



The Antecedents of Halal Consumption Congruence (HaCC) of Malaysia's Halal Food Products: A Conceptual Approach

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Abstract

Today's Muslim consumers are techno-savvy, with access to unlimited knowledge and embrace Halal as their lifestyle. This paper is exploring the antecedents of consumer Halal Consumption Congruence (HaCC) on Malaysia's Halal food products and its influence towards their purchase intention and buying decisions. Three common constructs of consumer consumption congruence were identified, namely country of origin, consumer ethnocentrism and religiosity commitment. The results generated would uncover the antecedents of consumer HaCC and its effects on Muslim consumer attitude and purchase intention towards Malaysia's Halal food products. The findings proffer a modest contribution in understanding and defining the scope of HaCC for Halal food products.

Keywords: Congruity theory, Consumer ethnocentrism, Religiosity commitment, Halal consumption congruence.

1. Introduction

This paper is exploring the trends and pattern of the Muslim consumer consumption behaviour towards Malaysia Halal food product. Although there are various workshops and courses on Islamic Banking and Finance, but only few focus on Islamic marketing, Branding and Muslim consumer behavior. Thus, there is a real need for more research in this field, as there are opportunities for innovative thinking and new marketing approaches (Wilson, 2012). Today, the number of Muslims is growing and growing in proportion to other segments (Alserhan, 2010; Ogilvy Noor, 2010) which lead to the emergence of Halal economy.

The emergence of Halal economy (Evans, 2011) is derived from the global Muslim consumers who seek for total Halal lifestyle (Razak, 2010). It encompass the food they eat, the pharmaceutical, personal care and cosmetic products, banking services, travel, education, entertainment and etcetera. Wilson (2011a) wrote that Islamic marketing represents a widening of definitions and interpretations concerning words such as "modest". According to Mr Hamid Badawi of Al Islami Foods, the demand for Halal food is on the rise and the expected growth rate is at 20% by 2025. The global Halal trade value was estimated at US\$2.1 trillion (RM7 trillion) a year and the food sector was estimated at US\$693 billion (RM2.3 trillion) a year (Povera, 2010). The demand for Halal food accelerates with the increase of awareness among the 60.4% Moslem in Malaysia.

Halal is becoming a lifestyle for Muslim consumers who are looking for high quality, hygienic and ethical products (Tahir, 2011) as well as syariah compliance, healthy, wholesome and hygienic (Sungkar, 2009). The resurgence of Islam have led to the increase of awareness on the contents, processes, sources and other determinants of consumer products that they are consuming (Sungkar,

2010).

Malaysia's Prime Minister highlighted that Malaysia's directions towards realising the potential of the Halal industry requires a thorough understanding of all the issues and challenges that face it. It is time to realistically assess the progress, effectively re-evaluate the strategies to fully capitalise the enormous untapped potential of the industry (Muhammad, 2010).

A. The Issues

Wilson and Liu (2011) indicated that "Muslim consumer behaviour is largely a cultural construct, which necessitates that marketers should understand Islam through the varied lenses of Muslim consumers". Temporal (2011) highlighted the similarity of the world Islamic markets are common faith, values and identity as Muslims and this means they have similar dietary requirements (Halal), similar lifestyle requirements (finance, education and entertainment) and strong sense of community and welfare.

The differences of these Islamic markets are their location are diverse and communicate in multiple languages and dialects. They adhered to Islamic requirements according to their different cultural and lifestyle. Other obvious differences include their education, affluence and marketing sophistication, which marketers must take into consideration in formulating their market penetration strategies.

Several issues that Malaysia's businesses have to take into consideration are;

- **Malaysia's Halal Food Branding**

Halal or Islamic branding has three constructs namely; country of origin, target audience and its halalness (Alserhan, 2010) and according to Ogilvy Noor (2010), Halal or Islamic branding is a sharia-friendly principle. Malaysia Halal food producers have to ensure the best Halal branding strategies that are acceptable among the Muslim consumers around the world.

- **Malaysia's Halal Food Producers Production Practices**

Food producers in Malaysia did practice Halal processes during production but it is moderately correlated (Othman et al, 2009). According to Shahidan et al (2006), the reasons for the moderately relationship are the inconsistency of animal slaughtering definition, the introduction of Halal logo by various bodies, the use of Arabic-sounded or Islamic-signaled brand names, the rampant display of Quranic verses and the lack of enforcement on the misused of Halal logo.

- **Confidence Ranking of Malaysia's Halal Food Products**

The finding of Halal Industry Development Council shows that Malaysia is in 3rd place in France and 4th place in Netherland, in terms of global consumers' confidence towards Malaysia-Halal food products. Whilst in the Middle East, Malaysia is ranked 2nd after Middle East on the consumers' confidence (Bidin, 2008).

- **Differences in Religiosity Commitment**

The non-acceptance of stunning prior to slaughtering requires the understanding on the influence of religiosity commitment (RC) of the consumers (Halal Survey Monitoring Committee, 2010). This is because the level of RC would be reflected in the individual's attitudes and behavior (Johnstone et al., 2001; Sungkar, 2010). Consumers will consider buying new products if these products do not violate or contradict their consecrated ideas (Yun et al, 2008).

Halal Monitoring Committee (2010) highlighted that 95% of the Ulama in UK do not accept "mechanical slaughter, 90% rejected electrical stunning of chickens, 85% rejected electrical stunning of larger animals. The most importance finding is that 99% of those ulama expressed preference for non-stunned. Malaysia's acceptance of mechanical slaughtering and stunning of animal prior to slaughter presents a problem in penetrating European and Middle Eastern markets. Although according to Theory of Religious Values, religion does not directly impose obligations but it usually moralistically sets certain values, beliefs, and practice requirements (Worthington *et al.*, 2003). The heart of religion is commitment, thus, consumers' likes and dislikes would be strongly influenced by their religious commitment. Consumers they will consider buying new products if these products do not violate or contradict their consecrated ideas (Yun *et al.*, 2008).

2. Literature Review

A. Congruity Theory

Congruity Theory is a model of attitude change that describes some patterns of the relationship between two or more dimensions, which has been expanded from Heider's Balance Theory by Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955). According to Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955) congruity theory predicts that if there are two contradicting people, sets of information, or concepts on which a judgment must be made by a single observer, the observer will experience pressure to change his or her judgment on one of the sides. However, if the two sets of information are similar or congruent, then there will be no problem, and the observer will not experience pressure of any form. This concept indicated that when change in evaluation or attitude takes place it always increases congruity with respect to the existing frame of reference.

The main contribution of the theory is the formula that allows one to calculate the amount and direction of attitude changes. It helps predict how much the attitudes of the audience may vary with respect of source and concept (if the audience considers a source is reliable, interesting and attractive, there is congruity and there is no need to push for attitude change)

Rogers (1959) define congruence by combining these concepts; congruence is the state of openness to experience the way an internally congruent individual meets new experience. From a social point of view congruence is the psychological adjustment. Extensional describes the specific types of behavior of a congruent individual and it conveys how the open, mature, adjusted person interacts with not just one's self (internal) or others (relational), but the world (systemic). Rogers (1959) continues the definition of extensionality as the tendency to see experience in limited, differentiated terms, to be aware of the space-time anchorage of facts, to be dominated by facts, not by concepts, to evaluate in multiple ways, to be aware of different levels of abstraction, to test his inferences and abstractions against reality. Extensionality highlights two aspects of congruence — first, the personal perceptual practice of seeing and being aware of experience itself, or factual, low-inference reality, and second, the development of critical-creative thinking which holds and evaluates multiple experiential viewpoints.

B. Halal Congruence

Self-congruence is defined as a fit between the consumers' self and the brand's personality or image (Aaker 1991; Sirgy 1982). It refers to the degree of the consumer's self-concept attached to the image of typical brand users (Liu et al, 2010). Sirgy (1997) defined the self-image congruence as the subjective experience through the interaction of product-user image and consumer's self-concept in the consumption process. Self-consistency has been proven to have an influence on consumer preferences, satisfaction (Jamal, 2007), and their purchase intention (Ericksen, 1996; Mehta, 1999). Self-congruity types can be classified into four types (Sirgy, 1982), namely actual, ideal, social, and ideal social congruity. High self-congruity occurs when a brand-user image matches an individual's self-image (Sirgy et al., 1997), and vice versa.

There are a number of literatures on self-image congruence for brand choice, preference, and loyalty (Ericksen & Sirgy, 1992; Sirgy and Samli, 1985; Sirgy, Grewal, & Mangleburg, 2000; Sirgy & Johar, 1999). Self-image congruence also results in better product evaluation, greater satisfaction, and even higher purchase intention (Ericksen & Sirgy, 1992; Sirgy and Samli, 1985; Sirgy et al., 2000; Sirgy & Johar, 1999). However, substantive evidence is lacking for self-image congruence with Malaysia Halal food products.

Landon (1974) initiated the discussion of self-image which focused on the image projected by various products. Consumers were thought to prefer brands, products or suppliers with images that are congruent with their own self-images (Landon, 1974; Green et al, 1969; Sirgy, 1980). Sirgy (1983 and 1985) and Ericksen (1996) used actual self-congruity and ideal-congruity to predict consumers' motivation.

Both Sirgy's and Ericksen's study confirmed the relationship between self-image/product image congruity and purchase intention. Researchers suggested that self-congruence can enhance affective, attitudinal, and behavioral consumer responses to the product/brand (e.g., Aaker 1999; Grohmann

2009). Self-congruence plays a vital role in creating emotional brand attachment thus, consumer's self-concept is pertinent for an emotional brand attachment to occur (Chaplin and John 2005; Park et al. 2010). Self-congruence can be achieved through consuming a product/brand with a personality that he or she regards as similar to either the actual or ideal self. Actual self-congruence reflects the consumer's perception of the fit between the actual self and the product/brand's personality, whereas ideal self-congruence is the perceived fit of the product/brand personality with the consumer's ideal self (Aaker 1999).

According to Ross (1971) an individual would relate his ideal self-concept to products that were consumed publicly and his actual self-concept to products that were consumed privately. This is confirmed by Hughes (1976) study that found ideal self was more congruent to the most preferred brand of automobile (a publicly consumed product), whilst actual self-image was more congruent to the most preferred brand of toothpaste (a privately consumed product). It seems there is no significant difference between actual and ideal self-image congruence for privately consumed brands (Graeff, 1996). A larger congruence between brand image and ideal self-image existed for publicly consumed brands, suggesting that "product evaluations might be more strongly related to ideal congruence than actual congruence" (Graeff, 1996).

Graeff (1997) suggested that consumers whose actual and ideal self-image was congruent to the brand's image held a more favorable attitude and purchase intention toward the brand. Brands with actual self-congruence generated higher levels of brand attachment, whereas brands with ideal self-congruence, consistent with aspirational branding, were not as successful in increasing emotional brand attachment (Abel et al. 2013; Malar et al., 2011).

An actual self-congruent product/brand reflects who the consumer actually is, whereas an ideally self-congruent product/brand reflects who the consumer would like to be (Malar et al, 2011). From the above theories, the definitions of Halal-congruence for the study are as follows:

- the degree of the Muslim consumer would like Malaysia's Halal food product image attach to his/her public image.
- the degree of the Muslim consumer believed Malaysia's Halal food product image is attach to self-image-identity.
- the degree of the Muslim consumer perceived that their self-image recognition attach to the Malaysia Halal food product.

C. Attitude and Intention

The rapid growth of Halal economy provides tremendous business opportunities to Malaysia's entrepreneurs. Thus, it is vital to investigate and understand the motivation of various Muslim consumers of Halal food products, especially in term of their attitude and purchase intention. According to Morwitz et al. (1993), there is a positive correlation exists between purchase intention and purchase behavior. Purchase intention measured the likelihood of purchasing a product by consumers. Brand attitude can influence consumers' purchase intention (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). Marketers have to create strong emotional brand connections with consumers because it could lead to higher levels of consumer loyalty and in turn increases company financial performance (Park et al. 2010). There are three fundamental aspects of consumers' perception; namely exposure, perceptive selection and interpretation (Solomon & Stuart, 2005). Consumer perceives a product using his/her sensory receivers (exposure) and pays attention to the stimuli selectively (perceptive selection). Then, he/she interprets it by associating a particular significance to the stimuli (interpretation). The interpretation process would be influenced by his/her needs and experiences.

Current models of consumer's perception refer to branded products which focus on consumer's own values and beliefs, opinions, lifestyle and so on characteristics (Solomon and Stuart, 2005; Silvera et al., 2008), product characteristics (Aaker, 1991; Kukar-Kinney et al., 2007; Kotler et al., 2007) and (Thang and Tan, 2003; Swanson and Horridge, 2006).

The knowledge of the products' country of origin has a direct influence on the perception of the same product (Schaefer, 1997; Yu and Littrell, 2003; Inch and McBride, 2004; Aiello et al., 2008; Pieniak et al., 2009), therefore it can be considered one of the major factors influencing consumer's

perception of the good (Phau and Leng, 2008). Previous studies show that consumers perceive local food products as higher quality products (than branded products) because of its manufacturing characteristics (hand-made, ancient manufacturing process, etc.) and the quality of the materials/ingredients used (Weatherell et al., 2003; Roininen et al., 2006; Guerrero et al., 2009).

The underlying theory of the research is adapted from Theory of Planned Behavior by Ajzen & Fishbein (1980). According to Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1985) behavior is assumed to be determined by intention and intentions are explained in terms of attitudes toward the behavior and subjective norms. These attitudes and norms leads to beliefs about consequences of performing the behavior and the normative expectation. Thus, a person behavior is explained by his/her beliefs (Ajzen, 1985).

According to this theory, intention to perform a behavior appears to be based on personal attitudes and perceived social norms, thus attitudes are then influenced by beliefs on a behavior's outcome (Ajzen, 1985). There are 2 types of attitudes that is general attitude towards physical objects, racial, ethnic or other groups, institutions, policies, events or other general targets and attitudes toward performing specific behaviors with respect to an object or a target.

Thus, this study is integrating TPB with Congruity Theory since the consumers who consume and purchase Halal food products from Malaysia would be influence by their perceived congruence towards the products.

D. Country-of-Origin

Pantano (2011) considered that the image and the culture of a region have the greatest influence in the choice of purchasing local products. The image of the region concerns the reputation of the territory and individuals reaction to their knowledge of and feelings about the territory (Prentice, 2006; Ktonecnik and Gartner, 2007). This means local products are the expression of a place (Swanson and Horridge, 2002; Swanson, 2004) and culture can play a key role on the perception of its local products and on consumers' buying intention.

Brand origin refers to the effect of a brand's country of origin (COO) on consumers (Ahmed & d'Astous, 1996; Johansson, Douglas, & Nonaka, 1985; Kim & Chung, 1997; Thakor, 1996; Thakor & Lavack, 2003). Prior research indicates that consumers in developing countries or areas prefer foreign brands from more developed economies, because these foreign brands represent social status, high quality, and fashion (Papadopoulos, 1993; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Some studies highlighted the effects COO of brands has on consumers (Ahmed & d'Astous, 1996; Johansson et al., 1985; Kim & Chung, 1997; Thakor, 1996; Thakor & Lavack, 2003).

Zhou and Hui (2003) found that brand origin could affect consumers' perceptions of quality, attitudes and purchase intentions. This is because of their positive symbolic meanings, such as modernity and the high social status associated with foreign brands (Zhou & Belk, 2004). Brand origin image is also significantly positively related to consumer's purchase intention (Lin and Chen, 2006). The credibility of a brand is a key factor influencing a company's success (Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000). The more credible brand would have a higher purchase intention toward the brand (Winters, 1988).

E. Level of Ethnocentrism

Consumer ethnocentrism is the effects of buying intentions with regard to products from the home country and from countries that are perceived to resemble or differ from it (Kaynak and Kara, 2002). Highly ethnocentric individuals are intolerant and judgmental with respect to cultures different from their own (Booth, 1979; Luque-Martinez et al., 2000). Ethnic and national symbols and values is perceived as a source of pride and often despised the values of others (Luque-Martinez et al., 2000). Shankarmahesh (2006) has classified the dimensions of consumer ethnocentrism in to four main categories: socio-psychological, economic, political, and demographic.

While Altintas and Tokol (2007) have identified three main constructs of antecedents of consumer ethnocentrism: xenophobia, negative attitudes towards foreigners, and conservatism. Their results show that xenophobia and conservative values influence ethnocentrism.

F. Religiosity Commitment

Religiosity is defined as the extent to which an individual is committed to the religion he or she professes and the teachings, such as the individual's attitudes and behaviour reflect this commitment (Sungkar, 2010). According to Muhamad and Mizerski (2010), religious affiliation, commitment, knowledge and orientation affect Muslim consumer behavior. Religiosity is capable of influencing an individual cognitively and behaviorally. The heart of religion is commitment (Stark & Clock, 1968).

Religiosity commitment is the extent, to which an individual committed to religion he or she professes and its teachings, and this commitment is reflected in the individual's attitudes and behavior (Johnston et al., 2001) defined. The supposition is that a highly religious person will evaluate the world through religious schemas and integrate his/her religion into his/her life (Mokhlis, 2006). The resurgence of Islam have led to the increase of awareness on the contents, processes, sources and other determinants of consumer products that they are consuming (Sungkar, 2010). Consumers' likes and dislikes are strongly influenced by their religious commitment. Consumers they will consider buying new products if these products do not violate or contradict their consecrated ideas (Yun *et al.*, 2008). Religious commitment affects consumers' orientations regarding consumption patterns, as well as their social behavior.

Wilkes et al., (1986) and Worthington et al. (2003) developed and introduced two general components of religiosity are identified: religious affiliation and religious commitment. Worthington *et al.*, (2003) concluded that highly religious person will evaluate the world through religious schemas and thus will integrate his or her religion into much of his or her life. These individuals will appraise violations of religious standards as very stressful events and perceive them as threatening to the self (Stephens and Gwinner, 1998).

Theory of religious values indicate that religion does not directly impose obligations but usually moralistically sets certain values, beliefs, and practice requirements (Worthington *et al.*, 2003). Worthington et al (2003) defined religious commitment as the degree to which a person adheres to his or her religious values, beliefs, and practices, and uses them in daily living. According to Swimberghe (2010), religious commitment measures initially involves both a cognitive (focuses on the individual's belief or personal religious experience) and behavioral component (the degree to which an individual practices his religious affiliation).

Religiosity commitment plays an important role in people's lives through shaping their beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes, regardless of their religious orientations (Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and others). These religious commitments and beliefs influence the feelings and attitude of people towards consumption (Jamal, 2003).

3. Research Methodology

From the literature reviews and arising issues, the proposed research framework will incorporate three main antecedents; namely country-of-origin, consumer ethnocentrism and religiosity commitment. In each of these antecedents, the congruity of the consumer to Malaysia and it Halal food will be measure.

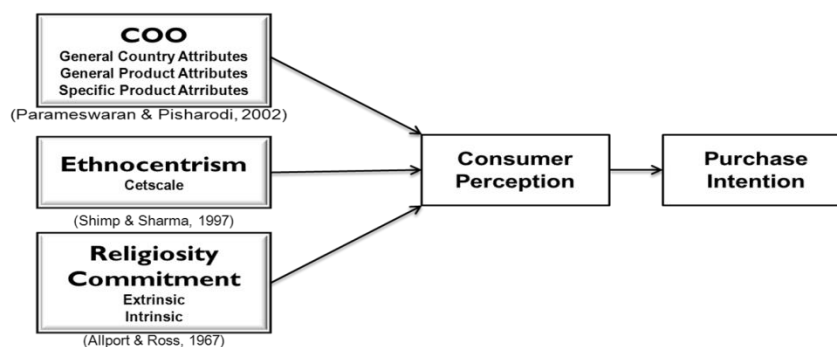
A. Research Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed framework and the underpinning theories adapted is Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1985) and Theory of Congruity (Osgood and Tannenbaum, 1955).

B. Research Objectives

From the problem statements, three main objectives were identified;

- i. to determine the antecedents of Halal Consumption Congruence
- ii. to determine the relationship of Halal Consumption Congruence on consumer attitudes towards Malaysia Halal food products
- iii. to examine the relationship of Halal Consumption Congruence and attitude on consumers' purchase intention of Malaysia Halal food products

Figure-1. Research Framework

C. Research Hypothesis

Thus, the study will be answering the following research questions;

H1 – There is a significant relationship between Country-of-Origin and Halal Consumption Congruence

H2 – There is a significant relationship between Religiosity and Halal Consumption Congruence

H3 – There is a significant relationship between Ethnocentrism and Halal Consumption Congruence

H4 – There is a significant relationship between Halal Consumption Congruence and consumer attitude.

H5 – There is a significant relationship between Attitude and purchase intention?

H6 – There is a significant relationship between Halal Consumption Congruence and Purchase Intention.

D. Instrument

The study will be done using mixed method. The first phase will be via in-depth interview relevant authorities (JAKIM, HDC and IHI) and key informants in the Halal industry to identify the key issues and Halal Congruence dimensions from the Halal industry experts, players and strategist. The Halal economy experts participating the World Halal Forum, MIHAS and World Halal Research would also be invited to contribute in this study.

The data to be collected in the second phase will be on the consumers COO, CE and RC as well the congruity of each antecedents that would influence the consumers purchase decisions. Data collection will be obtained by way of questionnaire consists of statements extracted and adapted from various literatures. The five-point Likert scales ranking from Strongly Disagree/Not Important At All (scale 1) to Strongly Agree/Very Important (scale 5) were used to measure their level of agreeableness with the item.

The sample size to be selected is at a 95 percent confidence level which would result in a sampling error of less than 5 percent. The sample size was estimated to be 300 responses. Statistically, the number of this sample met the requirements of inferential statistics (David, 1998; Sekaran, 2009) to produce valid and reliable research findings.

4. Conclusions

Numerous researches have concluded that consumer prefer brands, products or suppliers with images that are congruent with their own self-images (Landon, 1974; Green et al, 1969; Sirgy, 1980) used actual self-congruity and ideal-congruity to predict consumers' motivation. Both Sirgys' (1980, 1983 and 1985) and Ericksen's (1996) studies confirmed the relationship between self-image/product image congruity and purchase intention.

This study is would expand these findings onto the Halal food. Since the requirement for Halal food products differ from the non-Halal products, the factors influencing consumers' attitude and purchase intention are expected to be slightly different. Since the Moslem's today have higher level of

awareness and knowledge about Halal food and they are living a more holistic Halal way of life, Halal food marketers could no longer be able to just print any Halal logo on the packaging and get away with it.

This study may have some limitations and the antecedents defined in the framework model need to be tested before it can be generalized in other settings. Besides that, the consumers may not have total control to make the decision because of other influential factors such as government policy on imports, the increasing price of materials etceteras. In other words, the consumers' HaCC and purchase intention may be affected by constraints outside the consumers' control. Third, specific students' HLI choice will be chosen for the study because of their particular relevance.

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