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Consumers Knowledge and Readiness in Accepting the Implementation of Mandatory Malaysia Halal Certification Scheme (MHCS)

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ABSTRACT

Food Industries in Malaysia have implemented the Malaysian Halal Certification Scheme (MHCS) on voluntary basis for more than 49 years. This long experience should be exploited to boost the implementation of mandatory MHCS involving all categories of food premises. The aim of this study was to analyze the level of knowledge and readiness of consumers in Malaysia in accepting the implementation of mandatory MHCS by food industries. The study was quantitatively conducted involving consumers who were structured randomly selected from five different zones in Malaysia. All the study data were collected using specific pre-tested questionnaire and were analyzed using the statistical computer software program SPSS 21.0 (Windows). The results of the study show that the level of knowledge and readiness of consumers in Malaysia toward the implementation of mandatory MHCS is at a satisfactory level or at a medium high level. The level of knowledge and readiness status of Malay Muslim consumers is higher compared to non-Malay and non-Muslim consumers. The consumers' knowledge level could be used as an indicator of country readiness in the implementation of mandatory MHCS.

Keywords: Level of knowledge; Readiness status; Consumers; Halal certificate

1 Introduction

The Malaysian Halal Certification Scheme (MHCS) for food industries officially began in 1974. To date, the implementation was up to 49 years and was conducted on voluntary basis as stated in the Trade Description Act 2011 [1] under the Trade Description (Certification and Halal Marking) and (Halal Description) Order 2011. In the act, all commercial food manufacturers or providers are not required to obtain halal certificate of their food products or their food services from JAKIM or MAIN/JAIN, but they are strongly encouraged to apply and obtain the certificate. This long Malaysia's experience in voluntarily implementing the MHCS is seen as a strength to elevate the implementation by proposing mandatory implementation of MHCS involving all types of food industries; food



production/manufacturing, food preparation/services, food import/export at any stages; micro, small, medium or big scale. It should also involve all categories of food entrepreneurs of various races and religions throughout the country. Some questions may arise from this motion; (1) have the consumers or the general public in Malaysia as a whole really understood about halal food? (2) have the consumers or the general public in Malaysia as a whole can accept the mandatory implementation of the MHCS by food industries? and (3) are the non-Muslim communities in Malaysia ready to accept the mandatory implementation of MHCS? There were several studies done before by other researchers to evaluate the level of understanding of consumers about halal food ([2], [3], [4] and [5]) but all of them focused on specific group of respondents and using small number of respondents.

The aim of this study was to evaluate the level of understanding and readiness of consumers in Malaysia involving all races and religions in accepting the implementation of compulsory MHCS by all food industries in Malaysia.

2 Research Methods

The study was conducted quantitatively involving consumers who were structured randomly selected from five different zones in Malaysia covering also all major races and religions. The data were collected using specific pre-tested questionnaires and all the data were analyzed using the statistical computer software program SPSS 21.0 (Windows). Descriptive and inferential analyses were carried out on all the data in accordance with established parameters and were presented in the form of frequency, average value and central tendency values (mean, standard deviation, median and mode). The comparison of two parameters was done using the chi-squared test while the comparison of three or more parameters was performed using the ANOVA test. The difference in data values are calculated at a confidence level of 95% or at a probability value of $p < 0.05$.

3 Results

3.1 Respondents and Demographic Factors

In this study, about 875 respondents were participated in answering the questionnaire. The number of respondents is sufficient to represent the consumer population in Malaysia and the distribution is normally distributed according to the states and zones.

About 59% of the respondents were female and 41% were male. The age distribution of the respondents was found to be very wide between 17-81 years which illustrates very large age coverage. The average age of the respondents is 35.8 years while the median and mode age of the respondents are 33 and 22 years respectively. This finding show the age of the respondents were mature enough to provide feedback of the study. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents according to race, religion as well as muslim and non-muslim categories.

Table 1: *Distribution of Respondents by Race and Religion*

		Number of Respondents	%
Race	Malay	525	60.0
	China	246	28.1
	India	88	10.1
	Sabah Ethnic	9	1.0
	Sarawak Ethnic	7	0.8
Religion	Islam	529	60.5
	Buddhist	74	8.5
	Kristian	177	20.2
	Hindu	86	9.8
	No Religion	9	1.0
Category	Muslim	529	60.5
Muslim/Non-Muslim	Non-Muslim	346	39.5

3.2 Respondent Comprehension Score

Mean comprehension score that obtained by the respondents in this study was about 75.4% which is at moderately high level. The lowest score is 38%, while the highest score is 100%. A moderately high score level was also showed by the median value (80%) and mode value (88%). The results of the study also showed that only the respondents' comprehension scores according to gender did not differ significantly (at $p>0.05$) while the respondents' comprehension scores according to other factors were all significantly different (at $p<0.05$). The study also showed that zone, gender, marital status and membership in the consumer association factors have a small impact on the differences of the comprehension scores. State, education levels and employment or study factors having a modest impact on the difference respondents' comprehension scores while race, religion and Muslim/non-muslim factors have significant impact on the difference respondents' comprehension scores. The study also found that there was a significant and positive straight relationship (positive linear correlation) between the age and level of understanding. It means that the higher the age of the respondent the higher the level of understanding in matters related to the halal or non-halal food. The correlation coefficient between age and understanding is not too big, which is only at 27%.

Figure 1 below shows the distribution of comprehension scores among respondents by race.

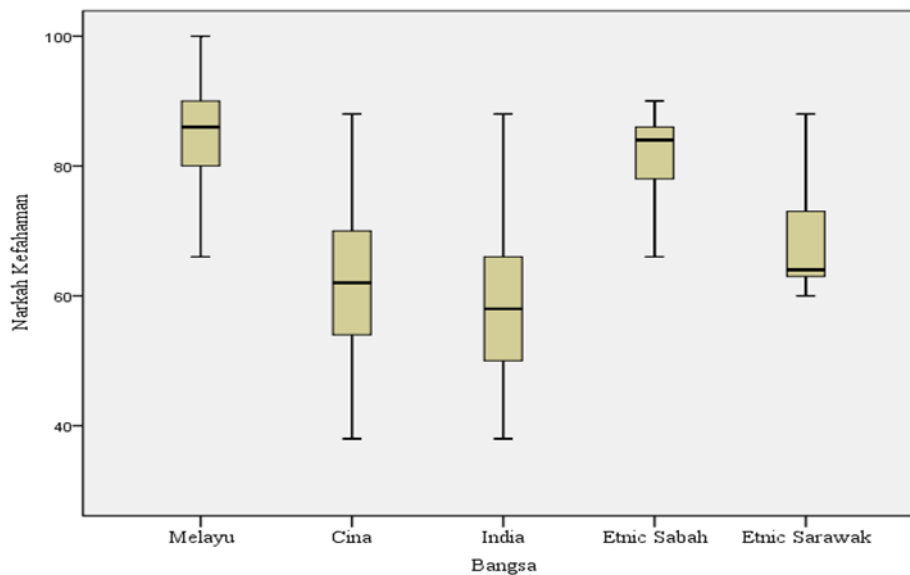


Figure 1: *Distribution of Respondents' Comprehension Scores By Race*

From Figure 1, it was found that the Malays had a smaller range of score differences among them (between 66-100% marks or a difference in score distance of 44%) compared to the Chinese (difference of 50%) and Indians (also a difference of 50%). Sabah and Sarawak Ethnic should be ignored in this study although both respondents have a small score difference of 38% and 28% respectively, they were influenced by too small numbers of respondents of nine and seven respectively. This results mean that the difference in understanding among the Malays is smaller compared to other races. Figure 1 also shows that the median score for Malay respondents is higher at 86% compared to the median score for Chinese (62%) and Indians (58%). This situation showed that most (more than 50%) of the Malay respondents scored higher than the Chinese and Indian respondents. This also means that the level of understanding of the majority of the Malay respondents is higher compared to the level of understanding of other races.

Comprehension scores among respondents according to religious factors were found to be similar to racial factors where Muslim respondents had a smaller range of difference in scores among them (between 66-100% or 34% difference in score distance) compared to Christian respondents (difference of 42%), Buddhist (difference of 50%) and Hindu (difference is also 50%). The range of differences in scores of non-religious respondents was small (difference of 50%) but it was influenced by a small number of respondents. This results also mean that the difference in understanding among Muslim respondents is also smaller compared to other religious respondents. The median score for Muslim respondents was also found to be higher (86% score) compared to the median score for Christian respondents (62%), Buddhist (62% score) and Hindu (58% score). This situation showed that most (over 50%) of Muslim

respondents scored higher than other religious respondents. This also means that the level of understanding of the majority of Muslim respondents is higher compared to the level of understanding of other religious respondents.

4 Conclusion

This study involves a large number of respondents and is more than sufficient to represent the consumer group in Malaysia. The consumers' level of understanding about halal food is satisfactory at a moderately high level. The understanding level shows the consumers' readiness in accepting the implementation of mandatory MHCS. There is no significant difference in the level of understanding and readiness among consumers according to most of the demographic factors except the race and religion factors which are most likely to influence the difference in the level of understanding and readiness. The level of understanding and readiness of the Malay consumers is higher compared to the level of understanding and readiness of the consumers of other races.

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