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Factors Influencing Attitude Towards Halal Cosmetic Among Young Adult Urban Muslim Women: A Focus Group Analysis

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Abstract

Halal cosmetic and toiletry industries have great potential to drive the Halal economy. In view of branding Halal cosmetics, it would be more effective to position Halal values to new insights for championing the Halal economy. The persistence of this paper is to identify the factors considered in making decision to consume cosmetic product. Focus groups are used to collect a broad qualitative understanding of perceptions from two different groups of respondents in relation to success factors. Additionally, it is to investigate and gathers the information regarding the issues that attribute Halal brands for cosmetics products and to classify the difference and similarity of opinion and suggestion from the young adult Muslim female groups from the urban area (Klang Valley). There are two groups of respondents, group A (user) among those who are using Halal cosmetic product, group B (non-user) among those who are not using halal cosmetic product. The outcomes of the findings link directly to the design of learning activities and the future direction of the research.

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Keywords – Halal cosmetic; attitude; user; non-user

1. Introduction

Beauty and personal care have been supported and positive outlook respond from the industry players in Malaysia (Euromonitor, 2012). The players seem interested to invest in extensive research into new products, accommodating new functional benefits such as sun protection, whitening, moisturising, hydrating and anti-ageing. The mainstream of cosmetic industry today had been conquers and monopolized by the non-Muslim and the Muslim seems taking the back seat (Swidi et al, 2010). The increasing number of total population of Muslim consumer is nearly 20% of the population in the world, thus, this is the main reason of the halal wave in the cosmetic industry had change the buying behavior among the Muslim consumer today (Swidi et al, 2010).

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Thus the issues of the ingredient in cosmetics position a serious situation and becomes a big question mark, additionally, the demand of Halal today not just focusing on food but also had been capture to other non-product categories such as cosmetic. The demand for Halal products today is rapidly increasing since the consumers are becoming more religious through knowledge and information on concern towards halal (Lada, 2010), Hence, this calls for assurance that the product is not only safe to eat and of high quality, but also is expected to be produced and processed in a manner that is safe for the environment (Kim and Chung, 2010). It is not a new issue that arises about Halal cosmetic, as currently this industry is seeing the emerging Halal industry after food and finance (Mahathir, 2010). Level of consciousness towards Halal cosmetic is still low, yet if the product is available and ready in the market, 57% and 37% of Muslims in Singapore and Indonesia respectively, claim that they will purchase (Halal Journal, 2008). A number of cosmetic companies around the world are competing against one another to capture a share of the multi-billion dollar cosmetic market (Rastogi S.C, 2003). Most of cosmetic companies have offered varieties of product category widely held with different brands either local or international. Principally, the target customers of cosmetic companies are female consumers (Kumar, 2006). Comparatively in 1990s, cosmetic was only for adult women. However, in today's new market, they are competing to reach younger adult female audiences (Kumar, 2010). Halal is not only about a brand element, but also part of a belief system and moral code of conduct in our daily living (Aziz, A. et al, 2010).

Most of the Muslims have probably raised the value of the foreign brands than local brands (Mokhtar et. al, 2012). Nonetheless, brands from Muslim countries will be of less concern than the Western brands (Mokhtar et. al, 2012). This situation defines the condition that is encountered by the Muslim consumers as they go through their daily routine in purchasing product that they need. Thus, the local cosmetic products have not yet become a "home brand" for the female Muslim customers in Malaysia. This is reiterated in Euromonitor from Trade Sources and National Statistics 2012 that revealed only 0.5 percent of the market share in Malaysia are using Safi and is ranked at number 34 out of 170 types of cosmetic product in the world wide (above 34 are the international products that are not certified halal). Safi is a leading halal local brand with the halal certification from the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, JAKIM (Norma, 2011). The brand carries a comprehensive range of skincare, personal care and toiletries products developed to meet the needs and preferences of modern Muslim women and men. Safi is one of the most well-known brands among Malay women in Malaysia (Sulaiman, 2010). The next challenge will be on how to integrate halal cosmetics into the framework of the global beauty industry today in order to strengthen the value of halal compliance cosmetics products in the global market and to investigate the perception of young adult Muslim females in an urban area towards the local cosmetic product. Thus, this focus group could illuminate the perception towards purchasing halal cosmetics and subsequently spearhead to continuous purchase among those consumers who have already consumed the halal cosmetic product (user) and the consumer with the intention to consume the Halal cosmetic product in the future (non-user).

2. Background to the Study

The manufacturers and marketers use *Halal* certification and logo as a way to notify and encourage their target market that their goods are *Halal* and *shariah-compliant*. In general, the Malaysian Muslim consumers have the tendency to believe in and purchase product with the reliable *Halal* certification issued by the Malaysia's Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) which is under the purview of the Ministry in the Prime Minister's Department. By Halal certification, the companies are able to use it on their packaging or display it at the company's premise. Halal Development Corporation (HDC) is the agency responsible to create awareness among the members of the society toward the significance and the importance of Halal to them.

Halal market does not only focus on the Islamic countries, but also in non-Muslim countries (Ibrahim A. K. (2010). There are 86% of American Muslim consumers who believe that American

companies “need to make more of an effort to understand Muslim values” (Hussain, N. 2010). Increased consciousness and availability of halal products has given an alternative to increase global market (Al-Harran, D. S., & Low, P. (2008). The population of Muslims in Malaysia 60%, but their preferences are similar with other consumer segments that demand products based on quality, health, and shariah-compliant, which has increased (Mahathir, 2010). This shows that Malaysian community today has gained more respect and attention from others, in particular when a person keeps clean and tidy. This requires not only the person's clothing, but also the application of halal elements to various parts of the body. Therefore, apart from wearing suitable clothes, the adornment used must also be halal. Principally, cosmetics are important to how most women feel on a day to day living. Cosmetics are more often consumed by women than men (Norudin, 2005) as the target customers of cosmetic companies are among the female consumers (Kumar, 2006).

Thus, the issue of halal ingredients in cosmetic products today poses serious challenges (Coulter et al, 2000). After all, halal is to provide a peace of mind to the Ummah (Hamid, M. A. 2006). However, it remains imperative that the vision of providing the halal label to cosmetics must get an approval from JAKIM. Malaysia's determination to set the standard for halal products according to Islamic principles is an expected new effort by JAKIM to bring the credibility of the halal logo for cosmetics as well. However, how does this issue capture the female Muslims in Malaysia today, as they are the main target market of most cosmetic companies? What are the factors involved in shaping decision to purchase the halal cosmetic? According to Baker (2010), although branding to Muslims could make use of the branding techniques developed by Western experts, it has to take into consideration the spiritual needs of the targeted Muslim consumers. Previous research conducted in Muslim markets majority (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Malaysia) has found similarities in consumer behavior in each, when it came to how beliefs and values affect modern consumption (Hussain, N. 2010). For individual Muslims who are spiritually raised, all their actions are unified and all these actions are either pleasing or displeasing to Allah and “*They are careful about what, when, where, how, from who, and how much to consume*” (Baker, 2010).

3. Methodology

This research targeted the consumers among young urban Muslim female adults (19 – 35 years old) in Klang Valley. The objective mentioned earlier which is to identify the factors that may influence the attitude towards buying the halal cosmetic. The respondents have been asking about the values that should be portrayed by halal cosmetic product and the important attributes of halal brand had been freely discussed among panels. The interviews have been conducted in a special meeting room and the session was taped and transcribed. The study was further defined by narrowing it into two focus group sessions according to specific profile of the panels (user and non-user of halal cosmetic product). Users are those who consume halal cosmetic product while non-user is vice versa. Each session comprises 10 panels, therefore 20 panels participated.

The objective of the study was to develop a platform for the researcher to extend the study. Focus group will be implemented by selecting and assembling by the researcher, to develop a group of individual to come out with their view, comment and understanding from the personal experience (Barker et al, 1990). Focus groups are perfect for 'filling in the gaps' of the study and this approach aimed to generate the concept and hypotheses of the study (Krueger et al, 2000). One of the advantages of focus group is to highlight the respondents' attitude (Morgan, D., 1988). The group involved has been assured to have a comfortable and private setting with the professional moderator. They are inquired with a question each that may generate the participant's involvement to create effective and interesting environment. Meanwhile the facilitator is accountable to write up the input and data by observation along with the discussion. The data then were used to clarify and analyze if it was required for the study, to

formulate the transcripts. The material has been provided for each of the participants that are applicable and related to the study.

Each group was asked the following questions:

- What are the criteria of factors that you consider in making decision to buy cosmetic and facial care brand? Which are the criteria you consider the most important to least important in buying a brand of cosmetic?
- Before you choose the cosmetic product what are the factors that have been set in your mind and will influence you to choose the brand? Who?
- When I say cosmetics and facial/ skincare, what are the brands of cosmetic and skincare spring to your mind?
- How would you describe halal cosmetics? What are the elements or criteria to describe halal cosmetics and what drives you to use halal cosmetic? (rank order of importance)
- If a magic genie could grant you a wish to create an ideal halal cosmetic, what would you ask for? Any suggestions for improvements for halal cosmetic? (consumers' expectation)
- Postulate future of halal cosmetics market in Malaysia in the next 5 years? What's their level of interest?
- If I say SimplySiti, what actually crosses your mind?
- If the brand SimplySiti becomes a person, what characteristics does she have?

4. Findings

4.1 Result (Group A: User and Group B: Non-user)

Table 1: Factors in making decision to choose cosmetic

Factors in making decision (Rank from most important to less important)
Content/ ingredient
Product suitability
Halal
Price

Based on the discussions of 20 young urban Muslim female adults' from the Klang Valley, they have described, explained, evaluated and interpreted their perception towards halal cosmetic product. This study has explored that the level of awareness towards halal cosmetic is still low (see Table 1). Halal is not the main factor that they considered before they consume the cosmetic product. However, the content/ingredient of the product is the most important factor that both respondents (user and non-user) considered in making decision to buy a cosmetic product. This has been proven from the responses including comments such as:

.....I believed that Halal is not a core factor that cross in my mind while deciding to consume cosmetic product. It should not be an issue as I am more concern on halal towards food rather than cosmetic. Because, cosmetic is something outer and I can use make-up removal to perform my prayer...

Results from both groups probed indicated that the contents/ingredients are the main factors in consuming cosmetic product. They will first refer to the packaging of the cosmetic product to search for the content/ingredient before deciding to consume. If the product is of natural resources and no halal endorsement or hesitation in the content stated (no placenta, fetus, animal fats or organs) this is sufficient. Hence, it is not necessary to recognize the halal logo from JAKIM. This is followed by the suitability of the product towards their skin, which means that there is no side effect after consumption. Subsequently, halal does not trigger but a 'Bonus' to the buyer when 'Halal logo' is obtainable at the packaging of the product. Higher price can be considered, if the product is of high quality and provides customer's fulfillment.

Further, the participants have indicated clear positioning of local brands as halal cosmetic brand. Additionally, they have a strong perception that the Muslim and Malay cosmetic brands (Safi, Sendayu Tinggi, Tia Amelia or Zaiton) are produced by 100% Muslim and Malay manufacturers. The participants have a strong perception that the brand name plays an important role. Therefore, those products that sound 'Malay' or 'Arab' such as Safi, will automatically influence them to trust that the product is halal and the manufacturers are Muslim and Malay. Consequently, customer needs to be cautious on the possible implications if users only know Safi is from Unza Sdn Bhd (Chinese manufacturer). The scenario shows that brand name is an effective strategy for the manufacturer to create the competitive edge in the cosmetic industry especially to capture Malay consumers.

5. Conclusion

The research provides a different approach for understanding the factors that influenced the group of young adult Muslim women of the Klang Valley towards their intention to consume halal cosmetic product. This approach helps the researcher to evaluate each of the candidates by group, to illuminate their honesty and truthful feeling through responding the question that had been asked. The implication of the findings shows that the study of halal awareness towards cosmetic is low as 'Halal' is not a priority. However the content or the ingredient of the cosmetic product is the most important factor that may influence them to consume the cosmetic product. The next phase of our research is to implement the focus group to other Islamic countries, such as Brunei and Indonesia. The objective is to pursue at the similarity and differences from the views of their respondents.

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