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Factors Influencing Information Seeking Behaviour for Halal Food Products Among Malaysian Muslim Consumers: A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract— In the new global economy, information seeking behavior of halal food products has become a central issue for Muslims. Muslims in Malaysia form two-third of the entire population who makes the significance of consuming halal food products. This paper presents a conceptual framework on the information seeking behavior of Malaysian Muslim consumers while searching for halal food products. This conceptual framework presents the potential factors that might influence the information seeking behavior for halal food products among Malaysian Muslim consumers. This paper assumes that there is a relationship among human information attributes, namely: attitude, habit and awareness of individual and sources of information as factors that may lead to an effective information searching process. This study provides insights into how Malaysian Muslim consumers seek information for a halal food product that offers an effective searching process.

Keywords— Information seeking behavior; Halal food product; Malaysian Muslim consumers; Conceptual framework; Factors.

I. INTRODUCTION

The significance of information seeking behaviour of the halal food product comes from the Muslim's majority population in the world that forms the quarter of the world's population. The huge number of Muslims has made a huge impact on the international market. Besides, the growing number of Muslims has created global interest from food worldwide producers [1]. As a result, halal food is greatly demanded among global marketers [2]. In Malaysia, halal products are the primary key for consumption, where the majority of the population is Muslims [3]. The choice of halal food products is affected by several factors such as packaging, quality, price, country of origin, ingredients listed, halal logo and being operated by Muslims, making halal food the most essential choice preferred by the Muslim consumers [4]. Moreover, halal food demand comes from the Muslims' attitude in eating only halal food. This demand has pushed the researchers of information behaviours to reinforce their efforts to conquer the issues and cases of halal food application in Malaysia. Due to the importance of wholesomeness for Muslims, the practices of Total Quality Management (TQM) requires to be implemented for the aim of marketing halal productions as the food producer ought not only concentrate on methods for halal certification [5]. Hence, quality assurance and wholesomeness could increase the desire for such productions. Positively, Muslim consumers have given a growing response to halal, for it is a positive improvement in Islamic beliefs and practices [2]. Consequently, it is essential that halal food should meet both the quality and wholesomeness.

As a fact, research and studies have been extensively done in the field of information seeking behavior such as a professional model of information seeking for engineers, health care and lawyers by ([6], [7], [8], [9]). With that, a lot of models have been improved for halal food products such as [10] and [11]. However, little research links the two types of models: human information behavior models and information seeking models. This research assumes that linking among human information attributes, namely: attitude, habit and awareness of individual and sources of information as an attribute of information seeking model may lead to an effective searching process, thus arriving to the wholesomeness of halal food product among Malaysian Muslim consumers. This study proposes a novel conceptual framework to investigate the factors influencing information seeking behavior for halal food products among Malaysian Muslim consumers.

II. RELATED STUDIES

Previous studies have reported several related factors influencing the information seeking behaviour for halal food productions such as, concerning about ingredients, awareness of an individual, habit, Islamic laws, and attitude. For example, the work in [12] has studied the ambiguity in determining the halal product due to the obstacles of the existing scenarios in the industry among 340 Muslims in Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia. The study instigated that awareness factor is significantly correlated with information seeking behaviour among Muslim families. Work in [13] has identified the factors that give impact on the Malaysian

youth Muslims' behavioural intent to consume halal food at the private higher learning institutions in Malaysia, among consumers aged between 16 and 35 years old. The study uncovered that the positive attitudes of young Muslims and their behavioural dominance towards halal food often affect the intention to consume halal food in Kalang Valley, Malaysia. Work in [14] proposed a model to limit the impact of religious commitment on a halal brand relationship and buying intent. The highlighted point in that study is the usage of this model to define the effect of the halal brand relationship as intermediated between religiosity and buying intent. The influence of brand trust, brand attachment and brand commitment to make a significant relationship with consumers is regarded as a worthy stream in that research.

Though extensive research has been done in the field of information seeking behaviour, still little research links the two types of models, namely: human information behaviour models and information seeking models. This research is the first to link among human information attributes: attitude, habit and awareness of an individual, and sources of information as an attribute of information seeking model.

III. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Fig. 1 depicts the proposed conceptual framework which illustrates the links of human attributes of the halal food model with the attribute of information seeking model to guarantee the wholesomeness of food products. The human attributes selected in this study are attitude, habit and awareness of individuals. The attitude attribute is linked with the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) [10], [11]. The habit attribute is linked with Schematic of Triandis model [15]. As for the awareness of an individual, it is related to the conceptual framework proposed in [12]. This paper attempts to link these attributes with the parameter selected from an existing professional model by [8], along with sources of information, and investigate the relationship among these attributes and sources of information attribute, and finally linking the relationships with the wholesomeness attribute of halal challenges selected from the work of [16].

This study presented three hypotheses to investigate how the relationship among the three human attributes: attitude, habit and awareness of the individual and the information seeking parameter, which are sources of information, can lead to an effective searching for a halal food product among Malaysian Muslim consumers.

A. Relations

R1: A correlation between sources of information and attitude.

R2: A correlation between sources of information and habit.

R3: A correlation between sources of information and awareness of an individual.

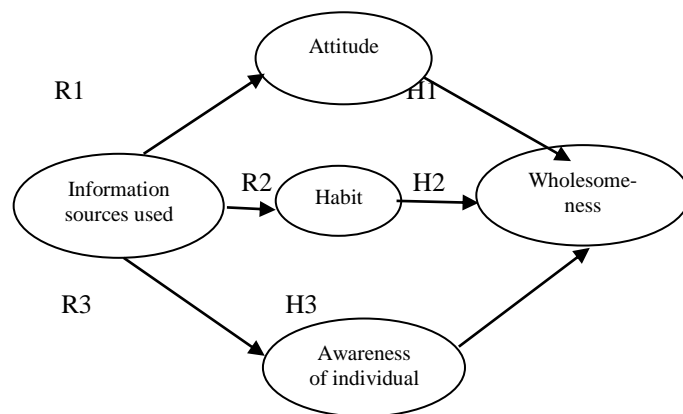


Fig.1 Proposed Conceptual Framework

B. Hypotheses

H1: A correlation between attitude and sources of information exists, that positively used and related to wholesomeness which leads to an effective searching for the halal food product.

H2: A correlation between habit and sources of information exists, that positively used and related to wholesomeness which leads to an effective searching for the halal food product.

H3: A correlation between awareness of individual and sources of information exists, that positively used and related to wholesomeness which leads to an effective searching for the halal food product.

C. Attitude

Work in [11] defined an attitude towards the behavior as “the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question”. According to [11] the intention of an individual to conduct such a behavior strongly depends on the attitude’s favor of the individual with respect to a behavior. Persons’ estimating of a behavioral outcome and the degree of their beliefs, decides the individuals’ attitude. Thus, a favorable attitude towards a behavior comes from a favorable outcome resulting from operating a particular behavior of a strong belief of a person and vice versa. In other words, the stronger the attitude to accept the product, the stronger the intention will be shown in the acceptance behavior and vice versa. Spacious proof has been provided that religion can generally affect consumer attitude and behavior [17], and especially the decisions about buying food and the habits of eating [18].

D. Habit

Various studies using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to food related behaviour have successfully included habit as a separate predictor of motion [19], [20]. Habit promoted by doing an action several times such that a pathway is created by the neurons in the brain, which enable them to move quickly from a trigger point such as watching TV, smoking and eating halal food. Habitual behaviours can take days or even years to develop, depending on the complexity of the habit, and how often they are practiced.

Evidence demonstrates that once neurons have produced the pathway, it stays fixed and thus difficult to break. This may clearly show that the habit of doing or accepting such a product reflects the Islamic rule as an important agenda, noting that once it is exhibited, it will stay fixed.

The importance of consuming halal food products among the religious community will stay in their mind forever once it is permanently practiced. As a result, for some people, the acceptance or consumption of halal food products is considered as a habit because they are familiar with it. This is because a habit is a behaviour that has become automatic and is beyond an individual's awareness. Work in [21] have linked the identity of Muslims with eating halal food. This means that accepting products like eating halal meat can be regarded as a habit for some Muslims because this is their identity.

Thereafter, such behaviour will have a positive influence on the intention to accept products by the religious community, thus affecting the actual behaviour of accepting products. It can be expected that involvement of religious society is stimulated because halal products such as halal meat are perceived as being instrumental in meeting important needs, goals and values for being a Muslim, leading to adopt them as their habits, something they are used to.

E. Awareness of Individual

A major power to instruct halal food productions' manufacturer in the mart is Muslim's awareness. Therefore, as a Muslim, understanding and being awake of the halal and the haram notion is necessary, so we cannot just simply rely on authority. For example, Muslim consumers should check the food product ingredients when they go shopping. It is dynamic to have knowledge about the class of food products for Muslim consumers. The Malaysia Muslim society is still uncertain with products manufactured by Muslims, even though the products are in their choice. Furthermore, using the product cannot be prevented by anyone, and as a trial to deal with it, an individual' consciousness is required to be accomplished through private organizations or association of Islamic consumers [22].

In Malaysia, the level of awareness is low compared to neighboring countries such as Thailand and Indonesia. Hence, the awareness factor has been recommended to be increased among Malaysian Muslim consumers [23]. The limited sources of production information in the mart are the primary reason that leads to this situation. The daily misuse of halal logo by irresponsible persons made this kind of issue at worst. Thus, to avoid this issue, current researchers are motivated to identify consumers' awareness level through suggesting a suitable notion in supporting halal productions.

F. Sources of information

Individuals seek information from various sources, such as handbooks, conferences, journal articles, internet websites, newspapers, social media, colleagues, librarians, own knowledge and family members. These sources of information can be classified by types of channels into: formal (for example, a conference and a journal) or informal (for example, a social media and family members); internal

or external (a source within or outside the organization); oral or written (that is, written including paper copy and electronic text) and personal (own knowledge and experience) [6].

Generally speaking, individuals use information source in different ways. For example, a study of information needs of rural health care workers by [24] found that "journal articles and informal discussions with colleagues were the sources most frequently consulted by physicians, nurses and allied health professionals, whereas health care administrators preferred journal articles and reports".

In another study by [25] on engineers, they have shown that "they have a strong priority for informal sources of information, such as colleagues and their own personal collection of technical reports, handbooks and journal articles".

G. Wholesomeness

Halal is considered an essential part to meet the quality and wholesomeness of the produced food that covers the allowable requirements of Islamic instructions. As a matter of fact, the acceptability and wholesomeness of food products could enhance bodies and souls as well.

Accordingly, meeting halal requirements are a challenge found in the literature due to the difficulty of the food producers' role to meet halal requirements. It is mainly critical for the government to control and supervise all food producers. According to work in [26], the main idea is to ensure that manufactured products should be totally free of pollution and should not contain haram ingredients during its preparation, production and storage. According to [5], the practices of Total Quality Management (TQM) need to be applied for the purpose of marketing halal products where the food manufacturer should not only focus on methods for halal certification. Therefore, quality assurance and wholesomeness could increase the demand for such products. This is in correspondence to the findings suggested in [4] where texture, taste, variation, packaging, quality, freshness and price are the influencing factors that make halal food the most important option among Muslim consumer priorities.

IV. METHODS AND VALIDATION

To validate the proposed framework and achieve our aim of this study, a survey on the availability and the reliability of information about halal food products on the Malaysian market has been developed. The survey seeks to investigate the potential factors and relationships among human attributes, namely: attitude, habit and awareness of the individual and information seeking attribute, information sources that might influence the information seeking behavior for halal food productions among Malaysian Muslim consumers, thus arriving to an effective searching process for halal food products. The survey consists of five sections: demographic information, the importance of halal food, availability and reliability of information on halal food products, factors impacting the choice of halal food products and information sources of halal food products.

V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This research is one such contribution that has looked into the deeper aspects of human attributes along with information seeking attributes by linking human attributes, namely: attitude, habit and awareness of individual with the information seeking attribute, information sources, that positively used and related to wholesomeness of the halal food products, and hence proposing a conceptual framework for guiding the process of information seeking behavior for halal food products among Malaysian Muslim consumers. The major findings of this study are the variations of agreement towards attitude, habit, awareness of individual and information sources used, both formal and informal, for searching halal food products among Malaysian Muslim consumers. These variations among Malaysian Muslim consumers might determine the relationships between human and information seeking attributes such that we reach to the wholesomeness and hence to the effective searching process for halal food products among Malaysian Muslim consumers.

The future research might focus on confirmation of the above relationships in other settings for example: linking the mentioned human attributes with another information seeking attribute like process verification, and hence arriving to another searching process guidance for halal food products. Due to the fact that this research is limited to Malaysian Muslim consumers, future research might consider Non-Muslim consumers in Malaysia and even in other countries. Accordingly, halal food should be hygienically prepared, treated and produced so as to be healthy and safe for human consumption in general.

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