

## Perception Towards Halal Awareness and its Correlation with Halal Certification among Muslims

<sup>1</sup>A. Siti Mashitoh, <sup>2</sup>A.R. Norhayati Rafida and <sup>1</sup>A.R. Alina

<sup>1</sup>Institute of Halal Research and Management (IHRAM),  
Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), 71800 Bandar Baru Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Leadership and Management, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM),  
71800 Bandar Baru Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

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**Abstract:** Halal certification creates challenges to the industries due to the specification given in the policy. Consolidation of the Halal certification can be obtained by considering the role of the Halal certificates towards enhancing the reputation associated with Halal certification. The objectives of this study are to examine the level of awareness on Halal products and the respondents' perceptions towards Halal Certification and to identify the differences between gender and acknowledgement of IHRAM towards the relationship between the awareness of Halal and Halal certification. A survey was carried out using a questionnaire measuring the two variables using a *Likert* scales ranging from 1 - 5. The findings revealed that there is a moderate and positive relationship between the respondents' awareness on Halal and their perception towards Halal certification. The greater the number of people who get to know IHRAM, the higher the awareness on Halal and this increase the need for Halal certification among consumers. It implies that increases in awareness level towards Halal issues are correlated with increases in their perception towards Halal certification. As a continuity of this research, an extension that includes bigger sampling size may be more beneficial in explaining the relationship.

**Key words:** Halal • Certification • Awareness • IHRAM • Correlation

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### INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies had highlighted on the importance of Halal certification. In London, Regenstein et al. [1] found that the Jewish religion perceived current gene transfer reactions as acceptable regardless of the source of the gene on the ground that the product takes on the identity of the end product. Islam, however, rejects the use of synthetic genes and genes obtained from non-Halal animals while other forms of gene transfer are accepted by the Muslim community. Islamic organizations in Britain which claim authority through Halal are at the cross-road among the expanding markets,

The powerful political discourses identify the veiling of Muslim women as an undesirable Islamic practice in public life, whereas Halal is undergoing a

revolution in a discursive vacuum [2]. Consolidation of the Halal certification can be obtained by considering the role of the Halal certificates towards enhancing the reputation associated with Halal certification [3]. Besides that, the holistic approach of Halalness towards quality is strongly based on civic and domestic logics in which Muslim consumers prefer Muslim butchers with reputable integrity with sound moral and religious compliance [4].

There are a great demand and positive business opportunities for Halal products. In the United States and Europe, Muslims begin to request the need for Halal food. While in New Jersey and Minnesota, each of the State legislatures recently approved the "Halal consumer fraud protection" laws [5]. It creates critical mass and speculations that they should have their own version of a similar statute [6]. Even in Michigan, the elementary schools demand ease of access for Halal food.

Rampant misuse of the Halal certification is the main catalyst for the need to legislate laws that govern the consumers' rights pertaining to Halal food and product. Muslim consumers are restricted by their religious requirements to buy only foods which are Halal, which explain why Muslims consumers demand for Halal foods on the market. Muslims consumer demands for Halal food and product can further be explained by the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) [7]. According to the TRA, in particular, the second postulate of the TRA, attitudes are a function of beliefs. Hence, the Muslims consumer's attitude in searching for Halal food and product is the natural action on one's part to obey with religious obligations and commandments. On the other hand, the misuse by the Industry can be explained by the Law of Supply and Demand [8]. Lastly, the necessity of having legislative intervention to curb this misuse and abuse can be explained by the Deterrence Theory [9].

The purpose for having laws (concerning products for consumption) according to Curtis is that "the laws were made for a variety of reasons, including to ensure that consumers get what they pay for, provide assurance that the food is safe and to uphold religious beliefs" [10]. In general, under syariah law, everything is permitted for consumers' use and benefit. Nothing is forbidden except what is prohibited either by verse of the Quran or an authentic and explicit sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). These rules of syariah bring freedom for people to eat and drink anything they like as long as it is not Haram or prohibited.

The Malaysian government is committed towards Halal by ensuring that monitoring and enforcements of Halal products among related businesses and services in Malaysia are Halal compliant and relevant globally due to the vast number of Muslims worldwide. The policy as stated in the Malaysian Standards MS 1500: 2009 regulation requires a minimum of two Muslim workers as part of the mandatory requirement before being given the approval for Halal logo application. It creates challenges to the industries due to the specification given in the policy. In turn, most of the industries employ foreign workers which are not necessarily Muslims because of the low salary required by them.

There must be solutions in making the Halal certification a reality. It was reported that there is a lack of participation among Small Medium Entrepreneurships (SMEs) establishments to get Halal certification. It is due to the assumptions made by the consumers to believe that since the SME operators or owners are Muslims, the products produced must be Halal [11]. Even though the government and private sectors have done so much to

create the awareness and raise demand for Halal products, Malaysian SMEs will lose out if they fail to comply with food safety requirements and standards.

Due to the rapid growth of the Halal industry, it is crucial to tackle some issues on Halal certification because the Halal certificates and logos are highly required in gaining global market shares and towards retaining consumers. Would the awareness level on Halal increase their perceptions towards Halal certification? Is there any difference on the relationship between the gender and their knowledge on the existence of Institute of Halal Research and Management (IHRAM). Given the relevance of the above interaction, the objectives of this study are to examine the level of awareness on Halal products, the respondents' perceptions towards Halal Certification and to identify the differences between gender and acknowledgement of IHRAM towards the relationship between the awareness of Halal and Halal certification.

## **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

This research employs a quantitative approach which used a survey in order to examine the relationship between the awareness of Halal and Halal certification. The survey was based on the questionnaire which was developed and distributed among 52 respondents who were randomly selected among the national Halal Food Seminar (HAFOS 2012) participants and analysts from government laboratories in the northern part of Malaysia. The questionnaire consists of three sections which includes respondents' demographic background, awareness of Halal products as the independent variable and Halal certification as the dependent variable. The variables were both measured using a *Likert* scales from 1 - 5. In order to analyze the data obtained, this study used a Statistical Procedure for Social Sciences which emphasized on the descriptive findings, correlation and T-test. The reliability was tested on both variables. As a result, the 17 items that measured the awareness of respondents towards Halal products indicate a strong reliability which is  $\alpha = 0.828$  while the perceptions towards Halal certification scores  $\alpha = 0.760$  (11 items).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

According to the Table 1, there were 10 males and 42 females involved in the survey. The majority of the respondent are at age of 30 years old and above which is 34.6%. The second highest of 30% of respondent refers to age levels between 22 to 25 years old. 12% of respondents are at between 18 to 21 years old and only

Table 1: Demographic Background (N=52)

Subject	f	%
Male	10	19.2
Female	42	80.8
Age		
18-21years old	12	23.1
22-25 years old	16	30.8
26-29 years old	6	11.5
30years old and above	18	34.6
Knowing IHRAM		
Yes	32	61.5
No	20	38.5

Table 2: Level of Awareness on Halal Products

Level	f	%
Low	-	-
Moderate	7	13.5
High	45	86.5

Table 3: Level of Perceptions towards Halal Certification

Level	f	%
Low	-	-
Moderate	37	71.2
High	15	28.8

11.5% are at age range of 26 to 29 years old. Apparently, out of 52 respondents, only 32 respondents are aware of the existence of IHRAM while another 20 respondents have never heard about IHRAM before.

Table 2 shows the levels of the awareness which are identified as high, moderate and low. The level of perception towards Halal certification however is categorized into positive, neutral and negative levels. It is noted that most of the respondents has a high awareness towards Halal products which is 86.5% (N=45) while 13.5% were at the moderate level. None of them obtained lower score which indicates lower level of awareness towards Halal products. Another study supported this result in which the level of awareness is high due to preferences of Halal products by either non-Muslims or Muslims as they believed that the products were hygienic as compared to other non-Halal products [12].

Nevertheless, the perception of respondents towards Halal certification is quite discouraging when 71.2% of respondents are at the neutral level and only 28.8% had positive level of perceptions towards Halal certification (Table 3). This may be due to a number of factors and one of them is perception of the inefficiency of the Halal certification process [13].

Following this, it is found that there is a significant remarks of the relationship which is moderate and positive between the awareness level on Halal products and perceptions towards Halal certification ( $r=0.391$ ,  $p=0.05$ ). An independent-sample T-test was conducted to compare gender and awareness level. There was an insignificant difference in the scores for males ( $M=66.70$ ,  $SD=6.66$ ) and females ( $M=72.09$ ,  $SD=7.49$ ) conditions;  $t(50)=2.08$ ,  $p=0.720$ . These results suggest that gender really does have an effect on the respondents' awareness towards Halal products. Specifically, the results suggest that awareness level do not significantly differ between males and females.

The analysis also includes the variable of perceptions towards Halal certification. Similar result is found in which an insignificant difference exist between males ( $M=39.60$ ,  $SD=5.39$ ) and females ( $M=40.46$ ,  $SD=5.61$ ) conditions;  $t(49)=0.43$ ,  $p=0.89$ . When the independent sample T-test was run on the respondents' knowledge of IHRAM, the awareness level of Halal products is insignificantly different between a group that knows IHRAM ( $M=71.25$ ,  $SD=6.90$ ) and does not know IHRAM ( $M=70.75$ ,  $SD=6.91$ );  $t(50)=0.229$ ,  $p=0.161$ . However, the perception level towards Halal certification is found to be significantly different between the group that knows IHRAM ( $M=39.70$ ,  $SD=4.44$ ) and the group that does not know IHRAM ( $M=41.20$ ,  $SD=6.91$ );  $t(49)=0.939$ ,  $p=0.025$ , conditions.

## CONCLUSION

As far as this study is concerned, IHRAM should fulfill the requirements towards providing awareness to the industries particularly and the society in general as a center of excellence and to be widely known among Muslims societies in Malaysia. IHRAM can be supported by the very findings of this study that a significant difference is found between the group that knows and do not know IHRAM in the conditions of the awareness level and Halal certification.

More efforts should be done to increase the awareness of Halal products among Muslims. Not only is there a significantly moderate and positive relationship between the awareness level on Halal products and perceptions towards Halal certification, but the ways in which they form perceptions towards Halal certification may be highly affected and such public services and community activities announcement are among the best way to mediate the information of Halal products.

This study suggests that a bigger population should be involved in examining the relationship between the awareness of Halal products and the perception towards Halal certification. Having had the extension of this study, the result may reveal clearer position of the variables before executing progressive works of publicity and media reporting of Halal products and the importance of Halal certification. In fact, the government should engage more participation among authoritative bodies that are related to the Halal products such as industries and non-governmental organizations, so that enforcement of Halal certification may not be overburdened by over reliance towards enforcement and surveillance activities conducted by government agencies such as JAKIM. Besides IHRAM, more commitment from corporations should lead to a better environments and the implementation in the concept of *halalan thoyyibaan*.

Where there emerge loopholes from government agencies, independent and non-commercial bodies should have the ability to tackle some of the unresolved Halal issues among consumers. Halal compliances should be emulated especially among research centers of universities and institutions in other countries so as to empower the existing authorities on Halal government agencies such as *Institut Pertanian Bogor* and *Universitas Gajah Mada Halal Research Group Indonesia*, for the sake of knowledge and betterment of the Muslim *Ummah*.

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