

## Muslim Consumers Behaviour Through 'Buy Muslim First (BMF) Vs. 'Buy Halal First' (BHF) Campaign in Malaysia

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### ABSTRACT

The advertisement of products and services whether locally or globally attract consumers and persuade their buying decisions. Muslim consumers in Malaysia make half of the buying power that contributes to the nation's economy. The buying decision of Muslim consumers shows the highest rating for products that have received halal certification from the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM). In 2018, a 'Buy Muslim First' campaign was launched; however, it was misinterpreted as an agenda to boycott the non-Muslim products. The actual purpose of the campaign is to foster the sustainability of entry-level Muslim products in the small-scale industries. Meanwhile the 'Buy Halal First' campaign has long been enforced in Malaysia, which allows products manufactured, including by the non-Muslims, to obtain the halal logo. In an Islamic nation such as Malaysia, the halal logo is issued by authoritative institutions that are appointed by the Government such as JAKIM. These authoritative institutions are responsible to ensure that Muslim consumers have options of products which are compliant to the requirements of Islamic rulings even though the products are made by non-Muslim manufacturers. Hence, this article discusses the Muslim consumers' needs based on the BMF and BHF marketing campaigns.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study contributes to the existing literature by exploring the Buy Muslim First and Buy Halal First campaign, while situating it in Malaysian context and explicitly comparing it. This emphasizes the originality of the study.

## 1. Introduction

Consumers have the right to choose the goods they want to purchase. They are the entities that perform an important role in determining the change of price of goods. Nonetheless, in doing so they usually encounter various consumer problems as well as

being effected by the changes in market economy. Nevertheless, for some countries like Australia and even in the United States, they have adopted an open economic policy which includes consumer power in deciding the price of goods. The effect of price increase due to multiple determinants such as import monopoly has also affected the cost of living among consumers (Balakrishnan et al., 2000). According to Abdullah et al. (2014), price factor becomes one of the principal elements to consumers. They have the power to complain to the consumer organisation if they discover that the price of goods rises considerably.

The process of buying and selling between producers and consumers is a form of long-standing socio-economic relationship (Koc and Ceylan, 2010). Thus, in an ever-changing world economy, there is an imperative discussion on consumer behaviour regarding purchasing decisions. In fact, traders often use several efforts and strategies to persuade consumers to purchase goods that are being sold in the market. The advertisements of products and services which have been shown locally or globally have the capacity to attract and persuade the consumers in terms of purchasing decisions. Ramzan (2019) stated that through advertising and promotion, consumers are aware of the existence of a new item. Before consumers decide whether or not to buy an item, they should examine many determining factors, including differentiating between the needs and wants.

Malaysia has almost 60 per cent of Muslim consumers who contribute to the country's per capita economy. According to Jeannot et al. (2011), purchasing power among Muslim consumers makes them a vital factor in attracting producers of products and services. Manufacturers, as well as advertisers also focus on Muslim consumers in marketing the supply of goods related to Muslim products. The issues regarding the production of Muslim products could help enhance the economic wellbeing of the Muslims. In addition, by promoting the Muslim products, it can be perceived as upholding the economic *jihad* agenda.

However, in the consumerism perspective of Islam, there is a polemic that often prompts concern among Muslim consumers, particularly those related to the halal status. It applies either to the products or services rendered. Besides that, Muslim consumers are often anxious when it comes to allegations of goods which halal status is in doubt. In Malaysia, there has been a 'Buy Halal First' campaign since 1974 to support the issue of halal status through the establishment of JAKIM Malaysia. However, the 'Buy Muslim First' campaign launched in 2018 is said to exist to boycott non-Muslim products. In fact, the campaign to 'buy Muslim products' is not a brand-new campaign but has been around for a long time. Thus, this research examined the marketing relevance of the two campaigns from the aspect of Muslim consumers need.

## 2. Literature Review

Consumer behaviour unwinds a process that consumers go through in making purchasing decisions, using and disposing of purchased goods (Victor, 2018). In addressing consumer behaviour, among the essential factor is the purchasing activities done by the consumers. Consumers are exposed to a diversity of information that could affect their purchasing decisions. According to Qazzafi (2020) among the elements that influence consumers in making purchasing decisions are either from the personal, psychological, social or economic aspects of the consumers. Therefore, the purchase

made by consumers oftentimes depends on the extent to which they choose, depending on the lifestyle, price of goods, brands and characteristics of such goods.

## 2.1. Consumer Purchase Need and Marketing

From a psychological point of view, the purchasing decision also depends on the personality of a consumer. Someone with a narcissistic personality, for instance, will buy branded items to show people about their greatness (Nevid & Greene, 2005; Sembiring, 2017) despite having to spend a lot. People who have an introvert personality may only buy something that they feel is imminent for themselves without thinking about what people will say about themselves because appearance is not very important due to their lack of involvement in social activities (Siti Ramizah et al., 2018). The economic aspect also has a notable impression on purchasing decisions. People with low incomes may only buy the essential items to meet the needs of their life, and they will be more likely to compare prices and focus on sales promotions to enjoy lower prices (Gbadamosi, 2009) while well-to-do individuals do not have to think hard to purchase something.

Ahmad Azrin (2012) has demonstrated that consumer behaviour is a sub-discipline to marketing. There is social interaction between buyers and sellers. Therefore, among the crucial aspects to formulate good social interaction are concepts such as needs, wants, demands, products, values, satisfaction, quality and market. All of these concepts need to be followed entirely to ensure that both individual and organisational satisfaction can be achieved (Ahmad Azrin, 2012). According to Bakator et al. (2016), manufacturers and traders utilise marketing strategies to convince consumers to buy their products or services offered. Bakator et al. (2016) also discovered that entrepreneurs do their own marketing activities in order to introduce new goods or services.

Nonetheless, the marketing landscape has transformed from conventional to digital median due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic that has hit the world globally. Butu et al. (2020) argues that there is a trend of change in the consumer lifestyle due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, manufacturers and entrepreneurs need to be accommodative by consistently using digital marketing system platform to cope with the new norms. All this while, marketing is being done to boost sales revenue from buying and selling with consumers. Even so, there is product marketing which is known to be deceptive and misleading towards consumers in promoting a product. The original purpose of marketing is to propose a business to the community. Some entrepreneurs employ overclaim techniques that cause consumers to feel cheated. Mohd Anuar et al. (2018) reported that overclaim in product advertising and promotion is the alleged points in the marketing promotion which do not exist in the sales product. The feature of overclaiming in the marketing of consumer products and services through advertising mediums are usually done by unscrupulous people in the marketing industry.

In persuing product promotion, some manufacturers or entrepreneurs are known to be willing to advertise their product displays through fraud and even fake guarantees in order to influence consumers to purchase their products. Advertising is one of the vital parts of marketing in conveying promotional and sales messages to consumers. Nonetheless, there is manipulation in product marketing that influences consumers to buy their product even though it is not an urgent need. In addition, product marketing through advertisement also oftentimes exploits specific individuals to drive sales. Furthermore, product safety issues are also known to be among the critical aspects that has to be regulated by manufacturers.

Manufacturers should be fully accountable in ensuring that the goods sold are safe for consumers to use. Issues related to consumer safety are among the elements of the consumer rights that need to be taken into account by manufacturers from a civil legal perspective (Mustafa 'Afifi & Mohd Mahyeddin, 2012). Having said that, it is disturbing because there are still manufacturers who disregard the health and safety aspects of consumers and market products that seem to endanger consumer safety. This scenario is mostly applicable to the issue of beauty and slimming goods that lead to adverse results for the consumers. Some manufacturers are negligent by their marketing products which do not get approval from the relevant authorities. In fact, they submit advertisements that guarantee satisfaction to the consumers even though the product could jeopardise the health and lives of the consumers.

Studies on consumer purchasing behaviour are often linked to comparisons between needs and wants. The consumer purchasing power analyses the issue between the needs and purchasing desires that are rarely satisfied. Control over buying for satisfaction is closely correlated to consumer attitudes of themselves. Khuang and Duyen (2016) declared that attitude is closely associated with the desire to have something that ultimately has the capacity to predict behaviours. Therefore, consumers are advised to be aware of consumer-related issues, so that product advertising do not fool them. In facing profit-making transactions, consumers are often seen as victims of fraud, and there is also an unstable situation and often in favour of producers and entrepreneurs. Hence, consumers always fail to be protected and do not get the protection which they deserve. Accordingly, consumer education should be foregrounded to consumers so that they appreciate and are well verse about their rights.

## 2.2. Muslim Consumer Behaviour

Consumers from an Islamic perspective can be regarded as individuals who consume goods or services to meet their needs or wants without exceeding the boundaries outlined by the religion (Ruslan et al., 2018). Islam dignifies consumers who use goods or services that do not violate the commands of Allah SWT. Among the consumer characteristics which are in line with the Islamic teaching are believers who prioritise halal goods. These halal goods are products that have been proven to be free from illegal content which is forbidden by the religion. Similarly, from the aspect of the manufacturing process, it should be identified as being clean and free from contaminated materials and faeces. Goods from Muslim entrepreneurs can easily be determined by the halal mark, which has gained recognition in the Islamic world. It indicates that every purchasing decision that Muslim consumers has made should be firstly scrutinised. Furthermore, it is imperative to distinguish the presence of a halal logo.

Khan (1984) explained the Theory of Muslim Consumer Behavior by associating it to two critical factors, specifically in the aspect of spending for personal and family welfare, and spending for the welfare of the society. For the first element, it is closely related to the needs of the consumers to focus on savings as well as consumer investment. At the same time, the second element tends to incline to the interests of society through humanitarian policy and social responsibility in the religion. This second element can be applied through the issuance of *zakat*, alms, donations, *waqf* and also wills that can be distributed to those who are in need. Based on the Theory of Muslim Consumer Behavior, Khan (1984) included the utility function of consumers which is correlated with the concept of *maslahah* in *maqasid shariah*.

From an Islamic perspective, [Mohd Zaid \(2018\)](#) considered that Muslim consumer behaviour is different from conventional consumer behaviour. As a Muslim consumer, self-satisfaction needs to be limited by the manners outlined by the religion because the goal of Muslim consumers to carry out economic activities and purchases is ultimately to achieve success in this world and the hereafter ([Mohd Zaid, 2018](#)). In addition, Muslim consumers are also required to be modest in their spending. Islam inspires its believers to be modest when carrying out purchasing activities. This simple nature manifests the right attitude. Muslim consumers do not spend at will without looking at the needs of each purchase. Therefore, for every consumer, they should be able to control their desire in buying goods that are not necessary which will lead them to be wasteful and extravagance. There is a wasteful purchasing activity when the consumer cannot distinguish between the needs or wants behind the activity. Therefore, prioritising the essential matters is far-reaching to lavishness in purchasing matters.

According to [Shirazi \(2016\)](#), the intersection between Islamic practice and consumer preferences offers a well-informed and carefully documented account of one prominent example of this phenomenon. [Shirazi \(2016\)](#) also discusses the global growth industry that has recently exploded to meet the demands of those who desire products certified as halal. Some consumers are fascinated by the product advertisements and continue to buy the goods without considering their requirements and needs. In this regard, Islam reminds its believers not to follow the desires of the heart, because primarily if it is not based on faith it is feared that it will be controlled by lust ([al-Ghazali, 2000](#)) and it tends to persuade one to waste. Expenditure that has a component of wastage is categorised as wasteful spending in Islam. Wasteful expenses involve spending on something halal in excess and exceeding the limits of necessity ([Surtahman, 2002](#)).

Muslim consumers are exposed to the marketing of products that are misleading and deceptive. There are marketing methods through 'fake review'. Even in the name of product promotion, marketing activities should not be carried out with a make up story ([Siti Sarah et al., 2016](#)). Islam recognises the concept of marketing to be legal. Nonetheless, if implemented fraudulently, such actions are prohibited and forbidden in Islam. Consumers frequently face the problem of expensive prices of goods that cause them to feel unjust in consumer-related information. Criticisms about the price of goods, particularly during the festive seasons have motivated consumers to fix higher budgets. Such a situation also influences the higher cost of living. According to [Mohd Aqmin et al. \(2018\)](#), the rising cost of living leads to lower purchasing power among consumers. As a result, consumers suffer from a higher cost of living, which results multiple predicaments in running expenses.

Among the rights as a Muslim consumer is to choose decent, high quality and halal goods. Muslim entrepreneurs need to provide goods that are believed to be halal and clean through a rigorous production and handling process. For instance, the manufacturer of food not only uses halal ingredients but also takes into account the aspect of preparation for packaging that is not contaminated and contains faeces. In this context, [Mustafa 'Afifi and Mohd Mahyeddin \(2012\)](#) stated that among the rights of Muslim consumers according to the Islamic law which firstly involves elements such as manufacturers should produce the best products for consumers. Secondly, consumers have the right to get accurate information about a product and lastly, they also have the right to change the goods due to defects or damages.

### 3. Methodology

The study was a preliminary literature review to obtain Muslim consumers behaviour concept. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes associated with the development of Muslim consumers and the campaign of both Buy Muslim First and Buy Halal First.

### 4. Result and Discussion

The 'Buy Muslim First' campaign was set in motion to the Malaysian community in 2018. This campaign intends to encourage Muslim buyers to prioritise the purchase of Muslim products. Nevertheless, this campaign has been misunderstood as an agenda to boycott non-Muslim products. The initiatives to promote the purchase of Muslim goods have caused misunderstanding to some Malaysians. This campaign became a polemic refuted by the community. According to [Shahrul et al. \(2020\)](#), the campaign to buy Muslim goods does not mean to boycott other products. In fact, this campaign does not reject non-Muslim products because it all depends on the preferences and decisions of the consumers themselves. This campaign proposes to give priority instead of boycotting. The campaign to buy Muslim products does not affect the production of halal products from non-Muslim manufacturers. Each of us should respect each other's consumer decisions in the environment of a multi ethnicity in Malaysia. As consumers, they will choose products that they are comfortable using. [Siti Hasnah et al. \(2020\)](#) mentioned that it is a must for Muslim consumers to find halal goods. Nonetheless, there are several concerns related to non-halal goods due to unscrupulous manufacturers. Therefore, there is no issue of boycotting goods from non-Muslims because it is the rights and choice of Muslim consumers in choosing the goods they want to buy.

Thus, the campaign to buy Muslim products is genuinely in line with the halal logo campaign because Muslim consumers will still buy based on the halal certification, famous brands with affordable prices. Of course, Muslim consumers prefer to get Muslim goods first to maintain clarity on the halal and haram aspects of such goods. Furthermore, this purchase decision also guarantees on the aspect of cleanliness according to Islamic law as compared to goods from non-Muslim manufacturers. Still, the decision to buy is solely on the consumer discretion on either buying Muslim goods or from non-Muslim manufacturers who have a valid halal logo. However, the real purpose of this campaign is to help the survival of Muslim products which predominantly in small scale industries. This campaign has the capacity to boost the quality of Muslim products as well as to promote small and medium industries. Small entrepreneurial companies also have business rights and opportunities in terms of marketing and capital. Through this campaign, it comprehensively facilitates the marketing of small entrepreneurs to market their products. Additionally, this campaign also elevates the empowerment of Malaysia as a halal hub to market Muslim products. Accordingly, the country's halal industry should be controlled by Muslim producers.

At the same time, the 'Buy Halal First' campaign has been enforced for so long in Malaysia, which encourages the non-Muslim products to obtain the halal logo. Essentially, the first action that a Muslim buyer needs to take is to ensure the halal status of the product (BHF), regardless of whether a Muslim or non-Muslim manufacturer sells it. Nevertheless, it is sufficient if Muslim consumers would purchase the Muslim products (BMF). Furthermore, it is vital to support the economic development of fellow believers in order for Muslims to stand at par with every other successful entrepreneurs in the world. However, this notion does not indicate that Muslims are forbidden from

purchasing the non-Muslim products. If it turns out that the product one tries to buy is not in the Muslim market (especially non-food), and the consumption of the product is important, and there is no element of concern about its safety, purity and business, then Muslims can purchase it.

Islam establishes great emphasis on halal and haram aspects in the manufacturing of the product. It is principally applicable to the product that is related to food and beverages which should be based on the concept of halal and its suitability. The aspects of halal and haram have been well explained in the teachings of Islam, which is closely related to the faith as a Muslim. Halal and haram matters have been determined in the Islamic text through the recitation of the Qur'an and Hadith. The consumption of all halal goods is a command of Allah to every Muslim. The existence of all halal goods in the market requires the manufacturing companies to adhere the Islamic ruling. It is an Islamic requirement that needs to be borne as a *kifayah* obligation.

The acquisition of halal products has become one of the interests of Muslim consumers. The awareness among consumers has proliferated the matters related to the Halal status of products in the Halal industry. This halal product is in high demand from Muslim consumers around the world. According to [Siti Zanariah et al. \(2014\)](#), there is consciousness among Muslim consumers on halal and haram issues, especially those who are involved in the food selection and halal verification of restaurant premises. Furthermore, there are those Muslim families who are doing information-seeking activities on halal food products. These activities are carried out to reduce the doubt and scepticism about a product, whether it is halal or not.

Guidelines on consumerism have been comprehensively discussed in Islam, especially towards Muslim consumers. The concept of halal, according to religious law, has been explained through Islam based on the recitation of al-Quran and al-Hadith. [Abdullah et al. \(2007\)](#) asserted that the concept of halal in terms of consumption of food and beverage products does not highlight the discussion of halal and clean from illegal elements solely. In fact, the concept of halal in Islam also raises from the aspect of *maqasid shariah* ([Nurul Zubaidah et al., 2019](#)). Muslim consumers are the central operator of the development of the halal industry in Malaysia. Demand for the halal industry goods is very high in the global market. Furthermore, Halal products in the market place has also been in high demand among Muslim consumers. The halal industry requires a large supply from halal food and beverage operators, food premises and slaughterhouses due to the high demand of consumers.

For Muslim consumers, the application of the halal logo in every product is imperative as it determines their purchasing decisions. There are numerous intricacies related to the halal status of the product, such as the use of fake halal logos, and there is a mixture of prohibited and non-halal ingredients. Some reckless parties use the halal logo on food and products that are not halal. For an Islamic country like Malaysia, the halal logo is being administered and implemented by an authoritative institution appointed by the government such as JAKIM. The determination of this halal logo is quintessential in order to guarantee that Muslim consumers can choose products that are suitable and following the compliance of Islamic law even from non-Muslim manufacturers. Products that are halal approved by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) has received high rating among Muslim consumers who have made their decision to buy Halal products.

According to [Abdul Razif and Rosfazila \(2020\)](#), the use of the halal logo is a cultural standard. The halal logo is used to help consumers choose halal food products. For [Lokman \(2005\)](#), the use of the halal logo is one of the marketing strategies utilised by traders and manufacturers. Even so, some perform fraud against the halal logo. Some businesses have acquired the halal logo and then misused the logo by adopting fake certificates and after further investigation and research on the product shows that the product contains alcohol or DNA which is banned by Islam ([Mustafa 'Afifi & Mohd Mahyeddin, 2012](#)). It explains that regular premises inspection by JAKIM is critical to ensure that the halal logo is trustworthy and reliable. Therefore, manufacturers who sell halal products not only support the marketing of halal products but also meet the needs of consumers who desire halal standards recognised by JAKIM.

Muslim consumers also give due respect to the sale and purchase of non-halal products that has taken place openly in Malaysia, such as the sale and purchase of alcohol and pork. Despite the reality, these two sources of food are something that is prohibited and forbidden in Islam. Nonetheless, as long as all parties respect racial sensitivity in Malaysia, having mutual respect for various religions and cultures, there is no conflict as everyone recognises their needs. Hence, the BMF initiative is a campaign that support Muslim product manufacturers without neglecting non-Muslim manufacturers as non-Muslim manufacturers can also market their products to Muslim consumers through the BHF campaign.

## 5. Conclusion

In short, the behaviour of Muslim consumers is closely related to their decision in carrying out purchasing activities which are more meaningful to their lives. The purchase decision is not just to fulfil the desire of consumer alone, but all their actions should be based on the interests of all individuals and society at large. Based on the Theory of Muslim Consumer Behavior, the choice to buy is to fulfil social responsibility to the society. Hence, Muslim consumers need to recognise the social responsibility of each of their purchasing decisions which will have a big and positive impact on the economy of the society. In addition to satisfy the needs of the consumers, every purchase is actually a contribution and an *infak* to economic empowerment through business dealings.

Consequently, BMF and BHF campaigns need to be in line with personal and community needs. By prioritising the BMF, their intention is, of course, to provide support to Muslim product manufacturers to further develop Islamic economic *jihad*. However, this campaign is not about supporting Muslim producers and boycotting non-Muslim producers. The intention to support this campaign needs to be in line with the Islamic teachings in order to be rewarded by Allah SWT. At the same time, BHF's noble idea is to help fellow Muslim which should be made among the characteristics of Muslim consumer behaviour. Consumers who purchase the products should ensure that the halal logo used for the product is recognised by the relevant authority of the country. JAKIM halal status and its benchmarks are essential to ensure that goods purchased by consumers have a recognised halal certification. Thus, this halal logo demonstrates the process of production and preparation of such goods which emphasize the aspects of cleanliness and the *halal toyyiban*.

Eventhough, these two campaigns that have stirred controversy among Malaysian, nonetheless, it should not be a personal issue that is biased towards any race. Malaysia, which is known to be a multi-racial country, has practised freedom and harmony among

various races. Thus, there is no issue of boycotting non-Muslim products if the product has a valid JAKIM halal certification. Even Muslim consumers are free to purchase halal goods from both Muslim and non-Muslim producers. It is no surprise that the BHF campaign has long been introduced in Malaysia without any untowards incidents. BHF is a campaign to market halal products which is an obligatory for Muslim consumers to choose from and buy.

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