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Analysing JAKIM'S Crisis Communication Strategies Using Image Repair Theory

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ABSTRACT

The halal industry is successful and in demand, offering numerous economic opportunities for entrepreneurs and organisations. Despite its enormous potential, particularly its vast market, which included domestic and international markets, the Malaysian government, regulators, and businesses were concerned about managing the halal crisis. As a country with a substantial Muslim population, Malaysia has a responsibility to provide halal goods and services that align with Islamic principles. Recent controversies have posed challenges to the industry's reputation and public trust, highlighting a critical gap in research regarding crisis communication strategies in this context. This study evaluated the crisis communication response strategies employed by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia ("Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia," or JAKIM) during halal crises using Image Repair Theory as the theoretical framework. Through qualitative content analysis of JAKIM's press statements, the research identified key strategies, including denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, and corrective action. The findings offer valuable insights for halal businesses and public relations practitioners, emphasising the need for effective crisis response strategies to safeguard organisational integrity and reputation. Meanwhile, the study contributes to the ongoing growth and sustainability of the halal industry.

Keywords: halal crisis, JAKIM, crisis communication, Image Repair Theory, crisis response strategies

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Introduction

Chan (2023) predicted that Malaysia's halal (permissible, 清真) market would be worth RM400 billion by 2030, accounting for 11% of GDP, with the food and beverage industry leading the way with an export value of RM27.84 billion. The 'Halal industry to expand to US\$113.2 billion...' (The Star, 2023) report predicts that the industry will contribute 8.1% of GDP by 2025. As a result, highlighting the Muslim community in Malaysia emphasises the importance of halal consumption, and halal marketing provides numerous benefits to both marketers and consumers. Regardless of an organisation's size, reputation, or industry, there is always the possibility of a crisis developing which can take numerous forms (Ashari et al., 2017). This situation extends even to the diversity of the halal industry. Effective risk management and safeguarding of a company's reputation necessitate proactive stakeholder

management (Aderibigbe & Fragouli, 2020), as a favourable reputation serves as goodwill, particularly during times of crisis (Wiedmann & Buxel, 2005).

Halal products are critical for Muslim consumers (Rodionova, 2017) since Muslims nowadays exhibit less tolerance for uncertainties and expect a halal environment with minimal risk (Tieman, 2021). In Malaysia, with its major Muslim population, halal food holds significant value, with halal labelling serving as a means for businesses, especially during times of crisis, as it enhances consumer loyalty and public trust (Tieman, 2017, 2021), and helps organisations maintain their reputation and credibility during crises (Chattaraj et al., 2021; Coombs, 2015). Meanwhile, concerns have emerged about the quality and integrity of halal food. Maintaining product integrity, avoiding questionable materials and adhering to strict standards are all challenges (Z. Mohamed et al., 2008). Furthermore, halal is a sensitive issue that can harm a company's reputation (Tieman, 2020).

In addition, according to Zaini and Yoyo (2021), newspapers record several cases of halal logo misuse, including forgery, illegal usage, invalid certifications and numerous other halal crises, blended with halal-approved cuts in a facility and repackaged with fake halal logos (Basyir, 2021; Chan, 2020), the sale of fake goods halal meat (Adam, 2021), and repackaging of goods with fake halal logo (Mohamad, 2019; Othman, 2018). Hence, halal crisis communication management has become an important area of focus for the Malaysian government, regulators, and businesses (Darwis, 2019; Y. H. Mohamed et al., 2020) to address the halal crisis. A halal crisis risks jeopardising corporate halal reputation, sales (boycott behaviour), and even existence (Heugens et al., 2004; Mohamed Rosli et al., 2023). This was reinforced by Tieman (2017), who argues that a failure to address the halal crisis in the supply chain can lead to brand loss and damage to the corporate reputation. Besides, the spread of false information or rumours can harm the credibility and economic stability of halal status (Pozlan et al., 2023), but transparent communication and effective action can avoid these circumstances (Fearn-Banks, 2017; Van Asselt et al., 2017).

Effective crisis communication can protect a company or brand's reputation and credibility during a crisis (Mikušová & Horváthová, 2019; Van Zoonen & Van der Meer, 2015) and shape public perception (Ehondor & Unakalamba, 2021; Tworzydło et al., 2018). As a result, organisations should apply appropriate crisis response strategies during a crisis. A positive reputation among stakeholders is earned over time; hence, crisis communication is only beneficial for establishing or maintaining long-term trust (Thiessen & Ingenhoff, 2011). The Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) oversees Islamic affairs in Malaysia, including halal certification, religious education, and other Islamic services (Abdul Aziz et al., 2016; Abdul Fazmin, 2023; Nik Muhammad et al., 2009). Manning (2007) emphasised the government's active involvement in food safety crises. Despite this, JAKIM plays a crucial role in maintaining halal status during halal crises (Asa, 2018). Employing appropriate crisis response strategies can help mitigate image and reputational damage, alleviating distressing emotions attributed by stakeholders to the organisation's crisis responsibility (Coombs & Holladay, 1996), and ensure internal stakeholders comprehend their halal values (Bidin et al., 2021). Crisis managers have an ethical obligation to address the community's physical and psychological problems through communication as their primary response. In some cases, organisations have been accused of failing to comply with halal procedures and guidelines, resulting in a crisis. Therefore, this research intended to investigate how JAKIM employs the Image Repair Theory to preserve a positive reputation and establish trust with stakeholders, thereby improving the overall success of crisis communication in addressing the halal crisis.

Literature Review

Halal crisis communication management

Effective crisis management is crucial for companies operating in the global market for halal products. Given the increasing demand for halal products and services, companies must meet stringent standards and requirements (Badrudin et al., 2012). Clear messaging to internal and external stakeholders is crucial for effective crisis communication (Thiessen & Ingenhoff, 2011). Consequently, a company must have strong crisis communication management because it affects its reputation and the public's trust. Crisis management is a systematic approach to managing and mitigating the risks associated with

halal non-compliance. Strong crisis management safeguards reputation and public trust, requiring a systematic approach that includes risk identification, preventive measures, and crisis planning (Tieman, 2021). In a randomised controlled trial of organising halal accountability in a company, Tieman and Habir (2022) reported developing a halal management system, conducting halal training for employees, and conducting regular halal audits to ensure compliance with halal standards.

Crisis communication message is a process of clarification of crisis by the organisation towards the public (Vos et al., 2011) in regaining public trust. The four pillars: process, control, organisation, and information of halal crisis management categorised it as the potential development of a global halal crisis in that the reputations of business halal practices are questioned and provide information on halal risk reports (Tieman, 2021). The risk assessment must consider crisis preparedness and stakeholder confidence development, as it is essential to use the halal crisis management model (Chik et al., 2018). The crisis management team should be trained and equipped to effectively manage the crisis and minimise its impact on the organisation (Laws & Prideaux, 2006). This plan should include clear communication channels, roles and responsibilities of the crisis management team, and steps to contain and resolve the crisis. In this way, companies can avoid halal crises and maintain their reputation and success in the halal market.

Image Repair Theory

In the stage of dealing with a crisis, Benoit's (2015a&b) Image Repair Theory presents strategies for message delivery in crisis management. The risk communication manual developed by Hance, Chess and Sandman (1988) points out the importance of credibility and responsiveness in establishing trust with the practice's openness is ideal, listening to an audience, taking steps to prevent trust-eroding actions, sharing information, and involving the public in risk problem solutions. Organisations should designate a spokesperson, develop contingency plans, and remain vigilant for potential crises (Khodarahmi, 2009). Risk management is a corporate-wide method of performing business and an area of crisis prevention (Mikušová & Horváthová, 2019). Stakeholder participation is recommended to understand non-expert risk perceptions (Bier, 2000). Crisis response on crisis responsibility significantly impacts the reputational threat (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 2015).

The use of Image Repair Theory is not an abandonment of verbal and print accounts, excuses, and apologies (Burns & Bruner, 2009). It is a concept that outlines strategies used to restore one's image in the face of accusations or crises with the aim of implying that an image might be improved but not completely restored if accused or suspected of wrongdoing (Benoit, 2015a&b). It is a crucial aspect of crisis communication. It aims to protect the reputation of individuals, companies, or organisations when faced with challenges to their image and suggests more effective image repair efforts accordingly. Crisis communication is an essential skill that seeks to safeguard the reputation of individuals, corporations, or organisations in the face of challenges to their image and reputation (Benoit, 1995; Burns & Bruner, 2009; Coombs, 2015) and works with strategies for image repair (Burns & Bruner, 2009). According to Benoit (2015a&b), that theory is divided into five major strategies: denial (not being responsible for the offensive act), evading responsibility (partially reducing blame), reducing offensiveness (justifying the situation), corrective action (attempts to fix the problem), and mortification (asking for forgiveness).

Benoit (2015b) emphasised that the theory is effective when accurate messaging and factual information are paramount for image repair. The theory aims to minimise long-term harm to the organisation's reputation and restore faith and trust among the public, stakeholders, and consumers (Abbas, 2023), practising a goal-oriented communication strategy (Burns & Bruner, 2009). Coombs and Holladay (1996) found that appropriate crisis communication responses, such as diminishing strategies for unintentional crises and dealing strategies for preventive crises, improve an organisation's reputation. Deny strategies help establish a crisis frame and sever any perceived connection between the organisation and the crisis, or the organisation has no responsibility for the crisis. For example, if the organisation's crisis is a rumour, it can deny it (Coombs, 2006; Xu & Liu, 2020). Diminish crisis response is an organisation that attempts to change the attributions stakeholders make about a crisis to mitigate the reputational harm resulting from the crisis (Coombs, 2006; Xu & Liu, 2020); it is the appliance of evasion of responsibility strategies. Deal strategies (apology strategy) help change perceptions of an organisation during a crisis by offering actual or symbolic forms of aid to victims and

asking for their forgiveness (Coombs, 2006; Xu & Liu, 2020); it can be understood through reduced offensiveness strategies from Image Repair Theory. So, organisations must handle crisis communication messages seriously.

The study of BP's oil spill crisis (Harlow et al., 2011) focuses on using Image Repair Strategies, such as corrective actions and mortification, in addressing stakeholders affected by the crisis. Additionally, victims were compensated. Meanwhile, in the tourism industry, Avraham (2020) states there was a strong emphasis on managing media relations, particularly image and communication management. This included reducing negative media coverage, managing crises, and conducting recovery campaigns. In the post-crisis phase, various strategies were employed, including delivering specific messages, engaging the public in relevant activities, and reducing negative media coverage through conferences (Avraham, 2020; Ketter, 2016). Notably, the focus shifted from theoretical frameworks to multistep model event-driven strategies, prioritising elements such as the source, messages, and audience. Avraham (2013, 2020) advocated a multistep model for altering a country's image, focusing on market considerations. Moreover, Avraham (2013) identified a minimisation strategy involving tactics such as ignoring, limiting, or downplaying the severity of the crisis. During natural disasters, it is crucial to limit misinformation while also utilising social media to access reliable information directly (Ketter, 2016). Communication efforts act as "spin doctor" to deliver crafted messages carefully while marketers pursue rebranding initiatives to new targeted groups with the tourism effort (Avraham, 2013). This theory emphasises the importance of tailored crisis communication strategies for organisations, regardless of organisational or victim perspectives.

Methods

The research employed a qualitative methodology by analysing JAKIM's press releases on its website. As suggested by Avraham (2020), qualitative content analysis proved effective for analysing promotional content like press releases. These releases, social media updates, and news articles are crucial for establishing and repairing corporate image (Harlow et al., 2011). Researchers downloaded all identified press releases of the halal crisis from 2011 to 2023 from its portal to investigate a historical aspect of JAKIM's crisis response strategies. The timeframe was determined by the portal's availability, which began in 2010, and the occurrence of the first documented crisis in 2011. There were thirteen press statements collected from JAKIM's website. According to the press releases, four crises have been identified: 1) Golden Churn Butter containing haram (forbidden) ingredients. 2) The Cadbury case, a certified product with slanderous information containing porcine. 3) Smuggling of halal and haram meat was permitted within Muslim markets. 4) Slander cases, such as JAKIM's implementation of strict regulations to ensure halal delivery by separating halal and "non-halal" delivery paths, raise concerns, particularly when alcohol (considered haram in Islam) is certified as halal. In detail, two were from the crisis of Golden Churn Butter, followed by four in the explanation of the Cadbury crisis, five for cartel cases, and one for slander cases each.

This study used manifest analysis to extract information from the text itself. Deductive reasoning coding was used, which combines relevant details with statements to draw specific conclusions using thematic structures (Azungah, 2018; Bengtsson, 2016) - data coding aligned with the research objective, utilising Benoit's Image Repair Theory crisis response strategies. Azungah (2018) stated that documents are essential for confirming human resource procedures in independent organisations, documenting historical processes, and evaluating informant details, notwithstanding accessibility and validity issues. The analysis specifically targets the strategy guided by Image Repair Theory, in which five main strategies and fourteen sub-strategies were used. The strategies include denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. The sub-strategies were shifting blame, simple denial, accused, defeasibility, good intentions, provocation, bolstering, minimisation, differentiation, transcendence, attack accuser, compensation, corrective action, and mortification. Researchers independently identified codes within the statements using a manual coding schedule, categorising each statement into the respective strategy group employed in crisis communication efforts aimed at image repair. Please refer to Appendix 1 for the coding manual.

Results

Corporate crises frequently involve image repair discourse, focusing on pre-crisis, crisis events, and post-crisis phases (Benoit, 2015a). This study employs image repair theory to decipher JAKIM's halal crisis communication strategy. Because each crisis necessitates a unique approach, stakeholders and best actions must be determined. Transparency and strong stakeholder relationships are prioritised in crisis communication (Rodionova, 2017; Shankar, 2014; Tieman, 2020; Van den Bosch et al., 2005; Zafra & Maydell, 2018). This section discussed key crisis response strategies used by JAKIM in responding to halal crises. The excerpts were translated by an English language bachelor's degree expert because the original press was written in Malay Language, to double-check the translation.

Denial Strategy

Simple denial

According to the content analysis, one of the strategies that stands out is Denial: either shifting blame or simple denial. The findings showed that JAKIM has heavily employed a simple denial approach when it comes to defamation cases but not shifting blame when dealing with halal crises. For instance, it was discovered that halal products like Golden Churn Butter and Cadbury chocolate contained porcine on 3 August 2011 and 2 June 2014, respectively. JAKIM thoroughly investigated both cases in collaboration with the Department of Chemistry Malaysia (Jabatan Kimia Malaysia or JKM). The findings and the investigative process were then shared with stakeholders to ensure their understanding.

"Despite differing results, JAKIM did not interfere with the discovery of porcine DNA in product samples collected by Jabatan Agama Islam Sarawak." (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2011b)

Following the press statement for the chocolate case:

"The chocolate sample Cadbury Dairy Milk Hazelnut batch (Batch no) 200813 M01HI2, (Batch no) 200813 M01HI2, and Cadbury Dairy Milk Roast Almond (Batch No) 221013 N01RI12 did not interfere with the discovery of porcine DNA" (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2014d)

Aside from the Cadbury incident, on 14 April 2022, an individual accused JAKIM of defamation for recognising an overseas certification body (Supreme Islamic Council of Halal Meat in Australia, SICHMA) that ignored halal integrity concerns. SICHMA and the Australian Department of Agriculture, Water, and the Environment (DAWE) were then asked to clarify the audit of the implicated organisation. Nonetheless, it was determined that the company strictly followed the prescribed standard operating procedures (SOP).

SICHMA...made a press release on 12 April 2022 explaining and refuting the organisation's alleged inability to provide halal approval to slaughterhouses under their supervision. SICHMA confirmed that they regularly audit Thomas Foods International. The Australian authorities, namely the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE), have also given immediate feedback on this issue by confirming that they view these charges as serious and have initiated action. DAWE emphasised that Australia has strict regulations that control the entire process of supplying halal meat for export. Only meat products that have met Australia's export regulations and requirements and comply with the importing country's requirements will be allowed to be exported. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2022a)

Furthermore, JAKIM denied the unreasonable or unique practice of a certified hospitality's delivery path of halal lifts, which drew media attention to the question of certifying the halal status SOP that occurred on 6 October 2022.

"Please be advised that there is no clause in the "Manual Procedure for Malaysia Halal Certification (Domestic) 2020" or Malaysian Halal Management System 2020 that requires the hotel or premises to display the "NON HALAL-LIFT" labelling." (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2022d)

Finally, JAKIM denied the spread of rumours about certifying alcohol for international markets, emphasising that the “Manual Pensijilan Malaysia” will not certify any alcohol-related products.

Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) refers to a French TikTok content, a wine product called Night Orient Non Sparkling Drink, which has been alcoholised through a fermentation process using high-tech machinery with halal certification from Malaysia. It is emphasised that the Malaysia Halal Certification procedure does not approve alcoholic beverages. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2023)

With the cases discussed, JAKIM used a simple denial of defamation during the investigation and collaborated with their stakeholders to clarify and provide clear information to the public.

Evade Responsibility

Based on the results from the content analysis, the second strategy identified is to evade responsibility: accused, defeasibility, good intentions, or provocation. The results showed that the approaches under evade responsibility were employed except for the accused.

Defeasibility

In the discourse of the defeasibility strategy, JAKIM emphasised their limited authority to render conclusive judgments in the case. This assertion stems from JAKIM’s response to food contamination incidents, in which they invited multiple stakeholders, including KPDN, JKM, Bahagian Keselamatan dan Kualiti Makanan (BKMM), KKM, and JAIN, to work together to address the issue. They claim that such incidents frequently occur because manufacturing lines are adapted to meet diverse market demands across multiple markets.

“...taken by Jabatan Agama Islam Sarawak (JAIN) due to the factors that have been stated and Muslims in Sarawak are reasonable to follow the decision that has been made by JAIN.” (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2011a)

Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia will hold a special meeting with the Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia (KKM), Jabatan Standard Malaysia (JS) and Jabatan Kimia Malaysia (JKM) about the issue of the discovery of Porcine DNA in two Cadbury chocolate samples... JAKIM will also summon the relevant companies to obtain further information about this case. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2014a)

Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia on today 24 May 2014 (Isnin) has held a special meeting with the Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia, Kementerian Perdagangan Dalam Negeri, Koperasi dan Kepenggunaan (KPDNKK), Jabatan Kimia Malaysia and Jabatan Standard Malaysia regarding the issue of the discovery of Porcine DNA in milk chocolate products with hazelnuts-Cadbury Dairy Milk Hazelnut. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2014a)

“...a special meeting of the Jawatankuasa Pemandu Halal which is composed of various agencies and halal-related experts to discuss halal issues thoroughly.” (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2020)

Added to the point, in the year 2020, smuggled meat was distributed in the Muslim market based on news reports. In this situation, the certified authority had placed the Muslim consumer in the stage of doubting their meat consumed. However, JAKIM applied a defeasibility strategy to avoid responsibility and emphasise the role of stakeholders in maintaining the halal status.

“Regarding the matter of smuggling meat...” Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) would like to underscore that the Kementerian Perdagangan Dalam Negeri dan Hal Ehwal Pengguna (KPDNHEP) is still investigating this matter. The importer also needs to submit together the health report from the veterinary authorities of the exporting country and the pass permit import from Jabatan Perkhidmatan Kuarantin dan Pemeriksaan Malaysia (MAQIS) before the meat and meat products are allowed to enter the market of this country. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2020)

In its media statement, JAKIM stated that the Department of Quarantine and Inspection Services Malaysia (MAQIS) should verify the status of imported meat as either halal or haram before it entered Malaysia. This is because JAKIM's responsibilities are limited to auditing the slaughterhouse's standard operating procedures (SOP) rather than granting permission for market entry.

On the other hand, in the year 2022, the issues of smuggling meat were discussed again, this time involving the shared responsibility of a foreign halal certification body recognised by JAKIM, SICHMA, DAWE, and Counsellor (Agriculture), Embassy of Australia in Malaysia in the case discussion. The engagement of an overseas certification agency is because the meat is supplied by Australia, and the slaughtering house is also located in Australia.

A company certified as halal by Malaysia's recognised authority in Australia is being investigated by the executive of Atase halal JAKIM at the Australian authority, the Department of Agriculture, Water, and the Environment (DAWE). JAKIM and Counselor (Agriculture), the Australian Embassy in Malaysia, also met on 28 April 2022 to ensure that the investigation's findings are submitted to the Malaysian government as soon as possible. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2022b)

In a reported case involving a slaughterhouse in Australia that failed to follow the certified procedure and obtain a permit to import meats to Malaysia, JAKIM investigated the specific slaughterhouse and discussed it with Australian authorities. JAKIM also met with Pertubuhan Kemasyarakatan Rakyat Malaysia (PEKEMAS) to learn more about the situation. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2022c)

Good intentions

According to the previous discussion, JAKIM had limited authority in certain situations. JAKIM, on the other hand, employs a good intentions strategy by assisting in protecting halal status. For example, in a media statement dated 26 May 2014, JAKIM explained food labelling to consumers by compiling a list of halal e-code guides that distinguish between halal and haram e-codes. The reason for its existence is that Cadbury chocolate was insulted for containing porcine, and food labelling with e-code serves the purpose of educating Muslim consumers about food labelling.

Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia would like to inform the public of the information that has been widely disseminated through social media regarding the E code associated with pork fat. Not all E-numbers used to make food products are sourced from haram sources. These additives can be plant, synthetic, microbial, natural, chemical and animal-based. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2014c)

"JAKIM will develop an Islamic user awareness programme to explain the Malaysian Halal Certification and the legal issue of porcine DNA and its impact on usage." (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2014d)

Furthermore, on May 14, 2022, JAKIM and JPV stated the SOP for halal certification, such as schedule auditing and slaughterhouse practices, to explain the meat smuggling case. The press included the SOP manual script for logistics services and slaughterhouse schemes to inform targeted audiences about JAKIM's position and efforts to secure halal status.

JAKIM and JPV want to emphasise that the Malaysian government's procedure for recognising overseas processing overseas slaughterhouses is strict and detailed. This is because the process of recognising slaughterhouses is systematically audited by trained JPV officers and JAKIM. The auditing process implemented is scheduled using the standards that have been set for product quality and safety based on the SOP in the Malaysian Standard for Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) MS 1514:2009, the Malaysian Standard for Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) MS 1480:2018 also includes Veterinary Standing Procedures Directive Malaysia (APTVM)23(h):1/2014 (Auditing of Slaughterhouses and Processing Plants). For halal compliance, we use the Malaysian Standard Halal Food Production,

Preparation, Handling and Storage - General Guidelines (MS1500:2009) and the Malaysian Protocol for Halal Meat and Poultry Production. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2022c)

Provocation

On the other hand, the analysis of JAKIM's role in dealing with halal cases and as a certification body reflected the limited power given and the efforts made. As a result, with the help of various stakeholders and certified companies, JAKIM used provocation to respond to an act of another cause. For example, in the press that explained the Cadbury chocolate case (May 26 & June 2, 2014), JAKIM emphasised that maintaining the halal reputation and status of certified products is a collaborative duty of the organisation and beneficial for business stakeholders.

It is crucial for all agencies to prioritise integrity in order to benefit all parties involved, including consumers and the industry. This is essential for maintaining the credibility of Malaysia's halal certification, particularly in terms of ensuring the validity and proper dissemination of information. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2014c)

Since this matter involves the responsibility and integrity of the company, a comprehensive inspection will be made again on the entire product production chain of Cadbury Confectionery (M) Sdn Bhd, which complies with Malaysian halal certification standards. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2014d)

However, in the smuggling meat case (December 23, 2020 & April 14, 2022), the strategy of provocation is direct and clear with the identified business partner's responsibility in securing the halal status of meat provided in the market.

The Malaysian government has stipulated that importing meat and meat products is only allowed from abattoirs/processing plants approved by the Malaysian Veterinary Services Department (DVS) and JAKIM. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2020)

JAKIM requested an explanation from SICHMA on 12 April 2022 and received an immediate response from SICHMA on the same day. JAKIM has also been informed by JAKIM's Embassy of Australia located in Canberra, which conducted a periodic audit on Thomas Foods Industries on 2 March 2022 and found that the halal slaughtering carried out at Thomas Foods Industries complies with the requirements of Malaysia's halal slaughtering standards and regulations on animals (animal welfare) which has been set by the Australian authorities (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2022a)

In addition, in the investigation of JAKIM-certified alcohol (haram - taboo goods) from France on April 28, 2023, JAKIM discovered that the certified company was based in Malaysia rather than overseas, and it is an expired certification since 2017; therefore, JAKIM rejected any assertion casting doubt on the halal certification status.

JAKIM also found that the Malaysian halal certificate displayed in the video was in the name of Inspirasi Mesra Sdn Bhd., a company registered in Malaysia that expired in 2017 and was not given to a company abroad. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2023)

Reduce Offensiveness

Based on the content analysis, the third strategy identified is reducing offensiveness: bolstering, minimisation, differentiation, transcendence, attack accuser or compensation. It involves explaining and justifying the stand of the organisation.

Bolstering

As previously stated, JAKIM collaborates with various stakeholders; therefore, it is critical to practise two-way communication using the bolstering strategy. In order to maintain halal trust and status, JAKIM advises consumers to avoid consuming haram products for the good cause of Muslims,

according to a press release dated 12 August 2011. For example, when it is determined that contaminated butter is not halal, JAKIM communicates openly with stakeholders and instructs them on how to discontinue or avoid consumption.

“...Muslims are asked not to use this product.” (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2011b)

Apart from that, JAKIM emphasised stakeholder efforts in food security, the International Numbering System (INS) as a gatekeeper to the explanation for the Cadbury defamation chocolate’s food labelling that occurred in 2014; meanwhile, appreciated the involvement of JKM in clearing the doubt.

JAKIM informed the stakeholders of the last date of investigation:

“The company producing the product has been subjected to periodic inspections, the most recent of which occurred on 20 February 2014, and was found to meet Malaysia’s halal certification standards.” (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2014a)

JAKIM highlighted the scheme and food labelling they followed in advance of the certification:

This numbering scheme adheres to the International Numbering System @ INS, which the Codex Alimentarius Committee established to protect human health and ensure compliance with ethical trade codes. The general public should be aware of the various types of food additives and the permitted levels of content in food products. The food and consumer goods industry is responsible for determining the source status of food additives used so that Muslim consumers do not have doubts. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2014c)

JAKIM appreciated JKM's involvement in the investigation.

“I would like to thank Jabatan Kimia Malaysia (JKM) for prioritising the testing of two Cadbury chocolate products.” (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2014d)

Furthermore, JAKIM made efforts to clarify that the slaughter process adhered to Malaysian standards before allowing the meat to be sold. JAKIM emphasised the JPV-outlined approval process for meat exports to Malaysia, which includes animal welfare considerations. Australian authorities also prioritise this dedication to animal welfare when obtaining halal food status.

The Islamic Development Department of Malaysia (JAKIM) held an Integrated Action Plan Coordination Meeting to Address the Counterfeit Halal Logo Issue of Smuggled Meat on 5 January 2021, which was chaired by YBhg. Datuk Abdul Aziz bin Jusoh, Deputy Director General (Operations) who carries out the duties of the Director General of JAKIM. The meeting was attended by the Director General of the Malaysian Veterinary Services Department (DVS) and representatives from the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs (KPDNHEP), the Malaysian Quarantine and Inspection Services Department (MAQIS) and the Royal Malaysian Customs Department (JKDM). (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2021)

Apart from that, a certified hospitality divided the path of delivery and labelled it as halal-lift, JAKIM appreciated the effort taken in maintaining the integrity of Malaysia’s halal certification that follows with the “Manual Prosedur Pensijilan Halal Malaysia (Domestik) 2020”.

“the hotel or premises may establish any halal control mechanism that is appropriate for the hotel’s facilities in accordance with the established procedures to maintain the integrity of Malaysia’s Halal Certification.” (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2022d)

Throughout these discussions, JAKIM has consistently acknowledged and valued the efforts and steps taken by stakeholders to protect and preserve the halal reputation.

Minimisation

Aside from that, JAKIM is working to minimise reputational damage during the crisis. JAKIM emphasises the steps taken to investigate certified samples and avoid public confusion about the status of the products in their press statements, which are shown below. In the 2011 crisis case, JAKIM

informed the public that the sample used for investigation came from a different supplier, resulting in a different outcome than JAKIM and JAIN's perspectives. Researchers have studied how JAKIM communicate in times of crisis:

JAKIM would first like to emphasise that the issue of confusion regarding the difference in the halal status of Golden Churn Butter products between JAKIM and the Jabatan Agama Islam Sarawak (JAIS) did not arise because the tests conducted by JAKIM on the product involved samples from different importers. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2011b)

JAKIM aims to prevent miscommunication by focusing on what is most important to deliver during a crisis:

Any findings by any agency involving halal issues must be coordinated with JAKIM/JAIN as the Competent Authority in halal certification under the Trade Description Act 2011. To avoid public confusion, only JAKIM should issue halal-related statements. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2014c)

Differentiation

However, in the 2014 Cadbury chocolate case, JAKIM took various steps to mitigate the impact of false information. JAKIM stressed that to avoid public confusion, only JAKIM is permitted to issue press releases on the subject. Meanwhile, JAKIM used a differentiation strategy to list and differentiate food labels using e-codes to educate consumers about food labelling. Researchers have studied how JAKIM communicate in times of crisis:

If the product is a local product with a Malaysia Verified Halal Certification, it can be used without hesitation, even if it has an E-code. However, if the product is not local and does not get a Malaysian halal verification certificate despite using the same e-code, users are advised to be careful when choosing the product. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2014c)

Transcendence

During the investigation stage of the halal crisis, JAKIM followed good crisis communication practices by providing transparent information and employing a transcendence strategy by focusing on investigating rather than explaining the crisis. As a result, during the investigation of the crisis for affected products, JAKIM referred to the rules and regulations of the halal certification holder, such as suspending or revoking the certification when necessary, as evidenced by Cadbury chocolate's certification being suspended during the investigation on 24 May 2014.

"JAKIM has suspended the halal certificate for both products immediately. At the same time, further investigation will be made to identify the source of the pollution." (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2014a)

On the other hand, as discussed previously, JAKIM collaborated with various stakeholders; therefore, at the time of investigating the defamation of cartel case in 2022, the involvement of "Presiden Pertubuhan Kemasyarakatan Rakyat" (PERKEMAS) and Australia's authority to understand and clarify the statement mentioned, "Slaughterhouses in Australia Supply 45% of Meat to Malaysia Not Following Islamic Sharia - Halal Status Doubtful" and "JAKIM Still Turning a Blind eye to Halal Integrity Issues". As a result, JAKIM presented the SOP guide to the press and informed the stakeholders about the case.

"JAKIM will immediately contact PERKEMAS and, in the meantime, will seek additional information from Australian authorities to assist in the resolution of this issue." (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2022a)

Attack accuser

In the image repair stage, it is unavoidable to have scapegoats for the crisis responsibility. JAKIM practised an attack accuser strategy to protect and maintain its reputation. It has been identified from the media statements from 2011 and 2022 that JAKIM points to the business partner's responsibility.

First, in the case of Golden Churn butter in 2011, JAKIM disclosed the investigated criteria and identified the possible contamination factors at the New Zealand-based factory. JAKIM's press confirmed the existence of porcine DNA in the products by JKM with the confirmation of the organisation's spokesperson. Researchers have studied how JAKIM communicate in times of crisis:

Several factors must be considered when investigating a porcine DNA test in a product, including the batch number of the product taken, which may occur during the product's manufacturing process. In the meantime, the possibility of contamination at specific levels must be considered. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2011a)

JAKIM would like to clarify the confusion and would like to inform the public of the results of discussions with the Ministry of Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism (KPDNKK)... on 8 August 2011, decided that Pure Creamery Butter - Golden Churn Butter produced by Ballantyne Food PTY Company (NZ) at Allen Street Morrinsville 3340 New Zealand sold in Malaysia is not halal....Sarawak Department of Islamic Religion on 19 July 2011 indicated that pork deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) was confirmed by JKM to be detected in the product....This has been verified by the company representative. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2011b)

With the recognition of JAKIM, SICHTMA is responsible for maintaining the halal status of the slaughterhouse in Australia, which was certified by the local certification body in 2022. Therefore, JAKIM stated that they would disqualify the certified slaughterhouse from offering meat in the Malaysian market if they discovered any failure to adhere to Malaysia's standards.

Supreme Islamic Council of Halal Meat in Australia Inc. (SICHTMA), as the halal certification body responsible for the halal supervision of the slaughterhouse, will be given a show cause letter and faced with the possibility of having its status as a halal certification body recognised by JAKIM be revoked if it is failure of complying with Malaysian halal standards and procedures. (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2022c)

Researchers identified an inconsistency in the halal standard in Malaysia and abroad through the statement, with the support of Zakaria et al. (2016), which states that JAKIM has recognised several halal certification bodies from other countries. However, if a case fails to meet JAKIM's standards, JAKIM is limited to revoking the previously granted halal certification or authorisation.

Corrective Action

Based on the content analysis, corrective action is the final strategy that can be identified. This approach was especially clear regarding porcine contamination discovered in certified butter imported from New Zealand. According to a press release dated August 12, 2011, the organisation admitted the presence of porcine DNA ingredients due to a leakage issue and agreed to initiate a product recall aimed specifically at the batches of butter distributed in the market.

"This decision was communicated to the company at a meeting on 9 August 2011 and the company Ballantyne Foods PTY Ltd agreed to have product recall from the market." (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2011b)

In conclusion, this analysis demonstrated that JAKIM frequently employed the strategy of evasion of responsibility and reduction of offensiveness in their media statements. Avraham (2020) emphasised that a multistep model of event-driven strategies was being implemented to restore the country's reputation in the tourism industry due to the findings on Middle Eastern terror attacks and the effects of war. Therefore, the JAKIM role had restricted authority in managing halal cases. Consequently, JAKIM frequently implemented defeasibility as a strategy, which required the involvement of pertinent stakeholders to resolve crises and serve as a mediator. Meanwhile, another strategy used by JAKIM in response to stakeholders is to strengthen their cooperation in maintaining halal integrity. Furthermore, JAKIM implemented an attack accuser strategy against organisations or parties that do not adhere to the halal SOP to maintain the halal reputation and trust.

Conclusion

Amidst the rapid evolution of the digital landscape, organisations face the imperative of adeptly managing their reputations through crisis response strategies amidst chaos. Benoit's (2015a & b) Image Repair Theory offers scholars a framework to comprehend how organisations reconstruct their images during unforeseen circumstances. Researchers analysing the application of this theory by JAKIM have concluded that each crisis necessitates a tailored solution, shedding light on the intricacies of halal crisis communication and strategies, a prominent topic in halal reputation and crisis management research. These insights deepen understanding of JAKIM's communication practices, which involve multiple government authorities and business partners and aim to mitigate organisational value loss and excessive stakeholder scrutiny at the onset of a crisis.

The current research findings reveal JAKIM's strengths in effectively conveying crisis messages when dealing with halal crises. Notably, the study's limitations stem from its reliance on JAKIM's press statements, potentially overlooking stakeholders' roles in delivering or accepting JAKIM's responses. Future research is suggested to examine stakeholder trust in JAKIM in handling halal crises. Moreover, the discrepancy regarding JAKIM's role as the sole authority for halal certification underscores the need for further research into stakeholders' responses during crisis onset and JAKIM's use of media relations to educate external stakeholders on its limitations in resolving issues. Addressing these limitations provides a deeper understanding of effective corporate crisis repair strategies across various crisis stages.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Author Contribution Statement

PEL: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Curation, Validation, Writing – Original Draft Preparation.
NEHMR: Project Administration, Supervision, Writing – Review, Proofread.
PKS: Project Administration, Supervision, Writing – Review, Proofread.
FSS: Project Administration, Supervision, Writing – Review, Proofread.

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Ethics Statements

This journal adheres to the ethical standards set by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

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Appendix 1: Explanation of the Strategies in Image Repair Theory

Strategies		Explanation
Denial	Shift blame	It is a strategy the company uses to reduce the offensiveness of blame or incidents that indirectly affect them.
	Simple denial	The company uses a strategy to reject the blame or incidents they do not perform.
Evasion of Responsibility	Accused	It is a strategy used by the company to claim it as an accident, mishap and/ or an excuse for the accident.
	Defeasibility	The company uses a strategy to mention that lack of information or ability caused the incident, which cannot blame the company solely.
	Good intentions	It is a strategy the company uses to act on questions and may be justified based on intentions.
	Provocation	It is a strategy used by the company to respond to the act of another, for example, scapegoating for the incident.
Reducing offensiveness	Bolstering	It is a strategy the company uses to stress the good traits and inform stakeholders about the past good works.
	Minimisation	The company uses a strategy to mention that the harm caused is less or minimal.
	Differentiation	It is a strategy used by the company to differentiate the situation caused.
	Transcendence	It is a strategy used by the company to justify it and highlight the purpose of doing it.
	Attack accuser	It is a strategy used by the company to be accused of wrongdoing.
	Compensation	It is a strategy that uses components by the company to apologise.
Corrective action		It is a strategy the company uses to vow to fix the problem.
Mortification		The company uses a strategy to admit the incident and seek forgiveness.