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TEKNOLOGI
MARA

Fakulti
Pengurusan
dan Perniagaan

FBM INSIGHTS

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA CAWANGAN KEDAH

Volume 1

2020

e-ISSN 2716-599X

UiTM *di hatiku*

eISSN 2716-599X



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THE AWARENESS OF PURCHASING HALAL FOOD AMONG NON-MUSLIM CONSUMERS

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Introduction

The halal industry is the fastest growing global business (Yusuf & Ab Yajid, 2016) fueled by the growing Muslim population. The growing market for “meat and money” (halal meat and Islamic finance) suggests its significance to both Muslims and non-Muslims (Wilson & Liu, 2010; Wilson, 2012). The global halal food industry has become a guarantor of quality assurance and a good lifestyle choice for the consumers around the world. The global halal food industry is not only a source of satisfaction for Muslim consumers but also a source of satisfaction for non-Muslim consumers (Ali, 2018). At present, the concern for consuming halal food products or the halal awareness are not just among Muslim consumers, but also the non-Muslims. For non-Muslim consumers, halal food products are considered as one of the hygienic, healthy and quality products (Talib & Ali, 2009).

Some studies have identified that halal food represents food that is pure and wholesome and free from haram (forbidden) products such as porcine, blood, carrion, dead animals, predatory animals and birds and amphibious animals (Adam, 2016). In recent years, it has been argued that the consumers, irrespective of their religion, have become more and more concerned about the food products they purchase and consume. This awareness is due to the customers, both Muslims and non-Muslims, who are gradually more involved in the food they eat (Essoo & Dibb, 2004). According to Farm & Jacoby (2005), consumers are demanding for fresh, authentic quality menu items because of their concern about food safety, nutrition and seeking to know where their food comes from and how it is produced. Thus, the level of awareness is the most important factor affecting consumers’ choices to buy halal food products (Hamdan, Issa, Abu, Jusoff, 2013). Furthermore, a study conducted by Yang & Huang (2017) also indicated that awareness of halal food products has a significant impact on the buying behavior of non-Muslim consumers. This is because the success of halal food industry is determined by the consumer’s awareness level of halal (Mohamed, Shamsudin, & Rezai, 2013).

Factors Influence Awareness Among Non-Muslim Consumers

One important factor that influences non-Muslim consumers to consume food is hygiene. Some studies identified that the non-Muslim consumers are also drawn towards consuming halal food products as they are cleaner, safer, healthier and more quality. Zailani, Kanapathy, Iranmanesh,

& Tieman, (2015) also found that non-Muslim consumers are shifting towards halal food because of the rising concerns about contaminated and unhealthy food. Furthermore, Golnaz, Zainalabidin, Mad Nasir, & Eddie Chiew (2010) stated that non-Muslims perceived halal food positively in which they believe that halal food products are healthy, hygienically handled and prepared.

Bergeaud-Blankler (2006) has identified that non-Muslim's intentions of buying halal product depends on many other important factors including age, educational qualification, religious thoughts and animal welfare as in similar findings of other researchers regarding non-Muslim's attitudes towards halal food. The findings also showed that non-Muslim strongly believe that halal foods are not only tastier and hygienic but also the best treatment for animals, as Islamic slaughtering system is much more effective for animals in terms of pain. They also believe that Muslim food producers always obey their religious belief in their food processing process.

Another factor that influences the awareness of non-Muslim consumers is related to their perceived behavioral control whereby it represents the individual's perception to conduct an intended behavior. With regards to the halal food purchasing scenario, a non-Muslim might consider several relevant control factors such as food safety, cleanliness, and price and assess them against their ability, before proceeding to purchase the halal food products. Some literature reviews identified that consumers have more confidence on halal foods as it follows stricter rules for foods processing than non-halal food.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, among the factors that influence awareness of non-Muslim consumers to purchase halal food products are hygiene factors, consumers' attitudes and consumers' perceived behavioral control. By knowing these factors, it will help marketers especially Muslim producer to focus on their advertising and marketing strategies in order to attract more non-Muslim consumers to purchase their products.

In this era, the Muslim producers should accept of the fact that customers are knowledgeable and they evaluate and make a survey about the product before purchase. By using technology, specifically the Internet, all of the information nowadays is available anywhere and everywhere. Because of this scenario, the marketing effort done by Muslim producer should not only focus on product packaging which is Halal logos and certifications but also on the quality of product itself. By knowing all these factors, it will help Muslim producer to increase their knowledge in this industry as well as maximize their profit in the market, thus help to develop halal food segment and the halal industry in Malaysia and onwards.

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