

# A Study on Consumers Perception on Halal Certification of Dietary Supplement Products

Norazlinabinti Abdul Aziz<sup>1</sup>, Hartini Saripan<sup>2</sup>, Farizah Mohamed Isa<sup>1</sup>, Mardiah Hayati Abu Bakar<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Senior Lecturer, <sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Faculty of Law, Universiti Teknologi MARA40450, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

## Abstract

The global health industry market perceives an enormous potential of profit within the dietary supplements business. Contributed by the changes in consumer perception in accepting that supplements aids in prevention of diseases, the number of supplements available to consumers has seen tremendous growth. As the supplements industry expanded with new innovations and advanced of technology, the consumers lose transparency in knowing the process, composition and ingredients of the dietary supplement products. They are exposed to many risks of the dietary supplement products that includes the safety, efficiency and quality aspects. Certifying the supplements as halal may safeguard the safety, efficiency and quality of the products as halal is attached to the concept of 'thoyibban' that upon compliance will accord assurance on the safety, efficiency and quality of the product. In suggesting for the reformation of current consumer protection on this area, the study intends to analyse the effects of halal certification on dietary supplement products to the consumers. The ultimate aim of the study is to answer questions whether there is a significant effect attaching halal certification on the dietary supplement products to boost the confidence of the consumer on the safety, efficacy and quality aspect of the products. This will assist in the direction of reformation over the current consumer protection framework. The study adopts a mix method of qualitative and quantitative method. The qualitative method embarks on analyzing the fundamental principle of 'halalanthoyibban' and its relation to the assurance of safety, efficiency and quality of dietary supplements products. The analysis of data acquired through qualitative method involve content analysis approach on traditional and contemporary sources of Islamic laws. The data acquired through content analysis is supported by semi-structured interviews with respondents that has been selected through purposive approach. The second part of the study uses quantitative method by distribution of questionnaires to selected consumers of dietary supplement products. The findings to the study disclose the effects of halal certification on dietary supplements product that may assist the policy maker and industry to make appropriate reformation to the consumer protection framework within this industry.

**Keywords:** Halal certification; Dietary supplement products; Thoyyibban concept; consumer protection.

## Introduction

Globalization has transformed many industries from the traditional/conventional ambiance to a modern and a technology based industry. Among the transformed

industry are the food, pharmaceutical and dietary supplements industry. Dietary supplements are products that are labeled as *dietary supplements* and are not represented for use as a conventional food or as a sole item of a meal or diet. Supplements can be marketed for ingestion in various forms such as capsule, powder, soft gel, tablet, liquid, teas, or any other form. Although dietary supplements have aided in the maintenance of the quality of life, yet the market is flooded with dietary supplements that are associated with many risks that includes the safety, efficiency and quality aspects. In addressing this issue this study intent to

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### Corresponding Author:

**Mardiah Hayati Abu Bakar**

Faculty of Law, Universiti Teknologi MARA-40450

Shah Alam Selangor

e-mail: mhabphd2017@gmail.com

explore the usability of the *halalanthoyyibban* concept in safeguarding the rights of the consumer involving safety, efficiency and quality. To what extent would the consumer know that a dietary supplement product that is certified halal provides an assurance of these three aspects. The knowledge of the consumer may become the guideline in the reformation of the current practice in bridging the *halalanthoyyibban* concept to the dietary supplement industry.

**Literature Review:** There are diverse products of dietary supplements that are also termed as health supplement or nutritional product and may range from foods modified or pure forms of vitamins and minerals to extract of various botanical or animal products<sup>1-2</sup>. In a study<sup>1</sup> the researcher disclosed that the dietary supplement products are commonly for medical problems including sexual enhancement, weight loss and sports performance. These products are freely available at numerous outlets. The marketing trend of this product sees the producers claiming that they are ideal for the maintenance, prevention and even treatment of chronic diseases. According to Sauer<sup>2</sup> dietary supplements encompass a wide spectrum of products, including vitamins and minerals, such as folate and calcium; herbal therapies and botanical agents, such as ephedra and ginkgo biloba; and enzymes or extracts from organs or glands, such as some “hormone” preparations.

Most authors<sup>2-3</sup> agreed that dietary supplement functions as a booster to the immune system, supplements the diet, reduce the risks of illness and age-related conditions, and improve performance in athletic and mental activities as well as to support the healing process during illness and disease.

Writings on the area of halal have started since the 1980s when the Prime Minister at that time, insisted on the setting-up a proper institutionalized management system of Islamic matters that include a proper management of halal related issues<sup>4</sup>. Since then, several studies were conducted on numerous areas and scope of halal particularly from the social perspectives.

The writings that were focused on the consumption behaviours<sup>5-7</sup> and medication behaviours<sup>8-11</sup> agreed that halal rulings have contributed to the shaping of the consumption and medication behaviours of many consumers. Even though there were observations on the effects of halal consumption behaviours on the formulation of government policies but studies on

appropriate tools and mechanism to execute the halal policies were not addressed<sup>12</sup>.

Substantial literatures<sup>13</sup> were based on the theological study of halals as a background to the concept of halal pharmaceuticals. This includes the study on Shari’ah rulings which also serve as relevant determinants of the halal status of any pharmaceutical product. These studies<sup>14-18</sup> discussed the Shari’ah principles relating to halal such as *Istihalah*<sup>19-20</sup> (transformation), *Istislak* (assimilation), *Dharuriyat* (necessity), *Maqasid Shari’ah* (for the public interest), the scope of halal,<sup>21</sup> the underlying reasons for the command to consume halal, the connection of halal and *thoyyibban* and the common usage of halal in daily life. Al-Qaradawi<sup>18</sup> in his book *Al Halal Wa al Haram fi al Islam*, focused on the Islamic legal approaches which aim to offer better understanding on the operation of halal rulings in societal life including the application of rulings on halal in seeking for medication.

There are various writings<sup>16,22,23</sup> on halal pharmaceutical that includes the growth of halal pharmaceutical industry<sup>24-26</sup> and the issues that surround the issues of halal certified products mixed with non-halal derived genes to enhance the growth process, reports on manufacturers who were not adhering to labelling requirements, the need to have proper and transparent labelling for halal products<sup>27</sup> the complex composition of modern drugs and medicine<sup>28,29</sup> that requires the switch of the old rule<sup>11,21,31-32</sup> from *caveat emptor* to *caveat venditor*, the discovery of non-halal ingredients in drugs,<sup>33-36</sup> and the doubtful status of some medication and drugs<sup>37,38</sup>. Even though there are abundant literatures on halal, these literatures did not specifically address the issues surrounding the developing industry of dietary supplement in connection to the possible assistance of adopting halal concept in the administration of safety, efficacy and quality.

**Problem Statement:** Supplement production flood the modern market due to the demand of consumers. Consumer demanded supplementary product due to increase of awareness and changes in lifestyle. Lately supplementary product is attached to issues of safety, efficacy and deterioration of quality. Halal assurance can be one of the solution to assure the safety, efficacy and quality of supplementary products. However, not many consumers understand the concept of *halalanthoyyibban*. Though there are many studies conducted on supplementary products and halal based

research, the studies only focuses on the theological study, marketing and business strategy, financial impact, health related issue and economic discussion. To date there is an absence of studies that relates the understanding of consumers on the ability of halal certified product to assure and safeguard the safety, efficacy and quality of a product. Hence it is the aim of this research to undertake the study in this particular area.

### Methodology

The study adopts mix method of qualitative and quantitative method. The qualitative method embarks on the analyzing the fundamental principle of ‘halalanthoyibban” and its relation to the assurance of safety, efficiency and quality of dietary supplements products. The analyzing of data acquired through qualitative method involve content analysis approach on traditional and contemporary sources of Islamic laws.

The second part of the study uses quantitative method by distribution of questionnaires via online forms and consumers who visit the pharmaceutical stores. The following are the charts representing respondents:

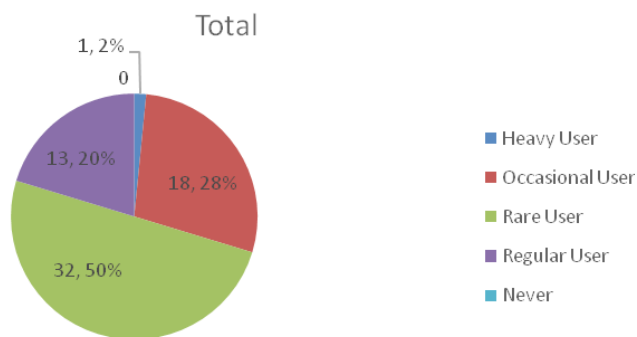


Figure 1

Majority of the respondents are Muslim female who are rare users of dietary supplement products.

### Discussion

#### Knowledge on Dietary Supplement:

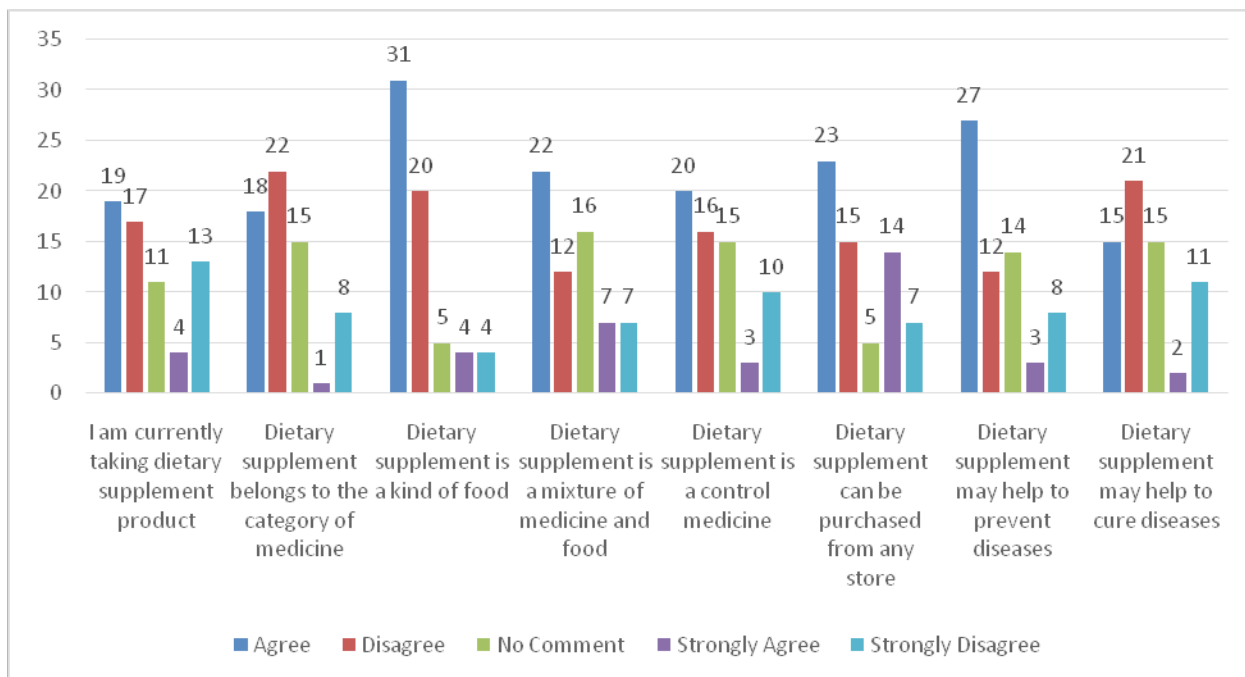


Figure 2

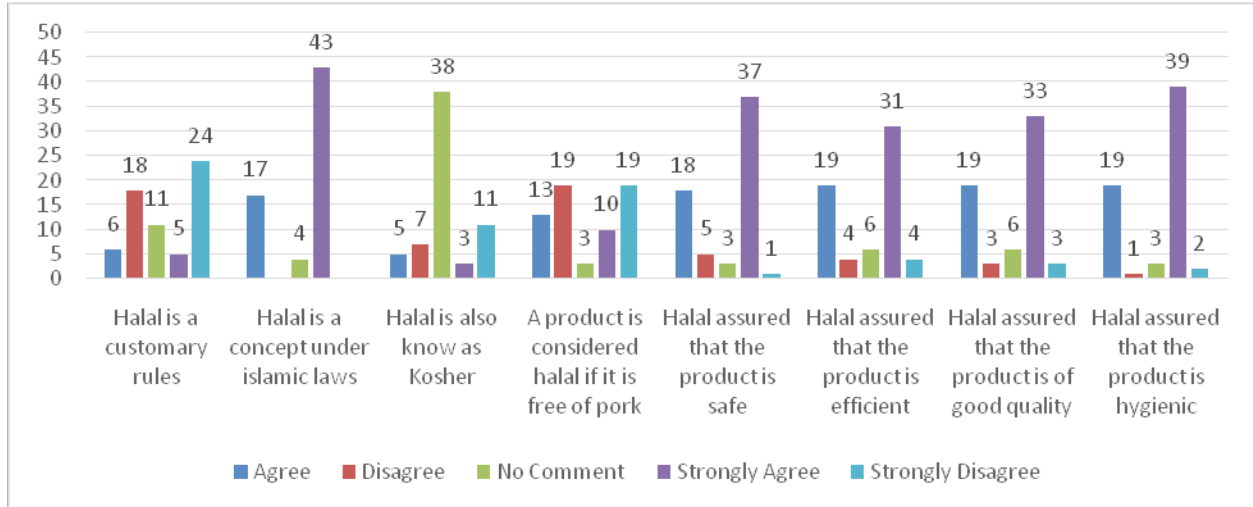
The analysis showed that a majority of the respondents were aware of the existence of dietary supplement products in the market as a majority of them are currently consumers of dietary supplement product. Questions aiming at testing the ability of respondents to classify dietary supplement product into the group of food

or medicine received a majority answer that the dietary supplement product is more of a food product rather than medicinal product. However, when posted with questions of the possibility that a dietary supplement product is a mixture of medicinal and food component, many are uncertain as to this possibility. It is also discovered that

the respondents believe that the function of a dietary supplement product is to prevent diseases rather than to cure diseases. In summary it can be said that most of the

respondents have a profuse understanding of the actual concept of dietary supplement product.

**Knowledge on Halal Concept:**

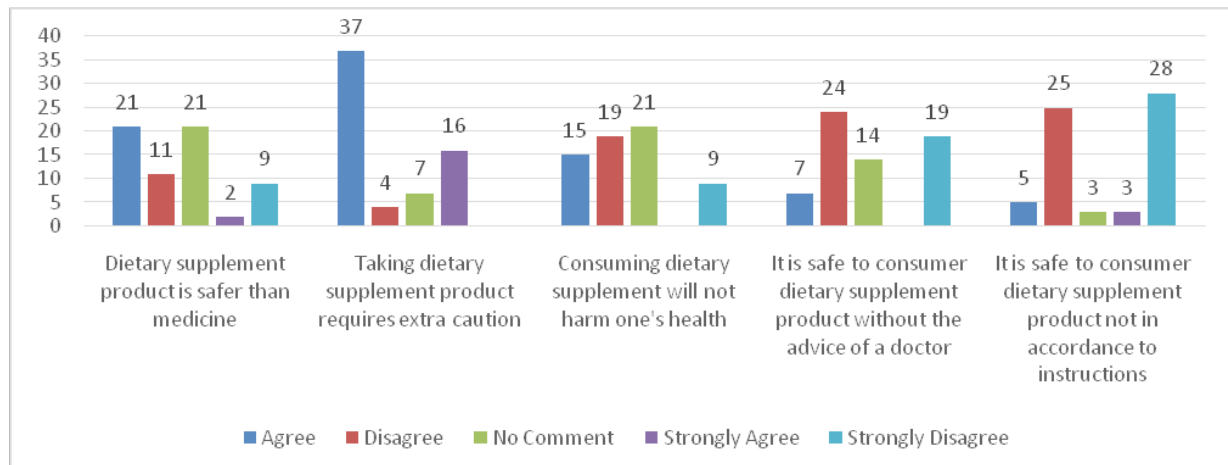


**Figure 3**

The analysis of this theme showed that not many consumers have sufficient knowledge on halal and its association to dietary supplement products. A majority categorised halal as a branch of Islamic law, whereas halal is a dietary concept and guideline for Muslim and not a component of Islamic law. A Muslim who consumes non-halal is a sinner and not a criminal. When asked on whether halal is a part of Customary law or a Kosher Dietary guideline, majority answered in denial showing that they are certain halal belongs

to rulings of Islam. When the question tested them on the actual understanding of *halalanthoyibban* concept, the respondents showed that they understand well that to get a product to be certified halal it must not only be free from any pork- based substances but there are other guidelines to be complied with. A majority of the respondents strongly agreed that halal may assure the safety, efficacy, good quality and hygienic aspects of the products.

**Associating Dietary Supplement With Risk:**

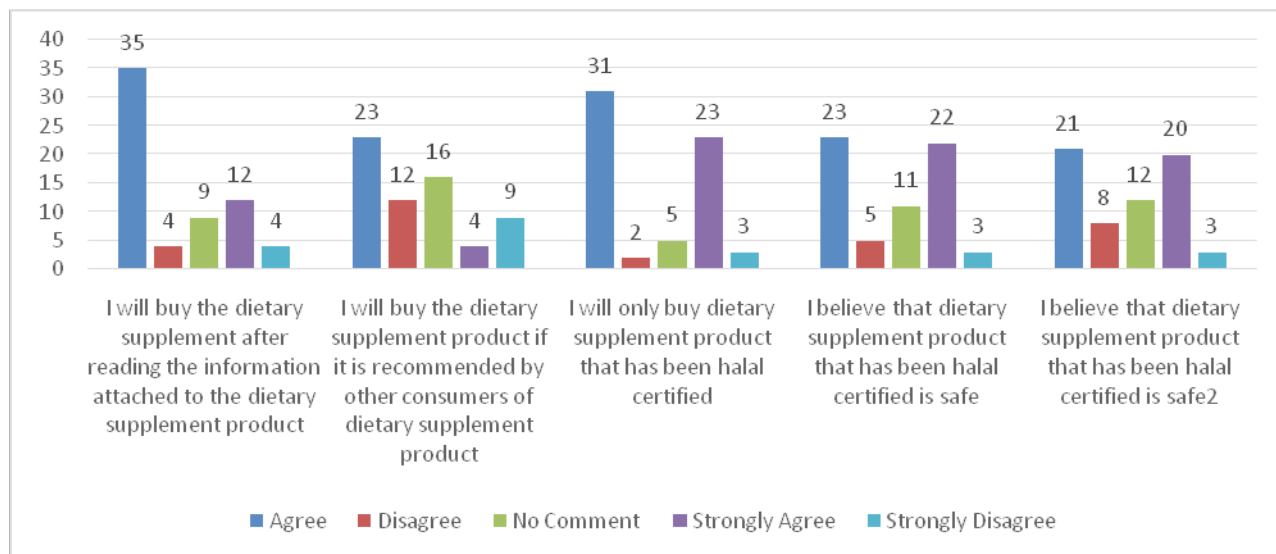


**Figure 4**

The analysis on this theme disclosed that a majority of the respondents are cautious consumers. Even though a majority agree that consuming dietary supplement products exposes them to a lesser risk than a medicinal product, they agreed that the normal rule in taking

medicine (such as it has to be taken with doctor’s prescription) and consumers must take the dietary supplements according to the instructions attached to the product.

**Desire to Purchase Dietary Supplement:**



**Figure 5**

From the analysis it can be summarized that the desire of respondents to purchase dietary supplement products were very much affected by information attached to the packaging and recommendations by others. As a majority of the respondents were Muslims, the findings showed that a majority of the respondents strongly agreed that they will only purchase dietary supplement product that has a halal certification. They believe that halal label assures the safety, efficacy and quality of the product.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this research show that a significantly high number of respondents understand the *thoyibban* concept insofar as the quality of products, but not to the safety and efficacy aspects. Most respondents agree that dietary supplements need to be halal certified as an assurance that the ingredients are halal so as to cast aside any doubts. With many cases of people affected by the side effects of certain dietary supplements, it is hoped that the outcome of this aspect of the research would help in the policy making, awareness and formulating

a standard operating procedure for manufacturers of dietary supplements to ensure the sustainability of this industry.

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