Perception of Muslim Consumers Towards Halal Branding in Advertising

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Abstract: The study is an eye opener into areas of Islamic Marketing that are becoming more substantial and have not been addressed. In advertisements, Halal is considered a brand that holds significant value for Muslim consumers. Furthermore, Halal branding especially in advertising has emerged as a new type of marketing advertisement. Such emergence has caused businesses to reconsider their advertising approach to attract new and retain old consumers. The study is aimed at providing an enhanced understanding on the role of advertising and branding towards Halal consumption. The role is further studied upon through extensive literature review and empirical data collection involving Muslim consumers. Analysis of data collected implied that existing insights on religious consumption is lopsided compared to the blooming Halal market particularly the perception of Muslim consumers towards Halal branding. Findings thus not only affect Muslim consumers, marketers, the government but also impact the society.

Keywords: Halal branding, advertising, Muslim consumers, perception.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Background

In the last decade, halal markets have expanded significantly thanks to the growing Muslim population and their dispersion in more than 112 countries. The Muslim population is currently about 1.8 billion and is estimated to reach 2.7 billion by 2050 (Abdullah and Ahmad 2010). The number of Muslims in the world is one quarter of the world's population. Among religions, Islam has the fastest growth and the Muslim consumer market has the fastest growth. The value of the halal market in 2015 was more than $ 1 trillion (61% in the food sector, 26% in the pharmaceutical sector, 11% in the cosmetics sector and 2% in other cases) (Mathras, Cohen, Mandel and Mick 2016; Voorveld, 2019).

As the fastest growing religion across the world (Thomson-Reuters, 2018), Islam is said by Kettani (2010) to have started in Asia though its prominence in Asia is vastly attributed by the fact that it is home to about 60 percent of its believers (Cornell University Library, 2017). Within Asia, 25 percent of the global Muslim population live in Southeast Asian countries (Cornell University Library, 2017) including Malaysia. According to Pew Research Center (2011), about 61.4 percent of Malaysians in 2010 were Muslims and the number is estimated to increase until 64.5 percent by 2030. Meanwhile on a global scale, Muslims comprised of 23.4 percent or 1.6 Billion of the general population (Thomson-Reuters, 2018) thus making them one of today's largest consumer segment. Muslims living in Malaysia is studied upon parallel with the country's aspiration of becoming a leader in the Halal market. Mohd nor (2018) reasoned Malaysia is strategically positioned to become a global Halal hub due to its strong tradition of Islamic values, robust regulatory environment and Halal industry ecosystem. With the evident growth of the local Halal market and the continuous backing of the Malaysian government, challenges are nonetheless bound to arise for the market to grow even further. Challenges in terms of marketing are mostly rooted to Muslims' prescribed consumption which compelled them to be more mindful and observant in their purchasing deliberation.

Overall, the primary purpose of the study is to present a better perception of the pivotal role of advertising and branding towards Halal consumption. The mentioned role is further expanded and specified through extensive literature review and empirical data collection involving Muslim consumers.

1.2. Research Gaps

One such challenge is faced by marketers when they need to advertise Halal branded products as they must ensure Islamic values are upheld in their marketing communications. Most forms of marketing communications particularly advertising try to persuade or influence the consumer to do something although in some cases, advertising is simply to inform consumers and make them aware of the product or company. In other words, it is strategic communication driven by objectives, and these objectives can be measured to determine whether the advertising was effective. Advertising reaches a large audience of potential

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consumers. The message is conveyed through many kinds of mass media which are largely non personal (i.e. advertising is not directed to a specific individual though this is changing with the introduction of the Internet and more interactive media). A popular media in modern times is social media. Social media is arguably among the most effective advertising conveyors nowadays as marketers and consumers can interact directly with one another by using social networking platforms. Voorveld, van Noort, Muntinga and Bronner (2018) and Voorveld (2019) concur by suggesting the integration of social media as an advertising strategy as it could aid stimulate digital engagement.

Yet, little is known on the role of advertising and branding towards Halal consumption despite the abundance of studies on Halal consumption and the concept of Halal food (Wilson & Liu, 2010). The study is prompted due to the scarcity of knowledge related to marketing communications or advertising strategies of Halal brands that take into consideration the unique value systems of Muslim consumers. This is also a ripe area of investigation as advertising is a key marketing strategy in creating brand awareness. A study by Alam, Mohd and Hisham (2011) found that religiosity is influential in a Muslim's purchasing deliberation as devout Muslims are more likely to use religion as a source of reference when deciding on which brands to purchase. Findings from such studies are more pronounced in the context of food consumption wherein religious symbols are often used as strong peripheral cues in advertising. As such, the study intends to investigate whether the presence or absence of religious cues such as Halal certification, Muslim consumers or Muslim celebrities dressed in hijab (i.e. headscarf) can be argued to be strong peripheral cues that can influence the perception of Muslim consumers.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Importance of Halal Certification in Advertisement

The term Halal which means permitted in Arabic, covers all aspect of a Muslim life. Products that are certified Halal are deemed fit to be consumed by Muslims and relied on to distinguish a product distinctively among the many. Halal products however are appearance-wise like its non-Halal alternatives though they can be distinguished by their nature, ingredients, processing, handling, and slaughter techniques (JAKIM, 2015). Halal certification in

advertisement give indication that the advertised products comply with the strict requirements outlined under Islamic law. Hassan (2011) asserted that such products are not only welcomed by Muslim consumers but are accepted by non-Muslim consumers as well due to its assurance in product quality. With Halal certification, marketers can highlight added value information that might persuade consumers Muslim to purchase the advertised product. Jamal and Sharifuddin (2014) reported that Muslim consumers in the UK rely on the presence of information cues from Halal certification such as Halal labelling and ingredient listing in their purchasing deliberation. The study will investigate whether the outcomes from previous studies (e.g. Jamal & Sharifuddin, 2014 and Ali, 2014) can be reproduced within the context of Muslim consumers in Malaysia. The first research question is proposed as follows;

RQ1: Do advertising strategies have positive influence towards religious consumptions?

2.2. Effect of Halal Towards Branding

Otherwise known as Islamic branding, Alserhan (2010a) regards the Halal brand is based on ethics and values of Islam; hence any product or service bearing the label's brand should be parallel to Islamic law. In addition, Alserhan (2010b) determines whether the product is Islamic by fulfilling three predetermined requirements; compliance with Islamic law, originated for Islamic country or majority population is Muslim and targeted Muslim consumers. Malaysia however is a multicultural country where the majority of population is Muslim. Therefore, not all local products are Halal and not all Muslim consumers accept every product branded Halal without doubt. Literature regarding this doubtful issue has been addressed by Ali (2014; 2012) who argued that some Muslim consumers have express doubt on Halal certification originating from countries that are not from theirs whilst Vohra, Bhalla and Chowdhury (2009) reported that Muslim consumers in different countries can be more or less conservative than others. Hence, the perception towards Halal branding from a Muslim consumer's perspective may differ as Ali (2014) revealed that the purchasing deliberation of Muslim consumers is complex and can be affected by religious influences (e.g. El-Bassiouny, 2014). Ali (2014) recommended that available information regarding the product that are on the labelling is used to mitigate such issue. The study will investigate how Muslim consumers in Malaysia perceived Halal branding in advertising. The second research question is proposed as follows;

RQ2: Do advertising appeals affect consumer's attitude towards Halal certified brands?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. The Roles of Advertisement in Branding

William, Sandra, John and May (2007) mentioned that the practice of advertising evolved over time as it played many different roles. It began to define the products maker and it continues to be a significant function until today. As technologies such as printing press allowed a broader audience to be reached, ads became more focused on providing commercial information along with identifying the manufacturer of the product. Due to the developments in industrialization that made it possible to manufacture more products than the local market could absorb, advertising assumed the role of generating demand for a commodity through two techniques: (1) hard-selling approaches that use arguments to convince customers, and (2) soft-selling approaches that create a brand image and stimulate the emotions of customers.

In addition to visual, message appeals also play a significant role in 'bright-up' campaigns. Belch and Belch (2007) note that the essential aspect of the marketing strategy involves how or style the promotional message is conveyed. One of the most critical decisions on creative planning includes choosing an acceptable appeal. Some advertising campaigns use reasoned arguments which are intended to convey product or service information which appeal to the logical elements of the decision-making process for customers. Some messages appeal to emotions to elicit some sort of emotional response.

Terri (2003) argues that advertisement is not about selling the goods or services but about promoting the characteristics that distinguish between the products and services. Differentiation of the brand and advertising is about positioning that brand by promoting and communicating the products or services differentiators to a targeted mass audience. Advertising is essentially an instrument in the effective programme of marketing and business growth that can help to generate new opportunities. The marketing goal is to concentrate attention on what separates the organisation from others. Branding by repetitive, regular ads is the most productive way to achieve that goal. Advertising means opportunities are created, and good advertising creates thousands of possible opportunities every day. The only way to be heard is to speak and the only way to be remembered is to repeat a very clear, convincing, one-minded message over and over again.

3.2. Halal Consumption and its Importance

According to the Pew Research Center (2012), 84 percent of the general population is affiliated with some form of religion. Given this figure and the effect that religion has on consumption, it is not surprising to see that religion has been central in some consumer research (e.g. O' Guinn & Belk, 1989; Izberk-Bilgin, 2012 and McAlexander, DuFault, Martin & Schouten, 2014). Recent research in advertising and consumer behaviour however has mainly included religion as a demographic control variable or as a moderator but not as a main construct or context of investigation (Mathras, Cohen, Mandel & Mick, 2016). Furthermore, many studies addressing religion, consumption and advertisement are based on the conceptualisation of the world by Western researchers and in Western consumer contexts (Durvasula, Andrews, Lysonski & Netemeyer, 1993 and Hassan, 2011). Nonetheless, as consumption occurs within a specific cultural context governed by certain norms and principles, it is essential to focus on the implications of advertising in other consumption contexts (e.g. Halal consumption).

Considering the growth rate of Muslim population, it is necessary to understand how important Halal is in a Muslim's daily life. Ali, Xiaoling, Sherwani and Ali (2017) listed three importance: the common association of the term 'Halal' for Muslim consumption, the rapid growth of Muslim population and the increase of demand due to the population growth. The term 'Halal' is similarly used in other industries to attract Muslims' attention such as Halal tour in the tourism industry. Halal particularly for consumption, is associated with hygiene, safety, and quality of higher standard (Ambali & Bakar, 2014 and Baharuddin, Kassim, Nordin & Buyong, 2015). This is apparent based on a study of non-Muslims perception towards Halal foods in the United Kingdom that revealed non-Muslims appreciate Halal products due to their freshness and good quality (Ayyub, 2015). Locally, Muslims consider Halal as important as Malaysia is a multicultural society. The Malaysian government has been promoting Halal campaigns nationwide and one of the efforts done led to the establishment of the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia or better known as Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM). JAKIM is the central authority for the issuance of Halal

certification in Malaysia. Halal certified and issued by JAKIM is regarded as a benchmark for safety and compliance to the Islamic regulations.

3.3. Muslim Consumer Perception

Literature suggests that consumer's behaviour towards certain products tend to be inclined by the notion of "self-concept" (Lindridge & Dibb, 2003; Govers & Schoormans, 2005; Lindridge, 2005 and Bonne, Vermeir & Verbeke, 2009). Previous studies have shown that collectivist society tend to be influenced by other members of a reference group that has similar behaviour trait attributes towards religious spiritual origins (Lindridge & Dibb, 2003 and Lindridge, 2005). This may affect consumers' buying behaviour where people tend to relate their self-image with the products they purchase (Govers & Schoormans, 2005). Therefore, the message advertising is trying to portray that relates to Halal consumption is very important. Muslim consumers for instance, are obliged to act in a manner that is acceptable in the Muslim society (Salamn & Siddiqui, 2011). This is because Islam requires Muslim consumers to strictly consume products that are permissible by Islamic Law (i.e. Halal goods and services) resulting in brands ensuring that they incorporate religious cues such as a Halal certification in their marketing communications to gain attention from the Muslim consumer segment.

In Malaysia, Fam, Waller and Erdogan (2004) discovered that religiously devout Muslim consumers were more likely to perceive advertising of gender/sex related, healthcare and addictive products as offensive. Religion thus has the capacity to influence consumer's perception of advertisements whereby consumers with high religious belief might feel more offended by advertisements of controversial products compared to those that are less religious (Fam *et al*., 2004). This exemplifies the important implications for brands that are advertising to Muslim consumers as advertising to Muslim consumers is far more complex due to the Islamic way of life. Islam also views advertising as a tool of educating and informing consumers about a company's product offerings (Abdullah & Ahmad, 2010). The Islamic way of advertising emphasises on truthfulness and being transparent in which brands are not allowed to conceal information from their consumers. Damirchi and Shafai (2011) clarified that any act of concealment to deceive consumers is regarded as consumer exploitation which is against the principles of Islam.

4. METHODOLOGY

Halal consumption have been extensively studied upon and many has grasped the knowledge in this area. There still is however vague understanding related to the role of advertising and brand. Hence, the study intends to provide a basis of understanding the role played by advertisers and what is understood by consumers. As a result, a qualitative approach is adopted to complement the study's exploratory nature. Empirical data were collected to solidify secondary data collection through semi-structured interviews with Muslim consumers. The study selected Muslim consumers as sampling to gain an understanding of expectation for Halal certified brands and the cultural sensitivities related to Muslim-centred marketing communication strategies from a consumer's standpoint. Questions posed were pilot tested beforehand and all interview sessions were audio recorded with permission to facilitate verbatim transcription of the collected information. The process of interviewing is deemed completed once data saturation is achieved. Data from the interview sessions are then transcribed and analysed using thematic coding.

5. RESULTS

Results in the study are summarized in Table **1**. The results are derived from interview sessions with 12 Muslim consumers. All of them were chosen to be interviewed according to several selection criteria. The criteria aid in ensuring beforehand that the interviewees have reach adulthood and possess the capability of purchasing Halal advertised product independently. Data from the interview sessions is transcribed and analysed using thematic coding. The coding process started with the collection of input from the respondents based on the type of questions they were asked. In total, there are 3 categories of questions: 'Halal perception', 'Logo perception' and 'Advertisement perception'. Questions in each category were also posed in sub-categories to smoothen the overall process and at the same time to decrease the risk of redundancy. In summary, most respondents provided similar feedback apart from a few categories suggesting differences in perception. Under 'Halal perception', respondents have similar definition of Halal and their expectation of products bearing the Halal logo are alike whilst under 'Logo perception', half of the respondents remain sceptical about buying products with another country's approved Halal logo. Meanwhile, under 'Advertisement perception', a majority considers

Table 1: Compiled Summary of Analysis

CATEGORY OF DESCRIPTION	SUB- CATEGORY	SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS
Perception towards Halal	Meaning of 'Halal'	Based on all respondents, the term 'Halal' encompasses various aspects but is certainly used by Muslims for mainly food consumption and use; to mean goods or services made from healthy and clean materials that are acceptable, prepared and manufactured in compliance with Islamic rules and regulations i.e. syari'ah requirements;
	Expectation of Halal products	Halal goods are required to support Muslims' health on the basis of all respondents, offer a broader variety of food alternatives, meet strict syari'ah criteria, have been tested on their methods, ingredients used and approved by the relevant Islamic authority (e.g. JAKIM in Malaysia) so that no negative issues (e.g. false certificates, misleading ads, suspicions, non-compliance and so on) have been found.
Perception towards Halal Logo	Buying products with Halal logo certified by other country	Half of respondents will purchase products with Halal logo certified by other countries because of their confidence in the practise of halal issuance by others, although some would ascertain everything within the Malaysian context through the JAKIM website and for non-consumables, product brand recognition is considered when purchasing while purchasing;
		Half of the respondents will buy only products with a Halal logo certified by Malaysia's JAKIM as some doubt the validity of the logo of others or are simply not confident enough compared to the JAKIM logo as they prefer to check and verify the Halal logo certification of the product on the JAKIM website
Perception towards Advertisement	Advertising appeal(s)	Based on all respondents, there is a small difference in advertisement appeals for consumables such as Maggi noodles and non-consumable ones such as SunSilk shampoo as Muslims are appealed by religion i.e. approved Halal logo; emotional i.e. brand awareness and product familiarity; logical i.e. The appearance of the commercial, the role of the product, the specifics of the manufacture of the product, the quality and design of the product, the taste of the product and the consumer's feedback.
	Justification for the advertising appeal(s)	Based on all respondents, Muslims justified faith appeal i.e. the halal logo must be proven irrespective of; emotional appeal i.e. attractive advertising gives a good impression and shows that the advertiser understands customer needs, customers should be familiar with the product to remove doubt, consumer feedback is dependent on as it is based on actual experience of use, better customer interest by endorsing revered personalities and rational appeal i.e. price should be fair and accessible, creative design that gives product specifics and for non-consumable product additional care should be taken to ascertain rational appeal i.e. the product does not affect consumers spiritually and physically and the functionality of the product
	Influence on consideration to buy the product	The majority of respondents were influenced by the purchase of the advertised product due to details such as halal indication, product definition and aesthetic value in the advertising, although some would be influenced only when they plan to purchase the product; different views on consumer and non-market goods or additional positive customer feedback while;
		Owing to health criteria and personal adherence to the religion, minority of respondents were not motivated to buy advertised product
	Perception towards Halal branding in advertisement	On the basis of all respondents, the perception of Halal branding is generally good because it is understood that the intention of the brand is to attract Muslim consumers and gain their loyalty, Muslim fully trust the halal indication and definition of the product although they are some who remain sceptical of the branding because they are not fully convinced with the product guarantee and some would even check for themselves to make sure that the product is really halal

advertisements influential in the purchase of Halal products by consumers.

6. DISCUSSION

The Malaysian government has poured countless efforts in many ways to achieve their aspiration of becoming a global Halal hub (Muhammad, Isa & Kifli, 2009 and EPU, 2015). One way taken was advertising Halal products through nationwide campaigns and exhibitions to increase public awareness of such products. Advertising creates better awareness and thus enable the promotion of halal branding which is specifically targeted for Muslim consumers.

RQ1: Do advertising strategies have positive influence towards religious consumptions.

RQ1 indicated that advertising does affect religious consumption. Therefore, proper advertising strategies are needed to ensure that Muslim consumers are aware of the Halal brand and continuously buy the brand's products. Although not many studies on advertising has been done in terms of Halal branding, the result is aligned with other studies that discussed how consumers' perceived Halal labelling including product ingredients that are suitable for Muslims. Advertisements are considered as important to guide consumers in their daily consumption of consumable and non-consumable products. Halal Logo gives them the confidence to purchase the advertised products or services. Advertisers thus can benefit by advertising the 'Halalness' of their product to attract Muslim consumers and simultaneously gain their loyalty for the long run.

RQ2: Do advertising appeals affect consumer's attitude towards Halal certified brands.

RQ2 indicated that rational appeal should be applied in any form of media that is related to Halal products. This is because rational appeal is revealed to be more effective among Muslim consumers as it incorporates religious facts that they should know about in the product's advertisement. The advertised Halal logo nevertheless needs to be confirmed by a recognised Islamic Institution. Doing so would give consumers the extra boost to buy the products. On top of that, product packaging and ingredients have their own role to play in advertising. The results indicated that the effectiveness of certain advertisements can be increased if there is a mixture of appeals such as emotional appeal and rational appeal in a single advertisement.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

As Malaysia is aspiring to become a global Halal Hub, empirical evidence from the study may provide some valuable insights that could be useful to enhance government policies and initiatives which may further spur the growth of the Halal industry in Malaysia. Results foretell future directions that potentially lead towards prospering the local Halal market parallel to the expanding Muslim consumer segment. The study outcome provided the basis where Muslim consumers were able to communicate their desires from Halal-certified brands in terms of marketing communication

and advertising messages. Advertisers can thus take advantage of feelings that consumers may have towards the advertised product or brand in the market to gain the competitive edge. The outcome also acts as a reminder for advertisers to be mindful of the social, devout, and social sensitivities related to their target market (Haque, Ahmed & Irfath Jahan, 2010). This is often to dodge irritating current or potential consumers as well as any superfluous clashes that might hurt the brand's image.

In today's advanced innovation era, popular promotion mediums such as blogs, websites and social media stages have surfaced to supplement conventional promoting media (e.g. TV, radio, and daily newspaper). The popularization of these promotion mediums has empowered companies to create advertising campaigns that would suit better with current consumer needs (Wright, Khanfar, Harrington & Kizer, 2010). Outcome from the study also appears to be advantageous for consumers, companies as well as the government. Brands and companies, particularly Halal-certified brands will have the upper hand as the study is able to provide a glimpse of what Muslim consumers truly want. Henceforth, they will be able to viably tailor their advertising strategies accordingly. The study outcome is also beneficial for government linked agencies that are responsible for the growth of the Halal industry in Malaysia [e.g. Halal Industry Development Corporation (HDC)]. For instance, relevant government agencies, as well as advertisers and marketers would have a better idea on how future rules related to Halal products and services is to be conceptualised, drafted, and enforced. Results in the study nevertheless bare apparent limitation as rich qualitative data is favoured as specific group within a limited area was targeted instead. Subsequently, further study should include respondents that are non-Muslim and the study scope broaden to optimise data collection of differing perception among cities or states in Malaysia.

8. CONCLUSION

Previously, Halal branding has been promoted and supported by the Malaysian government. Studies nevertheless have indicated that more time is needed to fully understand the concept itself. Outcomes from the study will provide advertising companies with comprehensive knowledge that would enable them to adapt the proper design and marketing tools for Halal products. Therefore, the knowledge gained not only provide better understanding from a consumer

standpoint but also sharpen the competitive edge of companies doing businesses in the Islamic marketing industry. The challenge for advertising companies nevertheless is balancing the competitive edge with improving their own profitability. Therefore, the need to analyse consumption culture within the Islamic context is present, as the present understanding appears to be lacking. Enhanced understanding will enable marketers to segment the market to subsequently address the specific needs, motivations, perceptions, and attitudes shared by members of the cultural group. In the study, Muslim consumers in multi religious culture are studied upon to discover influences that construct their preferences for Halal products. The study put emphasis on the perception among modern-day Muslim consumers, which are shaped by their own understanding of Halal branding. This is evident as more and more are becoming conscious of the Islamic values, norms, and belief system in their daily action.

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