



Halal Branding and the Consumer Response Among Non-Muslim Consumers

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ABSTRACT

The interpretation and application of halal might be different between non-Muslims and Muslims. Vast background in culture and religion in Malaysia would make not everyone be able to understand the topic of halal. However, the comprehension and the value of a multi-racial consumer perspective for better Halal branding practices in the country are excellent. The importance of this study is to understand the concept of halal and explore the attitude and behaviour of the halal brand among non-Muslims. This study is qualitative. The research design of this study is an exploratory case study that employs semi-structured interviews. With eight informants from the nonprobability of purposeful sampling, the participants include diverse backgrounds from students to industry experts, reflecting all possible study sides. The findings show that non-Muslims had limited knowledge about the halal brand. Halal is a specific notion to indicate that Muslim consumers' food is safe to consume. Especially pork-free and non-alcohol. Non-Muslim consumers affirmed they still need to know about the whole concept of halal more than just a logo. Understanding the need of others is also significant in a multi-racial country. Though non-Muslims are aware of the existence of the halal logo, especially in daily needs product, they do not restrict themselves to halal brand as for them, quality and brand name is their priority in purchasing. Hence, based on this research, it is suggested that the future researcher explore how the brand image of the so-called halal product may attract and create the purchasing intention among non-Muslim consumers.

Keywords: Branding, Consumer Response, Halal, Planned Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, many halal products such as food, cosmetics, and services are no longer consumed by Muslim consumers only but start to attract more markets from non-Muslim consumers. This phenomenon happened due to the awareness among non-Muslims of the context of halal products and services and the cultural assimilation among Malaysians (Ismail & Nassirudin, 2014). Similarly, Golnaz, Zainalabidin, Nasir & Chiew (2010) also emphasise that, at present, the halal concept has become familiar to non-Muslims, particularly those in Muslim countries. Hence, halal has become the standard of choice for Muslims and non-Muslims worldwide and is no longer just a religious obligation or observance. In Malaysia, halal standards are highly derived through its meticulous development process, which adopts global best practices, guidelines, and standards. As a result, the halal brand is big in Malaysia's domestic market with the majority Muslim population.

Therefore, Damita, Harun, Martin, Othman & Ahmad (2019) suggested that the target market of halal products should be extended to include non-Muslim consumers since the research shows that non-Muslim consumers nowadays have a favourable attitude toward Halal food. Their research indicates a positive attitude engaged between non-Muslims and halal food. The study also indicated that non-Muslims intend to repurchase halal food. Muslims and others such as friends, family members, and the public have commonly influenced this decision.

Thus, more efforts on halal branding should be investigated to promote halal products and services and ensure they can attract consumers and industry players among non-Muslims. According to Mooij (2019), a brand is seen as an 'association network' (negatively or positively) in the consumer's minds not just to the brand name or visual images, user association, product attributes, benefit and value but as well as places and occasion of usage. Additionally, an attractive brand to consumers can maintain its target market and guarantee brand repurchase (Borzooei & Asgari, 2013). The halal brand is beyond religious needs, but sanitation and safety are also an essential part of this certification for all layers of consumers. Such essential features are important selling points for all consumer segments' brand image (Damita et al., 2019). Therefore, this study aims to understand the concept of halal among non-Muslim. In addition, it also explores their attitude and behaviour towards the halal brand.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

A brand can be considered an attitude representing a set of beliefs about purchasing a product. Hence, the halal branding fulfils the Muslim religious obligation rather than establishing credibility and trust among the targeted audience. However, people view Islamic brands differently in different places, even Muslim consumers (Yusof & Jusoh, 2013). Hence, this leads to little image relevance in the non-Muslim consumer mind. Thus, there are grey areas of halal context for the non-Muslims, especially their understanding, even though the public is exposed to the information on halal consumption through various media (Awang, 2016). Nevertheless, the reliability and validity of information on halal consumption conveyed through social media is questionable because it does not closely monitor the information sources.

Malaysia is a multi-racial country. Diversity of religion, background and belief exists among Muslims as majority citizens. Indeed, Muslim consumers are obligated by their religion only to consume halal products. Therefore, when purchasing products, they look for the halal logo certified by the religious authority in Malaysia. Besides, the demand for halal products has increased over the past few decades (Golnaz et al., 2010). In contrast, many non-Muslim consumers still consider halal products and Islamic products as anything that does not contain lard in any product (Mathew et al., 2014). Therefore, the response of non-Muslim consumers toward halal products is still unclear in a multi-racial market environment which may differ in consumer mind regarding halal value.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Halal Branding

According to Johnson (2014), Brand image is the new capital in the era of the global marketplace, nations, regions, and cities to compete for economic purposes and is essential to influence people's decision to purchase certain brands or services. It gives emotional perceptions to specific brands that consumers attach according to Low & Lamb (2000), which offer more comprehensive definitions of the term 'self-identity' and value, which leads to an eternal relationship between consumers and the brand. Like any other religion, Islam also has an image that can be considered a brand in its privilege, brand image, and similar to any other universal brand (Yusof & Jusoh, 2013). Halal means permitted according to Islamic law, and as a brand, it indicates that the commodity, product, and service comply with Islam's teachings. According to Ahmad (2015), the concept of halal is not only clean but also pure (Toyibban), other than safety and hygiene attributes. These qualities play a significant part in persuading consumers' behaviour grounded in the Muslim faith- submission, surrender, and obedience in Islam. However, Islamic brands cannot be *sharia*-compliant until they fulfill several conditions related to ingredients, impacts, logistics

and intentions, which are Islamically called '*halal*' or wholesome products. Prior to the study done by Daud, Aziz, Baharudin & Shamsuddin (2012), halal's certified products were easily aligned with Islamic values, and such symbols give the audience the psychological comfort of a belief that it is cleaner well as healthier.

The halal way is known as credible, non-deceptive, ethical and straightforward, predominantly Muslim consumers, as they have a great concern and are aware of the food they consume to ensure they are handled according to Islamic law (Aziz, Rahim & Asri, 2019). Halal labels reassure them that the product adheres to the strict standard promised by the well-known brands for tight exercise over the audit and certification process, not just for meat, as Temporal (2011) mentioned. Through the halal logo, consumers have the freedom to select products that suit their functional and social needs. Therefore, religious associations attached to halal goods are essential, leading to different decision-making and buying decisions. Therefore, Halal is the primary Islamic marketing asset capable of influencing an individual cognitively and behaviorally, affecting brand trust as a fundamental consumer-brand relationship (Borzooei & Asgari, 2013).

Consumer Response

Communication through marketing is quite simple, starting with a brand sending a message out to a target market, later received and responded to by the public. According to Morgan, Whitler, Feng et al. (2018), the goal is to offer value and desired positioning at the right time by informing, persuading, or reminding current, previous, and potential customers about their products or services. However, the way consumers perceive the marketing strategies, including image or personality, positively or negatively affect the consumer perception in response to the brand (Andersen, Weisstein & Song, 2020). These reactions are essential as minor misunderstandings could convey a different perception which helps improve specific areas of a product or service. Furthermore, it will induce any company or organisation to improve to make their customers more loyal based on their experience, as mentioned by Hollensen and Opresnik (2019). Consumer insight eventually helps marketers plan from the right stimulus of effective marketing and positioning campaigns to other associated elements of the communications mix. Thus, it is often vital to form the marketing strategy by identifying required value propositions, especially those that could potentially be part of their customer base in the future.

Planned Behaviour Theory

The fast growth of Muslim markets is due to the high birth rate of Muslims compared to the birth rate of western countries, which is well below the natural replacement rate. Based on this growing trend, the United Nations Population Fund estimates that Muslims will account for 30 per cent of the world population by 2050 (Al-Kwafi & Farha, 2017). Hence, *halal* branding should not be a bizarre thing to a non-muslim. Though it is estimated that the growth of the Muslim market is growing fast, the response of the non-muslim to the Muslim market is essential to be explored. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) has often been used in Muslim and non-Muslim countries to measure the intention to consume *halal* products (Butt, Shams, & Perez, 2019). TPB predicts an individual's intention to engage in a behaviour at a specific time and place. The theory was intended to explain all behaviours over which people could exert self-control. The crucial part of this model is behavioural intent; behavioural intentions are influenced by the attitude about the likelihood that the behaviour will have the expected outcome and the subjective evaluation of the risks and benefits. Also, TPB explained that consumer attitudes include cognitive, affective, and behavioural components (Cheng, 2017).

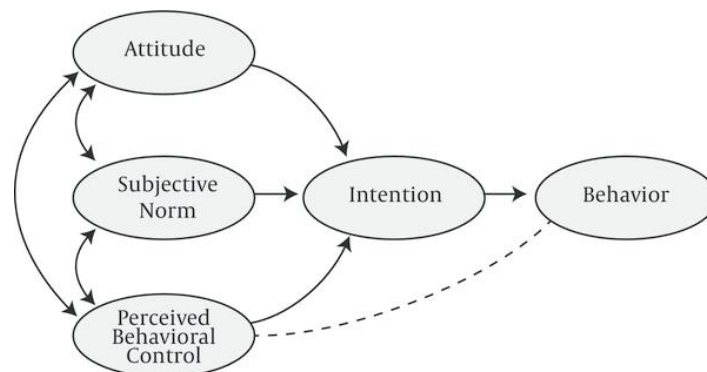


Figure 1.0: Theory of Planned Behaviour framework

Ajzen (1991) proposed the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) with the explicit goal of encompassing the descriptive possibility of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). TRA suggests that a person's behaviour is determined by their intention to perform the behaviour and that this intention is, in turn, a function of their attitude toward the behaviour and subjective norms. Referring to this study, the *halal* branding and consumer response among non-Muslim is exclusive research. Therefore, the TPB theory is a unique approach to exploring brain activity to confirm that non-Muslim consumers from specific market segments respond differently to market products based on their internal beliefs. To support that, Bisquolm (2010) suggested using TPB to explore the consumer's response because this theory can explain how consumers' attitudes and behaviours are correlated.

METHODOLOGY

The study of cultural life can be understood by studying what people think about, their ideas, and the essential meanings that contribute to their actions. Thus, a qualitative study is a suitable approach, which will look deeper into the problems and help discover new thoughts and different individual views, especially toward the research objectives (Yin, 2011). Humans can respond in different ways, and they do that most of the time until there is no single objective of "reality"; there are only (possibly multiple, possibly conflicting) interpretations of a situation. Based on Sorrells (2015), 'positionality' is a relational concept that refers to different experiences, understandings, and knowledge of oneself and the world gained, accessed and produced based on one's positionality. A case study helps focus on the issue explicitly highlighted on non-Muslim in Kampar, Perak.

According to Creswell (2013), a case study can go beyond the quantitative statistical results and understand the behavioural conditions that involve the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting. Therefore, semi-structured interviews are the main body of the research strategy with flexibility and allowing the researcher to respond to the data that emerged during the session in March and April 2021. Eight informants are selected from the nonprobability of purposeful sampling due to specific characteristics exceptionally knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell, Vicky & Clark, 2011). Notably, communicating experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and thoughtful manner gives considerable depth and insight to the topic. All informants come from different backgrounds, mostly university students (non-Muslim) and industry experts reflecting all possible study sides.

ANALYSIS

Qualitative research is based on subjective, interpretive and contextual data. Thus, the findings need to be believable, consistent and applicable. This study collects data ranging from field notes and audio and video recordings. Detailed analysis using qualitative analysis is adapted from Creswell (2013), generating meaningful data units and classifying and ordering these units. These include coding, categorisation, comparison, integration, and interpretation, which are essential in overall conclusions.

Theme	Sub-theme
Understanding	Halal meaning
	Influence (visual & information)
	Relationship
Intention	Experience
	Importance

Figure 2.0: Themes and sub-themes from qualitative data analysis.

Data is transcribed, focusing on words by thematic analysis to provide an illuminating description of a phenomenon by grouping them according to similarities. Since it is an exploratory process, it is suitable to explore participants' understanding, experience, or views regarding the discussed topic. Furthermore, several codes have been found that represent a theme or an idea. However, only two significant main themes were highlighted: understanding and intention, with five sub-themes as shown in Figure 2.0 above. All these themes were believed to meet the study's framing with valuable insight to discuss and create a narrative about the issues that non-Muslim consumers respond to halal branding.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

The interview was conducted with seven informants. Two informants were an expert from the halal industry (IE). The other five informants were non-Muslim consumers (I1, I2, I3, I4 and I5).

Understanding

According to IE1 and IE2, the halal industry is not outlandish to all Malaysians concerning Muslims or non-Muslims. The halal industry has expanded and gained popularity and understanding from time to time by others. By this means, local non-Muslim is expected to be already aware of the existence of the halal brand. In addition, halal products were easy to get in any store or supermarket. Based on the discussion of IE1 and IE2, it is true that non-Muslim consumers were aware of the halal brand and product. However, aligned with Borzooei & Asgari (2013), the understanding of halal branding and products is just essential among Non-Muslim consumers. According to I1, I2, I3, I4 and I5, they were aware of the halal brand and halal products because Islam is the main religion of Malaysia. Indeed, halal products have become the primary concern. Since the majority of the citizen in Malaysia are Muslim, I1, I2, I3, I4 and I5 clarified that whenever any production wants to produce any product, they have to consider the significant consumers as the strategy to gain profit. Referring to IE2, the non-Muslim understanding of halal might be slightly different, especially when some products receive halal certification and some are not even though the Muslims produce it.

Aziz, Rahim & Asri (2019) mentioned that many requirements were needed to get the halal certification. For instance, filling and submitting the forms also make it more intricate. It also ranges to ingredients, suppliers, procedures or processes of making, or even the packaging materials will be considered too. Hence, if many organisations are in the process of getting the halal certification, it will be more complex. Small and medium-sized enterprises or small and medium-sized businesses (*Industri Kecil Sederhana*) usually are supported by a few organisations. The organisations are the Standard and Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia (SIRIM), People's Trust Council (MARA), Small-to-Medium Enterprise (SME) and others, to provide guidance and fundraising opportunities, as well as to help with paperwork, packaging and many other things. This assistance, thus, will make the process easy to get the halal certification. IE1 added that things would be more complicated for non-Muslim and Muslim consumers when so-called Muslim names like Ahmad, Kak Ngah, and many more were displayed on food packaging. Hence when this situation happened, they perceived it as halal even though it was doubtful. Therefore, getting halal certification is not easy. Both experts mentioned that getting the Halal certification usually will take time. Some cases can take a year, depending on the products produced and marketed. Nevertheless, in Malaysia, the honourable thing about the halal certification is that it is only run by one organisation known as JAKIM (Daud, Aziz, Baharudin & Shamsuddin, 2012). So when there is only an organisation handling this matter, thus making it more reliable and convincing to control the quality products.

According to the informants (I1, I2, I3, and I5), the halal product is only meant for Muslims. As for non-Muslim consumers, they were not obliged to do it. Discussing the understanding of the halal products, only I4 seems to be understood the halal brand. According to I4, the halal brand is meant to be safe to be consumed by Muslim consumers, but it also has to follow the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia guidelines. This department, popularly known as JAKIM (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia), is a federal government agency in Malaysia that administers Islamic affairs in Malaysia (Zohdi, Ramli, & Awang, 2014). I4 also claimed that, even though the halal logo is displayed on the product, it does not confirm that it is safe to be used.

Furthermore, unlike I1, I2, I3 and I5, the halal understanding is that whenever there is no pork or lard ingredient on the product, it is considered halal without considering any other factors contributing to halal. Referring to the understanding of halal connoted by I1, I2, I3 and I5, it is aligned with IE1 and IE2. According to IE1 and IE2 that there are still many non-Muslim who do not understand the whole concept of halal. For example, they probably knew no pork and no alcohol as halal even though halal branding emphasises safety, hygiene, food security, whole supply chains, and wholesomeness of products and services. Therefore, their understanding (non-Muslim consumers) of halal is not exhaustive. No pork and alcohol are the famous ideas they can relate to even though the meaning of halal is more than that, from the process and

cleanliness to how they kept their product. Based on the experience of IE2 and IE2, it was clarified that some non-Muslims also believe that any animal like chicken, duck, cow, goats, and others is not going through the shariah-compliant slaughter is also considered halal. They do not know the requirement of the slaughtering process that allows Muslims to comply with the shariah guideline (I1, I2, I3, I4 and I5). Nevertheless, most informants except I3 are well informed that there is an organisation to certify halal products. However, they have no idea about getting the halal certificate.

Intention

The intention of purchasing halal products is varied. I2 indicated that buying halal products is when the non-Muslim person wants to give something to their Muslim friends as a souvenir or gift. It is also applied to I3 and I5. Non-Muslims have no restrictions in buying their needs, including halal goods, but it was not their priority- it is more towards brand familiarity and needs at that specific time. However, as mentioned by Yusof & Jusoh (2013), the understanding of halal brands or products proves that their understanding of the halal product is superficial. It is because the intention of I2, I3 and I5 to get the halal product to give away to their Muslim friends is good. They used to order food from any Chinese outlet or restaurant and instruct them not to put the non-halal ingredients in that food, such as cookies, moon cake, or even dried food. Even though the food did not contain non-halal ingredients, the utensils used have 'touched' the non-halal ingredients such as lard; thus, it is already considered contaminated. Unless, if only if a few procedures which JAKIM has outlined have been steered, such as *sertu* (ritual cleansing) process shall be conducted if the warehouse is contaminated with materials categorised as *najis mughallazah* and the environment surrounding the warehouse shall be cleaned following regular sanitation schedule (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2015). That is why brand image matters beyond the surface of an impression as a point of personality in making the correct recognition – clean, safe and healthier. It is not just about religion, and brand image encompasses visual elements and brand associations that have proven to be a misconception by the non-Muslim consumer. It is something that they had been interacting with through different media in developing their understanding all this while. A strong brand image will make it easier for consumers to remember a specific brand and what it stands for, not pointing to specific cultural values in multi-cultural consumerism.

On the other hand, all the informants clarified that the possibility of any products with an Islamic look (design or feature) to be measured as halal is high. Thus it will lead them to buy those products to be given to their Muslim friends too. In fact, according to IE1 and IE2, Islamic design cannot be considered halal as it is just a visual communication to indicate the value of a chosen culture as preferences, and it misleads the whole concept of the halal brand. In Malaysia, using symbols or patterns other than the halal logo is not allowed as it will confuse buyers, not only Muslims

but also non-Muslims. However, awareness by the public is still low, persuaded by the appearance of a product as an indicator of the halal brand. To reflect the perceptiveness of the I1, I2, I3, I4 and I5, thus IE2 justified that it is common among non-Muslims where the Islamic look packaging might be their primary indicator of whether the product is halal or not as they knew that kind of design usually targeted to the Muslim consumer (Butt, Shams, & Perez, 2019). Not all Islamic look designs are confirmed to receive halal certification. Sometimes it is to deceive the consumers. Many issues use religious elements to sell products, yet their product has not even received the halal certification. Sometimes, the background of the production of the product was also doubtful. These kinds of things are always happening in online shopping.

CONCLUSION

The size of the halal market is significant in Malaysia's local market and is regarded as the central Islamic marketing value in getting Muslim trust. However, each individual's social background and exposure vary in a multi-racial country. Their understanding of halal brands was somewhat limited, whereby Muslims abided by the rules of conducting halal concepts from processing and packaging to distribution more than just highlighting no alcohol or pork considered haram. Therefore, the brand image of halal brands from the non-Muslim perspective is only narrowed down to the religious commitment of the Muslim instead of the quality of preparation and safety more than just the ingredient itself. This religious matter is the most significant personality aspect that always captures non-Muslim attention but does not affect much on their purchase intention.

As a consumer, regardless of any background of market segmentation, quality is significant to be highlighted in giving halal brand new facelifts, especially to non-Muslims, other than the product price. Lack of knowledge in every aspect of production in halal certification from non-Muslim consumers' eyes establishes a fragile relationship between halal brands and non-Muslim consumers. Thus, developing the right brand image of halal brand trust is vital. It is not only practical and significant to all consumer segments, but it also gives consumers quality assurance by using halal logos as cues.

Subsequently, it instantly recognises consumers associated with the halal brand in motivating buying intention. Exposure to halal is more than just religious matters. It needs to be elevated to change the non-Muslim consumers' beliefs, perceptions and thoughts. For example, halal products are not only to cater for Muslims. Therefore, the non-Muslim should be well diverse about the halal brand. The halal branding should be understood deeper, such as the products' cleanliness, procedure, and safety-consciousness. Non-Muslim consumer needs to be educated about halal branding. All this while, they just perceived it as only for Muslims. Nevertheless, the under-

standing of halal also should be received well by them. Since the information about halal among non-Muslim is ineffective for them. Therefore, the halal brand should be rebranded to all races and religions in Malaysia using the correct initiative and medium to understand better and lessen the misunderstanding about halal products.

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