

MISUSE OF HALAL LOGO AND MISLEADING LANGUAGE: LEE MAY LING V PUBLIC PROSECUTOR [2018] MLJU 1514

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ABSTRACT

The misuse of halal logos and misleading language has grown in importance in Malaysia due to its potential impact on consumer trust and religious sensitivity. Halal logos are commonly acknowledged as indicators that products or services adhere to halal standards and Islamic principles. As a result, any unauthorized or inappropriate use of halal-related symbols could lead to confusion and negatively affect public confidence in the halal certification system. This paper reviews the case of Lee May Ling v Public Prosecutor [2018] MLJU 1514, which concerned the release of content on social media that featured a halal logo and caused controversy. The study examines the facts of the case, the legal issues involved and the relevance of halal forensic principles in addressing misleading representations. In addition, the paper also addresses the relevant halal laws and how such behavior affects consumers and society. The study emphasizes the importance of responsible use of halal-related symbols and the need to preserve the integrity of Malaysia's halal governance system.

Introduction

The growing demand for halal-certified goods and services has made the halal sector one of Malaysia's most important industries. Halal certification is viewed as a third-party verification that a product or service complies with Islamic principles and guidelines, as outlined in the Quran and Hadith (Islamic scriptures). It can also be a process that verifies a product or service meets Islamic law (Shariah) standards, ensuring it is permissible for Muslims to consume or use (Nandala & Azrak, 2024). As a result, the halal logo has become a reliable indicator of a product or service's legitimacy and influences customer purchase decisions.

The importance of consuming halal products is emphasized in Islam, where Allah SWT states:

Translation: "O you who believe! Eat of the good things that We have provided for you, and be grateful to Allah, if it is He Whom you worship"

(Al-Baqarah 2:172)

Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated highlighting the importance of distinguishing between halal and haram:

"Halal is clear, and haram is clear. Between them are doubtful matters... Whoever avoids doubtful matters clears his religion and his honor..."

(Sahih Muslim, 1599)

The risk of misusing halal logos and making false claims has also increased due to the growing significance of halal certification. The misuse of halal logos and certificates such as displaying logos not accredited by JAKIM has caused confusion among Muslim consumers, leading to a decrease in trust in the Malaysian halal logo (Abdul Salam & Ab. Halim, 2023). Such practices could undermine the legitimacy of the halal certification system and create questions about how halal-related representations should be used.

Additionally, the quick advancement of social media and digital technologies has made this issue worse. Information can be immediately shared with a broad audience, allowing misleading content to proliferate rapidly and trigger public reactions. Consequently, the misuse of halal-related symbols and language may not only mislead consumers but also influence how linguistic conflict plays a role in religious conflict and how it is manipulated by certain groups (Balraj et al., 2020).

This issue can be observed in the case of *Lee May Ling v Public Prosecutor* [2018] MLJU 1514. The lawsuit concerned a controversial Facebook post containing a halal logo and language that was perceived by Muslims as disrespectful and deceptive. The publication attracted a lot of public attention and ultimately led to the accused being prosecuted. Although the case is often examined from the standpoint of sedition law, it also brings up significant issues with the abuse of halal-related representations and their effects on society.

Therefore, this paper discusses the case of *Lee May Ling v Public Prosecutor* [2018] MLJU 1514 by analyzing the issues related to the misuse of halal logos and misleading language. The discussion also highlights the relevance of halal forensic principles, the applicable legal framework and the implications of such behavior on consumer trust, religious sensitivity and the integrity of Malaysia's halal certification system.

Misuse of Halal Logo and Misleading Language

According to Anees (2023), the halal logo is in the form of a symbol, and it fundamentally signifies adherence to Islamic consumption laws and halal certification requirements. In Malaysia, halal certification is issued by Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) and authorized state Islamic religious departments. Therefore, the certification verifies that a product complies with Islamic dietary laws and halal standards throughout its manufacturing process (Admin, 2026).

Generally, it is considered misuse of a halal logo when a halal symbol is used improperly or in a way that gives the false impression that a product, service or activity is halal. For instance, the use of an expired halal certificate, the display of an unauthorized halal logo or the use of symbols that closely resemble

official halal certification marks. As a result, consumers could be tricked into thinking that a certain good or service has been certified halal when in fact there is not a legitimate certification.

In addition, misleading language has emerged as a serious issue compromising the integrity of halal communication. Misleading language refers to the use of words or phrases that manipulate or deceive readers by creating a false impression (Fiveable, 2026). In the context of halal issues, such language could mislead consumers into believing that a product, service or publication complies with Islamic standards even in the lack of appropriate verification or certification. As a result, consumers might make decisions based on false information, which would erode trust in halal governance.

Furthermore, the development of digital technology and social media has increased the possibility of misuse of halal-related symbols and language. The repeated incidence of false halal logo and misleading representation reported by the media have put the consumers at risk of consuming non-halal food (Nasihah et al., 2020). Consequently, the misuse of halal representations can now happen in online publications, digital images and social media content in addition to product packaging and advertisements.

One notable example can be observed in the case of Lee May Ling v Public Prosecutor [2018] MLJU 1514. In this case, a social media post that included information about a non-halal food item along with a halal logo caused a great deal of public controversy and sparked worries about religious sensitivity. Despite being convicted under the Sedition Act of 1948, the case demonstrates how the improper use of halal-related symbols and language can lead to confusion, violate religious sensitivities and erode public confidence. Therefore, in order to maintain consumer confidence, protect religious sensitivities and uphold the legitimacy of Malaysia's halal certification system, it is imperative that halal logos and halal-related expressions be used responsibly.

Facts of the Case

The case of Lee May Ling v Public Prosecutor [2018] MLJU 1514 concerned Lee May Ling, who is also recognized as Vivian Lee, and her former boyfriend, Alvin Tan. The situation emerged from a contentious Facebook post shared on the page “Alvin and Vivian-Alvivi”, which got a lot of attention in Malaysia.

On 12 July 2013, a photo was uploaded on Facebook with the phrase “*Selamat Berbuka Puasa dengan Bak Kut Teh... wangi, enak, menyelerakan*” together with a halal logo. The post was published during the month of Ramadan and was available to the public through social media.

The publication sparked controversy as Bak Kut Teh is typically linked to a dish made from pork, which is forbidden for Muslims according to Islamic dietary laws. As a result, many Muslims found the combination of the halal logo with the phrase to be inappropriate, misleading and offensive. Additionally, the proof submitted during the hearings indicated that the halal logo featured in the post was not an officially recognized halal logo by the appropriate authorities.

Subsequently, many grievances were filed by members of the community who perceived the publication as offensive to Islam and potentially disruptive to religious unity. As a result, the officials initiated an inquiry into the issue. The study centered on the Facebook post, the people associated with it and the possible effects of the post on public feelings.

After the investigation, Lee May Ling faced charges under Section 4(1)(c) of the Sedition Act 1948 for disseminating a publication claimed to have seditious implications. The matter was subsequently presented to the court for resolution.

Summary of the Case

Laboratory analysis immensely helped in this case as it offered unbiased evidence based on hard science about the constituents of coffee product. Food forensic analysis is one of the primary weapons in the arsenal of authorities against contamination adulteration mislabeling, and unauthorized items in food products.

Qualified staff from the Department of Chemistry Malaysia carried out a chemical analysis on the coffee products in question using the accredited laboratory methods. The study showed that the product contained Sildenafil. One of the reasons why the court put so much faith in the laboratory results was for sure that the tests were performed per internationally recognized standard operating procedures, under the credible and well-established quality assurance system. The analyst's report became a major item of evidence during the trial.

The revelation that the coffee contained Sildenafil underlines how coming and cutting-edge analytical methods are essential for reliable food testing. Besides Liquid Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry and Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry, High-Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC) is the most popular technique employed by forensic laboratories worldwide for the detection of very low levels of pharmaceutical compounds in food samples (Saadat et al. 2022). These are techniques whose output is not only very accurate but highly sensitive as well, allowing them to pick up even the minutest amounts of hidden substances.

Besides what I just said, the results also bring out the indispensable nature of food forensic laboratories to raising the level of health in the general public. Had it not been for the laboratory tests, buyers would probably not have known that the coffee contained a drug; Yet another function of scientific investigation in this context is an indispensable aspect of food safety and regulatory compliance.

Means of Evidence

Documentary Evidence

Documentary evidence is evidence that contains a record of some kind and it played an important role in determining the facts of the case. The main documentary evidence was the Facebook post made by the accused, which featured the phrase “*Selamat Berbuka Puasa dengan Bak Kut Teh... wangi, enak, menyelerakan*” along with a halal logo. The publication was submitted to the court to illustrate the specific material that sparked public controversy and served as the foundation for the allegations against the accused.

In addition, the proceedings also relied on court documents, investigation reports and records of public complaints. These documents helped the court comprehend the context of the publication and its potential impacts on the public. Documentary evidence is usually considered important to help the court (or jury) decide what the documents prove (Citizens Information Board, 2026).

Digital Evidence

Digital evidence represented the primary type of evidence in this case. The Facebook post, along with its image, caption and online publication details, constituted the primary digital evidence submitted in court. As the publication was shared through a social media platform, investigators needed to confirm the authenticity and source of the content before it could be used in legal proceedings.

According to National Institute of Justice (n.d.), digital evidence refers to information stored or transmitted in binary form that may be relied on in court. In the present case, the Facebook post allowed the court to evaluate the content as it was originally presented and assess its potential impact on the public. The digital publication also demonstrated how social media platforms can enable the quick spread of contentious material to a large crowd.

Moreover, digital evidence holds significant importance in halal forensic investigations as online platforms can be utilized to spread misleading halal claims, unauthorized halal logos or false representations concerning halal products and services. Therefore, the Facebook post acted as an essential element of evidence in assessing the character and consequences of the publication.

Witness Evidence

Witness evidence is generally given by way of written statements and at trial, orally, prompted by questions from a barrister or solicitor and on occasion, the judge themselves (MG Legal Solicitors, 2020). Several witnesses gave testimony throughout the trial on how they understood the Facebook post and why they considered it was offensive and insensitive to the Muslim community. Their testimony helped the court assess the publication's nature and potential public impact.

Additionally, witness evidence helped the court in determining whether the publication could incite animosity and hostility amongst various social groups. The Facebook post's halal insignia was not an official halal logo approved by the relevant authorities, according to evidence produced during the proceedings. Thus, by offering insights into public opinion and the importance of the halal-related representation employed in the publication, witness evidence enhanced the documentary and digital evidence.

Issues Involving Halal Forensic

Islamic Jurisprudence

In Islam, honesty, truthfulness and transparency are highly valued in all types of engagement and communication. It is generally forbidden to do anything that could mislead people or give a misleading image since it could cause confusion and harm to society.

The use of a halal logo in conjunction with a reference to *Bak Kut Teh*, a dish that is commonly linked with pork, may be connected to the concept of *tadlis*, which is defined as dishonesty, fact concealing or misrepresentation that could affect how others perceive you. The use a halal-related symbol in a deceptive situation may still be seen as being against Islamic ethical principles even when the representation was not meant for commercial purposes.

Furthermore, fraud and deceptive representations are strongly forbidden in Islam, where Allah SWT states: “And do not mix the truth with falsehood or conceal the truth while you know [it]” (Al-Baqarah 2:42). This verse highlights how importance it is to give accurate information and refrain from doing anything that could mislead others. Therefore, the inappropriate usage of halal-related symbols could be seen as going against the values of integrity and honesty that Islam promotes.

In addition, the concept of *gharar* can also be used to analyze the problem. *Gharar* means ‘uncertainty’ and is associated with deception involving uncertainty and risk (Mustafa, 2025). Islamic principles demand that information and depictions be precise and unambiguous so that people can make defensible decisions. As a result, any misuse of halal-related symbols could raise questions about a publication's intended meaning and possibly erode public trust in halal organizations.

Misleading Use of Halal-Related Representations

One of the main issues in halal forensic investigations is the misuse of representations connected to halal. When it comes to identifying goods and services that meet Islamic regulations, halal logos, symbols, and expressions are important. As a result, any exploitation of these claims could lead to misunderstandings and erode public trust in the halal certification process.

In this case, the combination of a halal logo with a reference to Bak Kut Teh produced a portrayal that was deemed misleading and inappropriate. The publication was not meant to be a commercial advertisement, but the inclusion of a halal-related symbol in conjunction with a cuisine that is frequently associated with pork caused controversy and raised questions about how halal representations should be used responsibly.

According to Pauzi et al. (2024), Muslim consumers are relying on surrogates in selecting the alternatives for packaged goods in Islamic marketing literature. Therefore, the misuse of halal-related symbols may affect public perception and erode consumer trust. Additionally, when consumers are unable to discern between authorized and unauthorized statements because of deceptive halal claims, the confidence and integrity of the halal certification system may be impacted.

In the modern age, where information may spread quickly through social media platforms, the issue becomes more pressing. Online publications that give false information about halal may quickly reach a large audience, raising the possibility of misinformation and misunderstandings.

Therefore, to protect consumer trust and uphold the integrity of halal governance, it is crucial to utilize halal logos, symbols, and language responsibly. To maintain the accuracy and reliability of halal-related material, any depiction that could confuse or mislead the audience should be avoided.

Halal Management, Standard and Regulation

Malaysia has put in place a thorough halal management system to ensure the integrity and legitimacy of halal certification. The main administration of the halal certification process is Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), which is responsible for setting the standards for halal certification, conducting inspections and issuing halal certificates (Hashimoto & Esa, 2025). JAKIM aims to protect Muslim consumers and maintain public trust in halal-certified goods and services through an organized certification system.

In situations where halal-related symbols and representations are misused, the importance of proper halal management is evident. Since halal logos are indicators of adherence to Islamic law, their inappropriate or unauthorized use could mislead consumers and damage the halal certification system's reputation. Therefore, to stop abuse and maintain the integrity of halal governance, effective monitoring and enforcement systems are required.

In Malaysia, the use of halal certification marks is governed by the Trade Descriptions Act 2011 and the Trade Descriptions (Certification and Marking of Halal) Order 2011. These regulations prohibit false trade descriptions and false or misleading statements, conduct and practices in relation to the supply of goods and services (Trade Descriptions Act 2011 (Act 730), 2011). These laws are designed to protect the interests of consumers and ensure the accuracy and verifiability of claims pertaining to halal.

The case also emphasizes how importance it is for the general population to understand certified halal certification markings. Consumers should be able to tell the difference between official halal logos and illegitimate ones that could be confusing. However, while utilizing halal-related symbols and language, businesses, organizations and individuals must take caution, especially on digital platforms where information can spread quickly to a wide audience.

Thus, preserving customer trust and safeguarding the integrity of Malaysia's halal certification system depend on effective halal administration, clear regulatory standards and uniform enforcement. By taking these steps, halal-related representations are kept truthful, trustworthy and in line with Islamic values.

Consumer Trust and Public Perception

Muslim consumers are found to be very concerned about the halalness of the foods they consume (Mohamed et al., n.d.). Therefore, for consumers to be able to recognize goods and services that meet Islamic standards, public trust in the halal certification system is crucial. Consumers may become less confident and hesitant if halal-related symbols are misused or misrepresented.

In this instance, the public reacted negatively to the inclusion of a halal logo along with a reference to *Bak Kut Teh*, which garnered a lot of attention. The combination of a halal-related symbol with a food that is commonly associated with pork caused confusion and raised questions about the proper use of halal representations, even though the publication was not meant to be a commercial advertisement.

The legitimacy of the halal certification system is closely related to consumer trust. In Malaysia, each product, upon approval by the halal competent authority, may be marked with the halal certification logo of that authority, provided the product conforms to the requirements of MS 2634: 2019 - Halal Cosmetics - General Requirements (Hedy He, 2025). Misleading halal certification and fake news or fabricated news leading to the loss of confidence, affecting intention to purchase halal products about the halal status of foods and beverages decrease the trust of costumers (Aslan, 2023). Furthermore, misleading representations disseminated through social media platforms has the potential to quickly propagate and sway public perception. This emphasizes the value of responsible communication and the necessity of raising public awareness of the need to verify information pertaining to halal.

Therefore, the integrity of Malaysia's halal certification system depends on upholding consumer trust and encouraging truthful halal-related representations. Public trust in halal governance can be maintained by increased awareness, effective enforcement and ethical usage of halal symbols.

Conclusion

In a multicultural society, the case of *Lee May Ling v Public Prosecutor* [2018] MLJU 1514 emphasizes the significance of responsible communication and the proper use of halal-related symbols and language. From a halal forensic perspective, the case highlights a number of important concerns, including those pertaining to misleading representations, consumer trust and the integrity of halal-related symbols, even though it was prosecuted under the Sedition Act of 1948.

From the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence, the case highlights the importance of honesty, transparency and responsibility in all kinds of communication. The concepts of *tadlis* and *gharar* highlight the necessity of avoiding dishonesty, ambiguity and misleading representations that could lead to public confusion. Therefore, it is possible to view the misuse of halal-related symbols associated with halal as being at odds with the moral values that Islam advocates.

In addition, the case emphasizes how important effective halal management and regulatory compliance are. Any unauthorized or misleading use of halal logos could erode public trust in the halal certification system since these symbols are crucial in directing Muslim consumers. Consequently, maintaining the legitimacy of halal governance in Malaysia requires constant observation, raising public awareness and strictly adhering to halal regulations.

Finally, the case serves as an important reminder that symbols and representations associated with halal should be employed sensibly and morally. Maintaining public trust, fostering social harmony in a diverse society and protecting consumer interests all depend on the integrity of halal information.

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