

Selecting Halal Food : A Comparative Study Of The Muslim And Non Muslim Malaysian Student Consumer

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Abstract

There is an enormous and rapidly growing global market for Halal products. Halal is no longer a mere religious obligation or observance, but is considered as the standard of choice for Muslims as well as non-Muslims worldwide. Whilst Muslims can only consume products that meet strict religious requirements, the Halal concept has not been a major element among non-Muslim consumers. Very little is known about halal components and other determinants that has an impact on the selection of the muslim and non muslim consumers to choose halal food. By identifying consumers' thoughts and behaviors on the halal issue, marketers can begin to understand how they choose specific products and brands. Thus, this study aims to investigate the factors influencing the intention to select halal food amongst the Malaysian student consumers. A survey was conducted in a public university in a Southern State in Malaysia. The data were collected using a self-administrated structured questionnaire from 220 student respondents using a convenience sampling method. Only 175 responses were deemed suitable for further analysis, yielding a response rate of 79 per cent. Descriptive statistic and inferential statistics was used to identify the differences of factors influencing the selection of halal food amongst the muslim and non muslim student consumers.

Keywords : *Halal food, muslim consumer, non-muslim consumer*

Introduction

Food plays an important part of religious observance and spiritual ritual for many faiths. Food is defined as any substance, consumed to provide nutritional support for the body, in an effort to produce energy, maintain life, or stimulate growth.(New Britannica Encyclopedia,2013), maintaining proper health and also helps in the prevention and cure of diseases. Apart from the nutritional value, food has a significant societal, historical and religious role (Siti Hasnah,2011).

In many societies, religion plays one of the most influential roles shaping food choice (Musaiger, 1993, Dindyal, 2003). Yun, Verma, Pysarchik, Yu and Chowdhury (2008) found that consumers consider buying new products if the products do not violate or contradict their consecrated ideas. As accorded by Delener (1994) and Pettinger, Holdsworth, & Gerber (2004), religion can influence consumer attitude and behaviour as well as food purchasing decision and eating habits (Mullen, Williams and Hunt, 2000, Blackwell, Miniard and Engel, 2001). The impact of religion on food consumption depends on the religion itself and on the extent to which individuals interpret and follow the teachings of their religion. Most religions such as Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism forbid certain foods, for example pork or beef except for Christianity that has no food taboos (Sack, 2001).

Religion is one of the potential individual factors that will shape consumption decisions, especially among the Muslims. Food in Islam is contained within the concept of halal (permitted) and haram (prohibited). A growing concern amongst the Muslims about the food that they consume and the ingredients in it, has led to a stimulus in demand for Halal food (Sungkar, 2010). Halal food is consumed not only by 1.5 billion Muslims around the world, but also by at least 500 million non Muslims(Sha Peng Cheng,Honorary Director of China Islamic Research Center as cited in peopledaily.com.cn,2011). Halal is no longer just purely religious issue. Halal is the careful consideration and deliberation of a subject matter from all angles especially in the economic and scientific sense (Phuah,Jamaliah, Hoe and Mesbahi,2013). The halal consumption is also influenced by factors of , health, hygiene, taste , environment friendly, respect for animals welfare and social issues (such as religious identity and degree of acculturation) (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2005; Bonne & Verbeke, 2006 ,Burgmann, 2007). Halal products are growing in popularity among non-Muslim consumers due to humane animal treatment concerns and the perception that Halal products are healthier and safer. Moreover, Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (2009) latest report in March 2009, stated that the focus on food being wholesome also creates a strong opportunity to market Halal food as a lifestyle choice; the new organic product, especially in the USA and Europe where consumers already pay premium prices for organic foods. Many non-Muslims have already chosen to eat Halal food because of the perception that it is a healthy choice. It is expected that in the next five years, the consumption of Halal food will increase among the health-conscious markets.(Golnaz,Shamsuddin and Mad Nasir,2012)

Religion provides guidelines for not only Muslim consumers but also channel the behavior of non-Muslims consumers (Delener, 1994). The impact of religion has an internal influence on the lives of individuals and guides different rituals and behaviors Understanding the role of food in

cultural and religious practice is an important part of showing respect and responding to the needs of people from a range of religious communities.

The Halal Industry

Muslims worldwide today are experiencing an increase in their awareness towards the halal concept and this has opened up the demand for halal foods in compliance with their religious requirements. The unique identity and requirement of the Muslim market for Halal products is steadily being built into products and services across different sectors ó from food, beverages & consumables to non-food products and services. The Halal industry now spans across food processing, food service, cosmetics, personal care, pharmaceuticals and logistics industries, and expanding further into lifestyle offerings including Halal travel & hospitality services. (Halal Industry Market Report Malaysia 2012, www.egnatia.biz). In 2008, the global Halal industry was reported to be worth USD580 billion and in just four years, it has amounted to USD2.3 trillion in 2012. The biggest halal product segment, which is halal food, accounts for nearly 29 percent of total halal product trade that comes to about USD661 billion or 16 percent of the world's food trade(Malaysia SME, 31 Mar 2012).The halal food, is pegged to grow at a rate of 29% annually(www.establishmentpost.com, 2013). In the last few years, there has been an increase in food manufacturers seeking Halal certification all around the world, including in non-Muslim majority countries, where supermarkets are stocking them in greater numbers (www.matrade.gov.my,2012). Halal food is in the realm of business and trade, and it is becoming a global symbol for quality assurance and lifestyle choice (Jumaaton Azmi, Managing Director of KasehDia Sdn Bhd as cited in IslamOnline.net, 2005). The realm of halal may extend to all consumables such as toiletries, pharmaceutical, cosmetics and services including finance.(Lada et al 2009).

Furthermore, the Islamic awareness of halal food is expanding worldwide especially in the non-Muslim countries. Interestingly, the halal food concept is also gaining acceptance among non-Muslim consumers as halal food is perceived to be healthier with safe ingredients.(www.brerecorder.com,2009) and halal foods often are perceived as specially selected and processed to achieve the highest standards of quality.

Malaysia and the Halal Food Industry.

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multilingual society. The total population in 2010 was 28.3 million of which 91.8 per cent were Malaysian citizens and 8.2 per cent were non-citizens. Malaysian citizens consist of the ethnic groups Bumiputera (67.4%), Chinese (24.6%), Indians (7.3%) and Others (0.7%). Among the Bumiputera citizens, the Malays was the predominant ethnic group in Peninsular Malaysia which constituted 63.1 per cent. Islam was the most widely professed religion in Malaysia with the proportion of 61.3 per cent. As a multi-racial nation, other religions embraced were Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%) and Hinduism (6.3%)(Census 2010, www.statistic.gov.my). These Islamic values directly and indirectly influence the Malay lifestyle and food consumption.

The Government of Malaysia has placed a lot of efforts into promoting the local halal food industry. The halal industry is becoming a major economic contributor for Malaysia. Its export

value for all halal products for 2011 was US\$10.7 billion which was slightly over 5% of the total export for that year. Out of this, US\$3.6 billion is from halal food(www.establishmentpost.com,2013). The market for halal food products has been seen as a universally accepted products not only targeted towards Muslim consumers.

Problem Statement

Food choices and consumption behavior are imbued with social rules and meanings. The food choice and consumption is strongly linked to religion, which has acted as a strong motive. Religious structure and rituals are important influencers for the guidance of the consumer behavior intention to purchase the food products. According to the study of Sukman et al. (2009) on the consumption of GMF soybean in Malaysia, it was found that among different factors affecting the attitude towards GM soybean, religion and custom also played a significant role. Thus, in a multi-racial and culturally diverse society it is imperative for non-Muslims to understand the cultural and religious taboos of their Muslim counterparts. Halal principles have not become a major element in the fabric of non-Muslims lives due to a lack of knowledge among non-Muslims on Halal principles and insufficient information on the benefits of the Halal process(Golnaz et al ,2012). Halal values can be popularized among non-Muslim consumers if the society at large is made to be more aware of issues concerning health, hygiene, safety, the environment, social justice and animal welfare that comes along with the Halal ways of doing things. This includes understanding Halal principles which is important even though it may not be part of non Muslims daily life concerns.

Halal principles have now become a universal concept. It encompasses products and services of the highest quality that meet the ever increasing awareness and needs of non-Muslim consumers(Golnaz et al,2012). Investigating consumer decisions towards halal products is topical, first, given the halal food market size and its evolution in Malaysia, and second, given the policy relevance of the issue. Hence it is important for organizations to investigate, understand and gauge the role of religion in purchasing decision of its intended segment. This will enable organizations to develop products that conform to the religious requirements of its customers. Furthermore, they can reap the benefits of such strategies by integrating religious cues and symbols in its communication. Thus, the study of consumer behaviour in Malaysia is vital when it comes to marketing of halal products. The issue of halal or haram is of great importance as many non-Muslim do not understand the Islamic dietary codes and rules(Golnaz et al,2010).

Therefore,in the case of Halal food and consumers in Malaysia, some of the questions that need to be resolved are as follows:

What are the predominant determinants that may influence Muslim and non-Muslim selection of Halal food?

What are the different factors of Halal food selection between Muslim and non-Muslim consumers?

Literature Review

Muslim and Non muslim

The followers of Islam are called Muslims. Muslim is an Arabic word, which means someone who is in a state of Islam (submission to the will and law of God). Muslims come from all different races, ethnic groups, cultures and nationalities. Whilst a person who does not follow the religion of Islam is a non muslim (www.collinsdictionary.com).

Student Consumer

In this study, the focus is on the youth segment specifically the young adults in the pursuit of higher education from the age of 20-30 years . This youth segment is also known as the Generation Y or Millennials and were born between the years of 1981 and 2000. The millennials are now in their tertiary education level or have just joined the workforce. Millennials is a key customer segment for food service, not just in terms of market size but also due to their lifestyle and consumption habits. Millennials spend more than half of their money on ordering food for takeout and spend higher percent of their total money than other generations on snacks, and have a higher order incidence of snack food items (NPD Group Millennial Research,2011). Millennials are also influencing the new trend of healthy and hyper conscious eating. A few other trends Millennials are influencing are; eating meatless or vegetarian options, participating in vegan or raw diets, consuming a lot of fruits and vegetables, eating asian cuisine and eating familiar comforts food. Also, according to the Collegiate Gen Y Eating :Culinary Trend Mapping Report,(2012), college students will develop new eating habits and expectations that will stick with them long after graduation, which will impact the food industry for the long term. The Collegiate Gen Y Eating report indicates that the college Millennial demographic has a stronger preference for nutrition, flavor, comfort/indulgence and speed/convenience compared to previous generations. In order to attract this generation, foodservice operators and manufacturers will need to understand both the similarities and differences among millennials.

Factors affecting the Understanding of the Halal Food Concept and Selection of Halal Food

Religion

Generally, religion can be defined as a strong belief in a supernatural power that controls human destiny or an institution to express belief in a divine power. Religion is a system of beliefs and practices that dictates individual response and interpretations regarding what is supernatural and sacred (Johnstone, 1975). Religion is one of the most significant forces in the lives of people and works as an accountant that unifies, divides and amalgamates social groups (McCullough and Willoughby, 2009). It also persuades people's goals, decisions, motivations, purpose and satisfaction (Zimbardo and Ruch, 1979). Religion acts as a foundation stone on which humans build their attitudes and behaviour (Essoo and Dibb, 2004). Religious beliefs are tangled with cognitive elements, providing the basis of knowledge that control and justify our attitudes and behavior (Foxall and Goldsmith, 1994). This influence also plays a dominant role in shaping individual's attitude and behaviour towards material goods and services (Fam et al., 2004). Furthermore, in the consumption world context, religious obligations and beliefs direct people's attitude and feeling towards a range of products, such as food, financial, cosmetics and pharmaceutical products (Jamal, 2003; Essoo and Dibb, 2004; Mullen et al., 2000) by specifying prohibited or non-prohibited things and stating what is religiously acceptable or what is not (Fam

et al., 2002). Religion acts as a cultural lens through which a respondent decodes the incoming message, thus directly influencing the outcome of marketing communication (Michell and Al-Mossawi, 1995; De Run et al., 2010).

Quality

To the Muslims, there is an additional need for food quality assurance in that only food deemed as halal is fit to be consumed.(Mohani, Hashanah, Haslina and Juliana,2009). Quality is defined as the overall excellence or superiority that consumers perceive from a product/service (Zeithaml, 1990). Quality can be define as "fitness for use" or more appropriately for foodstuffs is; "fitness for consumption", which leads to what experts in ISO standard called customer or consumer satisfaction. Thus, quality can be described as requirements necessary to satisfy the needs and expectations of the consumers. Quality management practices such as adopting halal certification can boost customers' confidence and hence can lead to their satisfaction(Mohani et al,2009). Halal certification is known for its beneficial characteristics which are not only to be enjoyed by Muslim consumers but also by non-Muslims. Additionally, implementing Halal requirements will produce better quality products compared to those that only implement the conventional standards (Talib and Ali, 2009). Halal certification in an Islamic kind of way emphasized the importance of stringent rules, purity and ethics. Mohd Yusoff (2004) defined halal certification as an examination of food processes in its preparation, slaughtering, cleaning, processing, handling, disinfecting, storing, transportation and management practices. Halal is not only limited to the food materials and ingredients used in a restaurant but covers all aspects in the food supply chain as well as personal hygiene, clothing, utensils and working area (MohdYusoff, 2004). The role of halal certification is to ensure that the halal requirements of the goods are in place and signals that foods are permissible and lawful for the Muslim to consume has met the criteria for food quality(Sharifah et al,2011) and that the products must be good, safe and fit to consume. Halal requirements must be complied to at all stages of the production and supply chain, including procurement of raw materials and ingredients, logistics and transportation, packaging and labeling (www.hdcglobal.com,2013) . The Halal requirements meet many of the conventional quality standards, such as ISO, Codex Alimentarius, Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point and Good Hygienic Practice. Halal certification is important as it is the sole identifying mark that the product meets the halal requirements.(Mohani et al,2009). In fact, halal certification covers not only religious needs but are also commercially and community based.(Sharifah et al,2011).

In Malaysia, JAKIM is responsible in the issuance of halal certificates and execution of halal policy related to food and non food products (JAKIM, 2010). JAKIM would ensure all requirements stipulated under the MS 1500:2004 halal standards to be fulfilled before any halal product be awarded a halal certificate. The process therefore reiterates that, above all else, every Muslim demands that a product complies fully with Islamic religious standards. Therefore, halal certification offers such reassurance to Muslim consumers. The Muslims trust that the halal certification issued by JAKIM is an indicator of halal quality.

Health

Health is the greatest gift of all human beings from the Creator. Healthy living is an integral part of Islam. Furthermore, the Quran and the Sunnah outline the teachings that show every Muslim how to protect their health and live life in a state of purity. Food plays a very important role for health and in the daily life of a believer.(Siti Hasnah,2011) Consumers today understand the importance of health and they are searching for food that can keep them healthy, prevent diseases and improve their mental state and quality of life (Ahmad, 1996; Hasler, 1998; Milner, 1999; Poulsen, 1999).

Eating halal foods is not only good for physical health but also for spiritual development since it fulfills God's commandment The fact of the matter is, Muslim consumers are very similar to any other consumer segments, demanding healthy and quality products, which must also conform to Shariah requirements (Al-Harran and Low, 2008). As people become more health-conscious, Halal principles are no longer confined to the strictly religious but are becoming an appealingly healthy and hygienic cuisine style.

Food Safety

Within this context, halal food emphasized that cleanliness and hygiene is related to food safety. Food hygiene required steps and procedures that control the operational conditions within a food establishment (Hashim, 2004) in order to produce safe and hygienic food for human consumption.

The Malaysian Standard on Halal Food (MS 1500:2004) complies with the international standards of Good Manufacturing Practices and Good Hygiene Practices and prescribes practical guidelines for the food industry on the preparation and handling of Halal food (including nutrient supplements) based on quality, sanitary and safety considerations and serves as a basic requirement for food products and food trade or business in Malaysia.

The issues of food safety are becoming more complex in line with the advance of food technology. Trading food without certification and providing false documentation are among the contribution factors in the issue. Consumers ultimately must have confidence in the value of certification if they want to pay more for the certified goods (Caskie and Davis, 2001). The impact of food safety issue to the consumers is that they will lose their trust when the food they eat is not actually what they expected. Therefore, halal certification is a critical issue that must be addressed carefully by the food, hospitality and restaurant industry players in consideration of the Islamic dietary laws (Bonne and Verbeke, 2008; Mohamed Nasir and Pereira, 2008).

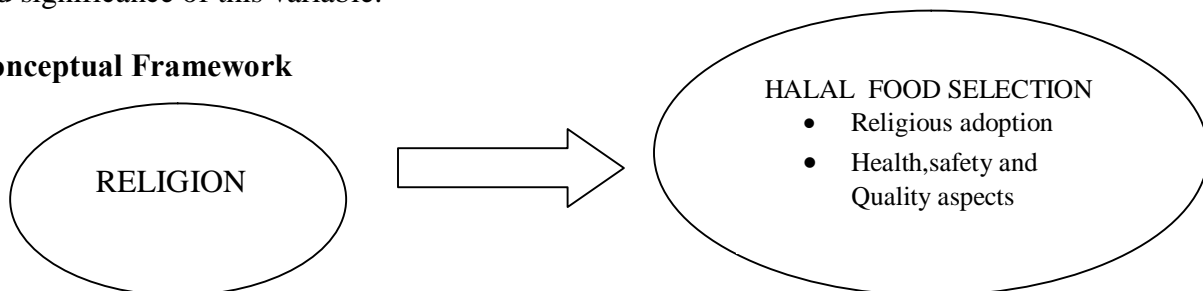
Past Studies on Halal Food

Muslim consumers are very similar to any other consumer segments, demanding healthy and quality products, which must also conform to Shariah requirements (Al-Harran and Low, 2008). Consumers would turn their attention to a well-marketed product that does not have a halal mark but they would read its ingredients, in contrast to purchasing one that has less credibility but sports a halal logo (Al-Harran and Low, 2008). Riaz and Chaudray (2004) pointed out that Halal logo was found to be important as a symbol of quality and safety. The author, Rajagopal et al

(2011), has identified that halal certification can be used as a marketing tool in promoting the halal brand/products or services whilst findings by Alam and Sayuti, (2011), have shown that the awareness of the halal concept and the knowledge of halal standards among customers are still low. Mohani et al,2009 found that religion plays an important role in determining the choice of food especially among the Muslims. Bonne, Blacker and Verbeke (2007) have used the theory of planned behavior to explain Muslim consumer's behavior towards meat consumption in the light of their religious obligations. Lada et al,(2009) concluded that different consumers have different beliefs about Halal products, where attitudes and subjective norm plays an important role to perform intention and supported by a study by Azmi(2010)

Academicians (Lada & Tanakinjal and Amin, 2009; Shaharudin, Pani, Mansor, Elias and Sadek, 2010;) Lada, et al., (2009) found that the concept of halal food are opening new vistas and avenues for the marketers and is emerging as a new brand concept (Wilson & Liu, 2010). In Malaysia, a research has been done by Baizuri et al. (2012) to examine the level of JAKIM service quality from the perspective of halal food manufacturers, and the result shows that JAKIM has not met manufacturer expectations. Golnaz et al. (2010) found that Non- Muslim customers who lived in a multi-religious social-environment like Malaysia are aware of halal food, whereas Non-Muslim customers understand about the safety of the halal food and are satisfied with halal products and services(Mir et al,2010) . In addition non-Muslim also emphasized the importance of knowledge relating to Muslim dietary prohibition and religious practices by expressing their understandings on conforming to the halal standard and procedures (Sharifah et al,2011). Golnaz et al (2012) found that as non-Muslim consumers become more educated, they are more likely to be familiar with Halal principles as shown by the positive effect and significance of this variable.

Conceptual Framework



Research Objectives

To determine the factors that may influence Muslim and non-Muslim selection of Halal food
To identify the different factors of Halal food selection between Muslim and non-Muslim consumers

H-1: There is a significant difference in the means of the religious adoption factor for non Muslim and Muslim consumers

H-2: There is a significant difference in the means of the health, safety and quality aspect factor for non Muslim and Muslim consumers

Methodology

Sampling and instruments

The purposive sampling method was chosen, with individual subjects representing individual sampling units. The sample for this study comprised 175 student participants of the Faculty of Technology Management and Business ,University Tun Hussein on Malaysia, aged over 18, and representing the millenials segment. The demographic profile included three items: ethnicity, gender, religion and the consumption of halal food.

The survey technique were adopted and structured questionnaires were circulated to the students. The structured questionnaire consisted of two parts (demographic and the factors influencing the intention to choose halal food). The questionnaire took seven to ten minutes to fill. It was comprised of 19 items. The questionnaire items were extracted and adapted from selected studies (e.g Golnaz et al,(2008,2009,2010), Sharifah et al ,Lada et al(2009)). A five-points Likert scale from was used to measure the intensity of responses, where 1 meant strongly disagree and 5 meant strongly agree.

Prior to the survey, a pilot study was conducted to test the suitability of the instrument. A total of 30 questionnaires were circulated among respondents, collected, and analyzed. The results of the pilot study show an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.907.

Findings

All data analysis was conducted using SPSS v. 17 The constructs were also tested for unidimensionality and reliability and were found to be relatively sound. An alpha coefficient value of around 0.97 was found for the survey.

Socio-demographic Information

The sample consists of 175 multiracial student respondents. As can be seen in Table 1 majority of the respondents were muslim (64 percent) and non muslim (36 percent). The ethic distribution were Malay (61.7%), Chinese (32.6 percent) followed by Indians (3.4percent) and Bumiputera (1.7 percent). With regard to religion, 64 percent of the respondents were Islam, 29.7 percent were Buddhist, 1.7 percent were Hindu and 4.6 percent were Christian. The result showed that most of the respondents were between 20 to 24 years (76.6 percent), while 17.1 percent was less than 20 years, 5.7 percent were between 25-29 years and 0.6 percent were more than 29 years, thus reflecting the segment of the millenials. Whilst 30.9 percent of the respondent were male and 69.1 percent female.

Table 1 : Demographics

Characteristics	Percent		Characteristics	Percent
Gender			Etnicity	61.7
Male	30.9		Malay	32.6
Female	69.1		Chinese	3.4
			Indian	1.7
Age			Bumiputera	.6
Under 20 years	17.1		Others	
20-24 years	76.6			
25-29 years	5.7		Religion	
Above 29 years	.6		Islam	64.0
			Buddha	29.7
Muslim/Non-muslim			Hindu	1.7
muslim	64.0		Christian	4.6
non muslim	36.0			

Another step toward determining the understanding and familiarity of Halal food selection among the consumers is to find how much they are concerned about the current issues on religious obligations, food safety, health and quality aspect . Table 2 shows the respondents' opinion on to what extent those stated issues are considered to be important. By referring to the mean, the overall majority of the respondents are concerned about religious obligation issues (4.07) and food safety, health and quality aspect (4.03) in their selection choice. Comparing between muslim and non muslim,(refer to Table 3), it could be seen that the muslim have a very high scoring of the mean 4.59 and 4.47 for the respective factors. However, the non muslim also showed a strong scoring for both factors with the mean 3.16 for religious obligation and 3.26 for the other factor.

The means for each factor : religious obligation and health, safety, quality aspect, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 :Factors means

Item	Mean	Variance	N of Items
Religious obligation	4.075	.055	8
Health,Safety and Quality	4.038	.010	11
Overall	4.015	.056	20

Table 3: Muslim versus non muslim means on factors

	muslim non	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Religious obligation	muslim	112	4.59	.525	.050
	non muslim	63	3.16	.761	.096
Health,Safety and Quality	muslim	112	4.47	.546	.052
	non muslim	63	3.26	.733	.092

Table 4 highlights the differences in means between the different religion. Interestingly non muslim of the Hindu religion shows the highest means for both factors than the other two religion, Buddhism and Christianity . The mean for religious obligation according to the non-muslim religions are : Hinduism(3.67), Bhuddism(3.19) and Christianity (2.73). Whilst the mean for the health, safety, quality aspect are as follows: Hinduism(3.39), Bhuddism(3.32) and Christianity (2.85).

Table 4: Individual religion means

Item	Religion	Mean	Std. Deviation
Religious obligation	Islam	4.59	.525
	Buddhist	3.19	.772
	Hindu	3.67	1.063
	Christian	2.73	.375
Health,Safety and Quality	Islam	4.47	.546
	Buddhist	3.32	.740
	Hindu	3.39	.533
	Christian	2.85	.684

To test H-1 and H-2, independent sample t-test was conducted.

Table 5 presents the result of t- test of the measured variables. There are significant differences for all the studied variables between muslim and non muslims consumer. Hence, H-1 and H-2 were supported.

Table 5 : Independent sample T-Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Religious obligation	5.435	.021	14.665	173	.000	1.432	.098
Health,Safety and Quality	.212	.646	12.432	173	.000	1.214	.098

Discussion And Conclusion

It could be seen that the orientation of the muslims students in selecting halal food more are towards the religious obligations (mean 4.59) whilst for non muslim they are more concern on the issue of health, safety and quality aspect(mean 3.26) for their food selection. The mean of 3.16 for faith and beliefs and 3.26 for health, safety and quality factor received for the non muslim also indicated that most of them were aware of the Halal Food concept. It was found that all the respondents regardless of their ethnicity and religious beliefs understand and are familiar with Halal Food concept. Non-Muslim respondents has also emphasized the importance of knowledge relating to Muslim dietary prohibition and religious practices as seen from the the scores of the religious obligation factor. Interestingly the non-muslim of the Hindusm religion showed the highest means from the other two group of religion, with Buddhism trailing next. This might be due to the religious observance and dietary laws are stricter in the two religions as they might also have some prohibition that are similar and could be found in the halal food concept. Whereas, for the Christian consumer they tend to be freer in their dietary restrictions and are not so concerned in religious adoption and health,safety,quality aspects issues in their selection of food. The mean of 3.67 for religious obligation factors and 3.39 for health, safety and quality aspects also suggest that the knowledge about Halal food concept is higher in the Hindu consumers than the other two religion group and Hindu consumer also favours health,safety and quality aspects when selecting their food. The lower means of 2.73 and 2.85 for the religious obligation and health,safety and quality aspects for the Christian consumers might suggest that they have less understanding and knowledge of the Halal food concept and religious adoption and health,safety and quality aspects in selecting food are not of priority.

When tested for the significance between the Muslims and Non-Muslims versus their food selection based on the two factors-religious obligation and health,safety and quality aspects; both of them are significant at $p < 0.05$, 95% confidence level. Thus the findings in this study supports that religion plays an important role in determining the choice of food especially among the Muslims and this is in line with the findings of Mohani et al,(2009).

The high mean for the consumers-muslims and non-muslim for both factors could also be due to the respondent segment of the millenials and their educational background whereby for the millenials, their emphasis on food are more towards the importance of health and sustainable lifestyles. Also, the younger generation in Malaysia has been placed on the integration of ethnic groups at school. Thus, they are more aware of the Halal principles and for the non muslim student they have mixed with Muslim students throughout their schooling years. The respondent involved in this study are all students at the tertiary level of education and thus their knowledge and understanding of the halal issue is better due to their high education. Therefore, the results from this study could not be generalized to other segments and of different education level.

This study have provided an insight into Malaysian Muslim and non-Muslim consumers attitudes toward Halal food products. Although non-Muslims seem to understand the Halal food concept with regards to sustainability issues and fulfilling religious obligations, the dissemination of information with regards to Halal Food concept must be continued. The importance of the Halalness of food products to the Muslim communities has to be highlighted to the non-Muslims so that they can understand and become more familiar with the strict requirements in preparing Halal food for Muslims. As a multi-ethnic nation with many different religious backgrounds, the implementation of Halal principles and concept on all food manufactures and food providers is a win-win situation to both Muslim and non-Muslims in this country.(Golnaz et al,2012)

A food manufacturer or a marketer needs to understand how the Malaysian consumers, construct their preferences according to their religious orientation as this will help support the selection of appropriate target markets and provide a basis for marketing-controlling activities. In addition, it provides managers with the information necessary for successfully tailoring products to market segments by communicating the benefits of food within a segment.

The current study concludes that religious values, health, safety and quality motives are significant factors in explaining the consumption of food products in Malaysian societies. Religion plays one of the most influential roles shaping food choice, therefore, if consumers in these markets are more religious, then the products and the way these products are promoted need to be prepared in accordance with the spiritual and religious dictations and influences that those consumers acknowledge

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