Non-Muslim Consumers’ Halal Food Product Acceptance Model

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Abstract

This study aims to propose conceptually the model of Halal product acceptance by the non-Muslim consumers. The model is proposed by reviewing consumer behaviour theories, such as theory of planned behaviour (TPB), the Triandis model (TRIANM), and Halal product acceptance model for the religious society (HPAM). Antecedents for the non-Muslim acceptance of Halal food products are determined along with the moderator construct. Inner perspective, Halal logo credibility and habit are treated as the antecedents. Whereas the introduction of acculturation in the model as moderator variable will provide an understanding on how the non-Muslim consumers accept the Halal food products. The study on non-Muslim consumers in the Halal industry is scarce and there is the need for further research pertaining the issues of non-Muslim consumers, both empirical and non-empirical. Since the conceptual nature of the study, only the proposed model is presented in the paper. Any supporting, field or raw data are not included in the paper.

Keywords: Halal food; consumer behaviour; non-Muslim consumers; acculturation

1. Introduction

Malaysia is both developing and multicultural country. As a developing country, Malaysia needs a substantial economy development that would drive the country’s wealth and economic growth. In this context, Malaysia has established the halal hub on 2006 as a response to the significant growth of the global Halal business (Ambali and Bakar, 2013). Given the global growth of Halal business, hence Halal food products are no longer an industry that simply complies with religious requirements but it is becoming an economic force for both domestically and

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globally (Ambali and Bakar, 2013). With the full support provided by the government, Malaysia has developed halal certification using Islamic laws prescription as basis in all its related operation (Aziz and Chok, 2013). Abd Latif et al. (2014) suggest that Halal certification requirements by Islamic Development Department of Malaysia (JAKIM) are the strictest among nine Halal certification bodies worldwide in their study. Thus, Halal foods are regarded as one of the healthy food available in the market. This emphasizes the importance of the Halal logo as a cue for the consumers (Bonne and Verbeke, 2008). For Muslim consumers, the Halal logo may serve as both religious and quality cue; whereas for the non-Muslim consumers, the Halal logo may serve for the quality cue only (Grunert, 2006).

The non-Muslim consumers in general (38.7 per cent of the population in Malaysia) have accepted the Halal principal of food and documented by previous researches (Golnaz et al., 2012; Haque et al., 2015). They are reported to have the positive response toward the Halal food products (Mathew, 2014; Haque et al., 2015). Past studies regarding the non-Muslim consumers’ behaviour on Halal products acceptance have revealed positive response related to health, food safety, hygiene and food quality (Golnaz et al., 2012; Aziz and Chok, 2013; Abd Latif et al., 2014; Mathew, 2014; Haque et al., 2015). It is acknowledged that people have become more aware about the food that they consume; health, the origin, hygiene, animal welfare and quality (Abd Latif et al., 2014; Mathew et al., 2014).

In a multicultural society of Malaysia contact between two or more cultures occurs in daily basis, such as in trade, work, education and food preference (Laroche et al., 1999; Mohd-Any et al., 2014). While the culture of Malay Muslim is dominant in Malaysia, the contact and relationships between cultures that exist in the country should shape a mixture and resulting in a distinct type of culture, also known as acculturation (Jamal, 1996). Acculturation also used by past literatures to understand the level of adaptation and acceptance between existing cultures (Ayyub, 2015; Hui et al., 2015). Therefore, by studying acculturation could lead to a better understanding on how the non-Muslim consumers accept the Halal food products. However, the study on acculturation process by the non-Muslim consumers on Halal industry in Malaysia is under researched. Therefore, in order to fill the gap, this study will propose a model of the Halal food product acceptance by the non-Muslim consumers. In order to propose such model, the study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the predictors of Halal food product acceptance by the non-Muslim consumers?

RQ2: How does acculturation influence the Halal food product acceptance by the non-Muslim consumers?

The paper will be organized as follows: theoretical review on the widely used consumer behavior theories of theory of planned behavior (TPB), the Triandis model (TRIANM) and Halal product acceptance model for the religious society (HPAM). The next section would discuss the formulation of the proposed model and description of each identified variables. Finally, the paper is summarized on the conclusion section.

2. Theoretical review

To understand the Halal product acceptance by the non-Muslim consumers several theories regarding consumer behaviour are reviewed. They are the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), Triandis model (TRIANM), Halal product acceptance model (HPAM). TPB and TRIANM have successfully used by past studies to predict the consumer behaviour in many different settings, while the inclusion of acculturation theory would add a deeper understanding of the non-Muslim consumers’ acceptance not only to the Halal food products but also to the culture of the host nation (Malaysia).

2.1. TPB
TPB is the elaboration of theory of reasoned action (TRA) made necessary due to its limitation as it does not incorporate the volitional control (the degree to which a behaviour can be performed easily) in predicting a behaviour (Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2005). Hence, TRA could not accurately predict the behaviour in question (Ajzen, 1991). TRA consist of two intention dimensions: (1) attitude (the individual’s evaluation in performing a behaviour); (2) subjective norm (the individual’s social pressure to perform a behaviour based on the view of significant others). The addition of behaviour control assessment should precisely predict the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Ajzen (1991) also asserts that the resource and opportunities available to individuals must be to some extent dictate the likelihood to perform the behaviour. As such, behavioural control is an individual’s response and comprehension to the resource and opportunities, respectively, available to him/her to perform the behaviour conveniently (Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2005; Bonne et al., 2007).

2.2. Triandis model

The theory posits that behaviour is predicted by culture, habit, intentions and facilitating conditions. The addition of culture, habit and facilitating conditions depict that Triandis model provides more relevant antecedents of behaviour (Bergeron et al., 2005). Culture is regarded as shared standard operating procedures, unstated assumptions, tools, norms, values, and habits in understanding the environment (Triandis and Suh, 2002) and consequently determine the degree to which goals, cooperation, competition, relationship, and individualism are emphasized (Noordin and Jusoff, 2010). As such, a person’s beliefs, attitude, norms and values are influenced by culture and established a person’s ideals or general beliefs (Furst et al., 1996). Intentions to perform behaviour are predicted by affect, perceived consequences and social factors. Affect and perceived consequences could be viewed as the dimensions of attitude which represent the emotion (affect) and cognitive (perceived consequences) in performing behaviour. Social factors is related to subjective norm in the TRA and TPB that in performing a behaviour, an individual is influenced by significant others’ view in the form of informational and normative influence. Facilitating conditions refers to the objective factors in the environment that allow an individual to perform behaviour in a convenient manner (Chang and Cheung, 2001).
2.3. Halal product acceptance model

The model is an integrated framework of consumer behaviour theories with the addition of Islamic law as the facilitating conditions which influence the attitude, intention and habit in performing the behaviour. The current model does reflect the religious society, in this case, the Muslim consumers who are highly religious. The Islamic law (religion) clearly dictates all facets of the Muslim lives, which in turn, become the important factor in performing a behaviour. Since consuming Halal food product is also dictated by the Islamic law (religion), the Halal food consumption has become a habit for the Muslim consumers who are highly religious (Abd Rahim and Junos, 2012). Past studies findings on highly religious Muslim consumers have argued that these consumers will rely on their referent group in performing a behaviour, rather rely solely on their attitude (Bonne et al., 2007).

2.4. The proposed model

By adapting the three previous models, the proposed model of Halal food product acceptance by non-Muslim consumers is established. Figure 4 depicts the conceptual framework. TPB is the basic theory in developing the proposed model with the extension of variables from the TRIANM. Inner perspective, Halal logo credibility and habit are identified as the antecedents of Halal food product acceptance by the non-Muslim consumers. These
relationships will be enhanced by acculturation. The proposed model will explain the level of the non-Muslim consumers’ adaptation to the host country culture and subsequently accept the Halal food products.

Fig. 4. Non-Muslim consumers’ Halal food product acceptance model

3. Definition of variables

3.1. Inner perspective

Inner perspective is the individual’s overall feeling and expectation in performing a behaviour. A person’s overall feeling and expectation is influenced by moral norms (subjective norm of TPB and social factors of TRIANM). Conner and Armitage (1998) posited that moral norm will influence in socially determined and validated values attached to a particular behaviour. In other words, in performing a behaviour an individual is determined by his/hers feeling (emotion), expectation (cognitive) and socially determined and validated values by his/hers culture. Furthermore, in a multiracial society of Malaysia a person would negotiate and weigh food values in making a food choice which determine by his/her ideals on food (Furst et al., 1996). A non-Muslim’s inner perspective in the food choice is therefore influenced by his/her cultural background, and would include taste/sensory perception (affect), health attributes (cognition), internal social influence (norm) and his/her knowledge in Halal food (self-efficacy) (Mohd-Any et al., 2014).

3.2. Halal logo credibility

Brand credibility derived from the brand signaling literature which stated that companies can utilize the brand as signals to convey their information in a marketplace that is characterized by imperfect and asymmetric information (Erdem and Swait, 1998). The asymmetric information is described as the inability of the consumers to evaluate the product quality. A firm’s brand credibility comprised of two dimensions: (1) expertise; and (2) trustworthiness (Erdem & Swait, 1998). The uncertainty for consumers toward Halal food products is the invisible and intangible quality characteristics (credence attribute) that can hardly be assessed or ascertained by individual consumers even upon or after consuming the product (Bonne and Verbeke, 2008). Consumers have to rely on the Halal logo credibility to trust the conveyed information. In this sense, brand credibility of the Halal logo represents the coordination mechanism of the Halal industry to ensure the Halalness of food products which not visible to the consumers. Halal logo credibility is the facilitating condition that allows an individual to perform behaviour in a convenient manner. The role of facilitating condition is very much related to perceived behavioural control in TPB.

3.3. Habit

Habit is defined as a behaviour that performed automatically and beyond an individual’s awareness (Bonne et al., 2007). Past studies has found that habit is one of the predictor of food related behaviour (Honkanen et al., 2005; Bonne et al., 2007). Honkanen et al. (2005) argued that performing a particular behaviour would increase an
individual’s cognitive accessibility, which in turn, influence the intention. He further suggest that intention in performing a behaviour does not have to be reasoned, it could be habitual. In the food choice process proposed by Furst et al. (1996), people developed strategies to simplify and minimize time needed for their food choices. Further, the authors suggest that these strategies are formed by incorporating well-established habits or rules. Since past studies on non-Muslim consumers have found their positive response on Halal food products, it is worth to know whether such acceptance is determined by habit or developed rules. In other words, the consumers will develop a set of rules which become a habit in making the food choices.

3.4. Acculturation

Acculturation is a continuous contact between two or more group of individuals with different cultural backgrounds with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups (Jamal, 1996). Berry (1997) proposed two fundamental dimensions of acculturation: (1) cultural maintenance; (2) contact and participate with the larger society. He further suggests that the intersection of these two dimensions have resulted four forms of acculturation: (1) integration (participate in both culture); (2) assimilation (participate in host culture but not the heritage culture); (3) separation (maintain the heritage culture but not participate in host culture); (4) marginalization (neither participate heritage nor host culture). Among the four forms of acculturation, integration is the most favoured form since the participation in both cultures would more likely to predict the likelihood of Halal food product acceptance (Hui et al., 2015). The most common indicators of acculturation are: (1) language used; (2) social participation and interaction; (3) mass media preference or usage; (4) dietary acculturation. (Laroche et al., 1999; Bonne et al., 2007). In this study, acculturation is regarded as non-Muslim consumers’ value negotiation with the larger society (Malay Muslim) in making the food choice. Therefore, identifying which form of acculturation the non-Muslim consumers will determine the level of acceptance of the Halal food product.

4. Conclusion

This paper aims to establish a conceptual framework for Halal product acceptance by the non-Muslim consumers. TPB, TRIANM and HPAM are the foundation theories in developing the conceptual framework. The theories are reviewed and TPB is the main theory that extended with variables available in the TRIANM. The HPAM incorporate Islamic law in the framework, which is required for Muslim consumers. In the case of non-Muslim consumers in this study, the acculturation variable is introduced. In a multicultural society of Malaysia the non-Muslim consumers’ cultural backgrounds, which predominantly Chinese and Indian, have laid on the foundation of ideals or general beliefs on their assumption on food (Furst et al., 1996). Such environment setting requires maintenance of traditional culture and/or gain new cultural traits of the host country through interaction and participation (acculturation) (Laroche et al., 1999). The non-Muslim consumers would tend to use their ideals in making their food choice and negotiate their ideals against those of the host country’s (Furst et al., 1996; Laroche et al., 1999; Bonne and Verbeke, 2008; Ayyub, 2015). Thus, it is likely that they utilize their ideals in weighing the Halal food concept offerings of Halalan-Tayyiban which means wholesome and safe to consume, coupled with certified hygienic and safety manufacturing process (e.g. HACCP and JAKIM Halal certification) provide both quality guarantee and marketing tools for the Halal food products (Marzuki et al., 2012; Abd Latif et al., 2014; Golnaz et al., 2015). The result of ideals negotiation is the establishment of rules which would lead into habit in their food choice. Moreover, with the growing concern on food quality and health issues have positioned Halal products as a credence attribute and consumers would rely on its brand credibility. The aim of this paper is to propose a model for non-Muslim consumers’ acceptance conceptually. Since the conceptual nature of the paper, only the proposed model is presented in the paper. Any supporting, field or raw data is not included in the paper. However, an empirical study that based on the proposed model will be conducted in the future. Data processing, results and findings will be presented in the future empirical study. The model could be tested in different multicultural, OIC, and Islamic countries to identify the level of Halal food product acceptance by the non-Muslim consumers.
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