

A STUDY ON EATING HABITS IN A SMALL TOWN OF KUALA LUMPUR

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ABSTRACT

It goes without saying that healthy life is important. It implies as staying well, living an active life and eating a healthy diet. Hence, a preventive measure is an essential prerequisite for staying in good health. Is it best to think cure, not prevention? Or best to take prevention rather than cure? When making the case for greater investment in ones' health this argument appears in mind for most academic and policymakers. Prevention can be as simple as living a healthy life, focusing on well-being and knowing the risk factors with food. "Diet Related" and "Non-Communicable Diseases" are on the rise. These trends pose a threat to the individual's quality of life and act as an economic threat to welfare. The remedies are too model behaviors of a healthy lifestyle, starting with eating well and physically active. The purpose of this paper is to study the consumers' buying behavior on healthy food and examines how different factors effect on decision making on Organic and Halal foods choice in the restaurant. The main method used for collecting data is through semi-structured interviews within the communities in Kampung Sungai Penchala. In short, this paper has indicated that attitude, brand image, price factor and religious commitment had positive effects on consumers' buying behavior on Organic and Halal foods.

Keywords: organic, halal, eating habits, buying behavior, and restaurant.

INTRODUCTION

This study is much concentrated into the area of food research since daily lives involved around food and eating habits. In Malaysia for instance, food is truly the one thing that brings Malaysians of all ethnicities together. Eating together promotes family bonding. It creates an environment that allows family conversation and preserved family tradition and cultural heritage. According to Kitter, Sucher & Nelms (2012), the term food habit is to describe the manner in which humans use foods, including everything from how it was chosen, acquired, and distributed, prepares, serves and eats it.

Globally, more and more people started to take a strong interest in matters revolving around food. These days, the communication of eating a balanced diet that includes the right amount and variety of nutrients is important to most consumers. The consumer motivation on healthier choices of foods has contributed to a growing demand for other choices of nutritious foods such as

natural, green food and functional food. Among the growing trends in the health and nutritious food products in Malaysia are the Organic and Halal foods.

Over the years, Malaysian has focused more on their healthy diet. The attitudes concerning food have changed significantly and will continue to do so. Interest in health and wellness is driven by the rising disease burden in population and the cost of healthcare. The Ministry of Health (MOH) concerned on the populations' unhealthy eating habit have prompted to carry out various campaigns link to healthier eating habits among the public. Example of this lead campaigns is the one that promoting eat healthily and reduce sugar intake. The local government had also initiated a National Plan of Action for Nutrition of Malaysia, NPANM II (2006-2015) to tackle the issues of unhealthy eating practices in Malaysia. In 2010, a revised Malaysia Dietary Guideline (MDG) was launched to help Malaysians to stay healthier.

Undoubtedly, by exploring the behavior of Malaysian eating habit is a door closer to understand the intrinsic value and culture behind food. More importantly, deeper understanding what causes the gradual and steady growth in Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) facing by the present and future generation is needed. With the rise in local NCD diseases, there is a relatively deep connection between health problems as associated with modern lifestyle. These trends have had an impact on foodservice operation. As the concern for health increases so has the demand for healthy food. Thus, the purpose of this study was also to explore and review the total concept of consumers' buying behavior. And the likelihood of the significant context effect on food attitude and buying/consumption intention.

In short, the location site for this study is in a Malay Reserved Land of Kg Sg Penchala. This village is on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, the Malaysia capital, established 100 years ago with a backdrop of predominantly hills planted with rubber trees. In 1972, Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) took over the administration of Kg Sg Penchala. In 1999, further development of this area with the introduction of SPRINT Expressway. With both road development and proper infrastructure, it marks the beginning of an urban modernity. Currently, the land is actively being sought after by much Malaysian over its commercial value, i.e. for residential and commercial. Overall the findings of this study may be able to provide a broader perspective and ideas for the government, marketer and local food-service industry to come up with better campaign of public health program, marketing strategy, and related food concept businesses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

FOOD AND EATING HABITS

As urbanization widens especially in Major Township in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya, Malaysian are putting in longer working hours and rushing to meet date-line. This may have resulted in increasingly time-poor for them and family. The effect of urban lifestyle experience as in modern lifestyle patterns such as more families eating out and younger generations rely heavily on fast food are common nowadays as shared by Sidik & Rampal, (2009). As these concerns continue, the retailer and restaurant will become an important hub for health management.

This has caused a total shift in eating patterns and their lifestyle to the favor of more convenience-oriented 'grab and go foods' as more Malaysians have less time and energy to prepare home-cooking meals at home. Perhaps, this may be the causes of the gradual and steady growth in

Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) facing the present and future generation. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2011) reported that as much as 60% of world annual deaths are due to NCD and approximately 25% of this death were premature and could have been prevented.

In the 10th Malaysia Plan (2011-2015), the local government admits that the trend of unhealthy eating habits, poor lifestyle and lack of physical exercise are the main contributor of NCD each year. It was quoted as in Malaysia; Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD), such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer surpass the communicable diseases in term of morbidity and mortality. There are the major causes of admissions and deaths in a government hospital as reported by the Ministry of Health (MOH).

Notably, the improvement of dietary habit and contribution to health maintenance has contributed to the evolution of the rapid changes in consumers' food consumption these days. Domestically, the trend of eating away from home goes beyond just satisfying hunger and has become a popular form of entertainment. Based on a study by Abdelhamied (2011) despite this, the consumer often face the conflict of making a choice when there is various alternative presented. In a more define meaning, when people go out to eat, and they expect to derive pleasure and satisfaction from it, especially whenever the food is presented in a charming place. In relevant, the number of new restaurants has increased proportionately to the demand of people who are eating out more often. Consumers' are increasingly put a premium on saving time and eating healthy in a better environment.

HEALTHY FOOD TYPES – ORGANIC AND HALAL

In general, Malaysia consumers has gained interest on the importance of Organic and Halal foods and desire to try local produce has steadily increased and changing the landscape of the industry. The domestic Halal food industry is impacted by the global market demand. According to Yaakob et al., (2007), the present Malaysia economy is targeting agriculture as the third engine of growth and is aiming to take a lead role as a food-producing and trading nation in this region, particularly play an active primary role in the halal-food hub amongst Muslim countries to cater for growing total population amounting to two billion Muslims out of the world's population of Muslims.

Furthermore, a steady growth in trends is the Halal popularity of Halal products among non-Muslim. This is due to the perception of the Halal food product are healthier and safer. Globally as reported by the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America 's (2009), the focus on wholesome food has also creates a strong opportunity to market Halal food as a healthy and lifestyle choice; the resemblance of a new "organic product", especially in the USA and Europe where consumers already pay premium prices for organic foods. Interestingly, a study done by Gohnaz, Shamsuddin, & Mad Nasir (2012), have indicated that it is expected that in the next five years, the consumption of Halal food will increase among the health-conscious markets.

Meanwhile, over the past two decades, the organic food industry with the growing concerns about health and quality of diet and environmental awareness has led many people to question modern agricultural practices. This has been reflected in a steadily increasing demand for organically produced food, which is perceived as being healthier and less damaging to the environment as shared by Lockie et al. (2002). Therefore, while Malaysia is known as the global

Halal hub, domestically the Organic food market has slowly and steadily built its own fan of environmental and health-conscious food lovers.

Hence, there is an important aspect in a social development link between food and health for consumers in recent years. Tudoran et al. (2009) defined health value as "the degree to which individuals value their health". Equally, many researchers have published much scientific literature documents on similar topics. According to Krutulyte (2010), it has been reported that consumers nowadays are more concern and interested in healthy food products to prevent diseases and maintain healthy living. Additionally observed by Johanson, et al. (2011) the motivation for food choice may be influenced by an interest in health, weights concern, sensory pleasure, ideological reasons, convenience, price or familiarity.

BUYING BEHAVIOUR (ATTITUDE, BRAND, PRICE AND RELIGION)

Buying behavior is the decision processes and acts of people involved in buying and using products. It is commonly influenced by cultural, social, personal and psychological factors. Obviously, every individual will have different buying decisions. Some may plan ahead and others may be just as through impulse buying. Perhaps they engage in purchasing activities several times per day. Moreover, according to Asch and Wolfe (2001) upon recognizing a need or a want to purchase something, the consumer's perception situation would directly affect the way he or she behaves. The most significant element of consumer buying behavior that impacts the consumer's intention to buy and that motivates the consumer to make buying is the consumer's attitude. Therefore, it is important to understand the consumer's attitude in the light of their intention to purchase, as to offer them the right products at the right prices through right marketing channels.

In accordance, there are two previous researchers to support the using of Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) on the positive attitude toward consumer purchase intention. The first one was from Malaysia, Alam & Sayuti (2011) which was applying TPB on Halal food purchasing that have able to validated that attitude could facilitate in predicting purchase intention. Next was from Indonesia by Sofi Aditami (2016) the analysis of Halal product purchase intention using TPB model revealed the similar result. Both of the related study does share the statically testing on the validity and reliability on their research. In short, an attitude is reflective of a consistently favorable or unfavorable feeling that a consumer has as a result of an evaluation towards an object (be it a person, thing or situation). The personal attitude of an individual plays an important role pertinent to setting a personal value on healthy products purchase (Paasovaara, 2011). In addition, the personal attitude of the consumer is one of the key aspects of buying behavior that directly affects the buying decision of the consumers. No single consumer buying decisions are alike and vary in the amount of effort put into the decision making process differs.

Generally, when the consumer is buying a product, they are also buying a brand image. A good brand always has a long-lasting impression. In a study conducted by DeLong (2004), purchase decision can be stimulated by the knowledge of brand and consumers tend to rely on the brand image they already know. Therefore, marketers play an important role to construct a long-lasting brand image that would entice consumers to purchase and repetition of purchase to that particular brand. The medium of communication for the brand image is constructed through advertising, word-of-mouth, reference group, celebrities, and media (Mihalcea & Catoiu, 2008).

Basically, brand image is the overall impression of a brand's total 'personality' in the consumers' mind.

In component of the marketing mix, pricing charged on the product or services consumed by the consumer affect the buying behavior of the consumers. Marketers must consider the price sensitivity of the target consumers while fixing prices. Price is normally a major influencing factor of spending or making a buy decision. According to Agardi & Bauer, (2000), the feeling of retailers themselves indicates price is an important selection criterion for shoppers. In general, the price is notably the most important consideration for the average consumers (Cadogan & Foster, 2000).

The number of new restaurants has increased proportionately to the demand of people who are eating out more often. Consumers' are increasingly put a premium on saving time and eating healthy in a better environment. In the research done by Shaari & Arifin (2010) and Pettinger et al. (2004), many have suggested on the importance of religion in influencing consumers' attitude and behavior. This was supported by Blackwell et al., (2001) that religion has also been linked to food purchasing decisions and eating habits. In many traditions, religion is expressed in terms of one's relationship with or attitude towards Gods or Spirits. According to Delener (1994), religion provides people with a structured set of beliefs and values that serve as a code of conduct or guide to behavior. In relevant, the Chinese and Indian diet is more to the organic products since their practices towards vegetarian eating under religiosity. On the hand, the Muslim diet is strictly in Halal foods. Therefore, in many societies, religion is, in fact, one of the most influential roles in food choice (Dindyal, 2003; Essoo & Dibb, 2004). Several other studies on the dimension of religious example provided by Shaari, Ahmad Nordin, & Abdul Malek (2013) measures devoutness for Muslim by religiosity, giving the scope of interest was mainly influence by either 'strictness' and/or 'faithfulness' of a person in following Islamic teaching when it comes to choosing food. Thus, it is believed that religious belief plays as an important factor, which has an impact on consumers' buying intention.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative analysis approach was used in this research. It is an in-depth exploration of what the community think, feel or does and crucially why and when it comes to the decision of healthy eating and healthy living. The method of data collection involves direct interaction i.e. semi-structured interview with an individual on a one to one basis and occasionally individual in a group ambiance depending on the outcome. The duration of each interview session took about 1.5 hours and audio recorded using mobile application which was later transcribed into verbatim. The target sample size was at fifteen (15) as it appropriate for in-depth studies. As concluded in a study by Sobal (2001) the varying number of participants is much depended on the data extensiveness needed to achieve theoretical saturation.

Undoubtedly, the analysis of data in qualitative research can be complicated. It tends to be quite difficult at a time during the process of interpretation. It is more complicated when it's required translation from the mother tongue or in the native language into spoken English. Therefore, the steps taken to interpret and structure the current data involved examining, categorizing and recombining all information's, was done carefully as to ensure proper meanings can be derived from the response received. In addition, criteria for validity and trustworthiness in this qualitative research are closely tied to the particular topic in which a particular investigation is conducted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results from this study show a relationship between attitude, brand, price and religious and their influences on the consumers' buying behavior of Organic and Halal food products which showed that they were all significant determinants of consumer's decision making on healthy products. In accordance, Theory of Planned Behaviour has been adopted as this theory was one of the most powerful tools to test consumers' behavioral intention (Ajzen, 2001). One of the major strengths of Theory of Planned Behaviour is that is widely applicable to a variety behavior in different contexts, including such diverse area as health communication, environmental concern, risk communication, mass transit use, and, more recently, technology adoption. The theory also has been used successfully in hundreds of different studies in the last two decades (Ajzen, 2011). This does well apply to this current research to show the connection of healthy eating (Organic and Halal Foods choice) and behavioral intention.

There was also a positive indication that attitude of an individual significantly related in the selection process on Organic and Halal food products. In addition, personal attitude of the consumer is one of the key aspects of buying behaviour that directly affects the buying decision of the consumers. No single consumer buying decisions are alike and vary in the amount of effort put into the decision making process differs. The importance of brand, on the other hand, showed variability in the extent of importance that participants viewed branding on health claim food products. With the segment of consumers have more understanding on the healthy alternative to foods; there is a significant influence of brand on buying behavior. The result indicated the motivation attitude towards Organic and Halal products is due to brand credibility, trust, and confidence between seller and buyer. Further to brand image, participants supported a brand that is familiar and trusted. For example, according to one participant, "when shopping for the family, the buying decisions are often motivate by the familiarities and trusted brand. For example, if for coffee my husband will only want Nescafe brand, for toothpaste Colgate is a must, bread for my children is Gardenia, my favourite shopping place is Tesco and the list continues. If a new brand than I might take a look into the food labelling for right information's." Accordingly, Mohamed & Daud (2012) have justified, trust enhances consumer commitment to the brand.

On the price factor, there were mixed findings since the feeling and effect varied between individuals decision making. Nevertheless, the consideration of paying more or less still needs to factor-in when people are dining out and during their purchase intention. "I do shop around and compared prices information before deciding where to buy. I do buying for food at more than one area to take advantage of low prices. I still get fresh produce and value for my money. Mostly on weekend, seasonal period or school holiday, hypermarket will hold promotion. This means I can purchase product at a better value, e.g. fruits, chicken, and even basmati rice price is at least on discount every quarterly". On one hand, people who are health conscious spend more on healthier product and based decision making on their income level. On the other hand, the busy working lifestyle people do not have much time to prepare own meal, thus eating out is the best option. Therefore, the balance between cost and convenience is also the driving factors behind the healthier food choices. According to the Webber et al. (2010), the role of price can be related to the importance of a particular food product in relation to other food products accepted for household use.

Religion acts as a core culture in everyday life of most peoples. Interestingly, religious play important roles especially in consumption implication. The final results revealed a high affiliation

between consumers' buying behavior on Halal food choices as well as other products within the community. Further, with the belief of purely on Islamic faith and strong Muslim here, it is a pivotal role in what is allowed and forbidden for consumption and in many other aspects that pertain to everyday life. Hence, the devotions of moral and obligation as in the term 'deontological' are an important principle when engaged in consumption style and making a decision. The finding is clearly linked with the research done by Barbarossa (2012) which indicate that 'deontology' have the positive significant influence to motivate the consumers to engage in green or organic purchasing behavior. From this perspective, one respondent shared her experience travelling abroad by saying "during my oversea trip, if Halal restaurant are not available, the availability of seafood dishes is an alternatives. Other preferred option is generally organic/vegetarian food. A Subway chains is good choice as I'm able to picks, choose the ingredients and monitor the preparation. To avoid meat, tuna and seafood is another option, and available of meatless or veggie sandwich with a base of cheese and salad is good enough for me." In addition, there is a positive relationship between ethnic value practicing and buying behavior when the people with 'deontological' view will feel guilty when they are not acting in moral duty (Haines et al., 2008) since they are tied with the deontology principle and holding ethical values.

CONCLUSION

Finding shows an attitude, brand, price and religious is much related to consumers' buying behavior on Organic and Halal products. The study also found that consumer eating behavior and attitude towards the healthy foods perception are positive and encouraging in correspondent with the above factors. The result concluded that religious commitment is the highest influences in roles shaping food choices, particularly for the Muslim. For the non-Muslim, the result indicated that their perception toward Halal enhances their confidence to buy/consume the food products, due to the perception of a high standard in food safety and food hygiene.

The study revealed that the nature of brand conscious is strong influences among the participants buying behaviors. The number of advertisement that involved celebrity in branding showed the connection with customers and loyalty to its brand. Other consumers were more conscious and concern on the element of labeling such as descriptive information on the ingredient used. However, if the products certified and carried approved Halal logo, it would be a matter whether buying conventional or organic food.

In price sense, consumer perceived value and pricing in healthy food behavior vary and diverse characteristic of price motivating factors was confirmed. This was observed through the opinions on the prices-perceived quality relationship. Different consumer market segment have a different approach in choosing and buying healthier foods – some make a price comparison to get cheaper food while some were willing to pay extra for better quality. This clearly signifies that that price is a variable that has a direct impact on the buying intention of consumers.

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