

Consumers' Perceptions of Halal Food Certification

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ABSTRACT

Halal has been used as a benchmark for safety, hygiene and product quality assurance. Empirical research into Halal food certification is minimal. Hence, the goal of this research is to describe selected aspects of respondents' perception of Halal food certification. The descriptive statistics of the 20 factor items revealed that a significant number of respondents have a positive perception of Halal food certification. They mainly expressed that Halal food products are important to them. What's more, using Halal food products is their own choice. Indeed, they have high inclination to choose Halal food products over other types of products. Firms should play a dominant role in improving consumers' attitudes towards Halal food certification in the challenging digital marketplace. Future research direction is also presented.

Keywords: Halal food, Knowledge, Religion, Attitude, Intention

Introduction

In the Quran, the word "Halal" is defined as legal or allowed, which is some food that is suggested in the Quran. All food that is mentioned in the Quran is Halal, except those items that are identified as Haram, and banned from consumption (Alam & Sayuti, 2011). "Muslim consumers are thoughtful in their buying behaviour to guarantee that the products they purchase are Halal (lawful) and Toyyib (good) according to their religion" (Wilson & Liu, 2011). Consumers, whether Muslims or non-Muslims are exposed to a wide variety of products and services. They refer to product packaging as guidance for product evaluations. It is the responsibility of Muslims to seek Halal products for their consumption (Mukhtar & Butt, 2012). Halal has been used as a benchmark for safety, hygiene and product quality assurance. Empirical research into Halal food certification is minimal. Hence, the goal of this research is to describe selected aspects of respondents' perception of Halal food certification.

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The subsequent section reviews literature related to knowledge, religiousness, and attitude. The methodology applied in this research is elaborated in Section 3, while Section 4 details the analysis of data. The conclusion and recommendations are presented in the final section.

Literature Review

This section deliberates on consumer behavioral aspects such as knowledge, religiousness, and attitude. Knowledge refers to “the facts, feelings or experiences known by a person or a group of people” (Azmawani, Ebrahim, & Suhaimi, 2015). Preceding works by Abdul Aziz and Chok (2013) asserted that knowledge influenced consumers’ attitude towards halal foods. Ireland and Rajabzadeh (2011) avowed that halal knowledge of the products affects consumers’ decision making to accept or reject them. Besides, consumer purchasing behaviour, product information searches, and product evaluations are determined by their knowledge of the concept of Halal (Aertsens, 2011; Gracia, 2007; Stobbelaar, Casimir, Borghuis, Marks, Meijer, & Zebeda, 2007).

Righteousness is “the extent to which an individual is committed to his/her religion, and it is then imitated in his/her attitude and behaviour” (Ahmad, 2015). Preceding scholars avowed that consumers’ religious affiliation is significantly associated with a number of consumption-related variables (Swimberghe, Sharma, & Flurry, 2009). Indeed, consumers’ food choices, food consumption, and decision making processes are also influenced by aspects like religion. (Bonne, Vermeir, Bergeaud-Blackler, & Verbeke, 2007; Megawati & Muhammad, 2014).

Attitude towards behaviour is referred to as the “degree to which a person has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the behaviour in question” (Ajzen, 1991). Prior research reported that consumers with positive attitude tend to have positive behavioural intentions (Azmawani et al., 2015; Hinsz & Nickell, 2015). The rationale being attitude is the most significant determinant of consumers’ behavioural intention (Briliana & Mursito, 2017).

Methodology

Data were collected from 350 students in a public higher learning institution in the Federal Territory of Labuan, Malaysia using the self-administered questionnaire. This activity was conducted for a two week period from September 15 to 30, 2017. Of these, 300 respondents completed the survey, creating the response rate of 86%, after eliminating missing data. The questionnaire was designed in two sections. Section A presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Section B consists of 20 measurement items that were derived from four factors and designed in a 5-point Likert scale stretching from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). To measure knowledge, five items were adapted from prior research (Golnaz, Zainalabidin, Mad Nasir, & Eddie Chiew, 2010).

Righteousness was assessed by using five items adapted from research conducted by Rehman and Shabbir (2010), and Salman and Siddiqui (2011). Five items of attitude toward halal food, and intention to refer to Halal food were modified from research instruments of Aziz, Amin, and Isa (2010), and Salman and Siddiqui (2011). A descriptive analysis such as frequencies and percentages on aspects of respondents’ perception of halal food, righteousness, attitude toward halal food, and intention to refer to Halal food was performed via Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program version 21.0.

Data Analysis

Of the 300 completed responses, participants were primarily males (56%), and the remaining (44%) were females (see Table 1). In terms of age, a small portion of the respondents aged more than 25 years (3%),

23-25 years old (5%), and less than 19 years old (6%). However, participants were mostly 20-22 years of age (85%).

Table 1: Respondents' Profile

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	<i>Male</i>	132	44.0
	<i>Female</i>	168	56.0
Age	<19 years old	19	6.4
	20-22 years old	255	85.0
	23-25 years old	16	5.3
	> 25 years old	10	3.3

Description of Knowledge of Halal Food Certification

Table 2 depicts the frequency, percentage and means for each of the 5 indicators of respondents' perception of the factor called Knowledge Of Halal Food Certification. Mean values among the factor items are varied with the majority of respondents selecting 4 = agree or 5 = strongly agree for most of the items. Means range between 3.68 and 4.22. Statement "I understand Islamic laws of Halal and Haram for food and drink" had the highest mean score. Precisely, the majority of respondents (87.3%) expressed positive agreement on this statement, followed closely by the statement "I have enough knowledge to differentiate between permissible and forbidden food". On the other hand, the statement "I know about the current issues regarding ingredients such as E471" had the lowest mean score among the five statements that belong to the factor Knowledge Of Halal Food Certification. Further, only a small portion of respondents (6%) have sufficient knowledge about the current issues regarding product ingredients.

Table 2: Perception towards Knowledge of Halal Food Certification

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
"I understand Islamic laws of Halal and Haram for food and drink".	3 (1.0)	21 (7.0)	14 (4.7)	132 (44.0)	130 (43.3)	4.22
"I feel that I have sufficient knowledge of which foods and drinks are forbidden by Islam".	3 (1.0)	24 (8.0)	21 (7.0)	139 (46.3)	133 (37.7)	4.12
"I have enough knowledge to differentiate between permissible and forbidden stuffs".	4 (1.3)	14 (4.7)	23 (7.7)	132 (44.0)	127 (42.3)	4.21
"I know about the current issues regarding ingredients such as E471".	17 (5.7)	51 (17.0)	35 (11.7)	104 (34.7)	93 (31)	3.68
"I know the difference between Halal certification for products and Halal certification for premises".	7 (2.3)	25 (8.3)	27 (9.0)	134 (44.7)	107 (35.7)	4.03

Note: Percentages are in parentheses

Description of Religiousness

To explore respondents' perceptions about the issue of religiousness, descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, and mean) for each item were calculated. Table 3 details description of religiousness. On a five-point Likert scale, statement "I enjoy spending time with others of my religious affiliation" had

highest mean (M=4.15), implying a significant number of respondents (88%) rated 4 and 5 of this questionnaire item. The next important statement reported by the participants were statement "I happily and willingly pay my zakat on time" (mean=3.92), and statement "I often watch religious programmes on TV" (mean=3.81). Further, 70% of all respondents indicated they agreed (43.7%) or even strongly agreed (26.3%) with the statement "I often read religious books and magazines". Only 3% strongly disagreed with this statement. Besides, more than half of the respondents (65%) also agreed and strongly agreed with the statement "I often participate in religious talk at mosque". Only 1.8% of the respondents disagreed with this statement.

Table 3: Perception towards Religiosity

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
"I happily and willingly pay my zakat on time".	25 (8.3)	21 (7.0)	29 (9.7)	104 (34.7)	121 (40.3)	3.92
"I enjoy spending time with others of my religious affiliation",	7 (2.3)	13 (4.3)	16 (5.3)	155 (51.7)	109 (36.3)	4.15
"I often participate in religious talk at mosque".	19 (6.3)	45 (15.0)	4.2 (14.0)	117 (39.0)	77 (25.7)	3.63
"I often read religious books and magazines".	8 (2.7)	46 (15.3)	36 (12.0)	131 (43.7)	79 (26.3)	3.76
"I often watch religious programmes on TV".	13 (4.3)	34 (11.3)	31 (10.3)	140 (46.7)	82 (27.3)	3.81

Note: Percentages are in parentheses

Description of Attitude toward Halal Food Certification

Attitude toward halal food certification factor consisted of five items. All mean values surpassed 4.00 on a five-point Likert scale (range from 4.09 to 4.27), inferring respondents mainly agreed on these statements. The first referred to statement "I always look for the Halal label when I buy food products", while statement "Halal food products

are important" had highest mean score. Specifically, most respondents (53%) strongly agreed and 33% agreed that "Halal food products are important". Further, many respondents (79.3%) believe that using Halal food products are their own choice, while more than three quarters of the respondents (80%) have a positive inclination to choose Halal food products. Indeed, 83% of the participants revealed that "most people who are important to them would also use Halal food products".

Table 4: Perception of Attitude toward Halal Food Certification

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
"I like to choose Halal food products".	3 (1.0)	27 (9.0)	17 (5.7)	104 (34.7)	149 (49.7)	4.23
"I always look for the Halal label when I buy food products".	15 (5.0)	37 (12.3)	26 (8.7)	116 (38.7)	106 (35.3)	4.09
"Halal food products are important".	7 (2.3)	23 (7.7)	11 (3.7)	99 (33.0)	160 (53.3)	4.27

“Using Halal food products is my own choice”.	6 (2.0)	28 (9.3)	16 (5.3)	88 (29.3)	162 (54.0)	4.24
“Most people who are important to me use Halal food products”.	6 (2.0)	32 (10.7)	12 (4.0)	98 (32.7)	152 (50.7)	4.19

Note: Percentages are in parentheses

Description of Intention to Refer to Halal Food Certification

Respondents also responded to the factor of intention to refer to Halal food certification that consisted of five items. Mean scores among the factor items vary (ranged between 3.95 and 4.17). Most respondents (78.6%) reported positively that they are “willing to shop around to buy food products with an authentic Halal logo”. Moreover, the highest mean score was discovered on statement “I intend to purchase Halal food products in the future”. What’s more, 84% of the respondents agreed with this statement. Additionally, many respondents (78.3%) reported that they are “willing to wait longer to buy food products with an authentic Halal logo”, and 78.3% stated that they are “willing to travel long distances to buy food products with an authentic Halal logo”. Most respondents also strongly agreed (41%) or agreed (37%) with the statement that “I am willing to pay more for food products with an authentic Halal logo”.

Table 5: Perception towards Intention to Refer to Halal Food Certification

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
“I am willing to pay more for food products with an authentic Halal logo”.	10 (3.3)	30 (10.0)	26 (8.7)	111 (37.0)	123 (41.0)	4.02
“I am willing to wait longer to buy food products with an authentic Halal logo”.	9 (3.0)	36 (12.0)	20 (6.7)	106 (35.3)	129 (43.0)	4.03
“I am willing to shop around to buy food products with an authentic Halal logo”.	8 (2.7)	37 (12.3)	19 (6.3)	115 (38.3)	121 (40.3)	4.01
“I am willing to travel long distances to buy food products with an authentic Halal logo”.	11 (3.7)	40 (13.3)	23 (7.7)	104 (34.7)	122 (40.7)	3.95
“I intend to purchase Halal food products in the future”.	8 (2.7)	24 (8.0)	17 (5.7)	110 (36.7)	141 (47.0)	4.17

Note: Percentages are in parentheses

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research describes selected aspects of respondents’ perception towards Halal food certification such as knowledge on halal food, religiousness, attitude toward halal food, and intention to refer to Halal food. These aspects were derived from the component of attitude toward halal food certification. Hence, the research findings offer some important implications to practitioners. Firms should play a dominant role in improving consumers’ attitude toward Halal food certification in the challenging digital marketplace.

Additional perspectives that embolden consumers’ reliance toward Halal food certification is that they apprehend Islamic Halal and Haram aspects while selecting any food and drink. Plus, they are

knowledgable whether the product is permissible or forbidden by Islamic laws. These aspects were derived from the component of knowledge of halal food certification. Consequently, firms should enhance consumers' knowledge regarding importance of referring to halal food certification in product selection, evaluation, and decision making. Firms should use traditional and electronic media to enhance consumers' knowledge of Halal food certification. Future research is suggested to amplify the sample coverage beyond student groups so as to expand the generalisation of the results. Besides, data could be analysed using structural equation modelling technique in order to determine which factor produced the strongest impact on consumers' intention to refer to Halal food certification.

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