

IDENTIFICATION OF DRIVERS AND INHIBITORS OF HALAL FOOD STANDARDS: THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR.

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ABSTRACT

As many organizations started to venture into the halal food industry, halal label or certificate itself may not be adequate to instill and gain Muslim consumers' confidence. Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia also has urged the business community in Malaysia not to solely rely on halal label to stay competitive. Instead they should be more proactive in improving the overall quality and halalness of their products. The prime minister has also launched an Islamic halal food standard known as the MS 1500:2004 in support of the implementation of Islam Hadhari introduced by the government. This standard provides general guidelines for the production, preparation, handling and storing of halal food. Hopefully consumers will not have to worry about the halal status of the food that they consumed.

Past researches proved that any innovations introduced to the industry would garner strong support if the innovations have been properly communicated to the industry players. The first step leading to adoption largely depends on the proper identification of drivers and inhibitors. Researchers have put huge interest in such adoption factors. At present there are no strong set of factors can be considered in determining the willingness to adopt halal food standard. Due to the scarcity of data on the identification of the determinants to be used, this paper therefore, will investigate and recommend the possible factors behind the adoption of an Islamic food standard. This paper will present an analysis on the suitability of the framework suggested by Theory of Planned Behavior to be used in analyzing the willingness to adopt MS 1500:2004 standards.

INTRODUCTION

The history of quality system standards in food related products have emerged since ancient times. It has been noted that the Assyrian tablets have vividly described the procedures to be implemented in ensuring correct weight and measures for food grains. The Egyptian scrolls have been found to dictate that labeling need to be applied on certain foodstuff. Ancient Athens for an example, insisted on inspections of beer and wine to be conducted for any impurities. Above all, the Romans were always believed to have a well-organized state food legislation system. As found and highlighted here, many of these ancient statutes were concerning the quality and safety of everyday food like sausages, eggs, bread, cheese, beers and wines (FAO, 1998).

Over the years, ISO has produced many standards regulating all aspects of our lives. Recently, ISO has released the ISO 22000, which specifically focusing on food production. This standard was firstly initiated in 2001 and later published in September 2005. It is proven that ISO certification will help organizations to be more efficient, competitive and reliable. However, certain specific characteristics of halal food might render the standards ineffective in terms of monitoring and control to ensure compliance to the Islamic rules. According to the guidelines for halal food developed by JAKIM, Malaysia has the same fundamentals but vary in the details. According to Malaysian law, food for Muslim or food with halal certification should be defined as:

- i. not made of/or containing any part or substance from animal which are forbidden to be consumed by Muslim, according to Islamic Law

- ii. not containing any substances which is declared as filth according to Islamic Law
- iii. not prepared, processed or manufactured using equipment which are not free from filthy substances
- iv. during preparation, processing or storage, it should not come into contact or be in close proximity with any food which do not fulfill the requirements as halal (JAKIM, 2005).

As the halal food industry started to expand and flourish, this emerging industry needs to have a proper guideline with regards to the quality management. Realizing the importance of having high quality management standard which is at par with the other food industry, Malaysia has recently launched an Islamic halal food standard known as the MS 1500:2004 in support of the implementation of Islam Hadhari introduced by the government. This standard provides general guidelines for the production, preparation, handling and storing of halal food. The government hopes that by enforcing this standard, consumers will not have to worry about the halal status of the food that they consumed. Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia has urged the business community in Malaysia not to solely rely on halal label to stay competitive, but to be more proactive in improving the overall quality and halalness of their products. This is because being a Muslim entrepreneur does not entitle them privilege of preferred business partners among other Muslim countries ("Don't rely on Halal label", 2003). What more when many non-Muslim entrepreneurs are strengthening up their competitiveness by certifying themselves as halal producers and slowly capturing the vast market.

THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR

However, all the efforts to strengthen the halal food market will not going to generate any positive results if the industry itself does not backed the said standard. This can clearly be seen in an earlier attempt to provide the Malaysian food industry with a halal food standard. The first halal food standard introduced to the Malaysian food manufacturers is the ISI 2020 in 1997. After many years in the market, manufacturers are still reluctant to adopt the standard and due to this, it has only managed to generate lukewarm responses (Rosly & Suhaiza, 2004). Most of them believed that the standard does not provide them with any tangible benefits and the manufacturers also were not well informed about the implementation procedures of the standard. Thus, it is utmost important for the government to be able to evaluate the industry responses towards the MS 1500:2004 implementation and make any necessary changes. This will avoid the MS 1500:2004 standard from having the same fate with its predecessor.

Past researches proved that any innovations, whether it is an administrative or technological innovations introduced to the industry would garner strong support if the innovations have been properly communicated to the industry players. The first step to be taken would be creation of knowledge about the innovation. Once it has been widespread, relevant bodies should persuade the industry to adopt. This is a stage where drivers and inhibitors of a particular innovation play important roles to establish positive attitudes towards the innovation (Roger, 1995). A positive attitude would lead to favorable decision with regards to the adoption of the innovation and definitely for the continuation of usage in future. Since the steps leading to adoption largely depend on the proper identification of drivers and inhibitors, many researchers have put huge interest in such adoption factors (Aminu Mamman, 2002; Kaendl, 2002; Welch, Mori & Aoyagi-Usui 2002; Kendall, et al. 2001). This is because; favorable results might ensure successful adoption.

The Theory of Planned Behavior was popularized by Ajzen (1985). The theory stated that the closest antecedent of behavior is intention. The intention on the other hand is determined by three independent factors, the attitude, subjective norms as well as perceived behavioral control. This theory has been used by many researchers in the past that tried to explain consumers' choices as well as consumers' behavior (Aarts, et.al, 1998; Caprara, et.al, 1998; East, 1996). Apart from consumer behavior, the theory is also very popular among social as well as medical practitioners (Grandon & Mykytyn, 2004; Shih & Fang, 2004; d'Astous, Colbert, & Montpetit, 2005; Baker, Little, & Brownell, 2003; Beale & Mansted, 1991; Blanchard, 2002).

Nash, Edwards and Nebauer (1993) have examined the underlying reasons for nurses' behavior in conducting pain assessment. Around 100 nurses were involved in the study and results indicated that the nurses' intentions in conducting the assessment were predicted by the components in the theory of planned

behavior. The findings also supported previous studies that attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control accurately predicted behavioral intention.

Another study conducted by Marcoux and Shope (1997) found that the theory of planned behavior has successfully predicted the intention to use alcohol among the 3,946 5th until 8th grade students in southern Michigan. 76% of the variance in the intention to use alcohol was explained by attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. The intention also explained 26% of the variance in the use of alcohol.

The Theory of Planned Behavior has also been used to explain consumer intention to buy food via internet (Caprara, et.al, 1998). The study highlighted that there are four types of beliefs which explained intention; belief about others' reactions, belief about availability of resources and personal abilities as well as belief about perceived benefits and disadvantages. Any favorable results for the beliefs would in turn positively influence behavioral intention to buy online.

Warburton and Terry (2000) on the other hand, used the theory to explain the volunteer decision making by older people in Australia. The intention to volunteer subsequently predicted the reported volunteer behavior. As with previous studies, the intention to volunteer was in turn predicted by social norms, perceived behavioral control as well as moral obligation, which mediated the attitude.

George (2004) has conducted a study on the intention to buy goods from internet, involving 193 college students in the USA. The study has used this theory as its basis. Results indicated that belief about trustworthiness was having positive relationship with the attitudes toward online purchasing which later positively affecting the purchasing behavior. Belief about self-efficacy for purchasing was also having positive relationship toward perceived behavioral control. This in turn has positive effect towards purchasing behavior.

Lee and Kozar (2005) have studied factors that affecting the internet users' adoption of anti spyware system. Their adoption model was developed based on this theory as well as previous IT adoption literatures. According to them, attitude was strongly represented by relative advantage in explaining adoption intention. Social factors or subjective norms were strongly supported by pressures to adopt emanate from others. While perceived behavioral control was dominated by computer capacity and capability.

Greenslade and White (2005) in their study to examine the above average participation in volunteerism found that the Theory of Planned behavior has successfully predicted the determinants of volunteerism. The theory accounted for significantly larger proportion of variance in above average participation in volunteerism.

Thus, it can be seen that the theory is popular among adoption/implementation researchers because of its ability to capture individual, social as well as situational factors that influence individuals' decisions (Ajzen, 1988).

PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

In the past, not many studies have been conducted to analyze the food manufacturers' behavioral intention to implement any food quality standards (Ahire et. al., 1995; Sila & Ebrahimpour, 2002; Yong & Wilkinson, 1999). However, recent developments like the introduction of ISO 22000 as well as MS1500:2004 showed that food standards have becoming more important, especially after considering the change in eating habits among people around the world as well as the increase in international food trade. It is estimated that the general world food trade has already past the USD400 billion marks per year (FAO, 1998).

Due to the lack of studies being conducted with regards to the intention to implement food standards, this paper proposes that the theory of planned behavior to be used as the underlying theory in assessing the food manufacturers' specific behavioral intention (implementation). As being explained earlier, the theory has been widely used and successfully predicted behavioral intentions in variety of fields.

In order to predict whether the halal food manufacturers intend to adopt the MS 1500:2004, the proposed framework should be able to describe:

- i. whether they are in favor of implementing it
- ii. how much do they feel the social pressure to implement it
- iii. whether they feel in control of the implementation action

According to the theory of planned behavior, by analyzing those three predictors, the framework will be able to determine whether the manufacturers will intend to implement the halal food standard and later improve the chances of them actually implement the standard. Below are the generic components of the Theory of Planned Behavior:

Behavioral Intention

In many instances in the past, intention has been treated as a proximal measure of behavior. This is mainly because, intention is referring to the efforts put in by people to perform the behavior. As a general rule, the stronger the intention the higher the chance the given behavior will be performed.

Perceived Behavioral Control

It evaluates a person's perception of his/her ability to enact the behavior. Such control is important to predict behavior because people normally will not going to have strong intention to perform the given behavior if there are no adequate resources and opportunities exist. In the past, studies related to intention to perform did not taking into consideration perceived behavioral control as one of its antecedent. However, since not all behaviors are under volitional control this variable becoming more important in analyzing behavioral intention.

In short, the concept of perceived behavioral control is similar to the concept of self-efficacy, which is a person's perception of his or her ability to perform the behavior. Perceived behavioral control over opportunities, resources, and skills necessary to perform a behavior is believed to be a critical aspect of behavior change processes.

In the context of food standards, higher commitment towards food standards will allow companies to be more flexible in the implementation processes. In many cases, such companies will be able to set higher quality targets than others as they have put in place strong quality system to monitor the operations. Top management support will provide many companies control over the standards' implementation process and thus making it more attractive.

Attitudes

This is related to the person's general evaluation of the given behavior. In many studies, attitude is treated as the main antecedent of behavioral intention. It can be in the form of positive or negative beliefs on performing the given behavior. There are two main components of attitude that work together, the behavioral belief as well as the outcome belief.

Founded on the literature reviews, there is basis to assume that organizations' perception towards the usefulness of MS1500: 2004 may be related to their decision to implement it later. Usefulness can be divided into ability to operate better, faster development, lesser maintenance and cost saving (Roger, 1995). Many organizations believe that if the innovation will be able to demonstrate its usefulness in daily operations, it will be adopted as such innovation will create competitive edge for them to compete in the industry.

Subjective Norms

This variable looks into the person's estimate of the social pressures on performing the given behavior. Again, this variable also has two main components, namely the normative belief and also the positive or negative judgment about the belief.

In terms of food industry, the market as well as customers is the foundation. Effective market research results in increased sales and profits. Many companies use market research to develop marketing plans. Among the most important questions that organizations need to answer before making any business decisions on their marketing plans are the markets where their products are sold and who buys the product or service. If most of their customers are Muslims or they are doing business in Muslim countries, the social pressures to be halal certified will be higher.

Based on the discussions, the proposed framework is mapped into the theory of Planned Behavior in order to provide sound basis for further analysis on the different level of MS 1500:2004 implementation among food manufacturers in Malaysia (Figure 1).

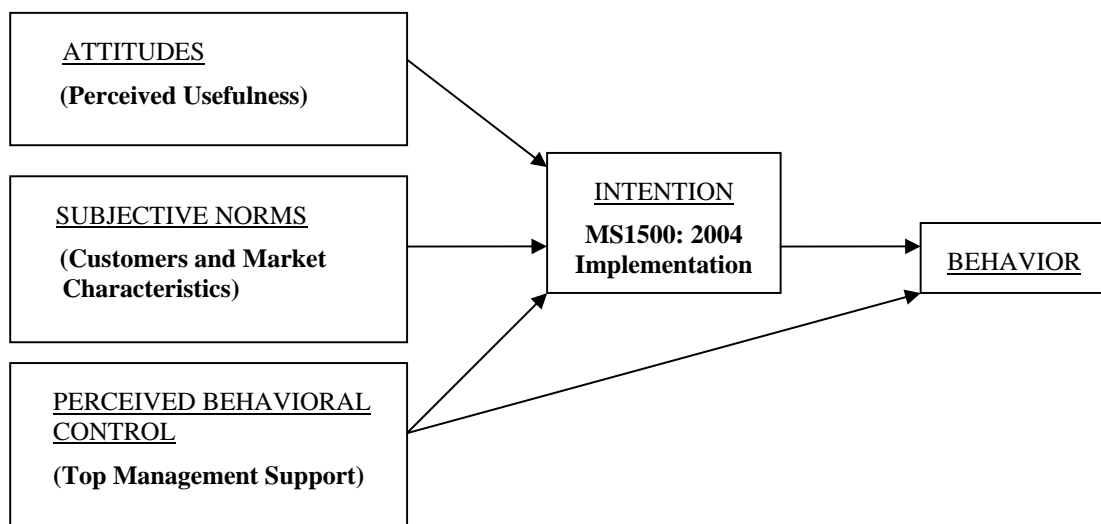


Figure 1: The Theoretical Framework based on Theory of Planned Behavior

METHODOLOGY

As mentioned earlier, the emphasis of using this framework is to investigate on the relationships between dependent variable and the independent variables. The main objective is to examine the suitability of this framework in gauging the intention of halal food manufacturers to be certified with the MS1500: 2004 Halal Standard.

The target population for this study is food manufacturers in Malaysia. The FMM-MATRADE Industry (Food and Beverage – halal section) 2005/2006 directory was used as population frame. Population comprised of all food manufacturers that have been certified with the current halal logo. Sample size of 115 respondents was targeted for the study as this reflected to the number of population for halal food manufacturer that are listed in the directory.

A set of questionnaire will be used to obtain the required information for this study. The questionnaire is divided into three main parts. The first part will gather organizations' general information. The second part of the questionnaire will measure the factors that will determine the intention to adopt MS 1500: 2004

Halal standards. Third part of the questionnaire will investigate the organizations' intention to MS 1500: 2004 Halal standards. The last part will require the respondent to provide some personal information.

CONCLUSION

The theory has been widely used to predict the intention of people to do a specific behavior and later will be used to predict the actual behavior. In general, the more favorable the attitude as well as the subjective norms being formed, plus with the strong perception on behavioral control, the stronger the person's intention to perform the given behavior. Therefore, in this situation, the food manufacturers' intention to implement the halal food standard can be predicted by observing the attitude, subjective norms as well as the perceived behavioral control components. The set of questionnaire, which has been verified by panel of experts in operations management, will be used to gauge the food manufacturers' intention to adopt MS 1500: 2004 using the abovementioned framework.

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