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Halal Awareness among Non-Muslims in Gardenia Bakeries (KL) Sdn. Bhd.

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Abstract: This research delves into the significance of halal certification in Malaysia's food industry, particularly focusing on non-Muslim perspectives at Gardenia Bakeries (KL) Sdn. Bhd. Halal certification plays an important role in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia. It serves as a guarantee of religious compliance, safety, and hygiene for food products. The findings of this study provide insights into the level of halal awareness among non-Muslims and its impact on their acceptance of halal food. The results highlight the level of understanding and awareness among non-Muslims regarding halal practices. Therefore, the relevant authorities can develop a comprehensive halal awareness program to emphasize the importance of halal certification to consumers, regardless of their race or religion.

Keywords: Halal awareness, Halal certification, concept of halal, non-Muslim consumers, factors affecting consumers

Introduction

Halal is a term derived from the Arabic word, which means 'allowed' or 'permitted'. It extends beyond the domain of food premises and food and beverages products, encompassing various industries such as logistics, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, contract manufacturing (OEM), slaughterhouses, and consumer goods. Halal also goes beyond the mere labelling of food, scrutinising preparation methods, ingredient origins, and ensuring health, safety, and cleanliness (Golnaz, 2010). Halal transcends religious considerations, delving into technical aspects, prioritizing safety to guarantee that products are free from harm.

In Malaysia, halal certification goes beyond its role as a religious obligation for Muslims; it has become a strategic move for producers tapping into the expanding Muslim consumer base globally. This certification, rooted in Islamic law, ensures adherence to guidelines for product safety, cleanliness, and purity. Interestingly, over 70% of halal food products in Malaysia are crafted by non-Muslim producers, highlighting the certification's market-driven significance (Abdullah, 2019). It is not solely about meeting religious standards; it is a key factor shaping consumer choices and market dynamics (Abdullah, 2019). In the context of halal awareness, the Chinese and Indian populations in Malaysia seem indifferent to whether their food is halal, with consumption patterns unaffected by the certification. Based on direct and indirect responses from fellow non-Muslim writers regarding halal certification, non-Muslim consumers may not necessarily understand the religious significance of halal certification, but they are inclined towards halal products due to perceived quality and safety standards. However, there is a notable lack of awareness among non-Muslims regarding the fundamental benefits

of halal, including the stringent hygiene processes these products undergo before reaching the market (Ismail, 2016).

This study aims to assess the concerns of non-Muslim consumers, focusing on their knowledge, health, and attitudes towards halal food products. The questionnaire was distributed to 100 respondents, consisting of staff from various departments at Gardenia, including sales administration, finance, fleet, and accounting. The distribution was facilitated through WhatsApp groups and QR code scans provided by the researchers. The information and data related to halal awareness among non-Muslim workers were collected within three months and then analysed using Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Selecting Gardenia Bakeries (KL) Sdn. Bhd. as the subject of this halal awareness research among non-Muslims is based on its prominent position in the bakery industry, making it a relevant and representative case study for exploring and understanding the perspectives of non-Muslims regarding halal practices. The data of knowledge levels will reveal the understanding of halal issues, while the analysis of attitudes towards purchasing will determine if the halal factor influences their buying habits (Sanep, 2014). Through these aspects, a comprehensive understanding of non-Muslim consumers' perspectives on halal products will be discussed and revealed.

Literature Review

Halal Food

Halal food products are gaining popularity globally, resonating not only among Muslims but also capturing the attention of non-Muslims, as they are associated with goodness, health, safety, and high quality (Aminah Abdullah, 2007). In recent times, there has been a noticeable surge in the consumption of halal food, especially among non-Muslim consumers. This trend is propelled by the expanding halal food market, not only in Malaysia but globally, spanning both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority nations. With the global Muslim population approaching two billion and projected to reach 2.2 billion by 2030, the demand for halal food is set to rise steadily. Halal food is not just about dietary choices; it embraces a comprehensive approach, governing every aspect of the food production process, from farm to fork. Rooted in Islamic law (Shariah), these regulations cover hygiene standards, avoidance of doubtful and forbidden substances, and meticulous selection of raw materials and processing equipment (Nurul Aisyah Amir, 2023).

Hence, foods that aren't prepared or processed following halal standards are off-limits for consumption, similar to alcohol or pork. For producers, it's crucial to bear these concepts in mind. It's not only about reviewing the permissibility of the ingredients; even the suppliers of these ingredients need to be approved by Muslim authorities as halal. This is essential because ingredients can come from diverse sources, including those based on meat (Aminah Abdullah, 2007). In addition, the Qur'an emphasizes the importance of choosing halal and *toyyiban* food in several verses. It can be understood that halal and good are inseparable because halal must be something beneficial in terms of its health, nutrients, and all aspects of its impact on humans. The concept of halal food, as stated in the Qur'an, prohibits the use of ingredients from animals forbidden in Islam or not slaughtered according to Islamic law (Tieman, 2020). Thus, the process for halal food products should encompass procurement, selection of materials, manufacturing, production, storage, and distribution until it arrives at the final customers (Ridzuan et al., 2021).

Halal Awareness

Awareness can be defined as the ability to comprehend, realize, and become aware of an event or object. While halal awareness is determined by whether a person understands what halal is, knows the proper slaughter process, and prioritizes halal food for consumption. As a result, halal awareness significantly impacts the inclination to purchase halal products. Randolph (2003) defines "awareness" as knowledge or understanding of a specific subject or situation. In the halal context, awareness literally means having a special interest or experience in something or being well-informed about current developments in terms of halal food, drinks, and products. As a result, consciousness describes people's perceptions and cognitive responses to what they eat, drink, and use. Subjectively, awareness is a relative concept in which a person may be only partially aware, unconsciously aware, or acutely aware of a halal-related issue (Anbali, 2014).

As a result, awareness of something is a fundamental aspect of human existence. Individuals possess varying levels of awareness in different aspects of life. In other words, awareness is the process of alerting or increasing the level of consciousness among the general population about the potential risks that can endanger human life and how people can try to minimize their exposure to these risks. In the halal context, it can be defined as a process of increasing Muslims' awareness of what they are permitted to eat, drink, and use (Anbali, 2014). Furthermore, it raises the question of how aware are non-Muslims are of the availability of halal products in Malaysia and the benefits of consuming halal products.

Non-Muslim Consumers

As a developing and multicultural nation, Malaysia is striving to achieve substantial economic growth for enhanced wealth and overall development. In the context of the global rise in the halal business, halal food products are no longer confined to religious compliance, but also have evolved into a significant economic force both domestically and internationally. For Muslim consumers, the halal logo holds dual significance as a religious and quality indicator. Conversely, non-Muslim consumers, constituting 38.7% of the population in Malaysia, primarily perceive the halal logo as a quality cue (Mas Wahyu Wibowo, 2016). Past research indicates that non-Muslim consumers have generally embraced the halal principle in food, responding positively to aspects such as health, food safety, hygiene, and food quality (Mas Wahyu Wibowo, 2016).

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative method in the form of a survey questionnaire that was developed based on previous research and specific measurement items. The research focused on non-Muslim consumers at Gardenia Bakeries (KL) in Bukit Kemuning 1, including all departments, using a purposive sample. The survey questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms, and a total of 92 responses were obtained for the data analysis. The researchers chose Gardenia Bakeries (KL) Sdn. Bhd. as the single research site to enable a focused and in-depth examination, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of halal awareness among non-Muslims in a specific context, thus increasing the depth and specificity of the research.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. The first section pertains to demographic data, encompassing four items related to personal characteristics of respondents such as gender, age, race, and religion. In the second section, the focus shifts to halal awareness, where there is a breakdown into three parts namely health reasons, logo certification, and religious considerations. The third section comprises eight items, while the fourth section explores purchase intentions, consisting of four items adapted from (Kurniawati, 2019). All items in this questionnaire were measured using various types of questions, including Likert scale items and open-ended questions.

Findings

The demographics of the participants are presented in Table 1. The study included 92 participants, with a majority being females (55.4%), followed by males (44.6%). Most of the respondents were Chinese (39.1%), followed by Indian (28.3%). In terms of religion, most of the respondents were Christian (38%), followed by Buddhists (33.7%). Additionally, 26.1% of participants were Hindu, while Taoism represented 2.2% of the respondents.

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants (n=92)

Demographic	**N (%)**
Gender	
Male	41 (44.6)
Female	51 (55.4)
Age	
20 years old to 25 years old	54 (58.7)

26 years old to 30 years old	18 (19.6)
31 years old to 40 years old	10 (10.9)
41 years old to 50 years old	10 (10.9)
Ethnicity	
Sabahans	17 (18.5)
Sarawakians	13 (14.1)
Chinese	36 (39.1)
Indian	26 (28.3)
Religion	
Buddha	31 (33.7)
Christian	35 (38.0)
Hindu	24 (26.1)
Taoism	2 (2.2)

The level of halal awareness was evaluated based on the table below, with section D indicating purchase intention having the highest mean rate at 3.1134. This suggests that, overall, respondents were inclined to buy and try halal products. However, the mean rate of 3.1 fell within the medium level category. Meanwhile, the halal awareness rate for the health reasons category was low at 2.4811, while for logo certifications, it was very low at 1.7743, falling below 1.8. Half of the respondents were not familiar with the halal logo of Malaysia and the logo recognized by JAKIM. Similarly, in terms of religious beliefs, the mean rate was low at 2.0206, followed by the halal awareness rate at 2.0013. This indicates that, despite their intentions to buy halal products, their overall level of halal awareness remained comparatively low, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of descriptive analysis based on section.

Variable	No. of Sample	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Health	92	1.0	4.00	2.4811	.74995
Logo	92	1.0	3.00	1.7743	.39494
Religious belief	92	1.0	3.00	2.0206	.58815
Awareness	92	1.0	3.50	2.0013	.50016
Purchase intention	92	1.0	5.00	3.1134	.79959

Discussion

The first objective of this research is to determine the level of knowledge and awareness among non-Muslims at Gardenia Bakeries (KL) Sdn. Bhd. This includes measuring their understanding of halal through aspects such as health, logo certification and religion. Next, the second objective aims to identify the sources from which they obtain information about halal.

It is intriguing that many respondents had provided a 'Neutral' response regarding the association of halal food and drinks with cleanliness, quality, and consumer benefits. This could indicate a lack of strong awareness or perhaps a need for more information on the subject, The majority of the questions in the survey, which pertained to the knowledge of halal and awareness of halal products and services, resulted in respondents expressing uncertainty, often opting for 'Maybe' instead of confidently choosing 'Yes' or 'No'. This suggests a lower level of confidence in their knowledge and awareness of halal. Moreover, although the majority of respondents recognized the Malaysian halal logo, as indicated by their positive responses to the question "*You know that the logo below is a Halal from Malaysia*?", there was hesitation to prioritize halal products in their purchases. Most respondents chose 'No' or 'Maybe', raising questions about the practical significance of this awareness. In addition, despite half of the respondents

admitting that religion influences their food choices, a significant portion (79.4%) did not prioritize halal food due to lifestyle and dietary preferences. They emphasized that halal considerations did not impact their nutritional well-being. Instead, their primary concern lay in the ingredients present in the food.

The second objective aims to measure the influence of variables such as halal awareness, logo recognition, food safety and hygiene, and religious considerations on the purchase intention of non-Muslim consumers when purchasing halal products. Therefore, the question is on identifying which factors significantly impact their purchasing decisions. Moreover, the correlation analysis revealed that each factor was related to awareness. To investigate these relationships, three hypotheses had been proposed.

Furthermore, the importance of the link between the variables was reported in the form of a significant value. There is a substantial correlation if the significance value is < 0.05. The developed hypotheses were grounded in some previous research on halal awareness analysis, citing works such as (Savitri, 2020) and (Syayyidah, 2021). Table 3 presents the correlations among independent variables.

Table 3. Correlation Table for Independents Variables

Variable		Health	Logo	Religious Belief
Health	Pearson Correlation	1	.374**	.208*
Sig. (2-tailed)			<.001	.041
	N	97	97	97
Logo	Pearson Correlation	.374**	1	.479**
Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001		<.001
	N	97	97	97
Religious Belief	Pearson Correlation	.208*	.479**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.041	<.001	
	N	97	97	97

**Correlation is significant at the level (2-tailed)
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The mention of correlation analysis aims to investigate the specific relationship between these factors and consumers' halal awareness. Descriptive analysis revealed that the majority of respondents exhibited a lower level of awareness about halal, which was quite noteworthy. Despite this low awareness, there was still a desire and intention among respondents to purchase halal products.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The proposal for Gardenia Bakeries (KL) Sdn. Bhd. to take the initiative in promoting halal awareness among its staff, regardless of their background, represents a proactive step. Holding awareness programs and training for all organizational staff, coupled with marketing campaigns, can contribute to a more informed and inclusive approach. Encouraging both Muslim and non-Muslim employees to embrace clean and halal food by highlighting the associated benefits further reinforces the idea of fostering awareness within the organization.

It is evident that creating awareness about halal products among non-Muslims is crucial to boost demand. The involvement of various government agencies like JAKIM and the Halal Industry Development Centre (HDC) plays a pivotal role in managing the halal industry in Malaysia. The call for a more aggressive government approach through halal awareness campaigns, involving non- Muslims, is a valid suggestion. The participation of multiple agencies, including MITI, the Malaysian Standards Department, DVS, and the Ministry of Health, emphasizes the collaborative effort needed to nurture the halal industry (Shahwahid, 2015).

The connection between Islam and dietary practices is quite clear. It emphasizes the importance of choosing halal and good quality food. The study highlights that non-Muslim consumers at Gardenia Bakeries (KL) Sdn. Bhd. generally exhibit a low level of concern regarding the halal and haram aspects of food. However, despite this, there seems to be a basic understanding among them, particularly

regarding the prohibition of pork and alcohol, as well as the necessity of animal slaughter in food (Isa, 2015).

It is fascinating to observe how formal learning and social interactions in Malaysia contribute to mutual understanding between different communities. The concept of celebrating Muslim friends in terms of nutrition and health reflects a positive attitude of mutual respect. The perception that food with a halal logo is clean and of good quality resonates well with non-Muslim consumers, acting as a symbol of food safety that influences their purchasing decisions (Isa, 2015).

The increasing knowledge and awareness about halal food, attributed to the government's continuous efforts and the aim to establish Malaysia as an international halal hub, are positive developments. However, the call for further improvement is valid, especially in addressing hygiene aspects, even among entrepreneurs with halal verification certificates. It's not just about promoting halal food products; it's about fostering a harmonious society that respects each other's dietary choices (Isa, 2015).

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