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Electronic and Online Halal Food in Malaysia: Identifying the Consumption Behaviour



Abstract: - There has been a rapid growth of the global Halal market over the past twenty years or so. In part, this has been due to the rising demands of the global Muslim society, the very potential of this market, governmental backing and various initiatives, along with the increasing awareness and knowledge of Muslims and others. With the unprecedented expansion of e-business that is being seen today, the various players and stakeholders need to gain a deeper understanding of consumption behaviors within the online Halal food market. In Malaysia, many food industries have been utilizing the ‘Halal’ term to gain a competitive edge. However, it has to be kept in mind that the rising demand for halal foods could be restricted because of the consumers’ lacking awareness or knowledge. This is particularly so with the younger consumers who might not pay as much attention to ‘Halal’ matters. In view of this, the current study focuses on the consumption behaviors of online Halal food among consumers from three different age groups. Responses were gathered by means of self-administered questionnaires from 384 respondents based in Malaysia’s Klang valley. The data analyses related to the descriptive statistics as well as the one-way ANOVA were performed using the SPSS 29 software. The findings indicate that there are differences in the consumption behaviors of online Halal food based on the different age groups. These findings could be potentially useful for Malaysian Halal food producers in accordance with the specific consumers that they are targeting.

Keywords: Halal Food, Malaysia, Consumption Behaviors, Online, Age Groups, Generational Differences

1 Introduction

Muslims hold religion to be a key aspect of their lives which plays a major role in their decision making (Sulaiman et al., 2019). It is a strong driver of their attitudes, purchasing intentions, consumption behaviors, food habits, etc. (Mansori, 2012). Abu Bakr Jabir Al-Jazairi (2010) states that according to Islamic law (Syariah), the term Halal can be seen as relating to any item which is permissible to be consumed by Muslims and which is physically and spiritually beneficial. This involves all of the components within the production chain like Halal sources (e.g., permissible meat, legitimate slaughtering procedures and handling), proper quality, safety, hygiene, nutritious value, packing, etc. (Arifin et al., 2021). The significant rise in the global demand for halal foods is reflected by the steady rise of the Muslim population across the world. This increasing demand has also been attributed to consumers becoming increasingly aware of and more focused on their religious duties. Put differently, the consumption of Halal food symbolizes a Muslim individual’s devout adherence to the laws of Islam.

The latest census conducted by the Malaysian government shows that approximately 63.5% of the country’s population is made up of Muslims, and as a natural consequence, there exists a highly competitive Halal market here. Also, within the contexts of Malaysia, the Halal food sector has become a standard necessity (Ahmad et al., 2018). The Halal food sector contributed significantly to the nation’s GDP, i.e., approximately 7.5 % in 2022, and is predicted to continue in its upward trajectory (Harinderan, 2023).

All over the world, more and more consumers- whether Muslim or not- are seen to be seeking out Halal certified foods, which is indicative of the quality of such products. Findings have shown that besides religious obligations, Halal foods are also becoming highly relevant for healthier lifestyles (Norrakiah et al., 2015). In addition, findings are indicative of other factors impacting the consumption behaviors related to Halal foods, for instance: assurance and trust (Abdul et al., 2009), halal certificates (Bonne & Verbeke, 2006), hygiene and pricing (Butt et al., 2021), promotions and marketing (Wang, 2013), environmental considerations and word of mouth (Kordnaeij et al., 2013), easy accessibility (Azam et al., 2020), product quality (Wang, 2013), age differences (Evelyn et al., 2011).

Marketing studies have often utilized the age factor to segmentalize consumer markets, for instance, in accordance with: “chronological ages”, “generational subsets”, “life cycles”, etc. (Noble & Schewe, 2003). In view of

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generational differences, individuals are usually categorized as falling into five main groups, i.e., Traditionalists—born between 1925 and 1945; Baby Boomers—born between 1946 and 1964; Generation X—born between 1965 and 1980; Millennials—born between 1981 and 2000; Generation Z—born between 2001 and 2020 (Cambell et al., 2017). In 2022, nearly 70 % of the Malaysian population was aged between 15 and 64 years. Like other Asian developing countries, a large percentage of the Malaysian population consists of youth, i.e., around 26 % from Generation Y and 29 % from Generation Z (Tjijtono et al., 2020).

2 Problem Statement

There is a marked rise in Halal food demand across the world. However, an in-depth understanding of consumption behaviors of online Halal food among Malaysian consumers is lacking, particularly with regard to the various age groups. Some reports hold that Malaysian youth do not have the necessary awareness concerning Halal issues (Krishnan et al., 2017), whereas others hold that the rise of Halal food demand within the nation can be attributed to consumers becoming more aware of their religious obligations. (Ahmad et al., 2018).

As stated by Yang (2017), consumption behaviors of online Halal food items could be impacted by packaging, quality, after sales service, brand reputation, etc. Golnaz et al. (2012) highlights the tendency of many from the younger generations to be oblivious regarding religious issues. They add that when compared to the older generations, the younger generations are more inclined toward the digital realm, technology, etc., and less toward religious education, information, and practices. Isa et al. (2015) highlighted that the Malaysian youth, whether Muslim or otherwise, are highly knowledgeable concerning Halal food. However, these findings may not be generalizable due to their study's small sample size. According to Yang (2017), Halal food consumers' age differences, educational achievements or job types did not significantly impact their consumption behaviors. In view of this, the current study seeks to address the gap in knowledge concerning the impact of age differences on the consumption behavior of online Halal food in Malaysia. The evaluation of this consumption behavior is done based on the consumers' attitudes involving the components of "cognition", "affection" and "conation".

3 Methodology

This study employed online cross-sectional survey questionnaires using Google forms, over the social networking platforms Facebook, Instagram, as well as WhatsApp. The targeted respondents were those who lived in the Klang Valley and regularly made online purchases of Halal food items. The respondents were divided into three groups, i.e., Group 1: ages less than 25; Group 2: ages between 25 and 43; and Group 3: ages between 44 and 59.

This study's questionnaire was designed using two languages, i.e., English and Bahasa Melayu, and was based on Awan et al.'s (2015) study. It was split into two segments, with the former pertaining to socio-demographic information and the latter focusing on consumption behaviors relating to online Halal food (six items). The Likert scale was utilized to gauge the respondents' answers which ranged from: (1) Strongly Disagree to (4) Strongly Agree. As recommended by Garland (1991), in order to do away with neutral responses, mid-point options like "unsure", "undecided", "uncertain", etc., were omitted from the scale. The assistance of the research supervisor and other faculty members was sought to validate the questionnaire items. A pilot test involving ten respondents was also conducted toward evaluating the questionnaire's overall reliability. Here, the Cronbach alpha score was found to be 0.952, indicating that the questionnaire was reliable. For the descriptive statistics and the analyses of variance (ANOVA) regarding the impact of age on the consumption behavior of online Halal food, the SPSS-29 software was utilized.

4 Findings And Discussion

4.1 Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

From the 455 invitations which were sent out, only 384 were received which were valid and fulfilled the study's inclusion criteria (84.3%), which were then further analyzed. The demographic characteristics of the study respondents are delineated in Table 1. Males constituted most of the study participants ($n = 201$, 52.3%), with most of the respondents being married ($n = 213$, 55.4%). The respondents were almost equally distributed across the three age groups, i.e., 35.9% in the first group, 31.5% in the second group and 32,5% in the third group. The majority of this study's respondents were Muslims ($n= 289$ or 75.2 %). Also, most of this study's respondents were employed within the public ($n=93$ or 24.2%) and private sectors ($n=123$ or 32%) respectively.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Study Respondents

	Frequencies	Percentages (%)
Gender		
Males	201	52.3
Females	183	47.6
Age Groups		
Group 1: Below 25 years	138	35.9
Group 2: 25-43 years	121	31.5
Group 3: 44-59 years	125	32.5
Marriage Status		
Married	171	44.5
Single	213	55.4
Religion		
Muslim	289	75.2
Non-Muslim	95	24.7
Employment		
Public	93	24.2
Private	123	32
Self-Employment	21	5.4
Students	142	36.9
Not working	5	1.3

4.2 Attitudes Toward Online Halal Food Items

A summary of the attitudes held by Malaysian customers toward online Halal food items are presented in Table 2. The gross mean value for respondents' attitudes toward online Halal food items was 3.455 (SD 0.571). The highest mean value was seen for the item "In my opinion, the consumption of Halal food benefits my health and wellbeing" (Mean = 3.85, SD = 0.436). This was followed by the item "When buying a food item online, I ensure that it is Halal certified" (Mean = 3.759, SD = 0.501) and "Most of the time I opt for food items that are Halal when shopping online" (Mean = 3.551, SD = 0.761). These findings are highly indicative of Malaysian customers positively perceiving the consumption of online halal food items. The findings are also in line with those of Khalek et al.'s (2017) whereby they demonstrated that more than 90 % of their respondents concurred regarding the health benefits of Halal food.

The study respondents were found to place a lot of importance on the food items being Halal certified when buying online (Mean = 3.759, SD = 0.501) which echoes Khalek’s (2014) findings. Nonetheless, their attitudes and consumption behaviors related to the purchase of halal food items were also affected by other consumers. In view of this, the item: “I will not purchase any food without Halal certification although I see other Muslims eat it” was associated with the least scores, i.e., Mean=2.868 and SD= 1.294. This finding reflects that of Khalek’s (2014) study which showed that approximately one fifth of Muslim youth would not be averse to eating at non-Halal restaurants. Also, that the perception and behaviors of others could influence young Muslim consumers with regard to their selection of food items that were Halal or not.

Table 2 Attitudes Toward Online Halal Food Items (n=384)

Items	Mean	Std Dev
It is easy to source for Halal food items from various online food markets	3.524	0.581
When buying a food item online, I ensure that it is Halal certified	3.759	0.501
In my opinion, the consumption of Halal food benefits my health and wellbeing	3.849	0.436
Most of the time I opt for food items that are Halal when shopping online	3.551	0.761
I am extremely strict when making food selections, particularly Halal food products	3.227	1.162
I will not purchase any food without Halal certification although I see other Muslims eat it	2.868	1.294
Overall	3.455	0.571

4.3 The Impact of Age Toward Online Halal Food Consumption Behavior

The statistical method utilized to uncover any differences in the attitudes and consumption behaviors toward online Halal food among Malaysian consumers was the one-way ANOVA. The focus here was on the influence of age on the respondents’ attitudes and consumption behaviors. The mean as well as standard deviation scores for all three age groups involved in this study are delineated in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation (Std Dev) Scores

Age Group	Total Number	Mean Scores	Std Dev
Group 1	138	3.730	0.364
Group 2	121	3.186	0.632
Group 3	125	3.425	0.574
Total	384	3.459	0.574

The alpha level which was utilized for each of the analyses was 0.05. The homogeneity of variance test demonstrated significance, i.e., (Levene F (2, 405) = 36.798, with a p value of < 0.05). This indicated a violation of the assumption of equal variance, hence necessitating the utilization of the adjusted F statistics, i.e., the Welch statistics. Due to its robustness, this was opted for in place of the Brown-Forsythe test.

The findings of the one-way ANOVA indicated that the main effect had a statistical significance, i.e., Welch’s F (2,239.769) = 42.385, P < 0.05. Based on this, it can be inferred that there exist differences between the age groups

when it comes to attitudes and consumption behaviors related to online Halal food items. The formula below was utilized for the calculation of the omega squared (ω^2):

$$\omega^2 = \frac{df(F-1)}{df(F-1) + N_{total}}$$

wherein $df = 2$, $F = 42.385$, $N = 384$

The value that was calculated for the omega squared (ω^2) was 0.164, implying that around 16.4 % of the total variations concerning the attitudes and consumption behaviors related to online Halal foods could be attributed to the differences in the respondents' age groups.

Additionally, the Games-Howell test was performed to make post hoc comparisons. This was done toward determining the most significant differences among two out of the three age groups. The findings pointed toward the average score of Group 1 (Mean = 3.725, SD = 0.361) being significantly greater than Group 3 (Mean = 3.179, SD = 0.627) and Group 2 (Mean = 3.419, SD = 0.569). The effect size of Group 1 with regard to Group 3 and Group 2 was seen to be 1.051 and 0.631, respectively. Also, the findings indicated that the Halal food preference for those from Group 2 was significantly less when compared to those from Group 3, which was associated with a 0.391 effect size. One of the more intuitive reasoning behind this finding could be that those from the older age groups tend to be more religious than their younger contemporaries (Golnaz *et al.*, 2012).

The findings of this study indicate that there are significant differences in the attitudes and consumption behaviors related to online halal food items which are related to age. Among the potential reasons for such differences could be: marketing and promotions (Kordnaeij *et al.*, 2013), social expectations (Nuttavuthisit & Thøgersen, 2017), religious considerations (Abd Rahman *et al.*, 2015), product quality (Soh *et al.*, 2017), digital savviness (Ayyub, 2015) as well as competing products (Kordnaeij *et al.*, 2013). In view of this, additional initiatives could be undertaken by the country's Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) toward enhancing the knowledge and awareness of consumers regarding Halal food items (Bashir *et al.*, 2018). This in turn could potentially play a huge role in positively influencing the purchase intentions, attitudes as well as consumption behaviors related to online Halal food products.

5 In Conclusion

This study explored the effect of age- based on three age groups- on the attitudes and consumption behaviors of Malaysians regarding online Halal food items. The findings of the study indicate that there exist significant differences between the three age groups with regard to their attitudes and consumption behaviors related to online Halal food products. Based on the findings, Halal food producers as well as other industrial players and major stakeholders could focus more on initiatives that are age specific. Also, the importance of future studies which focus on the potential factors that influence the age related differences seen in this study cannot be emphasized enough.

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