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Research Article

Assessing the Influence of Consumer Education, Personality and Social Media in Halal Purchase Behavior

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Abstract

Background and Objective: Recognizing the importance of halal to Muslim consumers had caused the traders to use the concept of halal as a form of marketing. However, Muslim consumers often face problems to ensure that the products they buy, including cosmetics are truly halal as they can only rely on the certification of the authorities. Rather than looking from a marketing perspective, this study was an exploration from consumer empowerment aspects. The objective of the study was to predict the determining factors that influence consumer behavior when buying halal food products. The study focused on four factors which were the intensity of consumer education, the personality of assertiveness and aggressiveness and the role of social media. **Materials and Methods:** This study was conducted in Malaysia and the data collection was done between December 2017 to March 2018. A total of 400 Muslim respondents participated in this study and were chosen through stratified random sampling. Multiple linear regressions were used to identify the factors that contributed to consumer behavior. **Results:** Results showed that only the intensity of consumer education and the personality trait of assertiveness were able to explain a 7.1% variance in the behavior of the respondents while buying halal food products. The results also found that the personality of aggressiveness and social media were not the predictive factors of consumer behavior. The most influential variable was the intensity of consumer education. **Conclusion:** This research holds significant implications for the government and consumer associations, to give emphasis to effective consumer education programs to inculcate good purchase behavior among consumers.

Key words: Halal food products, predictive factors, consumer education, assertiveness, aggressiveness, Muslim consumers and social media

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Data Availability: All relevant data are within the paper and its supporting information files.

INTRODUCTION

The massive demand for Halal food had created more opportunities for business enterprises to engage in Halal food production to increase their profits¹. Previous studies, so far, had looked at the issue of Halal products from the perspectives of marketing and management. Using the consumer behavior model and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), most literature had identified the factors that lead to the intention to purchase Halal products. Abundant literature had proven that religion and the level of religiosity were among the main determinants of Halal purchase intention². Other factors included nutrition³, safety⁴ and having confidence in the Halal concept⁵. On top of that, numerous researches had focused on Halal awareness⁶, Halal knowledge⁷ and Halal certification⁸ in their studies.

In this article, Halal purchasing behavior of the consumers was explored from the perspective of consumer empowerment and consumer education, rather than marketing. Individual behavior could be explained by the Social Cognitive Theory introduced by Bandura⁹. There were several components in the individual factors which included cognitive and affective domains in identifying their effects on one's behavior. On the other hand, environmental factors referred to the influence of other people's behavior and non-human factors such as printed and electronic media. In addition to the Social Cognitive Theory⁹, the Empowerment Theory by Perkins and Zimmerman¹⁰ was also adopted to determine consumer's empowerment which also included consumer's actions. This theory emphasized that empowerment was a process of gaining literacy in individual self-development and it also affected the development of organizations and communities as a whole. The consumers would get the inputs of information and knowledge from educational programs that they acquired and later was translated into actions.

The literature did not provide empirical data to show the extent of the intensity of consumer education's effectiveness in determining consumer behavior specifically on Halal issue. The intensity of consumer education would include the frequency of information on media, the effectiveness and the clarity of the information and the extent the consumers trusted the information¹¹. The retrieval of Islamic-related information from the Web, including Halal matters, had been facilitated by the advancement of information technology¹². Social media could also be a medium between consumers and traders in explaining Halal and Haram issues¹³. Nevertheless, most studies only focused on the use of social media by

consumers in searching for information, but no data so far that showed how social media could shape consumer behavior when buying Halal products.

Apart from that, the personality of individuals would also shape the actions taken by that individual. An assertive personality referred to a person who strictly enforced his rights without violating the rights of others. Meanwhile, an aggressive consumer inclined to be more vocal to retain their rights¹⁴. A more assertive personality was more likely to express their dissatisfaction reasonably while still respecting others¹⁵. On the contrary, an aggressive consumer inclined to use coercion such as threats or penalties to demand the desired outcome¹⁶. As such, the present study aimed at testing the relationship between the intensity of consumer education, the role of social media and the personality of assertiveness and aggressiveness and consumer behavior in Halal purchase behavior.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Population, sample, sampling design and data collection

procedure: This research was a cross-sectional study and the data was gathered through a self-administered questionnaire. The population was made up of only Muslim consumers. Multi-stage random sampling was utilized to choose the respondents. The first step was to randomly select the states, secondly was to choose the district, thirdly the residential area and lastly the respondents. There were four zones consisting of the North, Middle, East and South of Peninsular Malaysia. One state for each zone was randomly selected to represent Peninsular Malaysia. Each zone was represented by 100 respondents. As such, a total of 400 respondents from 10 residential areas and 5 states participated in this study. It was also consistent with the determinations made by Sekaran and Bougie¹⁷ which stated that for a population exceeding 1 million, the sample should be above 384.

Research instrument: The questionnaire was designed to identify the factors affecting consumer behavior while buying Halal products. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part was designed to collect respondents' sociodemographic related information such as gender, income, level of education and marital status. Part B was on the determinants of consumer behavior which comprised of 32 items on the intensity of consumer education, 12 statements on the personality of aggressiveness, five statements on the personality of assertiveness and another six statements on the role of social media. Part C was on the

consumer behavior which comprised of 9 statements. The intensity of consumer education was divided into four domains; which were its frequency, the effectiveness, the clarity of the information and the extent of consumers trusted the information. In terms of personality traits, the assertive was defined as a consumer who had a firm stand and had a clear direction and goals in his action while aggressiveness meant a non-tolerant attitude toward others in one's actions. Multiple item scales were used to measure each variable in this study. Social media was measured based on how the respondents perceived its importance in shaping individuals' actions. The items for consumer education were adapted from Simanjuntak *et al.*¹¹, personality variables were adapted from Alberti and Emmons¹⁸ and social media from Speer¹⁹. In addition, items for consumer behavior were adopted from Abu Bakar *et al.*²⁰ who referred to the actions the consumers were expected to behave when buying Halal food products. The coefficient alphas for reliability test ranged from 0.94 for the intensity of consumer education, 0.70 for the personality of assertiveness and 0.76 for the personality of aggressiveness, 0.84 for social media and 0.76 for consumer behavior when buying Halal food products.

Statistical analysis: Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was employed to analyze data in this study. The researchers conducted a Multiple Linear Regression to determine the predictive factors of consumer behavior while buying Halal products. The independent variables were the intensity of consumer education, the personality trait of aggressiveness and assertiveness and the role of social media. The dependent variable in this study was consumer behavior.

RESULTS

Sample characteristics: A total of 400 respondents participated in this study. About 47.9% of the respondents were between the ages of 16 to 26 years old and the average age of respondents in this study was 30 years old. Thus, this group of respondents could represent the behavior of young consumers in the country. The results also showed that male respondents recorded a higher percentage of 64.0% which was 256 respondents compared to female respondents (36.0%). For marital status, slightly over half of the respondents (57.5%) were bachelors and 39.5% were married. Respondents' level of education had also been taken into account and the levels were grouped into seven categories where diploma holders recorded the highest number of respondents (37.5%) followed by degree holders (32.8%). In terms of income, 56.3% of the respondents had a household

income in between MYR2,000 and MYR4,000 which was considered as low medium income group and only 1.5% of the respondents had a monthly income of more than MYR8,501. The background of the respondents was presented in Table 1.

Intensity of consumer education, personality traits and social media:

The Table 2 illustrated the analysis of predictive factors in consumer behavior. The factors were the intensity of consumer education, personality traits and social media. The Table 2 showed the mean value for each determinant including the intensity of consumer education. The items for consumer education were measured according to 1 to 4 range scales, which were, 1 (never) to 4 (often), for frequency, 1 (not very clear) until 4 (very clear), for the clarity of consumer education. Meanwhile, the range scale for effectiveness was also 1 to 4 which was 1 (least effective) to 4 (most effective)

Table 1: Background of respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics	N = 400	Percentage
Gender		
Female	144	36.0
Male	256	64.0
Age (Year)		
16-26	191	47.9
27-37	102	25.6
38-48	75	18.8
49-59	27	6.8
>59	4	1.0
Marriage status		
Single	230	57.5
Married	158	39.5
Divorce	12	3.0
Highest education level		
Never studied	8	2.0
Primary school	25	6.3
Secondary school	79	19.8
Certificate/Diploma	150	37.5
Degree	131	32.8
Master/PhD	5	1.3
Monthly income		
Below MYR 2000	67	16.8
MYR 2000-MYR 4000	225	56.3
MYR 4001-MYR 6500	61	15.3
MYR 6501-MYR 8500	14	3.5
Above MYR 8501	6	1.5

Table 2: Determinants factors of consumers' behavior

Statement	Mean	SD
Intensity of consumer education		
Frequency of media	2.58	0.91
Clarity of information	2.55	0.98
Effectiveness of media	2.83	0.82
Trust towards the information	2.82	0.80
Total mean	2.70	0.88
Assertiveness	3.99	1.32
Aggressiveness	3.40	1.40
Social media	3.99	1.32

Table 3: Behavior of consumers

Statements	Mean	SD
I only buy a product that has a Halal logo on the packaging	4.11	1.10
I identify the authority of Islamic bodies that approve Halal certification if the product is imported	3.90	1.09
I identify the source of the product if there is no Halal certification	3.86	1.15
I am concerned with the cleanliness of the premise where the product is bought	4.04	0.97
I buy a product at non-Muslim premise if they exhibited a Halal logo recognized by JAKIM on the premises	3.42	1.29
I do not buy a product that has a Halal logo from abroad without checking whether it is a logo recognized by JAKIM.	1.94	1.22
I will not buy a product if it is located next to a non-halal product	3.61	1.33
I buy a product only when the premise operator is a Muslim	3.32	1.21
I will look for information on the Halal status through apps on my phone	3.39	1.18
Mean	3.51	1.17

Table 4: Multiple regressions

Variables	B	Beta	t	Sig.
Intensity of consumer education	0.22	0.09	2.65	0.008*
Role of social media	0.06	0.04	1.68	0.09
Aggressiveness	-0.05	0.06	-0.81	0.42
Assertiveness	0.12	0.04	2.82	0.005*

R² = 0.071 adjusted, R² = 0.060, F = 6.037, Sig. F = 0.00*, *p < 0.01

and for trust the range was 1 (don't believe) to 4 (strongly believe). The findings showed that the highest mean value was 2.83 for the effectiveness and the lowest was 2.55 for the clarity of the information. The total mean score for the intensity of consumer education was only 2.70 which was moderate. For the personality traits of aggressiveness and assertiveness, the scale ranged from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree". The results showed that for assertiveness the mean score was 3.99 whereas for aggressiveness the mean score was 3.40. Therefore, it showed that the respondents were more assertive rather than aggressive but both were at a moderate level. Similarly, social media also showed moderate value (M = 3.99) in which the respondents perceived that social media was moderately important in influencing individuals. Notably, the range was also from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree".

Behavior of consumers: Data in Table 3 showed the mean value for each statement that represented the respondent's behavior. The items were measured according to five range scales, which were 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The findings showed that the highest mean value was 4.11 and standard deviation was 1.10 for the statement "I only buy a product that has a Halal logo on the packaging", followed by the second highest mean score for the statement "I am concerned with the cleanliness of the premises where the product is bought" that is M = 4.04, SD = 0.969. It was also consistent with the third highest score

which was for the statement "I identify the authority of the Islamic bodies that approve Halal certification if the product is imported" (M = 3.9, SD = 1.09). Nevertheless, the lowest mean score was for the statement "I do not buy a product that has a Halal logo from abroad without checking whether it is a logo recognized by JAKIM" (M = 1.94, SD = 1.22). This was a negative behavior because as a good consumer, it must check whether JAKIM had certified the Halal logo. JAKIM is the only authority in Malaysia that can certify a product as Halal or can endorse the foreign certification authority as reliable. The overall total mean score for consumer behavior was 3.51 and SD = 1.17 which indicated that the respondents had a positive behavior, but it was moderate.

Determinants of consumer behavior: Presented in Table 4 was the results of multiple linear regression analysis in order to determine whether the intensity of consumer education, personality traits and social media correlated with consumer behavior. Results of the analysis showed that all the factors could explain a 7.1% variance in the behavior of respondents while buying Halal products. The full model was highly significant (F = 6.037, p < 0.001).

From the analysis, only two variables were statistically significant because the p-values were less than 0.05. They were the intensity of consumer education and a personality trait of assertiveness. In addition, the study found that the largest beta value was 0.22 which was the intensity of consumer education. This showed that the consumer education variable was the strongest variable in influencing the behavior of consumers when purchasing Halal food products. The beta value for the personality of assertiveness was slightly lower at 0.12 and indicated a lesser influence on the behavior of consumers in Malaysia.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to predict the determining factors that influenced consumer behavior when buying Halal food products. Rather than looking from a marketing perspective, this study was explored from consumer empowerment aspects. This study focused on four factors only which were the intensity of consumer education, the personality of assertiveness and aggressiveness and the role of social media. This study extended the understanding of the role of consumer education and social media to influence consumer behavior. Therefore, the implication of the study was more on consumer education policies to shape their behavior towards Halal food. This research was done under a theoretical framework adopted from the Theory of Social Cognitive and

the Theory of Empowerment. The Theory of Social Cognitive, although usually applied in the learning system has also been adapted in the social field. For example, Chiu *et al.*²¹ had utilized this theory to identify the relationship between individual factors such as cognitive, norms and values in influencing behavior among virtual communities. From the study, it could be identified that individual factors such as knowledge (cognitive) and values affective) had strong relevance to the actions portrayed by the communities. Therefore, in this study, the individual factors explored were the personalities of the consumers whereas the environmental factors were the intensity of consumer education as well as the roles of social media.

In addition to the Social Cognitive Theory⁹, the Empowerment Theory by Perkins and Zimmerman¹⁰ was also adopted to determine consumer's empowerment which also included consumer's actions. This theory had been adapted in the Basic Consumer Strategy European Union (EU) from 2007 to 2013 which emphasized on knowledge and skill as well as action to determine consumer empowerment²². According to Perkins and Zimmerman¹⁰, empowerment was an input and output process. The output process included actions, activities or structures that had been viewed whether it affected individual actions (behavior) or vice versa. The consumers would get the inputs of information and knowledge from educational programs that they acquired and later was translated into actions. The output obtained from these inputs created empowered and competent individual within the community and it could be reflected in their behavior. Therefore, in this research, the input was the intensity of consumer education whereas the output was the consumer's behavior in buying Halal products.

The inferential statistics showed that only two factors influenced consumer behavior towards Halal products. The first one was the intensity of consumer education and the second one was the personality of assertiveness. Most importantly, consumer education was shown to be the strongest factor. The finding was consistent with several previous studies that correlated consumer behavior and the importance of consumer education and knowledge²³⁻²⁵. Similarly, personality traits of assertiveness could also be reflected in consumer behavior, as emphasized by previous researches¹⁴. Nevertheless, the findings discovered that the personality trait of aggressiveness and social media were not the predictive factors of consumer behavior when buying Halal food products. That was inconsistent with previous studies who claimed that an aggressive consumer tends to be more vocal to retain his rights and to demand the desired outcome¹⁵ and the social media influenced consumer behavior¹².

Therefore, it was crucial for consumer associations as well as the government to strengthen the modules, the channels, as well as the programs to empower consumers. The present methods of implementing consumer education such as conducting seminars, talks, disseminating information through web sites and mass media should be maintained, since the respondents claimed them as effective. Nevertheless, the emphasis in the syllabus should be on the clarity of information. All the information conveyed to consumers should be informative, clear and simple so that consumers would understand the messages better and knew how to behave as a good consumer. For example, useful knowledge such as how to detect false labeling and Halal logos, the authorities from which to acquire correct information and the channels to complain when problems occur need to be imparted to consumers. Once equipped with the knowledge, only then the consumers could behave positively. It was consistent with past literature which claimed that an accurate understanding of the Halal concept could affect the actions of consumers as well as to build a healthy consumer culture and safe environment²³.

Consumer movements could also contribute to programs for consumers in either a small or large scale to share information and knowledge regarding Halal products. Such programs can be conducted in schools, institutions of higher learning, as well as at any non-governmental bodies or associations. Among the contents that could be implemented were talks about the importance to ensure the products were Halal and how to ensure the authenticity of Halal certification. It was interesting to note in this research, that social media did not play important roles in shaping consumer behavior towards Halal products which was inconsistent with previous researches¹². This might be due to the fact that was still a lack of information about Halal products on social media or this issue was not prominent enough to be discussed among the users of social media. Therefore, religious authorities and groups should inculcate the importance of consuming Halal products, especially among Muslim.

For policy implications on education, schools and parents should emphasize the Islamic way of life since these values could shape their behavior later in life. If the consumers gave priority to the importance of taking Halal products, they would be more assertive in their behavior to ensure that their products were truly Halal.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicated the importance of consumer education to empower consumers and to shape their behavior. It was also necessary to establish more

comprehensive programs, either through formal or informal education, especially in shaping one's personality to be more assertive in striving for the right to get Halal products.

SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

This study adopted two theories which were the Theory of Social Cognitive and the Theory of Empowerment to understand the consumer behavior. The study covered two individual factors in consumer behavior, which were cognitive and affective, as well as external factors of social media. The results showed the impact of consumer education and the personality of assertiveness on consumer behavior. This study helped researchers to uncover areas of consumer empowerment relating to Halal issue that other researchers were yet to explore. Thus, a new theory of consumer empowerment could be achieved. The findings would serve as a future reference not only to those researchers interested in Halal issues but also those involved in the field of consumer studies and marketing.

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