

Factor of Awareness in Searching and Sharing of Halal Food Product among Muslim Families in Malaysia

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Abstract. Information search activities are fundamental in information sharing, especially for the context of information confusion in the market for halal products. This research paper will focus on awareness factor in information searching and sharing of halal products in the Muslim families. Recently, the halal issue has become the hot topic as it involves community religious tenets. This study aims to enrich communications literature in terms of information seeking in halal food products. The sample of the research consisted of 340 Muslim families in Bangi, Selangor. The data are collected through questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive analysis and inferential analysis such as correlation. The result of the study revealed that awareness factor is significantly correlated with information seeking behavior among Muslim family.

1. INTRODUCTION

The growth of Muslim population is increasing over time. Muslim population taking up 30 per cent from the total population and it is forecasted that in 2025 the Muslim population will be increasing up to 35 per cent [1]. Due to this, the Halal product consumption is increasing and so does the demand for Halal products. Halal and its related industries have become an important market and lucrative business, same goes to its great potential of investment. Halal industry covers food, non-food and services area [2, 3]. Muslim group is seen as representing the entire population of Malaysia with an average of 60.4 per cent which makes halal issue as an issue of interest to the user [4]. In general, consumers' purchase intentions towards food are highly associated with individual and environmental factors such as marketing information, situation and food specific properties which include product [5]. This is because the roles of information, knowledge and Sharia are very important for Muslims in making their food choice. Search activity information is fundamental to the achievement of an individual as it is the key to the level of competence and to achieve information needs. Information seeking is one of the learning tools which

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involve search process, gather and use the information that had been found for certain purposes in the future.

1.1 Problem Statement

The exposure of halal issue becomes the hot topic to debate among society as it is vital for religion issue. Report shows that The Islamic Development Department (Jakim) withdrew halal certification from Secret Recipe Manufacturing Sdn. Bhd. due to violations involving hygiene offense under the Malaysian Halal Certification Procedure Manual and Good Manufacturing Practice [6]. This kind of issue becomes polemic in Muslim society. They have expressed their mixed responses on the matter since the issue has sparked concern among Malaysians, particularly the Muslim community. It can be seen through hot debate in media social, as it provides easier way to publish people thoughts and reach people all over the world [6]. 'Halal' is a simple concept but the current scenarios in the industry make it difficult and led to consumer confusion [7]. This matter becomes more complicated with the development of technology and also the diversity of resources obtained in the production of food including other daily products. The issue that arises is attracting the attention of Muslim consumers to new processing methods of foods and other products [8]. The halal issue that hit our country is getting worse and it should be taken care by all parties, especially consumers. This is because although various measures have been taken by the authorities concerned with the enforcement of halal logo, halal certification and other matters related to halal issues, however it is not exhaustive. The proof is, more industries or premises that actively selling daily use products, especially foods that are allegedly halal. The actual threats regarding halal issue is the lack of awareness in individuals itself. Perhaps consumers fail to build their own awareness because of the internal factor within themselves such as value, religiosity commitment and attitude towards halal products, information processing or external factor like environmental influence including culture, opinion leader and community [9]. The Muslim community in this country still does not have confidence against products manufactured by Muslims, even though the products are in choice. Moreover, no one can prevent people from using the product, but as an attempt to deal with it, an awareness campaign can be implemented through non-governmental organizations or Islamic Consumer Association [10]. Even though there are many studies have been done related to halal issue, this study, however, are focusing on the information seeking of halal food products. Most individuals avoid and ignored any information related to health especially things related to cancer. They purposely avoid the information because they are afraid knowing the result. The ignorance of information happens when individual knows about the problem yet chooses not to face it. Therefore, this study was carried out to achieve the following research objectives: 1). to identify the factor of awareness in searching for halal food products among Muslim families, 2). to identify the relationship between factor of awareness with information seeking behavior in Muslim families and 3). To identify the relationship between information seeking behavior and information sharing behavior.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Information seeking

Every human being wanted to know the feeling naturally [11]. Based on this reason, there are many researches has been conducted to investigate human information seeking behavior from all aspects of life. Most of the researches that have been done contributed to literature

development in psychology, computer science, business administration, religion studies, medical, genetic counselling, engineering and plantation. This situation shows that information seeking is vital in maximizing human cognitive needs and as a communication tool in human life. Information seeking action sparked by curiosity and awareness of the existence about the knowledge gaps. Usually, women dominated this kind of behavior in certain family. Woman tends to be the most dominant person in seeking information regarding their child and the whole family, especially for themselves [12]. This situation happens everywhere and it clarifies their role as a very caring person could not be argued anymore. Information searching behavior can be defined as the ways of how individuals collect information for their personal purposes, to add existing knowledge and for self-development [13]. In order to generate a better generation with a pure heart, information seeking on halal products is a must.

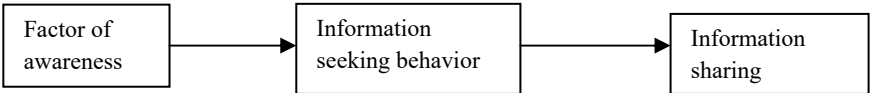
2.2 Awareness

Muslim's awareness is a great power in order to educate the manufacturer of halal food products in the market. As a Muslim, understanding and alert of halal and haram concept is essential, we cannot just simply depend on act and the authority. For example, Muslim consumers should take note about the content and ingredient of their food or any products when they shop. They also should be aware of the processing method whether it follows *shariah* compliance or not. There are nine categories of halal and haram related to food products. *Mashbuh* and *makruh* are in between halal and haram law [14]. *Mashbuh* means something that lead to curiosity, meanwhile, *makruh* means something that not encourages being used [15]. It is vital for all Muslim consumers to have knowledge about any products they want to buy falls under which category. In Malaysia, there are a few researches related to halal product such as [16]. Even though factor of awareness among Malaysian has been acknowledged to be increase, yet their level of awareness are in low category compared to other countries such as Indonesia and Thailand. The main reason that leads to this situation is the limited sources of product information in the market. This kind of issues is at worst when media reported about the misuse of halal logo by irresponsible person almost every day whether in print media and electronic media. Thus, to overcome this issue, researcher wants to identify the level of consumer awareness, next to suggest a suitable concept in promoting halal products.

2.3 Halal food

Food is a basic necessity in human life. In that case, Islam is very concerned about the issue of halal food. A food will be categorized as halal when the production of raw materials, material components, additives and processing based on the guidelines set out by legislation [17]. Therefore, it includes the preparation, processing, storage, packaging, handling and transportation that meet Sharia. Generally, Islam requires consuming all the foods that are fine and forbid eating the foods that are disgusting and dirty (*khabaith*). Standards of good nutrition for Muslims expressed as *halalan toyyiban*. In the course of Facebook Sahabat Halal Jakim, the food is fulfilling the concept of *halalan toyyiban* if it is free from Islamic banned substances, free from the substances that can cause harm, not filthy and also clean and safe. Cases like halal logo abuse, material fraud or content used in a product and also the management of premises that do not comply with *halalan toyyiban* standards commonly reported. The existence of such cases may raise questions about the validity of halal [18].

2.4 Conceptual Framework



2.5 Hypothesis

- H1: There is a significant relationship between the levels of awareness towards halal products with information seeking behavior among parents.
- H2: There is a significant relationship between the levels of awareness towards halal products with information seeking behavior among children.

3. Methodology

The questionnaire seeks to identify the level of awareness in information seeking behavior among Muslim families, and consist of five sections on demographic, exposure towards halal products, level of awareness, information seeking behavior and information sharing behavior. Pre-tested data among 30 families showed significant result with Cronbach Alpha’s value equals to 0.950. 340 set of questionnaires have been distributed to the respondents who live in Bangi, Selangor. Researcher decides to select Bangi as research location because majority of Muslim population live there [19]. Other than that, Bangi is an urban area that exposed to process food compared to rural area. Empirical data was collected through survey by using questionnaire. Data was analyzed using (i) descriptive statistic and (ii) Pearson correlation. Data were analyzed using SPSS and were presented using correlation.

4. Analysis and Findings

This study analyzed the relationship between the levels of awareness with the information seeking behavior among Muslim families. As noted in literature review, level of awareness among Muslim consumer is still low. Statistical analysis in Table 1 showed both parents and children has high level of awareness towards halal food products with 92.9 percent and 86.5 percent. This shows that parents are more concerned and aware of halal food products compared to children. Parents’ high awareness exist because they attended a lot of awareness campaign held either by the government or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to help Muslim consumer increases awareness in them about halal food products. Furthermore, Muslim consumer awareness of the issue concerning dubious counterfeiting halal logo also increased due to the campaigns held. According to them, an awareness campaign held was so relevant when there are dumping of fake halal logo and also variety of tactics used by traders to confuse consumer. This research finding is consistent with the findings from [20] which states that the factor of Muslim consumer awareness is high when it comes to the issue of the selection of halal food products. However, these findings contradict the issues raised by a local newspaper regarding people today are not compassionate about the matter and consider whatever sold is halal to them. This proves that Muslim society today no longer take for granted about the halal and haram food because realizing its importance to the development of an outstanding personality.

Table 1. Respondent Distribution towards the Level of Awareness of Halal Food Product

Awareness Level	Frequency		Percentage (%)	
	Parent (N=340)	Children (N=340)	Parent (N=340)	Children (N=340)
High (36-50)	316	294	92.9	86.5
Medium (23-35)	24	46	7.1	13.5
Low (10-22)	0	0	0.0	0.0

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents towards Halal Products Information Seeking Behavior

Information Seeking Behavior	Frequency		Percentage (%)	
	Parents (N=340)	Children (N=340)	Parents (N=340)	Children (N=340)
Active	321	314	94.4	92.4
Passive	19	26	5.6	7.6

According to Table 2, it was found that parents and children are active in seeking information. A total of 321 parents (94.4%) and 314 children (92.4%) said they actively seek information about halal food products. This means that, everyone in the family being active in seeking information of halal food products among Muslim family and not putting the responsibility on the shoulders of the parents alone, but the children also play a part thereof. This situation may be because they are exposed to the influence of the surrounding communities as well as a wide exposure in the media. Ease of access to the internet is one of the factors the children easily get information about halal issues, for example through social sites being visited, such as Facebook, Twitter and also BlogSpot. However, there are a small part of the respondents were passive in seeking information on halal product that is 5.6 per cent for parents and 7.6 per cent for children. They were passive in seeking this information because they were likely to rely on others in the family. In addition, it may be due to indifference and lack of self-awareness about the importance in searching the information of halal products in the family.

The information sharing is important in the family to ensure the harmony of the family institution. This includes the sharing of information of halal food products. According to Table 3, it was found that many occurrences of sharing in the Muslim family of 250 parents (73.5%) said they preferred to share information with families about halal food products. Similarly, the children, they said a lot of sharing in the family occurs in related of halal food products, but its percentage is quite low compared to parents with 68.5%. To enable the sharing of information occurs in a family, each member should have knowledge about what they want to share. This knowledge is usually acquired through the activity of information searching.

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents towards Information Sharing of Halal Food Products (N=340)

Information Sharing	Frequency		Percentage (%)	
	Parents (N=340)	Children (N=340)	Parents (N=340)	Children (N=340)
High	250	233	73.5	68.5
Medium	83	89	24.4	26.2
Low	7	18	2.1	5.3

4.1 Relationships between levels of awareness with information seeking behavior

H3: There is significant relationship between the levels of awareness towards halal products with information seeking behavior among parents.

H4: There is significant relationship between the levels of awareness towards halal products with information seeking behavior among children.

For the awareness factor and its relation to information-seeking behavior, it is found that coefficient of correlation and significant value for parents is ($r = 0.472$, $p = 0.000$). The correlation coefficient value is dissimilar to the correlation coefficient and significant value for children, ($r = 0.477$, $p = 0.000$). This study has found that there was a weak positive correlation between the level of awareness and information seeking behavior of halal food products for parents and children. Significantly smaller value of significance level also suggests that the second hypothesis (H3 and H4) of this study is accepted. This means that the higher level of awareness, the more active Muslim families seek for information. Muslim consumers are more concerned and realize the importance of finding and using halal products through inquiries to the responsible party whether they can trust the halal logo alone before buying a food product [21]. Accordingly, it can be concluded that consumer awareness on halal food products affect their information seeking behavior. In addition to this, the awareness aspect of halal food products can also be associated with exposure to halal issues. High awareness exists when Muslim families are exposed to halal issues featured by media or other sources, thus encourage their information seeking behavior.

5 Conclusion

The study shows that Muslim families have high level of awareness towards halal food products. Apparently, they no longer depend on information given by JAKIM only, yet they are highly active in information seeking of halal food products by their own. As a family, they communicate frequently in sharing of halal food information. This small study drips some information that factor of awareness are vital in information seeking of halal food products among Muslim families [22].

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