

Malaysian Students' Awareness and Experiences of Halal Products in South Korea

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ABSTRACT

Many Malaysian students have been studying in South Korea since “Look East Policy” was implemented by the government of Malaysia three decades ago. The major challenge faced by the Malaysian students in this non-muslim community is the difficulty to find halal products such as food and beverages, medicine, toiletries and cosmetics. It is therefore vital to investigate students' experience in meeting the challenge of searching for halal products in this foreign land. Apart from that, this study intends to investigate the attitude of Malaysian students and their awareness on halal products. Data were collected through online questionnaire and the respondents were Malaysian students from Persatuan Pelajar Malaysia Korea (PPMK) who are currently studying in South Korea. Implications of this study can be valuable to future Malaysian students' comprehension in matters related to halal products.

Keywords: Halal product awareness, Korean products, student's attitude, student's experience

1. Introduction

In South Korea (also known as Republic of Korea), the majority of

the population are Christians, Catholicis, Confucius and Buddha. Muslims in Korea constitute a minority of less than 0.5%. The rapid economic growth of South Korea in a very short period of time, referred to as “Miracle of The Han River”, has transformed the economy to a trillion dollars and become an example for many developing countries including Malaysia (Cuu, Le, Kim, & Kim, 2016). Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia was motivated by its success story and was moved to see that the “Sleeping Tiger” had waken up and roared with rapid advanced development. He then announced the “Look East Policy” in 1980s. The policy looked at Korea and Japan as role models of organisation, particularly in the fields of working culture and ethics (Aboo, Khalid, Sulaiman, Isa, & Saad, 2013). Many Malaysian students were sent to this Muslim minority country not only to study in academic institutions but also to learn work ethics and discipline of Korean people particularly in technical programmes.

Since Islam is a minority religion in South Korea, there is still no system and ethics regarding halal products. In order to attract Muslim customers, there are cases of restaurants and market that abuse the use of halal certification logo especially when it relates to food and products and claim that they are halal restaurant or halal market (Yes Halal, 2016). The verification of halal certification logo in Korea is endorsed by Korean Muslim association, Korea Muslim Federation (KMF), unlike Malaysia whose halal certification is issued by the government agency. For restaurant owners in Malaysia to place a Halal signage in their premises, they have to obtain certification from the Religious Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (*Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia*, JAKIM) (e-halal, 2016).

Being in a non-Muslim environment, questions were raised on whether Muslims in Korea are having awareness about halal products and could there be factors that contribute to the awareness among Muslims about halal products. In an attempt to provide answers to these questions, the study aimed to examine the Malaysian students’ altitude and awareness on halal products.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Halal

The concept of halal has long been discussed by scholars ever since the inception of shariah revelation more than 1400 years ago. It has become increasingly complicated due to a rapid expansion in science and technology where the clarity between permissible and non-permissible elements becomes blurred. In Arabic word, halal refers to permissible or authorized when referring to things or actions. The opposite of halal is haram which means unlawful or prohibited (al-Qaradawi, 1999). However, the term non-halal is frequently used in reference to haram. Masbuh (also known as shubhah) fall between the halal and haram. It means questionable, doubtful and thus should be avoided (Azahari, 2010). Under Shariah compliant, halal products are those which do not involve the use of haram ingredients, the abuse of labor environment and which are not safe or intended for harmful use (Hanzaee, 2011). The products must be hygiene, pure, clean and of quality known as "*halalan toyyibban*" (Abdul et al., 2014). In other words, halal products are quality products based on *halalan toyyibban* concepts as it integrates Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) (Shariff & Lah Abd, 2014).

2.2 Halal Products Awareness

Nowadays, the industrial demand of halal products is increasing worldwide. These include halal food, pharmaceutical, drugs and vaccine, toiletries, cosmetics and leather products. According to the report published by Ministry of Internatioanal Trade and Industry, (Status of The Halal Industry, 2016), there is an increasing number of halal certified companies in Malaysia. In 2015, there are 5276 companies that have halal certificates compared to the previous year in which only 5415 companies have halal certificates. This indication drives a key assumption that Muslims are more aware of the importance of halal products. Wahab (2004) has reported that lack of knowledge, awareness and understanding of the halal concept among Muslims and manufacturers of halal products may cause the loss of appreciation to

halal. Therefore, it is vital for Muslims to have an understanding on what halal is all about in searching for halal products. Halal products are not only limited to Muslims but they are also for the non-Muslims. Previous study by Golnaz et al. (2010) shows that non-Muslims have positive response towards halal products.

2.2.1 Halal Food

Food is essential to our life. Food is consumed by mankind for energy, to repair and build cells and also to prevent sickness. Food that meets up the Islamic dietary code and consumed by Muslims is called halal food. Food that is non-halal (haram) for Muslims to consume include pork, blood, alcoholic beverages and animals not slaughtered according to Islamic procedure (Islamic Council of Victoria, 2016). Korean people consume pork and alcoholic beverages almost every day in their life. It is not a surprise if pig byproducts particularly fats, can be found in food such as biscuits, chocolate, snacks and bread (Usman, 2007). Fahad Abdullah (Korea Joong Ang Daily, 2015) reported that only 140 restaurants in this country serve halal food and most of them are either Turkish, Middle-Eastern or Indian. Only 50 Korean restaurants offer halal food. However, there are only 5 Korean restaurants certified by Korea Muslim Federation (KMF). In recent years, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries that possess expertise in developing halal standard have collaborated with non-OIC countries such as South Korea, South Africa and China to strengthen the countries' capability of halal supply chain. Therefore, the selection of permissible sources in food preparation and processing in South Korea is based on halal regulations or standards developed by OIC countries (Elasrag, 2016).

2.2.2 Halal Medicines

Medicines or drugs (most commonly known as pharmaceutical products) are essential in medical treatment. With advanced science and technology, many drug formulations are complex and there are arguments about medicine as to whether it should be considered in the same class as food. According to Shariah law, halal pharmaceuticals (Peng & Roziah Hanim, 2012):

1. Must not contain any parts or products of animals that are non-halal or are not slaughtered according to Islamic right,
2. Must not contain 3 types of najis; mughallazah (severe najis), mukhaffafah (light najis) and mutawassitah (medium najis),
3. Must be safe and not harmful to human: non-poisonous, non-intoxicating or non-hazardous to health according to prescribed dosage.
4. Cannot be prepared, processed or manufactured using equipments contaminated with najis.
5. Must not contain any human parts or derivatives that are not halal,
6. During preparation, processing, handling, packaging, storage and distribution, they must be physically separated from any non-halal products and najis.

Malaysia has been one of the major contributors in upgrading and maintaining quality of halal pharmaceuticals. As for now, Chemical Company of Malaysia Berhad (CCM) is an industry front-runner that handles halal pharmaceutical products (Hussain-Gambles, 2010).

South Korea is the 13th largest pharmaceutical market in the world and the 3rd largest in Asia as reported by Top Markets Report Pharmaceuticals (2016). Nevertheless, South Korea's pharmaceutical companies are still seeking halal certification for some of their products and Ildong Pharmaceutical is the first Korean pharmaceutical company that receives halal certification from KMF for its lactobacillus supplement Biovita. Generally, drug capsules are mainly made of gelatin from porcine or bovine. In order to meet halal standards, YuYu Pharma is in the process of developing new type of capsule using plant extracts (Ji-Young, 2016).

2.2.3 Halal Cosmetics and Toiletries

Nowadays, cosmetics and toiletries can be categorized as essential personal care items for men and women. According to Cosmetics

and Toiletries Market Overview (2015), South Korea is the 4th largest cosmetics and toiletries market as compared to Malaysia which secured 12th in ranking. Malaysia is concerned more with halal cosmetics and personal care products that comply the Malaysian Standard MS2200-1:2008 – Islamic Consumer Goods Part 1: Cosmetic and Personal Care. The standard is intentionally used in the production, preparation and handling of halal cosmetic and personal care. The best sales in Korea as reported include natural cosmetics, functional cosmetics, hair care cosmetics and body care products. Most of Korean cosmetics are made by non-muslim manufacturers whose halalness can be dubious. In addition, many cosmetic products contain alcohols as humectants that help supply ingredients into skin, emollients, or cleansing agents. Likewise, some fatty acids and gelatine are derived from pigs and are commonly used in personal care products such as moisturisers, shampoos, face masks and lipsticks (Ahmad et al., 2015).

In the scope of halal cosmetics and toiletries, the concept covers critical aspects of production of the products. For instance, the ingredients must be halal and the usage of the substances must be permissible. Those things must be manufactured, stored, packaged and delivered in conformity with the Shariah (Group, 2012). The demand for halal products is rapidly rising since Muslims are more concerned and aware of halal concept. Therefore, cosmetics and toiletries industry also receive a trend on this global awareness, thus the demand for both halal cosmetics and toiletries is increasing globally (Ahmad et al., 2015). In South Korea, JNH Cosmetics is the first Korean company that manufactures halal certified cosmetic products to cater for the Muslim community (Korea Herald Business, 2016).

3. Methodology

This research was conducted to study the awareness of Malaysian students in Korea on halal products which ranges from food and beverages, medicines, toiletries to cosmetics. Questionnaire survey method was used to collect data from the respondents. Sekaran et al., (2010) highlighted that questionnaire survey method is suitable for this study because the designed questionnaire can be used as instrument

to collect data from the informants within a specified period of time and any doubts that the respondents might have about any item of the questionnaire can be clarified instantly. The questionnaire contained demographic characteristics of respondents and several aspects in examining the attitude of students in buying food, medicines, cosmetics and toiletries in South Korea. The questionnaire used multiple ranked questions indicating always, frequently, sometimes, rarely and never. The questionnaire was distributed to 100 Malaysian students in South Korea. However, only 96 of the distributed questionnaire were usable for the study. Data were collected mainly from Persatuan Pelajar Malaysia Korea (PPMK) through online distribution of questionnaires via google document. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software Version 23 was used to process and analyse the data.

4. Results and Discussion

This section discusses the findings and analysis of the study. It explains the demographic profile of the respondents and also the respondents' attitude towards halal products in South Korea in the aspects of knowledge, halal status/logo, ingredients and cost of products.

Demography of Respondents

The demographic background of the respondents for this study is given in Table 1. Among 96 respondents, 89.3 % of them are Muslims and 10.7 % are non-muslims. 43 % of the respondents are male and 57 % are female. From that number of respondents, 45.2 % are below 20 years old, 53.8 % are between 21 to 30 years old and 1 % is between 31-40 years old. All of the them are studying in South Korea. 88.2 % of the respondents are foundation/diploma students, 10.8 % are undergraduate students and 1 % of the them are postgraduate students. Furthermore, 77.4 % of the respondents have been studying in South Korea for more than a year but less than 5 years, and 22.6 % are considered new as they are staying in the country less than 1 year. 68.8 % of respondents are staying in Seoul, followed by 17.2 % in Incheon, 10.8 % in Suwon, 2.2 % in Busan and 1 % in other area in South Korea. In addition, 80.6 % of the respondents have monthly allowance between ₩ 500000 - ₩

800000, 11.8 % between ₩ 100000 - ₩ 400000, 5.4 % between ₩ 900000 - ₩ 1200000 and more than the rest of them have ₩1200000. All of the respondents are unmarried.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Percentage (%)
Religion:	
Islam	89.3
Others	10.7
Gender:	
Male	43
Female	57
Age	
Below 20 years old	45.2
21 – 30 years old	53.8
31 – 40 years old	1
Highest education level:	
Foundation/ Diploma	88.2
Degree	10.8
Master	1
PhD	0
Length of stay in South Korea:	
< 1 year	22.6
1 - 5 years	77.4
Place of stay in South Korea:	
Seoul	68.8
Jeju	0
Busan	2.2
Incheon	17.2
Suwon	10.8
Other	1

Monthly allowance:	
₩ 100000 - ₩ 400000	11.8
₩ 500000 - ₩ 800000	80.6
₩ 900000 - ₩ 1200000	5.4
> ₩ 1200000	2.2
Marriage Status?	
Single	100
Married	0
Divorced	0
<i>n</i> = 96	

Reliability Test

The instrument of this study was measured in terms of its reliability to look at the consistency and the stability of the research items. Cronbach's Alpha is a popular method used in reliability test. The Cronbach's Alpha measures the internal consistency or homogeneity among the multi-item scales such as the interval level measurement. Its coefficient measures how well the items in the measurements positively correlate to one another. The closer the estimated Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to 1, the higher the internal reliability of the multi-item scales. The coefficient alpha value above 0.8 is considered good, below 0.7 is acceptable and below 0.6 is poor.

Table 2 : Reliability Test

Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	N of Items
Knowledge	.831	4
Halal Status/Logo	.501	5
Product Ingredients	.740	7
Cost of Products	.812	2

According to the reliability analysis in Table 2, the reliability measurements of Cronbach's Alpha for items knowledge, product ingredients and cost of products are higher than 0.7, indicating that the questionnaire items are reliable. However, the Cronbach's Alpha for item halal status/logo shows that the value is lower than 0.6 ; indicating poor reliability. This would mean that there are a lots of variabilities of the data from the responses.

Aspect 1 : Knowledge

Finding of the study indicates that most of the respondents understand what is meant by *halalan toyyiban* food and beverages ($m=4.39$; $sd=1.191$). This finding showed that most of the respondents are cautious about what they eat as they are more concerned with hygiene, purity, cleanliness and quality according to Islamic perspective. Respondents also showed that they are aware of the term *halal* medicines ($m=3.43$; $sd=1.320$), *halal* cosmetics and toiletries products ($m=3.50$; $sd=1.265$). Furthermore, most of respondents understand that Muslims patients need *halal* medicines ($m=3.84$; $sd=1.242$). This finding showed that most of the respondents have become more concerned to ensure that medicines, cosmetics and toiletries products are safe and *halal*.

Aspect 2 : Halal Status/Logo

Most of the respondents agreed that *halal* logo authorized by Islamic certification bodies influenced their confidence to consume food or enter a restaurant ($m=4.30$, $sd=1.232$) and checked *halal* logo on food products ($m=3.43$, $sd=1.279$). Many of the respondents also do not mind if the food served is cooked by non-Muslim ($m=3.90$, $sd=1.047$). However, the respondents are more likely to disagree on believing that a restaurant serves *halal* food if the staffs have head cover or headscarf on ($m=3.29$, $sd=1.321$) and the rest who agreed consider that the food served is hygienic and does not contain *haram* ingredients (Rezai, Mohamed, & Shamsudin, 2012). In Islamic perspective, it is permissible if prohibited ingredients are prescribed for treatments of illness and there is no other better alternative and it is known as the most effective medication (Aziz et al., 2014; Shafie, Malaya, & Lumpur, 2006). Therefore, the respondents may consider non-Muslim doctors or physicians to prescribe the medication for them ($m=3.23$, $sd=1.228$) when seeking treatments. Apart from it, the option upon on pharmaceutical products is quite limited, thus the students are assured of the physician's prescription.

Aspect 3 : Products Ingredients

Based on the descriptive analysis on product ingredients, the majority of the respondents ($m = 4.05$; $sd = 1.268$) agreed that it is important to choose food that does not contain haram elements. Nevertheless, the respondents showed only the average value on their level of awareness of medicine and drug, for instance alcoholic level approved ($m=3.16$, $sd = 1.268$), the source of capsule ingredients ($m=3.00$; $sd=1.223$) and source of ingredients in oral drugs, injection, cream ($m=3.04$; $sd=1.256$) respectively. This could be due to the respondents' difficulty to understand the information on pharmaceutical label. For instance, the descriptions and codes displayed on the products' label are commonly not plausible and quite problematic to consumers for choosing safe cosmetics as well as halal product. In addition, most of the respondents face many problems in understanding the information on cosmetic and toiletries label ($m=3.125$, $sd=1.259$). Thus, it might be helpful if there are halal standard pharmaceutical guidelines which are easily understandable for Muslim consumers throughout the world. In spite of it, most respondents are confident with the products without looking at its halal logo as long as the ingredients are halal ($m=3.55$, $sd=1.21$).

Aspect 4 : Cost of products

Many of the respondents agreed to take halal food ($m=3.56$; $sd=1.238$) and halal medicine ($m=3.52$; $sd=1.361$) irrespective of the cost as they are confident with the 'halalness' of the products. Nevertheless, most of the respondents are undergraduate students who receive monthly allowance of about ₩ 500000 - ₩ 800000 (KRW) or approximately \$704 USD the amount is just enough for them to live. In addition, many of them are staying in the congested capital city of South Korea which has high living cost. Hence, they prefer to cook their food themselves to ensure the halalness and cleanliness of their meals. There are many halal restaurants and retail shops in a more established town like Itaewon, not too far away from Seoul. Yet, the transportation cost and the food are quite expensive (₩ 15000 = \$13.20 USD) and unaffordable to the majority of them.

5. Conclusion

Findings of this study showed that Malaysian students have a positive attitude and general understanding of halal products in South Korea. This could be due to the background of students who are mainly Muslims even though they live in a country where the citizens are mostly non-Muslims. There are four main aspects highlighted to reflect the students' attitude towards halal products including knowledge, halal status/label, product ingredients and cost of products. The next phase of this study is to investigate the awareness of non-Muslims in South Korea on halal products.

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