

# Student's Halal Awareness of Dining at Korean Restaurants

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## ABSTRACT

Korean cuisine is fast gaining international acceptance, particularly among younger generations, since Korean pop culture has established itself as a media powerhouse. Muslim customers are not excluded from having a strong enthusiasm in and desire for Korean cuisine as it grows in popularity. The problem arises when some of the available Korean restaurants in Malaysia do not have halal certification from Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM), besides the issue of confusing Korean terms used for their menus. The aim of this research is to determine the factors affecting dining intention and to analyse the level of halal awareness of dining at Korean restaurants among students at the Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (ACIS), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam. This study adopted the quantitative method where the primary data were collected through 318 sets of survey questionnaire distributed to the target respondents. The data obtained were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 28.0 to obtain the frequency, percentage, and mean of responses. From the findings, 68% respondents agreed that utilitarian value is the main factor that affects the intention of dining at Korean restaurants. Their level of halal awareness of dining at Korean restaurants is also high, where 78.9% of the respondents will avoid dining at Korean restaurants without a halal logo. In conclusion, the Muslims students from ACIS, UiTM Shah Alam are cautious about the halalness of the food they consume, particularly in Korean restaurants.

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## INTRODUCTION

Korean culture is becoming well-known around the world. According to Lee (2011), Hallyu is a term that refers to the extraordinary expansion of Korean style and popular culture such as music, films, dramas, online games, and Korean food. Korean culture has received a warm welcome by the young people nowadays. This is proven by the overall exports of Korean dramas to Asian nations, which surged in 2003, with the increased value of exports from US\$12.7 million in 1999 to US\$37.5 million in 2003 (Shim, 2006).

Korean restaurants are one of the attractions that draw people to try Korean food. Consumers view Korean food as distinctive and nutritious compared to other Asian cuisines (Liu and Jang, 2009). Among the most popular Korean meals are *samgyupsal*, *ramyun*, *chimek*, *kimchi*, and *chigae* (Nahar, 2018). Malaysians prefer spicy food, which is a prominent feature in Korean and Malaysian cuisine. Korean food companies are therefore more focused on satisfying consumer cuisine views and offer a wide variety of cuisine to the

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customers (Lee and Lee, 2017). In Malaysia, Korean food is adapted from its country of origin to ensure that traditional Korean food is authentic and aromatic. Consequently, when introduced to Malaysia, many Korean dishes are difficult to be modified in terms of recipes to sustain and preserve the taste, aroma, and originality.

The issue of halal food in Korean restaurants needs to be studied in more depth as traditional Korean food is mostly meat-based such as chicken or meat stew (stock) soup, thus halal slaughtering issue arises besides the food fermentation process that contains alcohol which has syubhah elements in it. In the making of Korean food, the fermentation process is essential. They considered that conventional cooking entailed a metabolic process that allowed food to 'mature', resulting in a better flavour and the ability to be preserved for longer periods of time. Fermentation aids in the delivery of beneficial bacteria, often known as probiotics, which aid in digestion, immunity, and weight management (Patra et al., 2016). The fermentation process is common in Korean kitchen, particularly in ingredients such as gochujang, kimchi, and soy sauce preparation. In Korean restaurants, these three ingredients are frequently used to prepare dishes including barbecue sauces, bibimbap, fried chicken, and many more. When the alcohol levels are beyond the permitted amount, which are not more than 1% as authorised by the National Fatwa Council, this aspect will likely be a hurdle to the restaurants to obtain halal certification (Jamaludin et al., 2016). The study by Abdul Rahim and Mohd Amin (2020) revealed that the top Korean restaurants in Kuala Lumpur confronted this scenario, when their fried rice dishes could not fulfil the criteria and guidelines for the usage of alcohol-containing fermented kimchi. Given their popularity, Muslim consumers are not exempt from the fact that they are intrigued by traditional Korean delicacies. However, just a few Korean eateries are halal certified. Even though some of the Korean restaurants in Malaysia put up signs indicating that they do not serve pork, these "no pork" or "pork free" labelling on these restaurants still raises doubt among Muslim believers. This is due to the validity of the claims made by the restaurants whether it fulfils the halal requirements in the whole process. The study by Othman et. al., (2016) also mentioned that in certain situations, the availability of unethical manufacturers or traders also have their own logos designed or known 'self-declaration' especially when the country does not limit the power of the recognition's logo. The total number of Muslims customers who visit Korean restaurant chains still seems to be high even with halal's ambiguous status (Buang et al., 2018).

Aside from the issue of unclear halal status in Korean restaurants, the dishes served in these restaurants can also be confusing for Malaysians. For example, terms such as *kimchi*, *jjajangmyeon*, *tteokbokki*, *bibimbap*, *gimbap*, and *dakgalbi* are quite common in Korean kitchen, but no available guidelines about the ingredients used to produce these dishes and lack of information on the critical ingredients used to produce these dishes, make it difficult for devoted Muslims to dine at Korean restaurants without a halal logo. Halal is a necessity for Muslims in restaurant selection for a meal. Some Muslims are confident to eat at Korean restaurants without a halal logo by judging from the "Muslim-look" or "Malay look" worker or server of the restaurants besides the existing customers. Therefore, this study was conducted among the Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (ACIS) students who have Islamic education background, but their awareness, intention, and desire to eat at Korean restaurants without a certified halal logo have not yet been studied. In this study, the elements of promotion, halal awareness, subjective norms, hedonic value, and utilitarian value which influence the Muslim consumers' patronage intention towards Korean restaurant chains in Malaysia were examined.

## METHODOLOGY

This research applied a quantitative method to achieve the research objectives. The survey technique was employed in this study, where questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. Both male and female undergraduate students aged 18 and above, who are currently enrolled at ACIS UiTM Shah Alam, Malaysia were selected as the target population. These students were from different courses. A total of 318 respondents from 1809 students had answered the questionnaire. The structured questionnaires were distributed via Google Forms and consisted of three parts, namely (a) respondents' demographic

background, (b) factors that encourage respondents to dine at Korean restaurants, and (c) respondents' halal awareness of dining at Korean restaurants. Their responses were obtained based a five-point Likert scale with five answer options, which are "Strongly disagree" (1), "Disagree" (2), "Neutral" (3), "Agree" (4), and "Strongly agree" (5). The questionnaires were analysed by using descriptive analysis through the latest version of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the analysis of the survey questionnaire, it was noted that a total of 318 respondents had answered the questionnaire which consist of female (76.8%) and male (25.2%) in different age groups from 21 to 23 years old (72.3%), 24 to 25 years old (16.7%), 18 to 20 years old (8.8%), and 25 years old and above (2.2%). They also come from two different marital statuses which are single (97.8%) and married (2.2%). These respondents are from two different courses, namely Bachelor of Halal Industry Management (71.1%) and Bachelor of Muamalat (28.9%) in different semesters; from semester 1 to semester 8. There are 40.9% of respondents from semester 7, 29.6% of respondents from semester 5, 16% of respondents from semester 6, 7.5% of respondents from semester 2, 2.8% of respondents from semester 3, 2.5% of respondents from semester 4, and 0.3% of respondents from semester 1 and semester 8 each.

### Factors Affecting Intention of Dining at Korean Restaurants

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of promotion, subjective norms, hedonic value, and utilitarian value while Table 2 represents the factors affecting intention of dining at Korean restaurants for each variable. Based on the results in Table 1, utilitarian value has the highest mean of  $3.77 \pm 0.87$ , which described that most of the respondents agreed with the statements under the questions related to utilitarian value. These findings are represented by the respondents' opinions in B8 and B9 in Table 2 where the respondents agreed that the feeling of wanting to try the various Korean dishes offered in Korean restaurants was the factor that encouraged them to dine at Korean restaurants with the highest mean score of  $3.79 \pm 1.10$ . Convenience, variety, looking for quality goods or services, and suitable prices are all utilitarian purchasing factors. Utilitarian motives are quantified in the restaurant concept by the benefits that customers receive while eating there. The menu supplied, flavour of the meal, portion size, presentation of the meal, and service itself are all utilitarian elements of a restaurant. According to Chang and Fang (2012), utilitarian values have a considerable impact on satisfaction and behavioural intention in the restaurant industry.

As advertised by many Korean restaurants, a wide range of appetizing dishes are available for selection. They are presented in an attractive and inviting manner. This will increase the customers' curiosity and desire to try the Korean dishes in Korean restaurants. This is supported by Hanzaee and Rezaeyeh (2013) in their study where utilitarian value had a direct effect on customer satisfaction in the fast-food restaurant industry. According to Ha and Jang (2010), restaurant customers have a variety of eating-out reasons, including social connection, enjoyment, taste, productivity, and economics. When these reasons are compared with the cost of food and facilities, diners frequently perceive utilitarian value. The reasons for patronising utilitarian restaurants are favourably associated with purchasing intentions.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on variables that affect the dining intention in Korean restaurant among respondents

No.	Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
1.	Promotion	318	3.4426	0.84625	4
2.	Subjective Norms	318	3.5409	0.95724	3
3.	Hedonic value	318	3.5645	0.97027	2
4.	Utilitarian value	318	3.7720	0.87051	1

Table 2: Analysis of mean, standard deviation and level of factors affecting dining intention in Korean restaurant among respondents

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
<b>PROMOTION</b>			
B1 - I will go to Korean restaurant during sales promotion.	3.34	1.041	Medium
B2 - I will go to Korean restaurant when discounts are given.	3.52	1.016	High
B3 - I may try the Korean restaurant just to confirm whether they are as good as in the advertisement.	3.61	1.011	High
B4 - I will go to the Korean restaurant that offer loyalty card with rewards (bonus points / gifts / rebates).	3.31	1.026	Medium
<b>SUBJECTIVE NORMS</b>			
B5 - I can be influenced by influencer in social media to eat at Korean restaurant.	3.29	1.191	Medium
B6 - I choose to eat at Korean restaurant as recommended by my friends.	3.79	0.977	High
<b>HEDONIC VALUE</b>			
B7 - I want to try eating at Korean restaurant after watching Korean movie/drama.	3.64	1.196	High
B9 - I dine at the Korean restaurant because it gives me a feeling of being part of a Korean culture.	3.49	1.026	High
<b>UTILITARIAN VALUE</b>			
B8 - I want to try variety of Korean menu offered in the Korean restaurants.	3.79	1.015	High
B10 - I like the variety of menu offered in the Korean restaurant.	3.75	0.922	High

Subsequently, the element that influences respondents' intention of dining at Korean restaurants is hedonic value with the mean score of  $3.56 \pm 0.97$ . This finding indicates that the majority of respondents agreed with the question related to hedonic value, which is further explained in Table 2. From Table 2, the majority of respondents agreed with statement B7 that they want to try dining at Korean restaurants after watching Korean dramas and movies, with the mean score of 3.64. According to Hanzae and Rezaeyeh (2013), hedonic value is the value that consumers receive after acquiring a product or service that causes them to feel pleasure, amusement, or enjoyment. The Korean acculturation through dramas is said to be successful when a lot of customers are attracted to their native foods. These findings are supported by Camarena et al. (2011) in their study that people who are already engaged in the popular media of other nations are more inclined to consume their food because pop culture teaches people about food safety, which is viewed as an inherent picture of a country's culture. Moreover, popular media can influence how strange cuisines are accepted by enhancing one's familiarity with a place.

Next, the third highest mean score is subjective norms which is  $3.54 \pm 0.96$  (Table 1) where the respondents acknowledged that they choose to eat at Korean restaurants as recommended by their friends with a high mean score of  $3.79 \pm 0.98$  (Table 2). Subjective norms refer to the consumer decisions as influenced by others. Kim et al. (2013) described subjective norms as the opinions of individuals who are close and significant to an individual that impact that individual's behaviour. These findings are in accordance with a study by Zhong et al. (2021) where subjective norms (personal views of reference groups and individuals among them) positively influenced the consumers' behavioural intentions of dining out. In Malaysia, the subjective norms play a prominent part where family members, friends, and colleagues act as a reference point (Afendi et al., 2014).

The final factor that influences the respondents' intention of dining at Korean restaurants is the promotional aspect with the lowest mean compared to other variables, which is  $3.44 \pm 0.85$ . This shows that most of the respondents are uncertain in responding to the statements under the questions related to the promotion variable. Based on Table 2, most of the respondents are undecided whether to dine at Korean restaurants during sales promotion with a mean score of 3.34. These findings are supported by Amofah et al. (2016) in their study that promotion had a significant but weak correlation with customers' decision to repeat purchase in the restaurant. However, Sari et al. (2020) reported that promotion is one of the factors considered by consumers in making purchase decisions in restaurants. Marketers of food goods can enhance product purchases through the use of targeted marketing communication devices, one of which is sales promotion.

## Respondent's Halal Awareness of Dining at Korean Restaurants

Table 3 demonstrates the analysis of mean, standard deviation, and level of respondents' halal awareness of dining at Korean restaurants. The findings have proven that the understanding and knowledge of respondents about halal awareness is excellent, particularly by statement C2 ("I know that JAKIM is the main body that authorises halal logo and certification for Korean restaurants") with the highest mean score of  $4.37 \pm 0.80$ . This indicates that the respondents have a good awareness of the authority of JAKIM to certify halal logo in Korean restaurants. This finding is supported by Hendradewi et al. (2020) in their study where people aged 11 to 21 have a good understanding and high knowledge of the halal logo printed on product packaging from Korea. Previous studies demonstrate that product without JAKIM Halal logo, food products from non-Muslim countries, unfamiliar brand and no clear list of ingredients make consumers feel less confident with the products (Rezai, 2012).

Table 1: Analysis of mean, standard deviation, and level of halal awareness among respondents during dining in Korean restaurant

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
C1 - I understand that Halal for Korean restaurant covers all activities from raw material to processing, preparing, and serving the food.	4.17	0.832	High
C2 - I know that JAKIM is the main body that authorizes Halal logo and certification for Korean restaurant.	4.37	0.795	Very high
C3 - I do not mind eating at the Korean restaurant without JAKIM Halal logo since some workers are Muslims.	2.19	1.126	Low
C4 - I do not mind eating at the Korean restaurant without JAKIM Halal logo since the consumers are Muslims.	2.13	1.160	Low
C5 - I believe the Korean restaurant do not serve pork and alcohol as advertised.	2.65	1.129	Medium
C6 - I will avoid Korean restaurant without Halal logo.	4.09	1.187	High

In addition, most of the respondents agree with statement C1 ("I understand that halal for Korean restaurants cover all activities from raw materials to processing, preparing, and serving the food") with a high mean score of  $4.17 \pm 0.83$ . It can be analysed that the respondents have a good knowledge of the halal requirements for Korean restaurants. This result is further hypothesised by statement C6 ("I will avoid Korean restaurants without a halal logo") with a mean of  $4.09 \pm 1.19$ . Their knowledge of the halal requirements for food and restaurants influences their intention to dine at Korean restaurants, which usually serve dishes made from unfamiliar raw materials. This evidence is supported by Hendradewi et al. (2020) in their study that the respondents felt safe consuming products originating from Korea only if the packaging is labelled with a halal logo. It can be concluded that the halal label acts as an important tool to increase the respondents' confidence in getting both Korean-based products and services. Halal cuisine may appear to be like other foods at first glance, but all the raw materials used, processes involved, nature of the meal itself, and employment of numerous procedures from the beginning to the end must be authorised and regulated by Islamic law (Krishnan et al., 2017).

The majority of respondents opposed dining at Korean restaurants without a halal logo even if most of the workers (C3) or customers (C4) are Muslims with the mean of  $2.19 \pm 1.13$  and  $2.13 \pm 1.16$  respectively. This indicates that most of the respondents are aware of and cautious about choosing Korean restaurants for dining. Besides, about half of the respondents are sceptical of the 'do not serve pork and alcohol' label advertised by the restaurants, with a total of 45.3% respondents disagree and strongly disagree. Nevertheless, the findings from a previous study by Krishnan et al. (2017) revealed that the halal logo on

products and restaurants are not acknowledged among Gen Z. In their observation among Gen Z in Malaysia, there are a lot of Muslims that consume Auntie Anne's products. Currently, Auntie Anne is a food industry in the franchise chain which has not been authorised as a halal food production in Malaysia. The contrast identified in the findings of this research can be contributed by several factors such as education background, place of origin, or household income.

These findings also align closely with the Malaysian government's emphasis on strengthening halal awareness and compliance through national policies such as the Halal Industry Master Plan (HIMP) 2030 and the initiatives led by JAKIM. The high level of halal consciousness demonstrated by the respondents reflects the success of Malaysia's halal governance framework, which positions the country as a global halal hub. By ensuring that restaurants, including foreign-themed outlets such as Korean restaurants, adhere to halal certification standards, the government not only safeguards Muslim consumers but also strengthens Malaysia's international reputation in the halal food sector. Therefore, the results of this study highlight the importance of continued collaboration between policymakers, industry players, and educational institutions to sustain halal integrity and consumer trust in line with the nation's halal agenda.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study was conducted to gain a better understanding and knowledge of factors that attract people to dine at Korean restaurants. The findings revealed that the utilitarian value is the most significant factor that affects the respondents' dining intention at Korean restaurants, followed by hedonic value, subjective norms, and promotional element. The respondents were mostly attracted to dine at Korean restaurants due to the wide variety of unique dishes offered besides recommendation by their friends. This study also examined the halal awareness of dining at Korean restaurants without a halal logo among students from ACIS, UiTM Shah Alam. From the findings, the respondents' level of halal awareness and halal knowledge of dining at Korean restaurants is notably high. The students from ACIS, UiTM Shah Alam are attentive and cautious about choosing Korean restaurants for dining. The findings from this research proved that there are doubts linked with the assessment of the halalness of Korean restaurants without a halal logo, which will affect the customers' decision. Muslim consumers should be highly selective about the services and food they are going to purchase for consumption. Since this study was only conducted on students with a religious education background, the author believed that further research could be extended to the public from different education backgrounds. Furthermore, this survey could be extended by getting responses from different perspectives such as Korean restaurant owners, Korean food producers, or importers.

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## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

## **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

Siti Aisyah Syafiqah Azizan contribute to the conceptualization, project administration, writing the original draft, methodology and formal analysis, Nadiah Ramlan involved in supervision, Validation, writing and reviewing the article.

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