

PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE ON MALAYSIAN HALAL AND AUTHENTIC HERITAGE FOOD (HAHFo) : INTERNATIONAL MUSLIM TOURISTS' PURCHASE INTENTION BEHAVIOUR

Siti Nazirah Omar^{1*}, Siti Radhiah Omar² and Shahrim Ab Karim³

¹Ms., University Technology MARA Melaka, Malaysia, sitinazirah.omar@yahoo.com

²Ms., University Putra Malaysia, Malaysia, sitiradhiahomar@gmail.com

³Assoc. Prof. Dr., University Putra Malaysia, Malaysia, shahrim@putra.upm.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

Abstract

As a Muslim country, Malaysia had received tremendous numbers of international Muslim visitors from all around the world and it was increasing from year to year. The major reason this country became an attractive destination for Muslim travelers is: Malaysia offers of a great, wide range incredible, splendid cuisine from three major ethnicities which are Malay, Chinese and Indian that symbolized the food culture. However, research has been revealed that Malaysian Heritage Food (MHF) is having a serious problem among Muslim tourists whereby they have the limitation to experience diversity of food culture due to non-halal issue and lack of confidence to purchase. In fact, the availability of halal kitchen and restaurants that served authentic heritage food from multiple ethnicities especially Indian and Chinese cuisines is also a typical concern. Thus, this paper aimed to address the gap by examining the importance of Halal and Authentic Heritage Food (HAHFo) and food culture experiences among Muslim tourists in establishing ethnic restaurants, kitchens, and food service providers with HAHFo concept. Data were collected by distributing questionnaires to Muslim tourists preferably who were visited in Kuala Lumpur. Findings discovered a highly significant importance for multi-ethnicity food providers to practice halal procedures in convincing Muslim tourists to choose variety of cuisines offered. Multiple regression analysis was used in this study to assess the relative importance of HAHFo dimensions towards protecting the authenticity of MHF. Finally, the results outline some possible practical recommendations for heritage food service provider who might pursue with marketing strategies towards serving HAHFo among Muslim international tourists and promoting Malaysia as a hub of diversity halal food culture for tourists' destination.

Keywords: Halal issue, Malaysian heritage food, muslim tourists.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry in Malaysia has been acknowledged as the major contributor to the nation economic growth which indicates as the second largest foreign exchange earner after manufactured goods. This clearly could be seen through its contribution of RM 47.2 billion to the Gross National Income (GNI) as discussed in the 12th National Key Economic Areas (NKEA) under the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) in 2012. Furthermore, Malaysian government has announced that year 2014 as the Visit Malaysia Year (VMY) due to the recognition of being 10th most visited country in the world through receiving of 25.03 million tourists' arrivals in 2013 (The Star online, August 6, 2013). Thus, the main agenda of VMY 2014 is to achieve 28 million tourists' arrivals that would strongly guarantee for a rising number of Muslim tourists from any Islamic countries in the world. Referring to Malaysian Tourism Statistic (Tourism Malaysia), 21.75% from 25 million foreign tourists visited Malaysia in 2012 were consisted of Muslim. Those tourists came from neighboring countries like Indonesia and Singapore demonstrate the highest number of Muslim travelers namely 2.10 million and 1.95 million respectively. Then, followed by the Middle East countries by 138 869 million which each Arab Saudi people had spent their

money at about RM 8154.80 for tourism purposes (Dewan Budaya, Mac 2013, pp. 10-11). Interestingly, the number of Muslim tourists shows significant increase since year 2000 and as stated by Tuan Haji Abdul Rahman Shaari, the Director of Islamic Tourism Center, Ministry of Tourism Malaysia, the confidence in the assurance of halal products through certification of halal by Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) is the main factor driving them to this nation.

In addition, according to survey by Crescentrating, a Singapore based Muslim travel consultancy, Malaysia has been recognized as one of the world's top Muslim friendly and halal holiday destination (The Star online, Jan 24, 2013). Due to this potential of being a hub for Islamic tourism, Malaysia needs to be concerned on Muslim tourists' preferences towards seeking for Halal foods which expenditure on foods confer a great contribution to the tourism industry. In 2010, it is proved that tourists spent almost 9.7 billion for foods and beverages for their indulgence vacation in this country (Tourism Malaysia, 2010). As Malaysia is well known of its multiracial citizen encompass Malay, Chinese and Indian, there are various unique cuisines to be offered for Muslim' tourists which each of them promises to savor an authenticity and heritage value in their eating experiences. Those different traditional local foods available for Muslim tourist to be consumed are being known as Malaysian Heritage Food (MHF) (Omar, Ab Karim and Omar, 2014). In general, most of Malay people in Malaysia are Muslim and they were obliged to the Islamic law of Halal concept in preparing food products as they followed what has been affirmed in the Quran and Hadith (Riaz and Chaudry, 2004a). Meanwhile, the other dominant races including Chinese and Indian are still new to the exposure on Halal food concept and their lack of knowledge in providing HAHFo has led to confusion and ambiguity among Muslim tourists especially in terms of making decision to purchase and their judgment towards Halalness of MHF would affect directly to the overall image of Malaysian food culture.

Indeed, Halal food consumption among Muslim tourists is the main agenda for tourist attraction in Islamic tourism. Muslim tourists would consume foods that are not prohibited in Islam (Mak et al., 2012, pp. 928-936) and they always seek for Halal MHF while enjoying their holiday in Malaysia. This was supported in a qualitative study on tourists' perception and attitudes towards MHF which one of the informants prefer not to dine in the Chinese restaurant without Halal logo displayed (Omar, Ab Karim and Omar, 2014). In fact, Halal criteria usually can be identified through Muslim tourists' responses and evaluations on MHF for the ingredients used, sources of raw materials and handling method (Bonne and Verbeke, 2008). However, at present, there is no research has been done which addressed HAHFo in the tourism industry. Even though there are several studies focused on food as a tool of promotion in tourism destinations (Buhalis, 2000, pp. 97-116; Echtner and Prasad, 2003, pp. 660-682; Gretzel, Yuan and Fesenmaier, 2000, pp. 146-156; Hudson and Miller, 2005, pp.133-142), yet there were only limited to food image (Quan and Wang, 2004, pp. 297-305). Some studies had discussed on Halal food consumption (Lada, Tanakinjal and Amin, 2009, pp.66-76; Wilson and Liu, 2010, pp. 107-123; Shaharudin, Pani, Mansor, Elias and Sadek, 2010, pp. 96-103) but there is still missing for academic literature and research concerning halal food in the hospitality and tourism industry (Hassan and Awang, 2009, pp. 385-402). Considering the critical importance of serving HAHFo among Muslim tourists in tourism destinations, two research questions were being constructed:

RQ1: Is there any strong relationship between Muslim tourists' attitudes towards HAHFo and their purchase intention behaviour?

RQ2: Does subjective norm (religion) has a significant impact on Muslim tourists' purchase intention behaviour towards HAHFo?

Therefore, this study anticipated the underlying factors influencing Muslim tourists' perception and attitudes towards purchase intention on HAHFo and their perceived importance on HAHFo dimensions is to be evaluated for further clarifications in establishing Halal and Authentic Malaysian Heritage Food (MHF) framework.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Halal Concept on Malaysian Heritage Food

The term Halal was rooted from Arabic word meaning permissible or permitted which in the context of Malaysian Heritage food it refers to the foods that are lawful to be consumed by Muslim according to Islamic (Shariah) law (Lokman, 2001; Shaikh Mohd, 2006, pp. 143-157; Lada et al., 2009, pp. 66-76). There are varieties and great offerings of MHF available in Malaysia for international Muslim tourists including Malay, Chinese and Indian

cuisines that require an emphasis on the halal issue before they might proceed with their purchase intention behaviour. As mentioned by Faryal and Kamran (2011, pp. 108-120), most of the Muslim intended to focus more on the ingredients of food rather than the other elements when they seek specifically for Halal heritage food in the market.

Besides, MHF may be perceived as Halal if it is often in line with the concept of Thoyyiban (wholesome) that has been clearly stated in the Al-quran:

فَكُلُوا مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَاشْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ إِنَّ كُنتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ

Then eat of what Allah has provided for you [which is] lawful and good. And be grateful for the favor of Allah, if it is [indeed] Him that you worship (16:114)

Based on the verse above, Almighty Allah commands for all Muslim to eat Halal and Thoyyiba foods depicted the hygiene, safety and quality (Dayang Aniza, 2012). Tafsir Ibn Kathir also explains the concept of Thoyyiba meaning good and beneficial. Alternatively, it can be defined as good quality, safety, cleanliness, nutritious and authentic (Shaikh Mohd and Mariam, 2006, pp. 143-157). On the other hand, Dayang Haniza also (2012) view the term of Halalan Thoyyiba as food and nutrition derived from Halal sources as well as not harmful to Muslim' health.

Thus, a vital issue on Halal principles and procedures comprises the nature, origin, the way the food are prepared and processed (Bonne and Verbeke, 2008, pp. 113-123) would affect the overall evaluation of Muslim tourists towards MHF. To date, MHF entails for Halal certification that covers from supply chain of raw materials, slaughtering, ingredients used, cleaning, handling and processing until the foods will distributed to be consumed by Muslim (Hayati et al., 2008). Not only that, a clean premise through maintaining the individual hygiene and sanitation, proper employee dress and quality equipment used signifies true Islamic practices in serving HAHFo among Muslim tourists (Ahmad, Abdul Kadir and Salehuddin, 2013, pp. 249-257). For instance, Muslim tourists need to think about the MHF consumption provided by non-Muslim food operators while enjoying Chinese and Indian delights because they also might serve MHF together with non-halal meals. Additionally, Dayang Aniza (2012) reveals some cases on the reluctance of restaurant owners to practice Halalan Thoyyiba concept such as using non-halal ingredients that resulted from the difficulty to obtain Halal certification from JAKIM and further evoke high level of ambiguity among Muslim tourists towards purchasing HAHFo. Therefore, there was a suggestion in a study by Georgiadis, Vlachos and Lakovou (2005, pp. 351-364) for the separating of the Halal and non-halal kitchen to avoid cross contamination process happened during the preparation of MHF. Moreover, through recognizing on image of Halal-friendly tourism destination, Malaysian government should aggressively promote to global world about HAHFo and take serious action on issuing Halal certification (Abdul Basit & Sahilah, 2010, pp. 1-8) among heritage food providers so that they can definitely control and assure HAHFo could be served with standardized and recognized Halal logo (Anir, Nizam, and Masliyana, 2008, 843-852) which currently was carried out by JAKIM in Malaysia (Lam and Alhashmi, 2008, pp. 259-266).

2.2 Authentic Malaysian Food Culture

As a matter of fact, authenticity is the utmost important element in defining cultural heritage values. Authentic is referred to originality, uniqueness, which could give a character and image to a constituent. Chhabra, 2005, pp. 64-73) and has its own historic value which reflect a region's culture. In tourism, it is considered to be one of the primary issues which must not being neglected when investigating heritage-related experiences (Chhabra, Healy & Sills, 2003, pp. 702-719; Jamal & Hill, 2004, pp. 353-372; Mohd Rani, Othman & Ahmad, 2014, p.59). The authentic of Malaysian food culture could be strongly associated with the methods of food preparation, food ingredients and eating manners. MHF is believed to portray the identity of Malaysia through the food cultural expression, lifestyle of Malaysian people, Malay, Chinese and Indian (Ab Karim, Abdul Rashid, Mohd Adzahan & Angelo, 2011, pp. 68-69). However, different culture has different values based on religious beliefs. Almost All Malays in Malaysia are Muslim while Chinese and Indian are non- Muslim. As mentioned earlier, Muslim is restricted to only eat whatever is halal. Hence, the authenticity of MHF should be adapted to suit the tourists' demands (Chhabra, 2005, pp. 64-73) especially Muslim tourists by ensuring the HaHFo including dishes from non-Muslim cultures could be experienced by them upon vacation to Malaysia.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study applied an intention-based model, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to explore HAHFo purchase behaviour among Muslim tourists. This model comprises the variables of attitude towards Halal logo, Halal ingredients and food preparation which refer as 'attitude', religion as 'subjective norm', government roles as 'perceived behavioural control'; and Muslim tourists' purchase intention as 'behaviour'. Researchers agreed on make use of TPB to envisage behaviour of tourists in Halal food selection (Sparks, Shepherd and Frewer, 1995, pp. 67-285; Cook et al., 2000).

According to Blackwell, Paul and James (2006, pp. 235-43), attitude can be defined as a person's evaluation towards purchasing behavior and it also was found to be a crucial element in TPB in foreseeing and delineating human behaviour (Ajzen et al., 1988). Besides, subjective norm illustrates the individual belief on others' influences such as family, friends, relatives and related groups (Lada et al., 2009, pp.66-76) towards performing purchase intention behaviour on HAHFo. Also, in several studies on Halal food consumption, religion indicates a strong impact on consumers' attitude and behaviour (Delener, 1994, pp. 36-53; Pettinger, Holdsworth and Gerber, 2004, pp. 307-16). Hence, this theory of planned behaviour (TPB) proved as useful model to predict factors contributing on HAHFo purchased by International Muslim tourists (Lada, Tanakinjal and Amin, 2009, pp.66-76; Syed, 2011) simultaneously urge the Malaysian Heritage Food provider to practice Halal procedure in serving HAHFo. The higher the level of perceived importance towards Halal criteria, the more Muslim tourists intend to purchase on heritage food that are lawful to be eaten.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study obtained the primary data through survey methods by using self-administered questionnaires distributed directly to international Muslim tourists whom were visited at Kuala Lumpur area. Particularly, Muslim people spent their time in Malaysia for several purposes such as travelling, business conferences, and visiting friends. Based on the actual sample size of 300 tourists, only 100 respondents were acquired for the preliminary analysis. Through on site survey, the researchers distributed 120 questionnaires. However, 100 respondents were completed replying successfully which point out 83.3% of responses. Thus, 200 samples need to be gained for further accurate data to be analyzed.

Besides that, in order to measure and pinpoint a quantitative interpretation of tourists' perceived importance on HAHFo items, 5-Likert scale is used ranging from "strongly disagree to strongly agree". There are five sections in the questionnaires; *Section A*: Respondents' Profile, *Section B*: Attitude towards the use Halal logo, Halal ingredients and Food preparation, *Section C*: Subjective norms (Religion), *Section D*: Perceived behavioural control (Government role) and *Section E*: Purchase intention behaviour.

5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Findings indicate that from 100 samples, 73% respondents are male rather than female which only represent up to 27%. Most of the respondents were between 26-35 years old contributing to a total of 40% whom were originated from Asian countries (83%) and it specifies about 34% had been visited Malaysia more than five times. Also, they spent quite a long stay in this country, between 3-5 days (35%) for their holidays (22%), business meetings (18%), visiting friends or relatives(12%) and other (45%) purposes. Based on those results, majority of respondents (69%) stated that they know about MHF and they had experienced Malay heritage food (53%) compared to Indian and Chinese cuisines. For the reliability test, value of cronbach aplha of 0.91 explains that there is a high consistency coefficient between items or variables and they are closely related to each other and all the data are good as they made this research valid (Sekaran, 2003).

Moreover, this study employed multiple linear regressions to test the relationship between elements in the TPB model and purchase intention behaviour. From figure 1, it shows that there is a significant relationship between attitudes and tourists purchase intention of HAHFO ($\beta=0.526$, $p<0.05$). Next, it was visibly proved the subjective norm has significant relationship with purchase intention behaviour ($\beta=0.250$, $p<0.05$). At last, perceived behavioural control also verify significant relationship with behavioral of purchase intention ($\beta = 0.252$, $p<0.05$). On the other hand, four elements perceived to be significantly important due to the tourists' evaluation on buying HAHFo including the use of halal logo ($\beta = 0.173$, $p<0.01$), food preparation ($\beta = 0.307$, $p<0.01$),

religion ($\beta = 0.306, p < 0.01$), government's role ($\beta = 0.246, p < 0.01$) except the halal food ingredients which has no significant relationship with purchase intention ($\beta = 0.081, p > 0.01$).

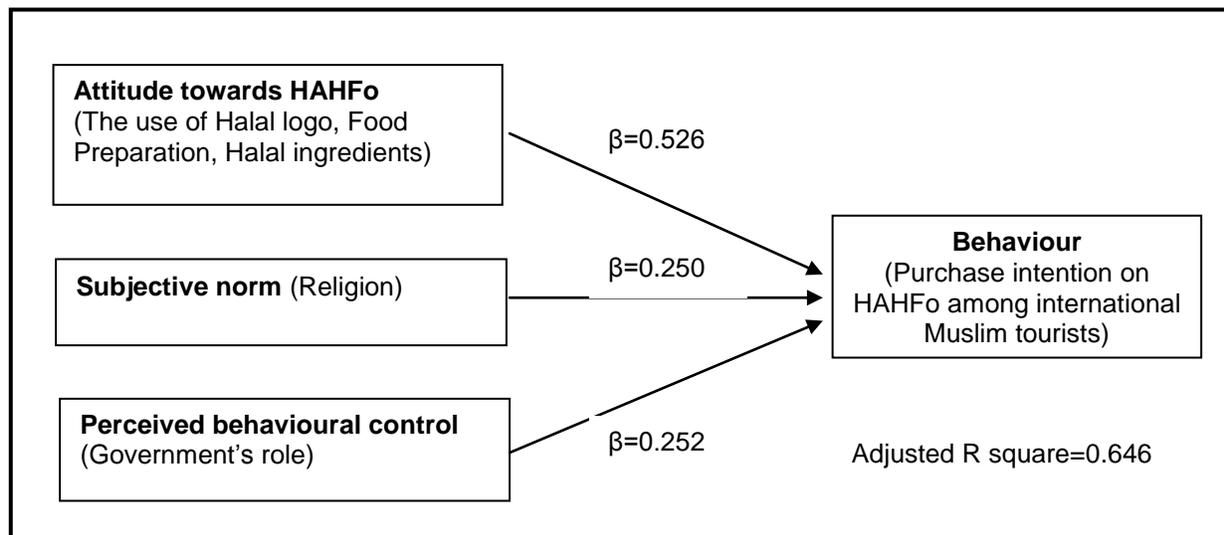


Figure 1: Multiple Regression Analysis

Other than that, the value of adjusted R square is 0.646 which TBP components; attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control explain 64.6% of the total variance in Muslim tourist intention to purchase HAHFo. R square is the percentage of the variable variation which is explained by a linear regression line. Hence, the results illustrate a significant relationship among those variables as it shows that the data is closely fitted the regression linear model. Thus, this study was response to two research questions which are; 1) there is a strong relationship between attitude on HAHFo and purchase intention behaviour among Muslim tourists with $\beta=0.526$ highlights the highest value among other variables and 2) subjective norm which refer to religion was confirmed to has a significant impact on Muslim tourists' intention to purchase HAHFo.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Without a doubt, Muslim tourists' purchase intention towards consuming food in tourism destination is strongly influenced by their attitude, their religions and beliefs. It is recommended that more food service providers could serve Halal Chinese and Indian food to tourists in the near future. Apart from that too, a specific policy on Halal practice needs to be formulated to improve and guarantee the Halalan Thoyyiba aspect in term of quality, safety, and hygienic preparation of the food and services. To put into a nutshell, the importance of establishing HaHFO is found to be significant in safeguarding Malaysian Food Culture as tourism attraction among International Muslim tourists as well as establishing Malaysia as the best food tourism destination which cater Halal food services for Muslim to enjoy our Malaysian Food Culture holistically without having any doubt.

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