

The readiness theme development from a case study in Thailand halal restaurants

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Abstract

Tourism industry in Thailand had generated a significant amount of the country's revenue, with approximately USD54 billion in 2017. The number of tourist arrival is expected to continue to increase by 10 percent annually, which in turn would increase the revenue of the food and beverage sector. The northeastern area in Thailand is becoming popular among Muslim travelers and the demand of halal food is increasing. Nevertheless, the number of halal certified restaurants in the northeastern region is meagre to match the influx of Muslim tourists into the area. A number of restaurants in northeastern area provide halal food without a halal certificate. Restaurants with a halal logo displayed can facilitate tourists' selection of an eating outlet. Hence, the purpose of this study is to identify, by means of a qualitative approach, the readiness of the noncertified halal restaurant towards obtaining halal certification. Semi-structure interviews were conducted with informants comprising (1) operators of halal certified restaurants (HCRs) and non-certified halal restaurants (NCHRs) and (2) the halal authority. The data was analysed using ATLAS where six themes emerged from the thematic analysis. Appropriateness, management support, change efficacy, discrepancy, personally beneficial, and perception towards change efforts were the readiness dimensions developed from this study. This study also mapped the readiness of the restaurants into six readiness stages. NCHRs were identified to be at the pre-contemplation and contemplation stages. Meanwhile, HCRs were classified to be at the maintenance and terminate stages. In addition, the findings could facilitate better understanding of the current situations and efforts that should be carried out by the authorised bodies to promote halal food in Thailand.

Keywords:

Halal restaurant, Readiness for change, Readiness stages, Tourism, Muslim friendly, Halal certification

1 Introduction

In 2017, the tourism industry in Thailand generated a significant amount of the country's revenue of approximately USD54 billion (Karaman, 2018). In the same year, 35.4 million international tourists arrived in Thailand, the second highest arrival recorded to be of Malaysian tourists (3.35 million) (Tourism Council of Thailand^a, 2017; Karaman, 2018). The number of tourist arrival is expected to continue to increase by 10 percent annually, which in turn, will increase the revenue of the food and beverage sector. This sector was identified as one of the top five sectors that contributed USD17.3 billion to the national GDP in 2017 (Tourism Council of Thailand^a, 2017). This is a golden opportunity for the country to gain more income by developing the tourism industry. Nevertheless, in order to comfortably accommodate tourists, particularly Muslim tourists, Thailand should be prepared for their necessities such as accommodation, food, beverage, and transportation. Fulfilling these needs may contribute to return visit and word of mouth among the tourists.

Food and drink are human's basic needs. Humans need to consume food or drink every day. Therefore, various foods should be prepared to support Thailand's visitors. Thailand has restaurants that offer various cuisines, including Thai, Japanese, and European. However, the world's Muslim population reported that Muslim global is expected to expand by approximately 35% 20 years later (Pew Research Center, 2011). Muslim tourists are noteworthy because they drive Thailand's tourism industry. Muslims must respect the teachings of the Quran, which guides all the aspects of human living, including, clothes, entertainment, and food. Halal food is accepted among Muslims, a view that is also agreed by non-Muslims (Haque et al., 2015). Therefore, halal restaurants can bring an advantage to Thailand because they can promote the country as a Muslim-friendly location. The quality of a halal restaurant can be communicated to customers with an official halal logo. Therefore, Thailand has to encourage noncertified halal restaurants to go for halal certification in order to ensure that their food production complies with Muslim dietary rules.

The aim of the study is to identify, by means of a qualitative research design, the readiness of noncertified halal restaurant towards establishing a halal food-service system. Data were collected from the northeastern region of Thailand as the region has become a popular tourist destination since 2016 (Tourism Council of Thailand^b, 2017). This area has been perceived by first-time tourists as a location for gaining different experiences. Popular among the Muslim tourists, the region should offer a variety of food and beverage and food quality certification through Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) or halal certification. The study will present the readiness themes of halal restaurant by using the experience of people involved in the operation of halal restaurants in the northeast area. The findings are anticipated to provide insights on

how restaurant operators should strategise their business towards acquiring halal certification. In addition, this study can facilitate better understanding of the current situations and efforts that should be carried out by the authorised bodies to promote halal food in Thailand.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Tourism industry in Thailand

The tourism industry constitutes the main part of Thailand's economy. Approximately USD54 billion of the country's revenue is contributed by the tourism sector. Meanwhile, 35.4 million international tourists arrived in Thailand in 2017 (Tourism Council of Thailand^a, 2017; Karaman, 2018). When the number of tourists arose, tourism businesses such as accommodations, souvenir shops, transportations, tour agencies, and restaurants are expected to expand as well. Furthermore, the number of tourist arrival is expected to continue to increase by 10 percent annually, which in turn, will increase the revenue of the food and beverage sector. About 66.8% of the tourists who visited Thailand were reported to be satisfied with Thai food during their visit (Ministry of Tourism and Sport, Thailand, 2016), and therefore, Thai food can be seen as an avenue for promoting Thailand as tourists' choice of destination.

Halal tourism seems to be a new trend that cannot be overlooked by a country that strives towards increasing its revenue, such as Thailand. In terms of world's population, the number of Muslims is expected to increase from 1.6 billion to 2.2 billion in 2030 (Pew Research Center, 2011). Thailand is bordered to Muslim countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia and therefore, approximately 3.35 million of Malaysian tourists were reported to arrive in Thailand in 2016 (Nurdiansyah, 2018). The number of Muslim tourists from the Middle East increased by 6.52% in 2017 (Ministry of Tourism and Sport, Thailand, 2017). All these indicators suggested that Thailand has the potential to attract Muslim tourists, particularly to new areas such as the northeast region. These areas, as noted by The Tourism Council of Thailand (2017), is ranked first as a tourist destination in 2017. The northeastern area is rich in a variety of local traditions hence an attraction to those seeking a new cultural experience in a holiday destination.

2.2 Halal restaurants in Thailand

Halal food refers to the production of food from raw materials, logistic, food storage, cooking, and serving that comply with Muslim dietary rules (Talib, Chin & Fischer, 2017; Haque et al., 2015; Yeo, Mohamed & Muda, 2016). Halal food must not contain any haram ingredient, such as pork, alcohol, flesh of swine, and all the food forbidden by the religion. People who cook halal food have to understand Muslim dietary rules, and in delivering the halal cuisines, they must abide the procedure explicitly mentioned in the Shariah (Khalek & Ismail, 2015). Muslim tourists will look for halal restaurants when they visit tourist attractions, and this norm could bring a positive impact to the tourism industry in Thailand because the trend can accommodate Muslim tourists. Halal restaurants can be seen as a new marketing strategy for promoting large

tourist groups. However, these restaurants must be certified by the authority, and from the authors' experience, most Muslim tourists would usually look for an official halal logo to be sure of a restaurant's quality. Domestic tourists, however, would look at the Muslim seller as a signal.

The halal official office bears the responsibilities on issuing halal certification in Thailand namely The Central Islamic Committee of Thailand (CICOT). This committee concludes halal experts and they must guarantee the quality of halal certification throughout the country. Business companies whose operation passes the twelve steps of halal certification must put an official halal logo in a visible place to communicate with Muslim customers. The two categories of halal restaurants are halal-certified restaurant and noncertified halal restaurant. Both of these restaurants are run by Muslim owners, but the second category does not submit any application before. Hence, they cannot display an official halal logo in their restaurant. The total number of halal certified restaurants in Thailand are 581 establishments: 306 in the central, 146 in the south, 111 in the north, 11 in the northeast, and 7 in the east (The Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2015). The largest number of halal-certified restaurants is in the central of Thailand (the capital city); this area is the first door that welcomes tourists. Other regions such as the northeast and the east locate a small number of halal-certified restaurants.

On the other hand, the northeast area was ranked as the first tourist destination in 2017 (Tourism Council of Thailand^a, 2017). The northeastern area is becoming popular among Muslim travelers and the demand for halal food is increasing. Nevertheless, the number of halal certified restaurants in the northeastern region is to accommodate the influx of Muslim tourists into the area. The halal food is preferred not only by Muslims but also by the non-Muslim tourists. A number of restaurants in northeastern area provide halal food but do not have a halal certificate. Restaurants with halal logo displayed can facilitate tourists' selection of an eating outlet. Therefore, this study can provide insight in terms of the readiness theme development particularly by studying the current situations and the factors that lead to halal certification among the restaurant operators in the northeastern area of Thailand.

2.3 The readiness theory

Unfreezing defines readiness (Susanto, 2008; Lewin, 1951). A change would transfer an organisation from a present state to a future state by raising its organisational potential (Weiner, Amick & Lee, 2008). Social change and trade competition would motivate an organisation to change, and the change would contribute to a better outcome and facilitate the organisation's survival within a competitive environment. When a member of an organisation accepts a change process, the change execution can easily take place (Susanto, 2008). In other words, the readiness theory is considered relevant for the present study because noncertified halal restaurants have to "change" to be halal certified, and the change can take place within their businesses.

Previous studies have suggested several readiness components, most of which refer to the readiness theory developed by Holt et al. (2007). The four components of readiness are appropriateness, management support, change efficacy, and personally

beneficial (Holt et al., 2007). In another view, Armenakis et al. (1983) addressed that the beliefs of organisational members should be a part of readiness factors, in addition to member's attitude and organisational capacity. On the same note, Susanto (2008) studied organisational readiness for change and found that if an employee has a positive attitude, a company can succeed in transition. Meanwhile, Lehman et al. (2002) presented four factors influencing readiness, namely motivation, institutional resources, staff attributes, and organisational climate. A review on articles, books, and journals found that the majorities of the readiness theories have different words but the definitions are mostly the same. For example, the first author mentioned mutual trust and respect as readiness factors, but a more in-depth study found that readiness carries the same meaning as organisational attitude. Therefore, the crucial factors leading to readiness can be summarized as follows: appropriateness, management support, change efficacy, personally beneficial, discrepancy, and perception toward change efforts.

The readiness stages are usually applied in a health-care studies. The six stages of readiness are pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination stage (Traugott, 2019; Lam et al., 2010; Vancampfort et al., 2014). These stages were applied in examining the readiness of no-halal certified restaurants. For instance, a restaurant owner who does not consider halal certification can be considered to be at a pre-contemplation stage, but if they have awareness on the value of halal certification they will be mapped to be at a contemplation stage. This mapping would identify the readiness of the restaurant operators in terms of their readiness stage, and such information can inform the authority on appropriate strategies to encourage halal certification.

3 Methodology

This research was conducted qualitatively by means of semi-structured interviews with the operators of halal-certified and nonhalal-certified restaurants as well as with the halal authority. The informants were selected by purposive and snowball sampling techniques (Johnston & Sabin, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007; Tongco, 2007). The study was conducted within the northeast region in Thailand. Prior to the interview sessions, all of the questions and the procedures were approved by The Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (JKEUPM). Each interview session lasted about 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded. The interviews began with general questions and before in-depth questions were addressed to fulfill the research objectives. The interview process continued until the data saturated was achieved. Creswell and Poth (2018) mentioned that the data collection will be saturated when all informants have been giving the similar responses or answering the same idea. The new informant does not answer a new point, hence, the research should summarise the data collection after interview one informant finished. The recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed using a computer software program, ATLAS ti. Findings are presented in tables and figures.

4 Findings

4.1 The readiness theme development

The readiness theme development from the current study is presented in Figure 1. Appropriateness, change efficacy, perception towards change efforts, personally beneficial, discrepancy, and management support were analysed to draw the conclusions for the study.

In terms of appropriateness, the organisational members thought that their business will gain more benefit after a change have taken the definition (Holt et al., 2007; Armenakis et al., 1993). Based on the findings, it was found that 10 codes including value-added, increasing the number of Muslim tourists, respond to a customer needed, added a restaurant information on the official website, to expand a marketing channel, a higher number of halal certified restaurant, better image, high income, the provincial Islamic committee has the ability to certify belonged to this category.

People who does not have any skill about a change activity but are confident in their ability to implement the change, would set for the meaning of change efficacy (Weiner, Amick & Lee, 2008). The authority responsible for halal certification takes care of the outside service, and verifies the halal application to increase readiness of restaurant operators. Restaurants owners constitute part of the readiness and therefore should be encouraged by the halal authority to go for halal certification. Such an endeavor will be more successful if the authority has the capacity and stands beside a restaurant owner. In a restaurant view, they could refer to perception towards change efforts. This category was the third theme of the study. When people understand the benefits they will receive from a change, they will pay attention to make the change. These benefits can be seen as value-added, high revenue, positive attitude on halal certification, trust, and easy access to halal restaurant information.

Personal beneficial is the benefit belonging to each person from change implementation (Holt et al., 2007; Lehman et al., 2002). The study identified that higher reputation, halal business consultant, speaker on a halal topic under this theme as the informants mentioned that they will be well known after obtaining the halal certification. However, the readiness process will not occur because of discrepancy. Armenakis et al. (1993) stated that the gap between before and after the change would be a part of the readiness. Majority of the informants mentioned that the halal certification process is too complicated, some mentioning the difficulty in initiating the process; hence, these codes should match the discrepancy theme.

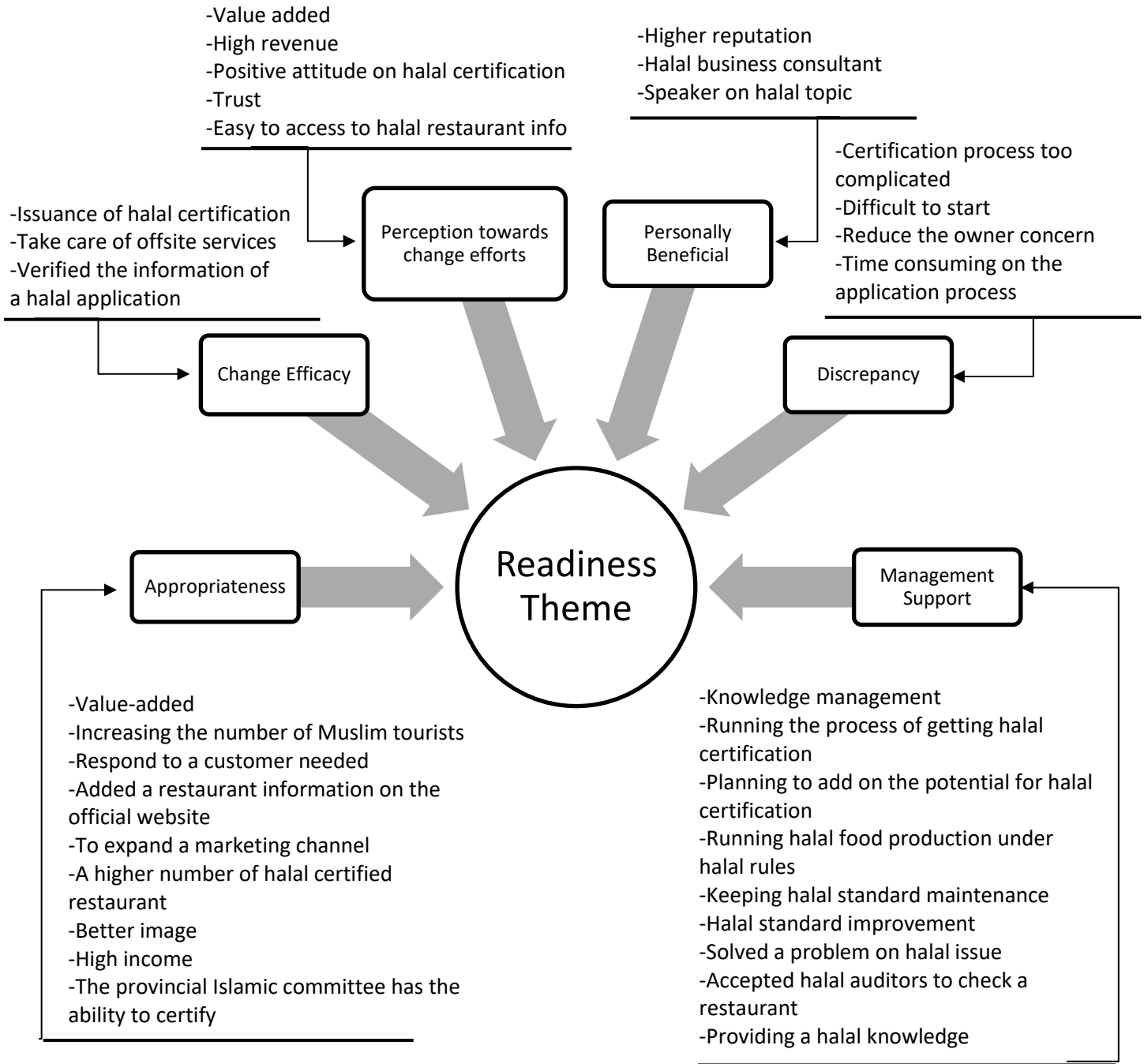


Figure 1: The readiness theme development

The last theme examined was management support. Susanto (2008) and Holt et al. (2007) mentioned that the senior leadership has to support the changing activity in order to ensure the success of the change. The findings suggested that knowledge management, halal standard improvement, and accepting halal auditor to check a restaurant are classified under management support. Both restaurant operators and the halal authority should strengthen their cooperation in order to facilitate halal

certification. The readiness themes development from the current study indicates that the readiness for halal certification is characterised by the six crucial components. Table 1 presents the selected excerpts from the interviews.

Table 1: Excerpts from the Interviews

Themes	Code	Quotations
Appropriateness	The provincial Islamic committee has the ability to certify	<i>"At here, we can submit the application to the Islamic committee, Khon Kean. They will come to examine our restaurant. No need to go to Bangkok"</i>
Management support	Accepted halal auditor to check a restaurant	<i>"The committee came here many time. Maybe 5 or 6 year, because the auditor checked everything since in the kitchen and they are serious halal logo must show on ingredients"</i>
Change efficacy	Issuance of halal certification	<i>"Yeah, the official halal logo have presented the quality of restaurants. We have to pass many steps to get the halal certificate to guarantee the hygienic condition"</i>
Discrepancy	Time consuming on the application processes	<i>"Umm, too long time around 6 months after we submitted the application. Then , we waited for the halal certificate"</i>
Personally beneficial	A higher reputation	<i>"A customer will follow GPS by using the official website to go to our restaurant"</i>
Perception toward change efforts	Positive attitude on halal certification	<i>"Halal logo can communicate with Muslim tourists around the world that will provide more income to us"</i>

4.2. The readiness stages

The readiness stages usually involve the studying of human behaviors and are widely adopted in the health sciences (Traugott, 2019). When people want to change their behaviors such as losing weight, they have to identify the readiness stage they are at. By knowing their stage, people can improve themselves in order to be ready for behavioral change. In the same way, because the noncertified halal restaurants have to obtain halal certification, they have to identify their readiness stage prior to the endeavor. The findings indicated that the readiness stages of the restaurant operators are based on their experiences, attitudes, and opinions.

Figure 2 maps the readiness stages of the halal certified (HCRs) and noncertified halal restaurant (NCHRs). The restaurants are grouped into their readiness stages. Nonetheless, majority of the NCHRs stand at the precontemplation stage; they mentioned that they are Muslims and that they can "certify" themselves and be "auto-certified" hence the triviality of going for halal certification. This belief indicates that the halal official logo is not valuable to them. The second group of NCHRs, on the other hand, had different views. Three establishments appeared to understand the worth of

halal certification but they did not proceed with the application because of the age of an owner, the small size of the restaurant, the minimal number of worker, and poor demand. Therefore, their readiness matches the contemplation stage. None of the restaurant operators mentioned that they have been preparing, advising, or planning to submit an application for halal certification, thus suggesting that the number of restaurants can be divided into those at the preparation stage and those at the action stage.

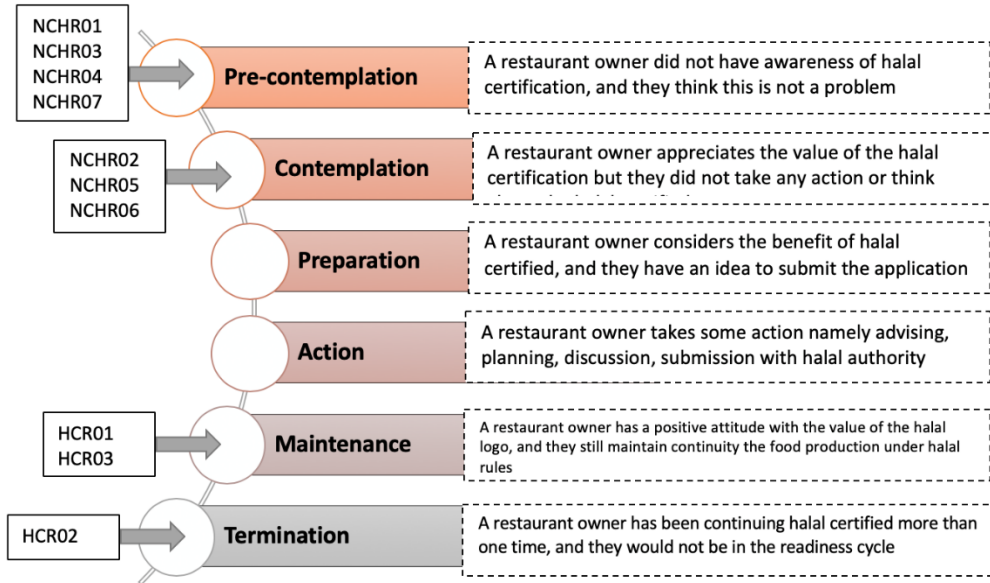


Figure 2: The readiness stages of the restaurant operators interviewed

Notes: NCHRs (non-certified halal restaurants); HCRs (halal certified restaurants)

Two of the HCRs are at the maintenance stage because they said halal official logo helps them to communicate with international tourists, and that the restaurant information have been recorded in their official website. Undoubtedly, they have a positive attitude towards the value of the halal logo. Only one HCR appears to be at the termination stage thus implying that the restaurant operator would continue doing the restaurant routine activities. HCR02 particularly has been continuing the renewal of the halal certified annually. They may cease from the readiness cycle because they are ready for halal certification. Table 2 shows the excerpts from the interviews, which describe the current situation of a halal restaurant within the northeast, Thailand.

Table 2: Excerpts from the interviews

The readiness stages	Quotations
Pre-contemplation	<i>"We are Muslim and we have already certified myself. I think enough. We run the business only two people, so, I don't want to do the difficult things."</i>
Contemplation	<i>"First of all, we must understand the purpose of halal training and know that why we have to join. Now, we focus on income, but if the owner is interested about halal certification, we are very welcome."</i>
Preparation	-
Action	-
Maintenance	<i>"Halal certification is not free, so, the owner has to pay. They should have a positive attitude with Halal logo. It may add the cost for a restaurant. They should focus on a logo's value and maintain continuity. Don't think too much about the certification fee"</i>
Termination	<i>"Um, yes, it is automatic. I was worried and I constantly remind my staffs to ensure cleanliness to be our top priority. Hence, I always have to make sure the place is always clean. About halal I am not worry because we know it well that it is halal"</i> <i>"We renew halal certification every year and this year is the third time for us"</i>

5 Conclusion

Nowadays, a new trend such as halal tourism has gained popularity due to the great number of Muslim populations. Muslim tourists fully abide to consume food and drink that adhered to the shariah. The crucial point for attracting a large group of Muslim tourists is therefore to present food quality in the form of halal certification. The certification may provide an advantage point to promote restaurants to both Muslims and non-Muslim customers. Six dimensions of readiness emerged from the thematic analysis from this study: appropriateness, management support, change efficacy, discrepancy, personally beneficial, and perception towards change efforts. This study also mapped the readiness of the restaurants into six readiness stages. NCHRs were identified to be at the pre-contemplation and contemplation stages. Meanwhile, HCRs were classified to be at the maintenance and terminate stages. The findings provide an overall picture of the restaurant readiness towards acquiring halal certification, particularly the readiness of the NCHRs in the northeastern region. The findings can provide better understanding of the current situations and efforts that should be carried out by tourism promotions bodies to promote the area as a Muslim-friendly location to tourists around the world.

6 About the author

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