

THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN PROMOTING HALAL PRODUCTS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Mass media is a channel for the public to get hold of particular messages and information. It is capable in reaching a huge number of people in any part of the world. Due to its capabilities and power, mass media has been used for decades and for various functions. With the advent of modern technology, the media still plays vital role in ensuring of the development of a society and nation. As a multiracial country and having Islam as the major adhered religion, sensitivity of local media on religious matters should be increased. Therefore, this paper highlights on the important roles of mass media and additionally their responsibility towards the social agenda and religious obligation.

Introduction

According to Hartley (2004), the word 'medium' is referring to any material through which something else may be transmitted. Therefore, a 'media' of communication is actually any means by which messages may be transmitted to another individual. In practice, the term is usually focusing on the 'mass' media that covers the usage of a medium for huge number of people. The 'media' is referring to content industries devoted to reaching every large popular audience and readerships in print (newspapers, magazines, popular publishing), screen (cinema, TV) and aural (recorded music, radio) media (Hartley, 2004).

According to The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English (Thompson, 1995), the word 'promoting' which comes from the term 'promote' means the act to encourage, support actively, to publicize and sell (of a product) (Wehmeir et.al., 2005). In addition, the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005) indicates its meaning as to help something to happen or develop. Therefore this paper intends to stress on the mass media that is widely use nowadays as a tool to develop public awareness or to publicize of a product or services.

Definition of *Halal*

Halal is a Quranic term which means 'permitted', 'allowed', 'authorized' 'approved', 'sanction' or 'lawful' by the Islamic Law (Syara'). In this paper, the term *halal* is referring according to MS 1500:2004. MS 1500:2004 is the *halal* standard based on previous standard developed by Malaysian Institute of Industrial Research and Standards (SIRIM) MS1500:2000. It was drafted to address issues pertaining to *halal* standard. According to Sumali (<http://www.Islam.gov>) the standard has been recognized by the United Nations and has effectively promulgated Malaysia as the world' s first to issue standards for the manufacturing, preparation, managing and storage of *halal* food (<http://www.islam.gov.my/portal/lihat.php?jakim=2140>).

According to MS 1500:2004 *halal* is defined as "things or actions permitted by *Syariah* law without punishment imposed on the doer". *Syariah* law in this context refers to the laws of Islam in the

Mazhab of Shafie or the laws of Islam according to other denominations of Maliki, Hambali and Hanafi which are approved by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to be in force in the federal territory or the Ruler of any state to be in force in the state or fatwa approved by the Islamic Authority (MS 1500:2004).

Halal food on the other hand is described as food permitted under the *Syariah* law and must fulfill the following conditions as follow:

- a) "the food or its ingredients that do not contain any parts or products or animals that are non-*halal* to Muslims by *Syariah* law or products or products of animals which are not slaughtered according to *Syariah* law";
- b) "the food does not contain any ingredients that are *najs* (things that are not permissible according to Islamic *Syariah* such as pig, blood, liquor, urine and etc. *Najs* also includes *halal* food that is contaminated or has direct contact with things that are non-*halal*. *Halal* animals that are not slaughtered according to *Syariah* law are also considered as *najs*) according to *Syariah* law";
- c) "the food that is safe and not harmful";
- d) "the food that is not prepared, processed or manufactured using equipment that is contaminated with things that are *najs* according to *Syariah* law";
- e) "the food or its ingredients do not contain any human parts or its derivatives that are not permitted by *Syariah* law"; and
- f) "during its preparation, processing, packaging, storage or transportation, the food is physically separated from any other food that does not meet the requirements stated in items a),b),c),d) or e) or nay other things that have been decreed as *najs* by *Syariah* law".
(MS 1500:2004:2)

Based on the above explanation it shows us that the definition of *halal* foods provided by the standard conforms to the Islamic dietary laws as specified in the Quran, the Hadith (sayings) of the Prophet Muhammad and his Sunnah (traditions) and in the Fiqh of Islamic Jurists; Hanafi, Shafie, Maliki and Hambali. Hence it is plausible to argue that the *halal* definition conforms to the Allah commands to eat things which are good and pure (*attoyyibat*) (Al-Maidah, 5:4). Good and pure here can be explained as good and wholesome foodstuff.

Moreover, the *halal* definition gives emphasis on safety and quality assurance as well as hygienic. Therefore safety and quality assurance will ensure that the *halal* products not only clean but they will be taken care of with good presentation and served in a proper manner and of quality for everybody.

Why Muslims must consume *halal* products?

Islam is the way of life. It has no dichotomy between what is called worldly affairs and religious affairs or sacred and profane. It governs all aspects of life such as politic, economy, social, science and technology, education as well as food. The life of a Muslim revolves around the concept of *Halal*. A Muslim must earn income from *Halal* sources, be involved only in *Halal* transactions and consume *Halal* food and drink.

Muslims are obliged to consume food or products that are *halal*, good and wholesome. Such obligation is evident in the Quran and the Hadith. Allah SWT says:

“O mankind! Eat of that which is halalan tayyiban (lawful and good) on the earth, and follow not the footsteps of Shaitan (Satan). Verily, he is to you an open enemy”. (Al-Baqarah, 2:168)

“And eat of the things which Allah has provided for you, halalan tayyiban (lawful and good), and fear Allah in Whom you believe”. (Al-Maidah, 5:88)

“So eat of the halalan tayyiban (lawful and good) which Allah has provided for you, and be grateful for the Graces of Allah, if it is He Whom you worship”. (An-Nahl,16: 114)

“O you who believe in the Oneness of Allah –Islamic Monotheism)! Eat of the lawful things that We have provided you with and be grateful to Allah, if it is intended He Whom you worship” (al-Baqarah, 2: 172).

“O (you) Messengers! Eat of the Tayyibat (all kinds of Halal foods which Allah has made lawful (meat of slaughtered eatable animals, milk products, fats, vegetables’ fruit etc.) and do righteous deed. Verily, I am All Knower of what you do”. (al-Mu’minun, 23:51)

“They ask you (O Muhammad s.a.w.) what is lawful for them (as food), say: “Lawful unto you are At-Tayyibat (pure and good foods)...” (Al-Maidah,5:4)

Meanwhile in the Hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said; *“Allah the Almighty is good and accepts only that which is good. Allah has commanded the Faithful to do that which He commanded the Messengers. Allah the Almighty said:“O you Messengers! Eat of the good things, and do right...” (Qur’an 23:51). Allah also said: “O you who believe! Eat of the good things wherewith We have provided you...” (Qur’an 2:172). Then he mentioned [the case of] a man who, having journeyed far, is disheveled and dusty and who spreads out his hands to the sky [saying]: O Lord! O Lord!-while his food is unlawful, his drink is unlawful, his clothing unlawful, and he is nourished unlawfully, so how can he be answered”. (Sahih Muslim)*

Hence the Muslims must eat *halal* food as the food that we eat has direct effect on us. It is the primary thing that needs to be considered by a Muslim. Supplications (dua) are not accepted due to consuming unlawful food. Besides of that Muslims are asked to consume lawful and good products because they are good for human body, mental, and spiritual.

On the other hand forbidden foods such as swine, intoxicants things such as liquor and dead meat are found to have negative impact on the people behaviour. Liquor for example can lead to behavioral disorder, acute and chronic depression, lost of rational judgment, suicide and so on.

Therefore Muslims are strictly prohibited from consuming unlawful foodstuffs or products. In the Quran Allah SWT said that:

“He hath forbidden you only carrion and blood and swine flesh and that which hath been immolated to any other than Allah..”. (al-Baqarah ,2:173)

"Forbidden to you is anything that dies by itself, and blood and pork, as well as whatever has been consecrated to something besides Allah, and whatever has been strangled, beaten to death, trapped in a pit, gored, and what some beast of prey has begun to eat, unless you give it the final blow; and what has been slaughtered before some idol, or what you divide up in a raffle; (all) that is immoral!" (al-Maidah,5::3).

O ye who believe! Strong drinks and games of chance, and idols and divining arrows are only an infamy of Satan’s handiwork, leave it aside in order that ye may succeed (Chapter V, Verse 90).

The prohibition of consuming unlawful products or food according to El-Mouelhy (<http://www.halahlpline.org/hlcncpt.htm>) is due to several reasons, namely:

- a. To preserve the purity of religion
- b. To safeguard the Islamic mentality
- c. To preserve life
- d. To safeguard property
- e. To safeguard future generations
- f. To maintain self respect and integrity.

The Role of Mass Media

Today's media are tremendously used by the audience according to their purposes. The messages brought by the media may influence and help people in many ways, from the need for reference to a simple situation as to let the time passes by. According to Vivian J. (2005), mass media are pervasive in modern life, in which they are all encompassing people to get involve in their activities and 'push' their intention to participate continuously.

On the other hand, the mass media is also used as source of information. Almost everyone would read newspapers, switch on the radio or television set to get information and latest updates on current issues. With the advent of modern technology and satellite, people can even watch various TV programmes at almost the same moment around the clock, without stopping. Therefore, mass media allows us to be undated and continuously learn new things like of an event or points that is way beyond our understanding such as about science and space.

Additionally, the most popular function of mass media today is mainly for entertainment purposes, in which people would watch television for leisure, buy a magazine that has a pin-up poster of a favourite artist or even participate in a radio programme slot for an opinion. Generally, people do almost everything with media and the most important function of the mass media is to educate people of any information and messages from the party that sends the information (the sender) to the receiver. This function normally runs together with the purpose to persuade the audience of the messages and information that the media carries. Advertising is a way of which people are persuaded to buy or use particular products or services in an advertisement.

Despite of its great influence, mass media today has grown to be seen as more commercial-oriented where the influence of money is always taken into consideration. The commercialization aspect is one of the important factors in the media industry especially in making decisions. Although using mass media is an important factor to disseminate information, the rational of decision making through media content often involve self-interest and bias (Ramendra, 2005).

The sense of self-interest is often injected in the media in which is popularly known as agenda setting. According to Walter Lippmann's idea of 'agenda-setting', it is the media who attempts to tell the people what to think about (Baran and Davis, 2005:316) so that they can start thinking about an issue after receiving it form the media. Individuals and the society may start to think and act according to their perception thus making decision to accept or reject of certain idea.

According to Karthigesu (1994) a more important role of the traditional media is as tools of development and histories had seen those four functions of media do plays important role for the development of a particular nation. In developing countries such as Malaysia mass media especially television is use as tool for education, propagation and route the people towards better future and livelihood.

Nevertheless development also brings lots of influence, beneficial and negative changes. One of the impacts brought by modern living is globalization. Due to the effects of globalization, commercialization of media is seen as more prominent than their sensitivity on social and

religious obligations. Today's news bulletins and public affairs programmes have imparted lots of commercial elements due to advertisers' and market demand. In relation, Bennett (2004) states that the situation is seen as a changing role of the media content in which the media system today tends to display a mixture of infotainment (consumer trends, fashion, sports, celebrity gossip) and sensationalism (sex, scandal and violence). Another aspect of the mixture is political negativity which is the social and governmental dysfunction (often emanating from politicians themselves) where journalist found 'discoveries' of scandal, waste and excess. The approach often works quite well for the advertisers as well as for grabbing audience's interest.

In addition, the media practitioners would use any means that provokes and captures audience attention. They would use a popular or controversial artist and even a comedian to ensure the audience stops, get the message and at the same time being entertained. Some may be amused by the approaches, techniques or dialogues in the advertisements but some may feel it annoying. What ever are the reasons, advertisers will always use direct or indirect provocative and persuasive ads approach in order to win the people's heart.

Media and Responsibilities

Despite of the mentioned roles and functions, there is another important aspect that the media should behave and implement in performing their operation and tasks, that is their social obligation towards the society (McQuails, 2000:150; Baran and Davis, 2006:113). The Social Responsibility theory is one of the Normative Theories that highlights on few ways to operate a media organization. Basically, there are four ways (known as 'Four Theories of the Press') that suggest approaches on administering media organization (normally the printed press) that is the Social Responsibility theory, Authoritarian Theory, Libertarian Theory (Freedom of the Press) and Communist Theory. Each has their own advantage and disadvantages approach depending on governmental regulatory and implementation and the Social Responsibility theory highlights some of the media obligation towards public.

Basically, according to a study report by Robert Hutchins (McQuails, 2000) a responsible press should:

- a. provide a full, truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning,
- b. serve as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism
- c. be a 'common carrier of the public expression'
- d. give a 'representative picture of constituent groups in society'
- e. present and clarify 'goals and values of society'.

In addition, the report also criticized the sensationalism of the press and the mixing of news with editorial opinion. As a multiracial country, the Malaysian media has vital agenda for the establishment of the country and at the same time struggling to maintain harmony and peaceful situation through out the nation. Although Malaysia is a nation that gives its people freedom of faith, Islam is the official religion in which the Muslim consists of the majority. Therefore, it is essential for the Malaysian media to fulfill certain obligation to the society such as on religious aspect, in this case towards the betterment of Muslim *ummah*. Article 4 of the Jakarta Declaration at the First International Islamic Mass Media Conference (1980), declares on the Islamic Mass Media Charter's Code of Ethics;

Islamic journalists must be committed to the propagation of Da'wah, to elucidating Islamic issues and to the defence of Muslim point of view. They should also seek to introduce Muslim peoples to one another. They should also be interested in Islamic history, Islamic civilization and the promotion of Arabic language and its dissemination among Muslims, especially Muslim minorities. They should also be committed to re-establish the dominion of Shariah, in lieu of man-made laws and

principles. They must be committed to struggle for the liberation of Palestine, especially al-Quds. They must be totally dedicated to the idea of the Islamic Ummah which must be untainted by either regional, national or tribal chauvinism. They must also strongly advocate the fight against under development in all its manifestations and support the effort towards full development which should guarantee to the Ummah, its betterment and power."

(Source : The Journal Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami", 7. 1980 (12), p. 60-61)

Through out the years since the articulation of the Hutchins Commission to impart social responsibility of the media in the daily duties, many have increase efforts to implement the obligation. Despite all the increasing awareness, still there seems to be little enthusiasm among many media professionals for its focus on public good. The conflict between social responsibility and profitability becomes serious in our increasingly commercialized media where responsibility becomes less central to the mission of many media organizations (Baran and Davis, 2006:123).

Enhancing Media Roles, Strategies and Obligation

1. Media Obligation and professionalism practice

Journalists of the printed or electronic media are the tools of a media organization in playing its role as a mediator between the senders of a message to the receivers. In this situation, journalists are normally bound to the code of ethics in performing their daily routine. They do not only need to be responsible to what ever they cover and write but also to ensure of the truthful, accuracy and balance in their reporting for the target audience. According to scholars, this situation creates a kind of burden for the journalist to do the best with the presence of sincerity and for benefit of others. (Baran and Davis, 2005)

In terms of professionalism of journalists, Malaysia's former Prime Minister, Tun Mahathir Mohammad indicated that the media has a social responsibility to the public (Loh & Koh, 2002 (in Sharon Wilson Ramendra , 2005) and the media in Malaysia is practicing the social responsibility theory (Safar Hashim, 1996) in Sharon Wilson Ramendra, 2005). Every journalist should be responsible for their news reports or coverage. Any mistakes done in the news reports, a journalist or media practitioner should apologise and clarify to the public that he or she accepts and admit the error.

According to Tuchman (1972 as in Sharon Wilson Ramendra, 2005) journalists also see themselves as satisfying their profession commitment to objectivity by looking at a story from both sides; assessing the conflicting claims and credibility of their sources; looking for the evidence in any issue; and not publishing anything which is untrue. As a result, objectivity is important for news reporting because if a journalist reports the news with a subjective view, it will jeopardise the facts. The readers cannot have a vivid picture on certain events and they may make a wrong news judgment.

Additionally, an ethical journalist would always be balance in many ways while performing a news report or coverage. According to a journalist from 'The Star' (Sharon Wilson Ramendra, 2005) ethics is important for a journalist because "it can serve as a guide, but the ultimate test is when you are put into a situation where you will need to apply the code to yourself and find out if you pass or fail...it is truly a test of your own conscience and your own sense of morality and religious upbringing that is going to make the difference."

In a recent interview with Dato' Dr Maamor Osman (2006) of the Muslim Consumer Association of Malaysia, he suggests that media practitioner play aggressive role in implementing their social agenda. *Halal* issues are seen as religious propagation and the obligation of every Muslims, therefore practitioners especially the Muslim media should carry their responsibilities accordingly

to provide truthful and objective information pertaining to any issues. Priority should be given to the benefit of the public and not too much on profitability.

2. Media as agenda-setter in da'wah

Another important role of the media is to set the agenda. A media would start highlighting on a particular issue and make the public start thinking about the issue. This is known as 'agenda-setting' in which the media people disseminate certain message to the audience (Baran and Davis, 2005). Without the function of a media, the information would not be known to others.

Social science scholars also agreed that television together with other mass media, has particularly play important roles in the development of a nation. In a developing country such as Malaysia, television is used as a tool to educate, to persuade and to channel the people towards a developed citizen (Karthigesu, 1994). Therefore in every mean of media ethic and responsibility, this factor has been an important function of a mass media campaign.

In regards to the *halal* issue, the media would give coverage and report news on matters pertaining *halal* issues. Information and messages that a media impart in news and advertisements for example could enhance public awareness towards the issue by using repetition. The process of repeating particular news or advertisements would ensure that the messages penetrate public's mind. This would eventually result on the successfulness of a particular media campaign. Therefore in order to ensure of promotion achievement, vigilant planning of a particular media usage is vital.

In relation to the situation, the *da'ie* need to implement positive changes by using various media as tools of da'wah. Women models with '*tudung*' (covered veil) in advertisements are an example of a da'wah approach by the media. But what is more important is to have more religious people involve in mass media industries. Matters pertaining to writing, content, clarification, credibility and source are vital in ensuring of proper messages given to the public.

3. Tools for Promotion Strategies

Selling a new product is harder than it seems. It requires detail and comprehensive planning. A manufacturer that wanted to promote its goods need some research on various information regarding such as the product market, distribution, target market, demographic background of targeted market, message, approach, buying trends and competitors (Mohd Sidin Ahmad Ishak et al., 2002). This information would be beneficial to the whole project planning and marketing tools.

Most entrepreneurs use advertising as a medium to promote their products. Advertising is a method to distribute messages to promote a service or a product paid by the advertisers (Keshishoglou and Aquilia, 2006). Iniatially there are three main types of advertising (Wells et al., 2000) :

1. Broadcast media
2. Print ads
3. Interactive media

Broadcast media consists of advertisements aired on television, radio and films. Whereas print advertisements are ads published in newspapers, magazines and directory books. Out-of-home advertising is also perceived as print ads because it was printed before it is advertised. With the advent of computers and internet, interactive media becomes popular among entrepreneurs and consumers as it may provide better information and much faster than before.

Print media are media that deliver certain messages one topic at a time. Whereas television and electronic media use a simultaneous approach to deliver a message quickly by using sound, motion and text (Wells et al., 2000). Nevertheless, print media are popular among the public due to the structured nature of print delivery and selective approach of target audience. Newspaper and magazines are examples of print media. Out-of-home advertising is another approach in implementing promotions. The approach was previously known as outdoor advertising, which covers from the use of billboards, big posters, painted bulletins to hot-air balloons in order to disseminate messages.

Entrepreneurs may use any medium to highlight their products or services to the market. But in order to ensure of the successfulness of a promotion, a detail and proper planning need to be executed. One of the important promotion execution planning is to identify the brand strategy. According to Hamid Mohamed (2005), branding strategy is process of identifying or creating a product name, product image and taglines. They represent the value of a product for your customers (Ward 1999). Hamid Mohamed (2005) further indicates that 'brand' is about customer perceptions towards the offerings and many times it is larger than the product itself. It is something beyond the 'name' of the offering. Normally the names which may include a word or 'device' such as design, sound shape or color or any of these combinations are used to identify an offering. Part of the branding strategy is an effective brand slogan builds on strategic content differentiation and unique selling proposition. The emphasis on brand strategy would ensure the successfulness of a product promotion.

Conclusion

Mass media has various roles and functions towards a particular society. As a mediator and sender of information media organizations and practitioners should be objective in implementing their assignments and responsibilities. Media responsibility does not only pertaining to the objective of a nation, society or media organization but as well as to their own religion.

In order to deliver accurate, truth and balance reporting, media practitioners should be supported by certain guidelines, ethical and professional values. Nevertheless, the issue of ethics of the media is critical due to modernization and globalisation. As mentioned by an editor of a local English daily, "These days there is a lot of pressure to deliver the news because speed is paramount. However, if you look at it objectively, speed is not the real issue here because the wire agencies have been doing it for years. The whole point about checking your information, verifying your facts, still hold true." (Ramendra, 2005)

Although commercialization is important to mesmerize the industry, too much commercial values would also impart negative influences, media has to implement proper guidelines and transparent in sensitive issues pertaining to religious matters. In the case of *halal* foods and products, excuses should not be accepted of any negligence of failure of putting the *halal* logo. Therefore, media should play an active role to increase public awareness on the *halal* issues and consumerism.

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