

Consciousness of Muslim Converts Towards Halal Food in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the consciousness level of Muslim converts towards halal food in Malaysia. This is a quantitative form of study involving 100 of Malaysian Muslim converts who attend classes in Malaysian Islamic Welfare Organisation (PERKIM) Centre, Malaysian Chinese Association (MACMA), Department of Federal Territory Islamic Affairs (JAWI) and Darul Falah Hostel located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The students were randomly selected for the study. The main objective of the study is to identify the most frequent attended food stores, to analyze the aspects affecting the Muslim converts prior to food purchase as well as to identify the common action been taken regarding the status of a food product for self-satisfaction. The findings show that the frequency of those Muslim converts attending the food stores is at the low level (mean 2.52). However, the significant level for the aspects affecting them prior to food purchase is at the moderate level (mean 2.84), while the level of common action been taken regarding the status of a food product for self-satisfaction as a whole is also at the moderate level (mean 3.37).

Keywords: halal food, influence, self-satisfaction, food stores, Muslim converts

1. Introduction

Basically, the use of logo and halal certification system solely targeted to the Malay Muslim user groups in the country to enable them to choose a product in the market without hesitation. On the other hand, almost ten years after its introduction, the response was quite surprising. The word halal today is no longer belongs to the Malay Muslim absolutely (Razaleigh & Ahmad, 2010). Traders are mostly held by Chinese ethnic and they began to realize the importance of halal and demanded to be given good products with halal certification even though they are non-Muslim in majority (Daily News, 2006).

For the business purposes, sometimes the manufacturer are so extreme, as far as possible they try to exploit the users and buyers with a 71-halal logo on all items no matter what type of product is marketed. This raises concerns leading to the insistence of illegal logo to be introduced. In this case, Former Minister in the Ministry Department, Datuk Abdul Hamid Zainal Abidin has given the answer that the halal logo is sufficient for Muslims in this country, distinguishes a product is halal or not (Sunday Times, 2002).

In Malaysia, Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) is an agency that has been mandated by the Federal government to process, validate and produce halal certificate and logo. Halal certificate is issued to only three categories of products and consumables for Muslim, abattoirs and food premises. The application of Halal certification is opened to all interested merchandise entrepreneurs. Halal certificate is issued to the applicant when they have passed all the requirements and regulations of Malaysia's Halal Certification. Each holder of such certificate is bound by rules and laws relating to the Trade Descriptions Act 1972 and the Food Act 1983. Since the application of halal certificate and logo are not obliged to the employers, then they are issued based on the application and only approved after they have met the halal standards (Chuah, 2001).

2. Research Methodology

This is a quantitative form of study involving a total of 100 respondents among Malaysian Muslim converts in Kuala Lumpur. The respondents were randomly selected. Questionnaires are related to the respondents' consciousness towards halal food which contains 25 items divided into three questions; question B is related to the

frequency of the respondents in attending the food stores, while question C is related to the importance level of the aspects influencing the respondents prior to food purchase, while question D is related to the common action been taken regarding the status of food product for self- satisfaction.

3. Literature Review

General overview shows the writings related to the halal are mostly carried out due to food aspect but it is actually covers various aspects of the audit, law, enforcement, halal certification, halal food, management, control or monitoring and others. The initial literature review was conducted and the study focused more on the aspects of halal food such as a study by Mohd Ali, Hairunnizam, and Abd. (2011) titled "Strategies Towards Enhancing Competitiveness Halal Food Products in Malaysia". This study aims to assess the procedures to apply halal certificate endorsed by JAKIM and to dismantle the importance of factors of production and the continuation of halal certification validity. The findings of this study aim to gain public confidence and create greater competitiveness, whereby JAKIM should intensify its efforts to raise public awareness on the importance of halal food. The halal input factor should be given a big attention to ensure the halal logo will be issued by JAKIM. Accurate information on the actual statistical number of companies producing halal products must be constantly updated and at the same time imposing heavier action on employers who make fraudulent use of the logo and brand of Islam to obscure the eyes of the customers.

Other than that, a study conducted by Salma (2011) in the title of her study "Halal Food: Its Importance By Islamic Perspective", focusing on halal food according to Islamic perspective and its importance in food biotechnology and the role of agencies related to halal food. The result shows that Islam is clear about halal and haram set out in the Quran and al-Sunnah and the importance of halal food for body and soul. About food biotechnology, the results of a study conducted Islam allows the use of food biotechnology, provided the materials used are halal.

While the study conducted by Norhalina (2009) entitled "Halal Certification Audit: Studies in the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia". This paper focuses on the implementation of halal certification audit in Malaysia. The main purpose of this study is to identify the things that need to be assessed during the audit whether sharia and technical aspect as well as to identify critical matters in halal audit. In addition, the review of the auditor's role as main agency implementing the audit. However, the importance of integration between halal standards and quality standards also need to be addressed so that the quality and safety of a dietary product are more secure. The findings of this study concluded that the implementation of the Malaysian halal certification audit in accordance with the requirements of legislation and auditing is a basic requirement before the halal certificate been approved and auditing been implemented by JAKIM in a one way form.

Another important study is the "Issues and Challenges in Malaysia Halal Certification Bodies". This study was conducted by Ahmad and Zul (2012). In Malaysia, several regulations have been put in place relating to the halal certificate or label. The main purpose of this study is to look for halal certification in Malaysia in aspect of the existence of some halal certification bodies, which has created confusion among Muslim consumers. Moreover, it was done to analyze the reasons for this confusion and offer some practical solutions from a legal standpoint. The analysis of collected data shows that the existing provisions of the law, especially Regulation Trade Descriptions Act 1972, which is not equipped to handle current issues and challenges for halal certification, especially regarding the control over halal certification bodies that offer halal certification services to the public.

From a research done by Salma (2011) with the title of "Halal Food: The Significance According to Islamic Perspective", debated about the concept of halal from the perspective of Islam. This study could be a reference in describing the concept of halal food but in this study there was a lack of monitoring of halal food. In comparison with a study by Zawanah Binti Muhammad, Haji Munir bin Haji Md. Salleh and Abdul Muhaimin bin Mahmud (2010) entitled "Halal: The Religious Claims And Economic Strategy", pointed more to JAKIM's role in the development of Malaysia's Halal certification management. This study is quite similar with the author's study but rather pointing to the economy, the author focused more to the study of food premises. From the point of halal food products in Malaysia, the study focused on the study of Mohd, Hairunnizam, and Hj. (2011) entitled "Towards a Strategy for Improving Competitiveness Halal Food Products in Malaysia". This study is more appropriate to the title of the author in describing the procedures applied in JAKIM Halal Certificate and the validity of Halal Certification but there is a lack of process monitoring and control of food premises which have been given the halal certification.

4. Research Findings

Respondents' demography in this study consists of age, gender, race, duration of converting to Islam, marital status and academic qualifications. Demography is an important element to know some important information related to the study.

4.1 Ages

The information of respondents' ages among Muslim converts in Kuala Lumpur is shown in Table 1. The respondents' ages are divided into six categories, under 18 years, 19-25 years, 26-30 years, 31-35 years, 36-40 years and 41 years and above. The results showed that of the total 100 respondents, the highest number of respondents were in the age of 19-25 years, which accounted for 61% (61 persons), followed by the group under 18 years with 18% (18 persons). While the smallest number of respondents who are 41 years and above, which accounted for 2% (2 persons) followed by the 31-35 years with 3% (3 persons) and group 36-40 years by 4% (4 persons) and the rest of the group 26-30 years represented 12% (12 persons). The study showed that the majority of Muslim converts who attend the classes in PERKIM, JAWI, MACMA and Darul Falah Hostel are those in group of 19-25 years of age are while the least were in the group of 41 years and above.

Table 1. Distribution of respondent's ages

Category of Ages	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
18 years and below	18	18
19-25 years	61	61
26-30 years	12	12
31-35 years	3	3
36-40 years	4	4
41 years and above	2	2
Total	100	100

Source: Questionnaires (2015).

4.2 Gender

In term of gender, the results showed that the majority of respondents comprised of 57 percent of female while the rest of 43 percent were male. It showed that female Muslim converts were majority with 57 persons from total of 100 respondents (Table 2). This common phenomenon could also be seen in any educational centres whereby females are dominant in population as they are more interested to further studies rather than the male students.

Table 2. Distribution of respondent's gender

Gender Category	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Male	43	43
Female	57	57
Total	100	100

Source: Questionnaires (2015).

4.3 Races

In term of race category, it shows that Sabah ethnics has led the number of Muslim converts in Kuala Lumpur. A total of 30 persons (30%) represent Sabah ethnics, while Chinese were 29 persons (29%) of the total number of respondents. It is followed by other nations such as Sarawak ethnics with total of 13 persons (13%), Indians 11 persons (11%), non-citizens 9 persons (9%) and aboriginal 8 persons (8%). The results showed that the highest number of the Muslim converts from Sabah ethnics almost the same as the Chinese while those with the least number of converts are aboriginal as listed in table 3.

4.4 Duration of Converting to Islam

Based on the answers given by the respondents related to the duration of converting to Islam as in Table 4, majority of the respondents with 39 persons (39%) had converted to Islam around 2-3 years, 24 persons (24%) converted to Islam within a year below, while 20 persons (20%) converted to Islam around 4-5 years and the remaining 17 persons (17%) converted to Islam around six years and over. A period of 2 to 3 years in embracing Islam is sufficient as an indicator if a person has a deep passion to learn the teachings of Islam.

Table 3. Distribution of respondent's races

Category of Races	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Chinese	29	8
Indian	11	11
Sarawak ethnics	13	13
Sabah ethnics	30	30
Aboriginal	8	29
Non-citizens	9	9
Total	100	100

Source: Questionnaires (2015).

Table 4. Distribution of duration of converting to Islam

Category of Duration	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
A year and below	24	24
2-3 years	39	39
4-5 years	20	20
6 years and above	17	17
Total	100	100

Source: Questionnaires (2015).

4.5 Marital Status

The results in table 5 shows that the majority of respondents were single with 92 persons (92%), seven persons (7%) are married and one person (1%) is a widow/ widower. Particularly relevant if there is a significant difference in terms of marital status of convert groups who attend the religious classes in a capital city. In perspective of logical reasons, the young converts are free from various problems such as earning a living to support their family and arranging family matters. The focus are broadened to themselves and their studies alone.

Table 5. Distribution of respondent's marital status

Category of Status	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Single	92	92
Married	7	7
Widow/Widower	1	1
Total	100	100

Source: Questionnaires (2015).

4.6 Academic Qualifications

The findings related to academic qualifications are listed in table 6. The respondents come in various level of academic qualifications. Majority of respondents, 74 persons (74%) are SPM/PMR (Malaysian Certificate of Education/Lower Secondary Assessment) holders, followed by 15 persons (15%) reached the stage of UPSR (Evaluation Test of Elementary School) / Evaluation Standard 5, while 10 persons (10%) have a diploma /STPM (Malaysian Higher School Certificate) and one person (1%) was a degree holder. It means that 74% of the respondents have chances to continue their education at a higher level after completing the Islamic classes offered in PERKIM, JAWI, MACMA and Darul Falah Hostel.

Table 6. The distribution of respondents' academic qualifications

Category of Qualifications	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Degree	1	1
Diploma/STPM	10	10
SPM/PMR	74	74
UPSR/Evaluation Standard 5	15	15
Total	100	100

Source: Questionnaires (2015).

4.7 Descriptive Findings of Consciousness of Muslim Converts Towards Halal Food in Malaysia

This section discusses the findings of descriptive mean values. A likert scale from 1 to 5 has been used in the instruments. In determining the level of the mean value for each variable, the author has categorized the mean scores into 5 levels as shown in table 7.

Table 7. Interpretation of score average in 5 levels

Average Scores	Interpretation
1.00 to 1.89	Extremely low
1.90 to 2.69	Low
2.70 to 3.49	Medium
3.5 to 4.29	High
4.3 to 5.00	Extremley High

Source: Department of Planning and Research Educational Policy (2006).

4.8 Frequency of the Muslim Converts in Attending Food Stores

Table 8 shows the results of respondents in attending 9 various of food stores. The overall mean of the respondents in attending the food stores is 2.52 and the whole frequency is at a low level (refer to the interpretation of the mean values in Table 7). It showed that two of food stores; Speedmart and Wholesale indicated a moderate level with the mean values of 2.93 and 2.70 respectively. In Malaysia, Speedmart is one of the famous food store with the largest branches, thus make it as a public choice due to the lowest of groceries price as compared to the other food stores. It is similar to the wholesale which can attract more customer due to the low market price and availability of fresh food. However, in overall, the frequency of Muslim converts in Kuala Lumpur attending the food stores is at a low level. This phenomenon might be due to the Malaysian life styles which most of them prefer to have food in restaurant rather than home cooking. They are no longer need to spend their time attending the supermarket to buy the food stuffs as there are 24 hours operating restaurants and fast food outlets in Malaysia. Another reason is, the institution has provided the daily meal for the students and it helped them to rarely spend in food purchase.

Table 8 The mean value, standard deviation and frequency of respondents in attending food stores

No.	Lists of the Most Frequently Attended Food Stores	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	Jaya Jusco	2.35	1.20	Low
2.	Giant	2.40	0.80	Low
3.	Tesco	2.55	1.16	Low
4.	Econsave	2.45	0.74	Low
5.	Carrefour	2.40	0.74	Low
6.	Speedmart	2.93	0.61	Medium
7.	Grocery Store	2.55	0.67	Low
8.	Night Market	2.35	0.91	Low
9.	Wholesale	2.70	0.78	Medium
	Overall Mean	2.52		Low

Source: Questionnaires (2015).

4.9 The Significance Levels of Aspects Influencing the Food Purchase Among Muslim Converts in Kuala Lumpur

Table 9 shows the findings of descriptive mean value and the importance of the aspects in affecting the respondents prior to food purchase. The overall mean value is 2.84. It means that the level of those aspects is moderately affecting the respondents in purchasing the food products. The detail findings showed that the three items were at the high level of influencing aspects; items of 'quality of contents' and 'expiry date' with the same mean value of 3.70, while the item of 'purity/halal' have 3.62 mean value. This means that Muslim converts focused more on the aspect of quality, expiry date and purity of a certain food product before making the purchase. It also shows their knowledge on the concept of halal which is not only meant for purity but also include the cleanliness. The food expiry date and quality of contents determine both of the body health and soul serenity. For the item of 'brand' is extremely low with 1.65 mean value indicated that the food brand is neither their priority nor concern and it suits to their level of students. However, in overall, the significance level for those aspects in affecting the Muslim converts prior to food purchase is at the medium level (mean 2.84). This implies that the sensitivity of Muslim converts in terms of purchasing a food product is still in a moderate level and thus, they have to keep on educating themselves on the concept of *halalan thoyyiban*.

Table 9. Aspects Influencing The Food Purchase Among Muslim Converts

No.	Aspects Influencing The Food Purchase Among Muslim Converts	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	Price	2.90	0.94	Medium
2.	Brand	1.65	0.91	Extremely Low
3.	Packaging	2.30	0.95	Low
4.	Purity/Halal	3.62	0.78	High
5.	Content Materials	2.85	0.79	Medium
6.	Producers	2.00	0.90	Low
7.	Quality of Contents	3.70	0.66	High
8.	Expiry Date	3.70	0.86	High
	Overall Mean	2.84		Medium

Source: Questionnaires (2015).

4.10 The Most Frequent Action Been Taken by Muslim Converts Regarding the Status of Food Product for Self-Satisfaction

Table 10 shows the findings of descriptive mean value, standard deviation and the level of common action been taken by Muslim converts about the status of a food product to achieve self-satisfaction. The mean level of common action been taken as a whole is 3.37. This means that the level of action been taken by Muslim converts regarding the status of a food to achieve self-satisfaction product as a whole is at a moderate level.

Table 10. Mean value, standard deviation and the level of common action been taken by Muslim converts regarding the status of a food product for self-satisfaction

No.	Action	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	Checking the official endorsement by JAKIM through email	2.99	0.94	Medium
2.	Communicating through message (SMS) or having a direct call to JAKIM	2.90	0.94	Medium
3.	Observing halal logo on a product to be purchased	3.62	0.89	High
4.	Examining the content or reading materials on a labeled product to be purchased'	3.62	0.78	High
5.	Observing packaging of a food product to be purchased	3.50	0.79	High
6.	Viewing producers of food products to be purchased	3.53	0.98	High
7.	Viewing brand of food products to be purchased	3.41	0.73	Medium
8.	No action and directly purchase	3.41	0.96	Medium
	Overall Mean	3.37		Medium

Source: Questionnaires (2015).

However, there are four items that have high mean values. Among the items of 'Observing halal logo on the product to be purchased' and 'Examining the content or reading materials on a labeled product to be purchased' have the same mean value (3.62). While the item 'Viewing producers of food products to be purchased' (mean 3.53) and 'Observing brand of a food product to be purchased' (mean 3.50). It showed that the respondents were satisfied by observing the halal logo and examining the lists of ingredients before making a food purchase. These elements indicated that the Muslim converts are concern about the food status to be purchased which not only guided in Islam but also ensure the health and safety to consume the product.

5. Conclusion

In overall, this study provides a preliminary picture of the level of consciousness among Muslim converts in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia regarding the halal food products. The results obtained led to the discovery of degree of consciousness among Muslim converts towards food product is at a moderate level and it indicates that this group have knowledge on the concept of halal in Islam. However, it is suggested to prepare them with ongoing education about the knowledge of *fardhu ain* in order to let them well adapt with the Islamic teachings in their daily life.

Monitoring and control processes of halal certification in any food premises are a vital matter in ensuring the production of halal food products and guaranteed safety for the use of publics. Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) is a powerful organization that ensures the safety of food premises. Issuing halal certificate and process of monitoring and control is under the authority of JAKIM as there are many arising problems such as the fake certifications for some of food companies and so on. Through this research, we will be able to recognise the acceptance level of Muslim converts on halal concept in their life and it will further develop their life styles in parallel with the Islamic guidance.

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