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Consumer's Perceptions and Behaviours towards Halal Food Products in Malaysia

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Abstract

The demand for halal products among consumers has increased over time. On average, consumers are increasingly sensitive towards the halal logo and details of the content of a product prior to purchase. Thus, the objective of this study is to analyse the consumers' perceptions and behaviours towards halal food products in Malaysia. Consumers' perceptions were measured based on the consumers' consent to the common perception that was perceived towards a product that has a halal logo and a non-halal logo. The consumers' behaviours were measured based on three forms of behaviours, which are, not purchasing, possibility of purchasing and sure of purchasing. Data were collected using questionnaires distributed to the consumers using the convenience sampling. A total of 406 consumers were analysed in this discussion. The study results show that the respondents were still unsure and wary of the halal status of a product even though it has a halal logo. Consumers' purchasing behaviours show that they were very dependent on the halal logo issued by JAKIM. An important implication of the study is focusing on the effort to deepen the causal factors to the clear doubts among consumers towards products labelled as halal in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Consumer, Perception, Behaviour, Halal Logo, Halal Product*

Introduction

The production of halal products has been a priority for entrepreneurs, companies and industries to ensure that their products are accepted by the society. Moreover, halal products are gaining popularity among consumers, including the non-Muslim consumers. A study by has identified several aspects that had influenced the perceptions of Muslim consumers towards halal food products, namely the safety aspect, religious value, health, exclusiveness, attitudes and the purchase intention (Ishak et al. 2017; Ishak et al. 2016; Widido 2013). Meanwhile, a study on Muslims consumers' perceptions and their attitudes towards the concept of halal and halal products in Malaysia shows

that the non-Muslim consumers were aware of the halal food existence, halal principles and the advantages in the slaughtering of animals (Golnaz et al. 2010; Zaimah et al. 2014).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is often used as a base to support the relationship between the concepts of halal perception of the Muslim consumers towards halal products (Aizen 1991). According to this theory, there are three key components that are influencing consumer's behaviour that is, attitudes, subjective value and behavioural control. Attitude is a psychological tendency to judge whether something is liked or disliked. It is an individual assessment, either positive or negative towards certain self-behaviour performance. Subjective value is an individual's perception towards social pressure related to what should be done or should not be done. At this stage, the cultural life of a community can control their behaviour. The perception of behavioral control is the individual's perception towards control over certain behaviours.

All the three components of TPB provide a guide to predict the human social behaviour (Aziz & Chok 2012). The most important component in TPB is the attitude on behaviour that is, an attitude that comes from the belief towards the collective behaviour (Widido 2013). A study based on TPB has identified the direct impact on the purchase intention and consumers' confidence in purchasing halal products (Omar et al. 2012). Four variables were identified, namely the purchase intention, consumer's confidence, perceived behavioural control, subjective norm and the actual purchase. The study results show that there were four causals and effects of the purchase intention and the consumer's confidence in halal products, namely, the perceived behavioural control and the intention of purchasing halal products, subjective norms and consumer's confidence, the intention of purchasing halal products and the actual purchase of halal product, and confidence and actual purchase of halal products.

Actually, study on factors influencing Malaysian consumers in the purchasing behaviour of halal products is still low (Othman & Hashim 2010). Besides that, rules and customs value of a religion in the consumer's environment will influence the attitudes and behaviours of the consumers especially in food purchasing decisions (Ishak & Zabil 2012; Bonne 2009). Normally, consumers' purchase of halal products is influenced by the product label, certification bodies, information resources, company's image and product quality (Masnono 2005; Ishak et al. 2015). Therefore, the main objective of this study is to analyze the perceptions and behaviours of the consumers towards halal food products in Malaysia.

Study Methodology

The study was conducted in Peninsular Malaysia and was classified into four zones, namely the North Zone (Perak and Kedah), South Zone (Malacca and Johor), East Zone (Kelantan) and the Central Zone (Kuala Lumpur and Selangor). The survey method has been conducted in this study. Data was collected using questionnaires distributed to the consumers by the convenience sampling method. The questionnaires contain information on socio-economic background, halal food products, innovation, halal perception, consumer's behaviour, tendency to give priority to halal products, and the need for companies to produce halal food products. This paper will only use the information on

halal perceptions and the consumers' behaviours. The Halal perception is viewed from the aspect of respondents' consent on a common perception of a halal product. The halal perceptions were measured using a five scales; 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=moderate, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree. A total of 15 items were used in the measurement. The halal perception measurement recorded a Cronbach-alpha value of 0.739. The halal perception was classified into three levels based on the average score, that is low (1:00 to 2:33), moderate (2.34-3.66) and high (3.67-5.00). The consumers' behaviours on halal products were measured based on three scales; which is, not purchasing, may purchase and will purchase. A descriptive analysis using frequency, percentage, average and standard deviation were used to describe the findings.

Study Result and Discussion

Respondent's background

The highest number of respondents were in the Central Zone (32.5%), followed by North Zone, South Zone and East Zone, each recording 27.3%, 23.7% and 16.5% respectively. The total number of female respondents were more (56.2%) than the male respondents (47.8%). Almost half of the respondents were in the age range of 25-40 years (49.7%), followed by respondents aged less than or equal to 25 years (34.5%) and respondents aged 40 years or older (15.8%). The Malay respondents recorded the highest percentage (69.7%), followed by the Chinese respondents (15.0%), Indian (12.3%) and others (3.0%). Most respondents have permanent jobs (80.3%). While the remaining respondents were working temporarily (10.3%) and contracts (10.6%), and there were respondents who were unemployed (18.7%). The monthly income distribution of the respondents recorded that the income that was less and equal to RM2,000.00 (36.5%) was the highest, followed by income between RM2,000.00 and RM4,000.00 (32.5%) and income exceeding RM4,000.00 (20.9%). The rest 10.1% did not have any income. The respondents' education level was classified into three, namely, school leavers (40.6%), diploma (41.2%), degree and above (18.2%).

Respondents' perceptions towards halal food products

Table 2 shows the respondents' perceptions towards halal food products. The results show that the respondents' halal perceptions can only be classified into two groups, namely high and medium. The respondents have high halal perception according to the sequence of Statement 7, 8, 11, 12 and 5. Respondents had the highest halal perception towards the need of halal products produced by the non-Muslim manufacturers which must obtain halal certification (Statement 7; mean=4.36). This finding shows that the consumers have a high awareness and sensitivity towards the confirmation of halal status, especially on the production of products produced by the non-Muslims [3,4]. The respondents also perceived a high degree of caution even if the product has a halal logo (Statement 8; mean=4.19). The consumers' cautious attitude is indeed evident in Statement 11 (mean=4.01), which shows that the respondents only purchase certain brands because they were convinced by its halal status. In fact, sometimes the respondents felt suspicious and doubtful with the halal status of certain products. This can be seen in statement 12 (mean=3.93) and Statement 5 (mean=3.88). In short, respondents were cautious about the halal status of a product even if it has a halal logo. It was proven that the three components in the theory of organized behaviour (attitude, subjective values and behaviour control) can be seen in this finding [7,8,9].

Table 1. Respondents' halal perceptions

| No. | Statement | Level | Mean | S.D. |
|-----|--|-----------------|------|------|
| 1. | Muslim manufacturers must produce halal product although there is no halal logo. | <i>Moderate</i> | 3.17 | 1.35 |
| 2. | Products marketed by Muslim traders are halal assured. | <i>Moderate</i> | 3.54 | 1.17 |
| 3. | Although there is no halal logo, I believe that products manufactured by the Malay manufacturers are halal. | <i>Moderate</i> | 3.11 | 1.20 |
| 4. | Products with no halal logo, are not necessarily not halal. | <i>Moderate</i> | 3.32 | 1.19 |
| 5. | I doubt the halal logo on some products. | <i>High</i> | 3.88 | 0.98 |
| 6. | Products that have halal logo, are not necessarily halal. | <i>Moderate</i> | 3.59 | 1.14 |
| 7. | Halal products produced by the non-Muslim manufacturers must obtain the halal certification. | <i>High</i> | 4.36 | 0.89 |
| 8. | Although there were already a halal logo, I remain cautious before purchasing. | <i>High</i> | 4.19 | 0.92 |
| 9. | I am confident that the products produced in Muslim countries are halal. | <i>Moderate</i> | 3.52 | 1.08 |
| 10. | Packaging that has JAWI script is halal. | <i>Moderate</i> | 3.03 | 1.16 |
| 11. | I only purchase a certain brand because I am already convinced of its halal status. | <i>High</i> | 4.01 | 0.95 |
| 12. | Sometimes I feel suspicious about the status of certain halal products. | <i>High</i> | 3.93 | 1.02 |
| 13. | Shops that have vegetarian food status is halal. | <i>Moderate</i> | 3.20 | 1.14 |
| 14. | As long as there is no information stating that it is not halal, the product is halal. | <i>Moderate</i> | 3.09 | 1.15 |
| 15. | Although others say that it is not halal, I remain confident because the brand has long been the choice for my family. | <i>Moderate</i> | 3.16 | 1.18 |

Meanwhile, there were ten statements showing that the respondents' halal perceptions were moderate, that is Statements 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14 and 15. Of all the statements that have the moderate halal perception level, it can be summarized into three findings. Firstly, respondents do have cautious attitudes towards products with halal status. Secondly, the respondents have confidence towards the products manufactured by Muslims are halal. Thirdly, respondents also have doubts towards some products although it has a halal status. Overall, the respondents were still undecided and were very careful with the halal status of a product even if it has a halal logo (Golnaz et al 2010; Othman & Hashim 2010; Ishak & Zabil 2012; Bonne et al 2009; Masnono 2005).

Respondents' purchasing behaviour

Table 2 shows the respondents' purchasing behaviours towards their favourite food products. This purchasing behaviours were categorized into six scenarios. *Scenario 1*: Respondents tend not to purchase (43.8%) when faced with the scenario of a non-Muslims manufacturer, no halal logo and only verbal halal assurance although the food is their favourite food. There were also consumers

who did not purchase at all (38.4%) when faced with the scenario. However, there were also people who would have purchased (17.7%) despite having been exposed to such a scenario.

Table 2. Respondents' purchasing behaviour

| Scenario | | Not Purchasing | May Purchase | Certainly Will Purchase |
|----------|---|----------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| | | Frequency (%) | | |
| 1. | Non-Muslim manufacturer, no halal logo, only verbal halal assurance. | 156 (38.4) | 178 (43.8) | 72 (17.7) |
| 2. | Non-Muslim manufacturer with JAKIM halal certification. | 88 (21.7) | 145 (35.7) | 173 (42.6) |
| 3. | Non-Muslim manufacturer, no halal logo and there is Jawi script on the packaging. | 185 (45.6) | 140 (34.5) | 81 (20.0) |
| 4. | Non-Muslim manufacturer with private halal certification. | 136 (33.5) | 159 (39.2) | 111 (27.3) |
| 5. | Bumiputera manufacturer with no halal logo | 153 (37.7) | 163 (40.1) | 90 (22.2) |
| 6. | Beverages from Arab Countries | 90 (22.2) | 212 (52.2) | 104 (25.6) |

Scenario 2: Respondents showed a higher propensity to certainly will purchase (42.6%) when they know that the food were manufactured by the non Muslims having JAKIM halal certification. However, there were also consumers who did not purchase (21.7%) although there were JAKIM halal certification. While 35.7% were recorded as may purchase.

Scenario 3: Respondents were found to have a higher tendency of not purchasing (45.6%) than would have purchased (20.0%) when knowing that the manufacturer is a non-Muslim, no halal logo and only using the Jawi script in the product packaging. However, there were also consumers who might purchase (34.5%) in such circumstances. This means that the use of Jawi script has low propensity of influencing the consumers to purchase a product which is claimed to be halal.

Scenario 4: Respondents were seen as rather cautious in the purchasing behavior when knowing that the manufacturer is a non-Muslim and having a private halal certification. A total of 33.5% tend not to purchase, and 39.2% were likely to purchase. Only 27.6% said they will definitely made the decision to purchase in such circumstances. These findings show that the consumers' confidence in the private halal logo is somewhat less than the halal logo issued by JAKIM.

Scenario 5: When faced with a scenario that the manufacturer is Bumiputera but does not have the halal logo, only a small proportion of the respondents who will definitely purchase (22.2%). The rest have the tendency not to purchase and may purchase, each recording 37.7% and 40.1% respectively. Once again, these findings show that the halal logo is something that is of a concern to the consumers of today.

Scenario 6: The tendency of respondents to not purchase and certainly will purchase was almost similar, that is the percentage of each recorded 22.2% and 25.6%. This shows that the

manufacturing countries' factor, whether Muslim or non-Muslim is less influencing in the purchasing behaviors. Based on the six scenarios that have been described, it can be concluded that the purchasing behaviors among respondents was strongly dependent on the halal logo issued by JAKIM. It is proven that the halal logo factor that appears on each of the halal food products is more trusted by the consumers today, especially the Muslims consumers (Widido 2013; Golnaz et al. 2010; Zaimah et al. 2014).

Conclusion

Overall, the respondents' perceptions towards halal food products can be categorized into two levels, namely the moderate perception and the high level perception. On average, the respondents agreed that the status of halal logo is necessary to prove that a product is halal. The packaging and image also affects the consumers' confidence. However, there were some respondents who did not placed the halal logo as a condition to prove that the products are halal. It means that there exist other factors which needed to be considered in addressing the issue of the consumers' halal perceptions. The respondents' purchasing behaviours also indicated that the halal logo by JAKIM was emphasized in determining whether the consumers will purchase a food product or not. In conclusion, efforts to explore deeper the causal factors to the clear doubts among consumers of halal food products in terms of perception and purchasing behaviour should be taken seriously and should be done in the future.

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