CONSUMERS' KNOWLEDGE AND READINESS TO ACCEPT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MANDATORY MALAYSIA HALAL CERTIFICATION SCHEME (MHCS)

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ABSTRACT

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. **Aim:** This study aimed to analyze the level of knowledge and readiness of consumers in Malaysia to accept the implementation of mandatory MHCS by food industries. **Methods:** The study was quantitatively conducted involving consumers who were structured and randomly selected from five different zones in Malaysia. All the study data were collected using a specific pre-tested questionnaire and analyzed using the statistical computer program SPSS 25.0 (Windows). **Results:** 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 knowledge and readiness status of Malay Muslim consumers is higher than non-Malay and non-Muslim consumers. **Conclusion:** The consumers' knowledge level could be used to indicate country readiness in implementing mandatory MHCS.

KEYWORDS: Level of Knowledge, Readiness Status, Consumers, Halal Certificate

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 (Trade Description Act, 2011) 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.

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 really understood halal food? (2) Can the consumers or the general public in Malaysia as a whole 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 as written by Othman et al. (2020), Nor Aini Haji Idris & Mohd Ali Mohd Noor (2013), Siti Fatimah Hamidon (2016) and Zaimah, R.1 (2014). But all of the research before focused on a specific group of respondents and using a small number of respondents.

This study aimed to evaluate the level of understanding and readiness of consumers in Malaysia involving all races and religions in accepting the implementation of mandatory MHCS by all food industries in Malaysia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted quantitatively involving consumers who were randomly selected from five different zones in Malaysia covering 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 25.0 (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 $p<0.05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondents and Demographic Factors

In this study, about 875 respondents participated in answering the questionnaire. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents according to states and zones in Malaysia where 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.

Table 1 Distribution of Respondents by State and Zones in Malaysia

Country	Number of Respondents	%	Malaysia Zone	Number of Respondents	%
Perlis	32	3.7	North	165	18.9
Kedah	43	4.9			
Penang	41	4.7			
Perak	49	5.6			
Selangor	149	17.0	Middle	203	23.2
Kuala Lumpur	54	6.2			
Melaka	34	3.9	South	141	16.1
Negeri Sembilan	36	4.1			
Johor	71	8.1			
Pahang	158	18.1	East	262	29.9
Terengganu	56	6.4			
Kelantan	48	5.5			
Sabah	59	6.7	Sabah & Sarawak	104	11.9
Sarawak	45	5.1			
Total	875	100.0	Total	875	100.0

In this study, 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. Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents according to race, religion and Muslim and non-Muslim categories.

Table 2 Distribution of Respondents by Race and Religion

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

The distribution of respondents in this study according to demographic factors; gender, race and religion were normally distributed as tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnova test and the Shapiro-Wilk test.

Respondents Comprehension Scores

The results show that the mean comprehension score obtained by the respondents in this study was about 75.4%, which is a 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 show that only the respondents' comprehension scores according to gender are not significantly different (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 havee a modest impact on the difference respondents' comprehension scores while race, religion and Muslim/non-Muslim factors significantly impact the difference respondents' comprehension scores. The study also found that there is 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 respondents the higher 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 according to race factor.
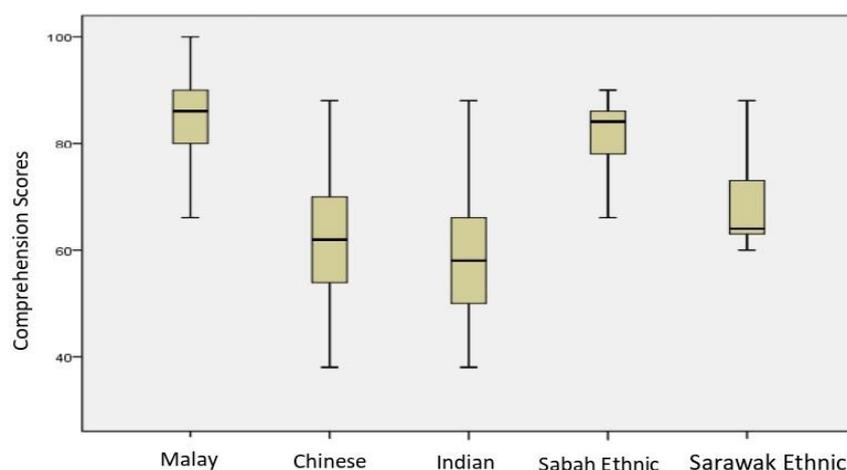

Figure 1 Distribution of Respondents' Comprehension Scores by Race

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. These 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 (the difference is also 50%). The range of differences in scores of non-religious respondents was small (difference of 50%) but a small number of respondents influenced it. 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 most Muslim respondents is higher than that of other religious respondents.

Respondent Answer Analysis

Table 3 shows a list of inaccurate respondents' answers by highest percentage.

Table 3 List of Inaccurate Answers by Highest Percentage

Question No.	Question	Inaccurate Answer (%)	Level of Understanding
1.iii	The order to eat halal food is for Muslims only.	71.5	Basic understanding
10.iv	Enzymes extracted from the blood of animals that are halal and slaughtered according to Syariah laws are halal for use in food manufacturing.	56.5	Technical understanding / high level
1.i	Halal food is a food that does not contain pork only (Pork Free).	48.7	Basic understanding
5.ii	Alcohol obtained not from liquor is halal to be used.	42.4	Technical understanding / high level
10.ii	Proteins extracted from chicken feathers and the chicken is slaughtered according to Islamic law are prohibited from being used.	40.3	Technical understanding / high level
9.iv	The use of unclean equipment does not affect the status of halal food.	40.1	Basic understanding
1.v	Syubhah food is a food that can be ascertained of its halal or haram status	39.7	Basic understanding
9.v	Canned soft drinks can be stored in the same refrigerator that stores alcohol.	39.3	Technical understanding / high level
7.iii	Foods that contain probiotics from not clearly halal sources are halal to be eaten.	37.9	Technical understanding / high level
8.iv	Alcohol is categorized as Najs Mughallazah.	36.8	Technical understanding / high level

From Table 3, it shows that the inaccuracy answers by the respondents, not only involving technical understanding or question of high understanding level but also involving the basic understanding questions. Table 4 shows the percentage of respondents according to Muslim and Non-Muslim categories who answered the question inaccurately.

Table 4 Percentage of Respondents by Muslim and Non-Muslims
Categories Who Answer the Questions Inaccurately

Question No.	Muslim	Non-Muslim			Inaccurate Answer (%)
	Islam (%)	Christian (%)	Buddhist (%)	Hindu (%)	
1.iii	68.6*	83.8*	76.3*	73.3*	71.5
10.iv	49.5*	64.9*	65.0*	73.3*	56.5
1.i	26.7	82.4*	76.8*	96.5*	48.7
5.ii	37.6	68.9*	40.7*	47.7*	42.4
10.ii	25.3	67.6*	61.0*	67.4*	40.3
9.iv	35.9	51.4*	46.9*	44.2*	40.1
1.v	21.7	71.6*	65.0*	69.8*	39.7
9.v	42.9*	36.5	33.9	32.6	39.3
7.iii	15.7	73.0*	71.2*	77.9*	37.9
8.iv	29.9	52.7*	45.8*	46.5*	36.8

Note: * indicates inaccurate answers above 40%.

From Table 4, most Muslim respondents do not understand exactly (answer inaccurately more than 40%) the basic question as in question number 1.iii (the order to eat halal food is for Muslims only), while for high-level technical understanding questions, most Muslim respondents do not understand exactly the question number 10.iv (enzyme extracted from the blood of animals that are halal and slaughtered according to Islamic law is halal to be used in manufacturing food), 9.v (canned soft drinks can be stored in the same refrigerator that stores alcohol) and 5.ii (Alcohol obtained not from liquor is halal to be used). Non-Muslim respondents including Christians, Buddhists and Hindus did not understand exactly almost the entire questions in the above questions except for question 9.v. The non-Muslim community may already be familiar with the question of the segregation of liquor with halal drinks.

Table 5 shows the percentage of respondents by race who answered questions inaccurately.

Table 5 Percentage of Respondents by Race Who
Answer Questions Inaccurately

Question No.	Malay (%)	China (%)	India (%)	Inaccurate Answer (%)
1.iii	68.8*	76.4*	72.7*	71.5
10.iv	49.5*	65.0*	73.9*	56.5
1.i	26.7	76.8*	95.5*	48.7
5.ii	37.9	48.4*	47.7*	42.4
10.ii	25.5	61.0*	65.9*	40.3
9.iv	36.0	47.6*	44.3*	40.1
1.v	21.7	65.9*	69.3*	39.7
9.v	42.7*	35.4	33.0	39.3
7.iii	15.8	69.5*	76.1*	37.9
8.iv	29.9	48.4*	45.5*	36.8

Note: * indicates inaccurate answers above 40%.

From Table 5, it was found that Malay, Chinese and Indian respondents followed the same trend as Muslim and Non-Muslim respondents (Table 2) where most Malay respondents did not understand exactly the basic question in question 1.iii (the order to eat halal food is for Muslims only), while for high-level technical understanding questions, most Malay respondents do not understand exactly the question 10.iv (enzyme extracted from the blood of a halal animal and slaughtered according to Islamic law is halal for use in the manufacture of food), 9.v (canned soft drinks can be stored in the

same refrigerator that stores alcohol) and 5.ii (Alcohol obtained not from liquor is halal to be used). Most Chinese and Indian respondents did not understand exactly almost the entire question in the above questions except for question 9.v.

CONCLUSION

This study involves many 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 to accept 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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