without an ounce of doubt. The same applies for Halal food business owners (fast food outlets and restaurants) who need absolute assurance that the ingredients and other raw materials from their suppliers are fully Halal. At a time when global Halal supply chains have become increasingly complex coupled with Halal frauds and scandals, trust in the Halal food sector has become challenging to maintain. Hence, trust both across the downstream (customers) and upstream (suppliers) continuum of the Halal supply chain, is unquestionably a significant quotient for a harmonious and efficient Halal food industry.

In fact, Halal supply chains seek to integrate Islamic principles across the traditional supply chains and logistic activities ranging from procurement, transportation, warehousing, packaging, storage and distribution. The very foundation of Halal logistics and supply chains is that Haraam (prohibited) items are not mixed with Halal (permissible) goods, which would otherwise compromise the Halal integrity of the whole spectrum and eventually deceiving food retailers and consumers. Thus, on one hand, with Halal food supply chains, Muslims and Halal food consumers feel that their food is meeting the highest standards of purity and cleanliness, as guaranteed by the Halal philosophy. On the other hand, food retailers benefit from the assurance that their supplies are concomitant to respected food standards, as enshrined by HCBs.

Buyer firms and suppliers in the Halal market have a fundamental reason to cooperate and collaborate together, because the success of their relationship will eventually impact consumers at the very end of the supply chain. As explained by Khan et al., (2018), the consumer sits at the end of the Halal supply chain, and hence any ruptures in the Halal assurance system will have serious repercussions on the latter. Such consequences are deemed to be extremely severe, because the Halal market is profoundly linked to religious commitments, which mean that Halal consumers are particularly sensitive. Generally speaking, the very nature of traditional supply chains and logistics is essentially focused on partnership, collaborative strategic alliances and teamwork. Halal supply chains and logistics have increased the need for substantive rigidity, quality assurance, traceability and visibility across the whole supply chains in to protect the Halal integrity of products. As such, combined efforts, concerted agreements, mutual support and intra-firm communication are even more optimized under Halal assurance systems.

Buyer-supplier relationship has gained considerable academic attention over the past three decades and is an important area of study. In fact, Kumar and Rahman, (2015) aver that the efficacy of the entire supply chain and the success of the final product are both hinged on the sustainability performance of each partner in the chain. Therefore, the critical role played by buyer-supplier relationship in an effective, sustainable and dynamic supply chain is undeniable. When looking at the Halal food industry, the buyer-supplier relationship takes a new dimension and perspective, since the Halal industry is unique where small breaches can have manifest ramifications. Overall, this reiterates the fact that trust and confidence are sine quanon elements for the sustainability of the Halal supply chains.

Identifying the research gaps and setting the research objectives

Given the rising interest and rise in scholarly research on Halal food purchase (Tiemann and Ghazali, 2013), Halal traceability in supply chains (Samsi et al, 2011), Halal logistics (Tan et al, 2012), Halal orientation strategy (Zailani et al, 2015) and Halal certification [Ab Talib et al, (2017); Ab Talib et al, (2016) and Ratnasari et al, (2019)], it can be said that the topic of Halal is gaining significant momentum. This academic interest is supported by the systematic literature of Baran, (2020), where the author confirms that research on Halal has been increasing annually based on studies for the period 2010 to 2018. However, the latter's analysis reveals that studies on Halal are still scant and there is a need to support more research on Halal in a general way. This view is also corroborated by Haleem et al., (2020) who have used bibliometric analysis to probe the research status on Halal and maintain that Halal research is still in its infancy stage. Furthermore, it also emerges from Baran, (2020) that the majority of studies have been conducted in Malaysia and Asia for Secinaro and Calandra, (2020), which means that other geographical set up is yet to be explored in terms of Halal experimentation. Likewise, Ab Talib et al., (2017) note that the bulk of research is centered on consumers; the downstream part of the supply chain, and for that reason, the authors have called for more studies from the perspectives of manufactures, suppliers and distributors who are in the upstream of the Halal supply chain.

From these research gaps, emanate the focal points of the present research. Firstly, by undertaking research on the buyer-supplier relationship, this study attempts to expand the literature on the upstream machinations of the Halal supply chain. Secondly, being contextualized in Mauritius; a SIDS with a minority Muslim population, the present paper brings a unique case within the body of work on Halal. Thirdly, the current study seeks to explore the role of trust between Halal fast food outlets and their Halal certified suppliers in order to investigate the extent trust exists amongst upstream actors in the Mauritian Halal supply chain. Also, the ubiquity of Halal fast food outlets in Mauritius builds an interesting case for the purposes of this research. The following research questions are based on the objectives highlighted above.

1. Is trust present amongst Halal fast food outlets and Halal certified suppliers?
2. How far does trust influence the buyer-supplier relationship in the Mauritian Halal fast food sector?
3. Does Halal food certification improve trust between Halal fast food outlets and their Halal certified suppliers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Halal Food Certification.

“O Mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] lawful (halaal) and good (tayyiban) and do not follow the footsteps of satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.” (Chapter 2, verse 168, The Holy Quraan).

Halal is an Arabic word easily translated as permissible and lawful, whose evidence come from the Quran, Sunnah (prophetic literature) and authentic scholarly proofs. In essence, any action which a Muslim would undertake must conform to what Allah has decreed as acceptable. By contrast, Haraam is any activity deemed as improper, inadmissible and distasteful by nature, which Allah has severely condemned. As such, Muslims take it as obligatory to refrain from Haraam actions and activities or anything leading to these, in order to protect their spiritual and religious commitment and cleanliness.

Halal certification serves as guarantee and accredits that the product has been sourced, stored, manufactured, transported, packaged and delivered in ways conforming to Islamic legislation. For that matter, a Halal certificate remains unarguably the most trustworthy accreditation that a product is Halal

suitable as granted by HCB, which means that Islamic laws have been respected in the manufacturing of a particular item and is deemed fit for Halal consumers. That is the product at the very base is permitted and all throughout the supply chain, it has not been contaminated by filthy substances, and if that occurred, necessary ritual cleansing has been practiced in order to safeguard the Halal status.

Halal is a typical credence quality; the Halalness of a product does not become manifest explicitly or physically, rather it is simply based on trust and confidence offered by the Halal certification. Taking the example of a piece of fried chicken, its Halalness is not evidenced directly or immediately through taste or flavour or any other tangible proof; it would taste the same as any other haram chicken probably slaughtered in ways inconsistent to sacred Islamic rites. As such, the logo or trade mark proving the Halalness of a product is the sole most trusted guarantee that it is Halal, along with the Halal certificate.



Figure 1. Halal logos in use worldwide.

Source: Hashim (2010)

In the same bandwidth, Talib et al., (2017) posit that manufacturers in the Halal food sector must pass through several strict inspections, regulatory controls and checks by the HCBs, before a Halal certificate is awarded. Thus, food quality, purity and wholesomeness is known to increase with Halal certification. In the words of Yusuf et al., (2016): “Halal certificate recently has been described as a new defining market force.” Thus, global companies have lobbied for a Halal certification in view to strengthen their competitiveness, market reputation and brand image as they jockey in an ever growing homogenous market on the verge of saturation.

Given the remarkable momentum gained by the global Halal industry lately, scholars and academic have been prompted to study the relationship between Halal certification and logistics performance and business performance, equally. The Resource Based View (RBV) model is well used in research in order to locate and leverage the resources and capabilities of firms which are deemed to be rare, inimitable, valuable and perfectly non-substitutable, so as to create serious competitive advantage over rival businesses. In this connection, Talib et al., (2017) argue that Halal food certification is in fact a resource on its own, used by companies to achieve a competitive edge and make a mark into the lucrative Halal market. Recent research in Halal certification has brought evidence that Halal certification has a significant and positive relationship with operational performance. [see Ab Talib et al., (2016); Nordin et al., (2016) and Yusuf et al., (2016)].

Halal logistics, supply chains and procurement.

With the unprecedented explosion of the global Halal market and the stratospheric rise in Halal consumption, it has become a daunting maneuver to protect the integrity of Halal products, especially if the points of origin are dispersed worldwide. To better illustrate this dual combination of sensitivity and fragility of the Halal supply chain, Hanzaee and Ramezani (2011), state that the Halal food business is a process from “farm to table” which enforces the requirement of Halal logistics and supply chains, in view to trace with efficiency the movement of Halal products across the trade routes. It is well documented in the literature that Halal logistics seek to integrate the teachings of Shari’ah (Islamic legislation) into conventional logistics activities in order to maintain the Halal status of products all across the supply chain till they finally reach the hands of final consumers. Khan et al. (2018) define Halal logistics and supply chain as:

“A process-oriented approach, to manage the flow of material, information and capital; through strategic coordination & collaboration of stakeholders, as to create value to improve the performance of the Supply Chain, in such a way that Halal & Toyyib (pure, clean and wholesome) is extended from farm to fork”.

The prime objective of the Halal supply chain is to safeguard the Halalness, purity and nobility of food or any other products until the end consumers receive them. From this legitimate and constant need to sustain the Halal status of a product all along the way, sprouts the concept of Halal procurement. In other words, Halal certified firms procure their supplies only from Halal certified, Shari’ah compliant, committed and trustworthy suppliers. That is why, Halal certified firms and manufacturers take it to heart to select and engage in commercial ties with only suppliers who are equally Halal certified or at least supply Halal certified products. All these efforts converge towards the preservation of Halal integrity, which is the safeguard of the Halal status of a product, and it starts from the very start of the Halal supply chain; at the hands of suppliers.

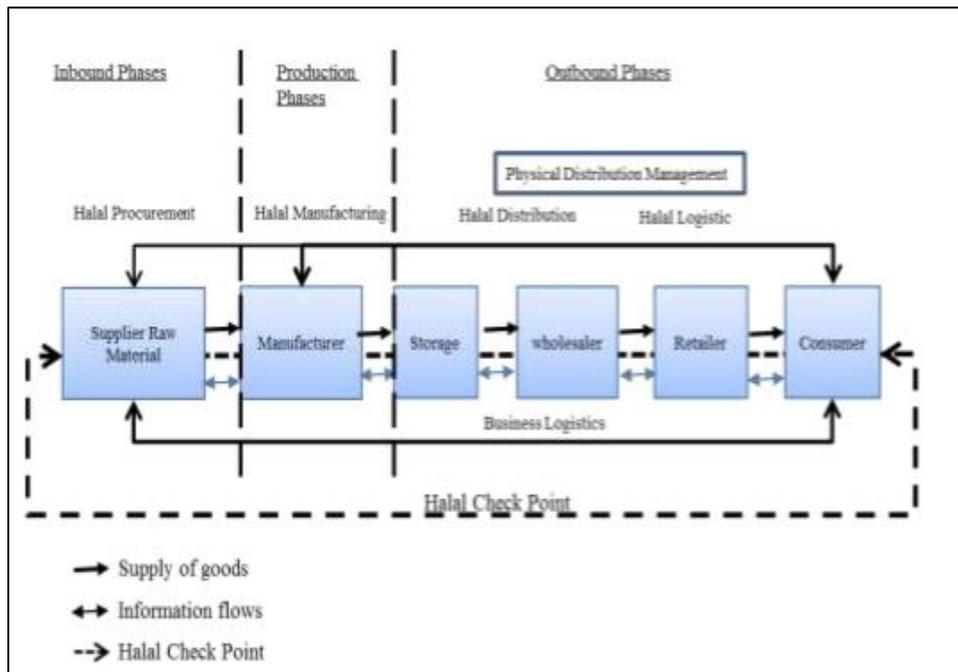


Figure 2. Halal supply chain network.

Source: Rasi et al. (2017)

The buyer-supplier relationship management.

Extending buyer-supplier relationships to long-term mutually cooperative engagements; beyond short-term contractual agreements, can have a serious impact on profitability and customer relationships (Semuel et al., 2018). One of the most underlying and essential motives of enhanced supply chain management is to create strategic alignments with upstream stakeholders in view to encourage inter-firm capacity build-up and proficiency. Undoubtedly, labouring to achieve synchronized and harmonious relationships with upstream suppliers and manufacturers, fosters buyer-supplier relationships, while diminishing the bullwhip effect. The “bullwhip effect” posits that slow or small changes in consumer demand will lead to consequential changes for producers and manufacturers at the top of the supply chain. This is because, the longer is the information transmit time between consumers at one end, and suppliers at the other, then alterations in production become more cumbersome to undertake.

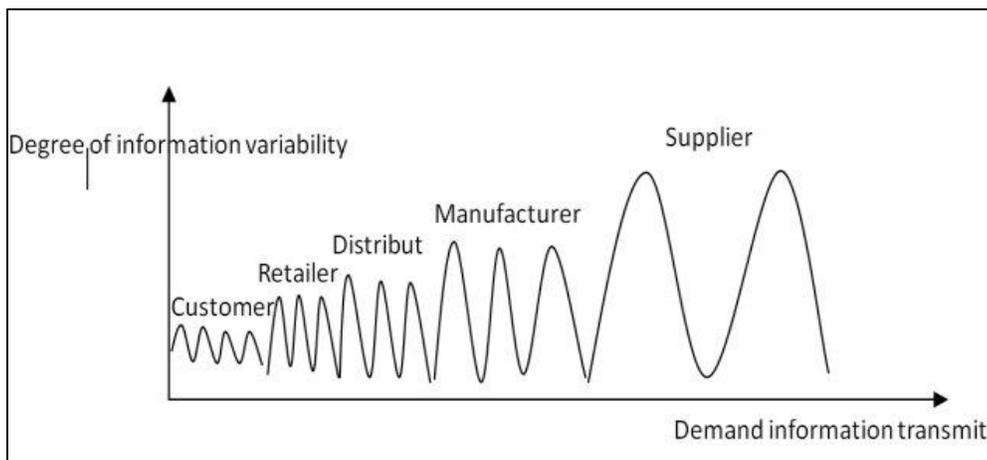


Figure 1. *The bullwhip effect.*

Source: Dai et al. (2017)

Trust: The cornerstone of buyer-supplier relationship management and Halal food certification.

Organizations in the 21st century are compelled to lay significant emphasis on cross-boundary strategic alliance and collaboration across the supply chain, in view to move forward towards technology driven capabilities and sophistication, especially at a time when market change and organizational evolution is gaining strong foothold. Thus, according to Fisher, (2013) trust has elevated itself to an important notion, given the globalized context of commercial transactions, where uncertainty and volatility are embedded characteristics of international trade. Undoubtedly, the element of trust is a prerequisite element in any engaging, strategic, resilient and long term aspiring relationship amongst business partners, notably within the buyer-supplier relationship. Belaya et al., (2018) view trust as the possibility to rely on a conjoint partner and the assurance that the latter will respect the mutual agreements, and not resorting to fulfilling personal interests instead. Concomitantly, for Capaldo and Giannoccaro, (2015) trust is considered as substantial in the nurturing of inter-organizational relationships, and Seppänen et al.,

(2007) confer that trust is a multidimensional construct involving aspects of reliability, fairness, loyalty, non-opportunism, benevolence and collaboration.

In the context of the Halal food industry, Omar and Jaafar, (2011) point out the necessity for the Halal status of the supply chain to be consistent throughout, until the products reach the final consumers. Subsequently, one of the most underlying principles of the Halal food supply chain is trust. This is supported by Ab Talib et al., (2015) who consider that Halal is an all-encompassing concept with elements such as faith, trust, clean, safe and free from non-Halal. Simultaneously, with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, food safety and quality assurance in food production has become a major concern, and in this regards, Amalia et al., (2020) argue that Halal food consumption can lessen the risks of probable outbreak of pandemics. The authors flaunt the merits of Halal food production systems as one abiding to stringent sanitary controls, where wholesomeness and quality of products, especially meat is maximized, thereby preventing cross-contamination and reducing the emergence of toxic microorganisms.

As such, businesses in the food sector are highly cautious over the manufacturing, handling, processing, packaging and distribution of raw materials, since negligence can have serious backlash on food security and consumer wellbeing. For these reasons, trust in the Halal food certification system by manufacturers, distributors and suppliers are critical for the upholding of Halal standards and principles. The trust, assurance and confidence which pervade at the upstream of the Halal supply chain, will eventually trickle down to consumers, thereby safeguarding the sanctity of the Halal food sector. Overall, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Halal food certification provides manifest assurance to food operators such as fast food outlets and restaurants that their supplies meet quality, safety, purity, hygiene and cleanliness standards.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of the study is shown below. The independent variable is trust while the dependent variable is buyer-supplier relationship management, itself containing four items: commitment, communication, satisfaction, long-term orientation. The aim of the framework is to address the research questions of the study, that is in the first instance, to show whether trust exists between Halal fast food outlets and their Halal certified suppliers. Secondly, to assess the influence of trust on the buyer-supplier relationship in the Mauritian Halal fast food sector. Lastly, the role of Halal food certification in improving trust needs to be investigated by way of overall results. In this study, “buyers” are defined as the Halal fast food outlets while “suppliers” are the Halal certified suppliers.

The Halal fast food sector in Mauritius.

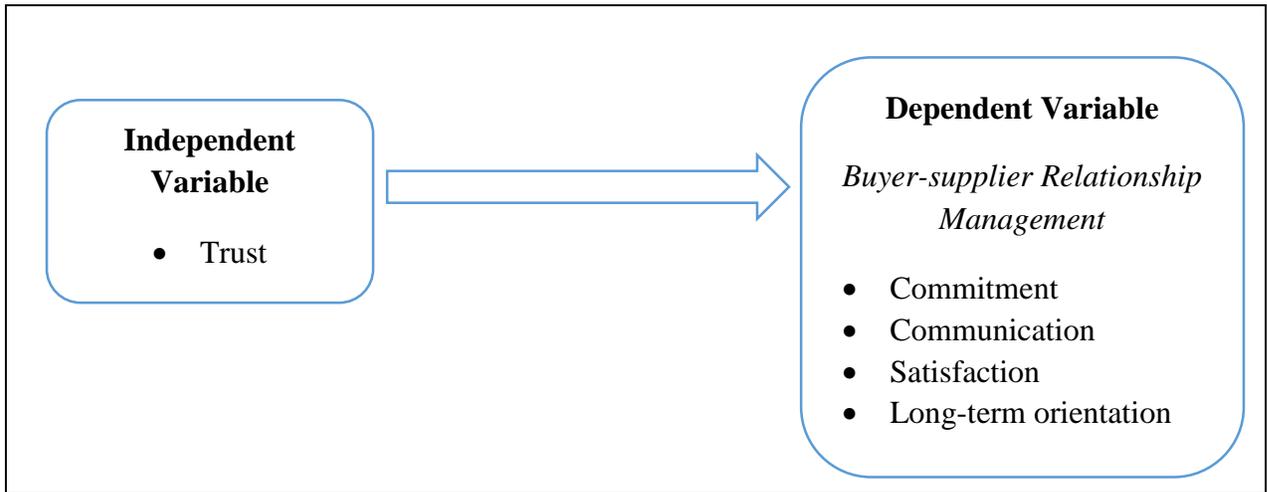


Figure 4. *The conceptual framework.*

Source: Adapted from Jiang et al. (2012)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sources, description of the data and sample.

This study has made use of both primary and secondary data as basis for the research. Important and key literature on Halal certification, Halal supply chains and logistics, buyer-supplier relationship and other inter-connected aspects were consulted extensively. Likewise, fresh data were collected from Halal certified fast food outlets in Mauritius through online questionnaires, which made use of psychometric 7- point Likert scales as the same was used in the study taken as primary reference [see Jiang et al., (2012)], in order to assess the likely association between trust and the buyer-supplier relationship itself comprising of; commitment, communication, satisfaction and long-term orientation as constructs. The Likert scales varied from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”.

Table 1
Sources of measurement constructs.

Dimension	Number of Items	Sources
1. Trust	5	Ganesan (1994), Kumar et al. (1995) and Jiang et al, 2012.
2. Commitment	4	Kumar et al. (1995), Anderson and Weitz (1992) and Ivens and Pardo (2007).
3. Communication	3	Heide and John (1992).
4. Satisfaction	4	Jap and Ganesan (2000), Lin and Germain (1998), Selnes and Sallis (2003) and Chatterjee (2004)
5. Long-term Orientation	3	Ganesan (1994).

Source: Author's compilation.

The target population for this study was Halal certified fast-food outlets, street snacks and restaurants, because they are an integral part of the Mauritian outdoor food landscape. The list of Halal certified fast-food businesses and restaurants was obtained from the directories of the Jummah Masjid, the Halal Research Committee (HRC) and the Jamiat-Ul-Ulama of Mauritius (JUM) which the triad of HCBs in Mauritius. The combined lists of the three Halal certifying bodies provided a population of 109 Halal certified food outlets.

Finally, 67 outlets have been shortlisted due to:

- Lack of contact details.
- Some fast-food outlets hold more than one Halal food certification and appeared in different directories more than once. Thus, they should be considered only once.
- Some owners owned more than one fast food outlet, and therefore should respond to the questionnaire only once.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Questionnaires were distributed to the 67 identified food business operators within the Mauritian Halal food sector, through the internet. However, out of the 67 respondents who were contacted, 30 of them responded, filled the questionnaire and sent it successfully. Therefore, this study garnered a response rate of 44.8 %, and therefore only the 30 collected questionnaires were available for statistical analysis. It should be noted that Halal food certification is a highly sensitive topic, and thus many respondents did not agree to participate in the research. This sensitivity was highlighted in the studies of Ali et al. (2017) and Zannierah et al. (2012).

Validity of samples is an essential principle in academic research, whereby the context of study cannot be neglected. In the words of Chakrapani, (2011): "One cannot decide on the sample size based on statistical formulas alone without considering the context." Given the sensitivity of the research and the fact that the target population itself was small, the 30 questionnaires obtained were deemed reasonably adequate, following the latter's reasoning.

Respondent profile

Table 2

Number of years in operation in the Mauritian Halal fast food sector.

Number of years in operation	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Less than 5 years	11	36.7	36.7
Between 5 to 10 years	5	16.7	53.3
Between 11 to 15 years	11	36.7	90.0
More than 16 years	3	10.0	100
Total	30	100	

Source: Author's compilation

The majority of respondents (36.7%) are new to the Mauritian Halal food sector which may indicate the attractiveness of the Halal food business. Equally, 36.7% of the Halal food operators have been Halal certified for over 11 years which testify to their keenness in safeguarding their Halal food certification

Table 3
Structure of business.

Structure of business	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Franchise	4	13.3	13.3
Soletrader	4	13.3	26.6
Family business	11	36.7	63.3
Company (private)	11	36.7	100
Total	30	100	

Source: Author's compilation.

The majority of the respondents (36.7%) were private companies, while soletrading businesses were less present in the Halal food landscape.

Table 4
Does Halal Food Certification (HCF) guarantee supply of high quality?

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative frequency
Yes	29	96.7	96.7
No	1	3.3	100
Total	30	100	

Source: Author's compilation.

The majority of respondents (91.7%) agreed that their Halal certified supplies guaranteed them supplies of high quality.

Table 5
Does Halal Food Certification boosts customer perception?

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative frequency
Yes	30	100	100
No	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total	30	100	

Source: Author's compilation.

All respondents unanimously agreed that their Halal Food Certification (HCF) has indeed boosted and improved their corporate image and customer perception.

Descriptive statistics.

Table 6

Trust Construct

Statements	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
<i>1. Our Halal certified suppliers are open in dealing with us.</i>	30	6.13	0.86
<i>2. When making important decisions, our Halal certified suppliers are concerned about our welfare.</i>	30	6.13	0.93
<i>3. When we share our problems with our Halal certified suppliers, we know that they will respond with understanding.</i>	30	6.10	0.76
<i>4. In the future, we can count on our Halal certified suppliers to consider how its decisions and actions will affect us.</i>	30	5.90	1.12
<i>5. We are confident with our Halal certified suppliers' ability to fulfil our agreements.</i>	30	6.26	0.69

Source: Author's compilation.

The computed means for each statement above show that respondents answered constructively for the different questions under the construct trust. The highest recorded mean is 6.26, for the statement: “*We are confident with our Halal certified suppliers' ability to fulfil our agreements*”. Therefore, it can be argued that trust between the Halal food business operators and their Halal certified suppliers is optimized and enhanced primarily because they are able and capable of fully honouring contractual agreements and responsibilities. This shows the trustworthiness of the Halal certified suppliers in Mauritius in honouring their obligations and fulfilling the requirements which exist in the Halal food sector. Besides, all means are quite high, which means that most respondents have strongly agreed with the statements on trust.

In other words, this confirms the fact that the Halal fast food outlets have faith, confidence and assurance in their Halal certified suppliers to commit to the strict Halal standards and supply ingredients of quality which satisfy the principles of Halal. Succinctly put, trust exists between Halal fast food businesses and their Halal certified suppliers in Mauritius.

Table 7

Statements with the highest means for buyer-supplier relationship variables.

Variable	Statement	Mean
Commitment	<i>Our positive feelings towards our Halal certified suppliers are a major reason why we continue working with them.</i>	6.20
Communication	<i>We always keep our Halal certified suppliers informed about events or changes which may affect them.</i>	5.93
Satisfaction	<i>Our personal working relationship with our Halal certified suppliers is satisfactory.</i>	6.17
Long-term orientation	<i>We expect our Halal certified suppliers to be working with us for a long time.</i>	6.43

Source: Author's compilation.

For the commitment variable, it is observed that “positive feelings” do exist between Halal fast food outlets and their Halal certified outlets, and this aid in the continuity of trading relations between the two partners. Indeed, in the Halal industry important sacrifices need to be made such as investing in specialized fleets of transports, segregated compartments and equipped warehouses to avoid cross-

contamination (Zulfakar et al., 2014). Consequently, conscious of such investments, Halal fast food outlets experience confidence and positivity towards their Halal certified suppliers.

Looking at the communication variable, it can be concluded that Halal certified outlets communicate with their Halal certified suppliers mainly in order to keep them informed of any event or occurrence which might affect them or which is of significance to them. Such a concern for their Halal certified suppliers is justified given the sensitivity of the Halal food sector, where consumer complaints need to be transmitted in a timely manner to suppliers and distributors.

Likewise, Halal fast food owners and their Halal certified suppliers enjoy affective mutual commitment, which is reflective of the satisfactory personal working relationships both share. This is further justified by the fact that 96.7 % of respondents averred that their Halal certified suppliers guaranteed them supplies and ingredients of high quality.

Lastly, Halal fast food owners are engaged towards longer term relationships with their Halal certified suppliers. That is, Halal certified food outlets strive to build long-term goals and objectives together with their Halal certified suppliers. Such a futuristic approach to their business relationships is crucial, because Halal food outlets are greatly dependent on their Halal certified food operators, and thus switching suppliers is highly difficult.

Bivariate Spearman Correlation Analysis.

The Spearman Correlation Analysis is a non-parametric statistical technique used to assess the correlation or the extent of linear association between two independent variables. The Spearman Rank Correlation Analysis is well known for its applicability in cases of small observations and its insensitivity to outliers. The value which indicates the strength of the correlation between the two variables is known as the “*coefficient of correlation*” and the strength and direction of the correlation is judged by its value lying between -1 and +1. The interpretation of the correlation coefficients was according to Dancey and Reidy (2007).

Table 8
Interpretation of Correlation values.

Spearman Correlation Coefficient	Interpretation
Greater or equal to 0.70	Very strong relationship
0.40 to 0.69	Strong relationship
0.30 to 0.39	Moderate relationship
0.20 to 0.29	Weak relationship
0.10 to 0.19	No or negligible relationship

Source: Dancey and Reidy (2007).

The table below summarizes the correlation values between trust and the dimensions of the construct buyer-supplier relationship. As can be noticed, all the values are positive which indicates that trust positively influences the buyer-supplier relationship in the Mauritian Halal fast food sector.

Table 9
Summary of correlation values.

Variable	Correlation value
Commitment	0.624
Communication	0.342
Satisfaction	0.625
Long-term relationship	0.550

Source: Author's compilation.

A firsthand inspection shows that all correlation values are positive, which means that trust has a positive influence on the dimensions of the buyer-supplier relationship within the Halal fast food sector in Mauritius. In other words, an increase in trust in Halal certified suppliers will eventually cause a strengthening of the relationship between them and the Halal fast food outlets or restaurants in Mauritius. As observed from the table, trust in Halal certified suppliers and the resulting commitment between them and their buyer partners have a positive and strong positive correlation value of 0.624. This shows that the trust Halal fast food outlets have on their Halal certified suppliers, eventually translates into deeper commitment and engagement between them. Consequently, it can be deduced that commitment between Halal certified suppliers and their buyer partners in the Halal food sector is mainly driven by the positive feelings and consensual entente between the two. As a result of which, Halal fast food chains and restaurants strive accordingly not to jeopardise or put to peril such a strategic bonding.

Concerning communication, the correlation analysis has demonstrated a moderate yet positive correlation between Halal food operators and their Halal certified supplies, within the Mauritian Halal food sector, with $r = 0.342$. Indeed, higher levels of trust between partners lead to increased communication pathways, from formal to informal ways of sharing information. The positive relationship shows that communication routes are open between Halal food operators and their Halal certified suppliers, but the moderate relationship calls for some reflection. Mauritius being a SIDS with a minority Muslim population, does not have a consequentially large Halal hub, unlike Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore amongst others. The size of the Halal sector in Mauritius causes communication between Halal fast food owners and their Halal certified suppliers to be merely transactional in nature.

The strength of correlation between trust in Halal certified suppliers and the satisfaction derived by their food operators and retailers in the Mauritian Halal food sector is found to be high; $r=0.625$. Hence, a high degree of trust will eventually promulgate an amplification of the level of satisfaction between the Halal certified suppliers and the buyer firms. This high satisfaction level imply that Halal fast food retailers have benefitted from the alliance with their Halal certified suppliers, probably in terms of high quality raw materials, ethical considerations, increase financial returns and respect of Halal food standards.

In fact, as demonstrated previously, the majority of respondents (36.7%), were Halal certified for over 11 years, which testify to the robust, amiable and resilient personal working relationships which grew deeper overtime, spearheaded by high satisfaction levels.

Likewise, trust is seen to strongly correlate with buyer-supplier long-term orientation at **0.550**, which signifies that an increase in trust between fast food outlets and their Halal certified suppliers will lead to a similar increase in the desire to engage in durable relationships. As seen above, Halal food certification plays a protagonist role in boosting customer perception and the majority of Halal certified outlets under study have been Halal certified for over 11 years, which bear testimony to the long-term endeavor in nurturing stronger relationships with their Halal certified suppliers over the years. The Halal food sector

clearly holds significant profitability for businesses worldwide and thus, in Mauritius too, the desire to maintain an influential status among consumers, will prompt food operators and restaurants to uphold long-term goals and business alliances with their Halal certified suppliers.

As demonstrated in Figure 5, the overall results equally underpin the fact that Halal food certification in the Mauritian Halal fast food sector is efficient enough since Halal fast food outlets are shown to demonstrate a high degree of trust in their Halal certified suppliers. Likewise, the positive relationships between trust and the variables within the buyer-supplier relationship construct, corroborate the argument that Halal food suppliers in the Halal fast food sector are complying to some extent to the guidelines and principles established by the HCBs.

If that was not the case, the Halal certified outlets would not have demonstrated high levels of commitment, satisfaction and desire for long-term orientation towards their Halal certified suppliers. The Halal food supply chain is a “farm to fork” process, which aims to preserve the Halal status and quality from source to consumers. Therefore, food operators such as fast-food outlets and restaurants are cautious of the quality, safety and security of their raw materials bought from their suppliers. Halal food certification provides assurance of the quality of such supplies and therefore enhances the trust between buyer firms and suppliers within the Halal food sector.

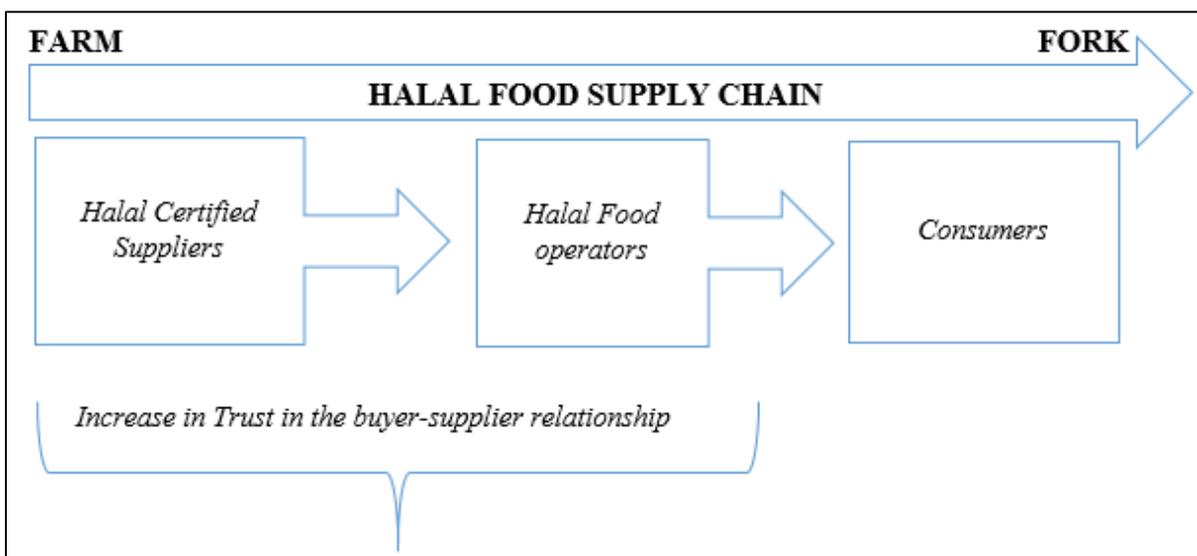


Figure 5. Farm to fork process in the Halal food supply chain.

Source: Author’s own illustration.

CONCLUSION

This research has concluded that trust plays a vital role in supporting and enhancing the buyer-supplier relationship within the Halal fast food sector in Mauritius, by taking the case of Halal fast food outlets and Halal certified suppliers. The element of trust is noted to have positive relationships will all the dimensions of the buyer-supplier relationship construct, commitment, communication, satisfaction and long-term orientation. This means that trust remains a strong contributor towards improving the rapport between Halal fast food businesses and their Halal certified suppliers. Simultaneously, the results are supportive to the fact that the Halal food certification principles in Mauritius are adhered and respected by Halal certified suppliers, as trust is high between Halal fast food outlets and their Halal certified

suppliers. In other words, the Halal fast food businesses and restaurants are confident that their suppliers are satisfying the Halal food standards put in place by the HCBs.

The main results are fully in accordance with key research findings and the bulk of literature on Halal. The findings of this research are expected to motivate Halal food outlets to endorse Halal food certification as a tool to improve their relationship with their suppliers and equally with their clientele, through cleaner, safer and better-quality food. The present paper has broken new ground in terms of research in the Mauritian Halal food sector and is one of the very first to undertake such an academic investigation in the local context. The overall results bring reassurance to HCBs that their Halal food standards are generally being respected, otherwise trust would not pervade between Halal fast food outlets and their Halal certified suppliers. Similarly, it emerges from the accrued findings that Halal fast food outlets and their Halal certified suppliers enjoy a positive, worthwhile and constructive relationship. At the same time, as per the author's best knowledge, this is one of the few studies looking at the buyer-supplier relationship from the lenses of the Halal industry.

As far as the recommendations are concerned, research and surveys by research institutes, Halal experts and universities are much required in order to gauge buyer-supplier perceptions, behaviours and understanding of Halal issues, so that improvements can be made. Likewise, there should be the promulgation of events such as seminars, conferences, forums, exhibitions and product launches which serve as a platform to showcase the latest R&D in Halal, while harnessing conversations with Halal experts and industry representatives which can help to improve understanding amongst Halal stakeholders. Despite the valuable conceptual and empirical contribution of this research to the Halal literature, its primary limitation is the smallness of the sample size, which reduces the generality of the results to some extent. A much larger pool of respondents would have provided more representative results of the Halal food landscape in Mauritius. Future studies should take interest in investigating on Halal food frauds and also the level of trust in the Halal food certification by consumers as well.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author is thankful to every respondent who participated in the survey, and is also appreciative of the comments of the two reviewers in improving the quality of the paper. Special thanks also go to the Jamiat-UI-Ulama of Mauritius (JUM) for validating the questionnaire. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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