

The effect of consumers' *halal* awareness toward purchasing imported food products

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ABSTRACT

Consumers' *halal* awareness refers to the level of knowledge and understanding that consumers have about *halal* products and services. The term *halal* pertains to goods and services that are deemed permissible and in accordance with Islamic principles and laws. The objective of this study is to examine the level of *halal* awareness among Muslims, with a particular focus on its significance for Muslim consumers in their decision-making process when purchasing imported food products. Moreover, the present study endeavors to examine the sentiments and actual purchasing behaviour of Muslim food consumers who have previously engaged in the acquisition of imported food products. A survey of 300 Muslim consumers was conducted in accordance with the objective of the study, which was to examine the Muslim consumers' *halal* awareness and purchase intent regarding imported food products. The examination of research data, regarding normality, reliability, factor analysis, and multiple regression, is conducted utilising the SPSS program. Based on the findings of the analysis, it can be inferred that there exists a significant correlation between consumers' awareness of *halal* requirements and their inclination to purchase imported food that adheres to *halal* standards in Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

The term *halal* is derived from an Arabic word that refers to anything which is permissible or lawful. Muslims frequently consider adhering to *halal* requirements and therefore deem it a crucial aspect of daily

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life, including business transactions, eating, and drinking. It is common knowledge that Muslim customers are strongly influenced and drawn to purchase goods bearing the *halal* certification. Despite the original intended audience of *halal* food being Muslims, Western food establishments have adjusted to cater to this dietary need and consequently export *halal* meals to regions with mostly Muslim populations, such as the Middle East and Southeast Asia. In recent years, there has been a notable enhancement in the *halal* standards for various food items. This expansion encompasses not just meat products but also extends to non-meat items such as confections, snacks, bakeries, dairy goods, and various other food categories. The adoption of *halal* standards by the Malaysian government and food producers in Malaysia serves as a notable example of this phenomenon, as it has been utilised as a benchmark for ensuring sanitation, quality, and safety (Choi & Jeong, 2019).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON HALAL AWARENESS

According to Azam (2016), explained about awareness, or consciousness, can be defined as possessing knowledge or understanding of a specific situation or matter. The term ‘awareness’ within the context of *halal*, pertains to possessing a certain encounter or inclination towards a subject, as well as being informed of any advancements or challenges related to *halal* foods, beverages, and products. Thus, *halal* awareness relates to the idea that Muslim consumers are acutely, partially, or subconsciously aware of challenges connected to the *halal* component of what Allah has authorised, as mentioned in Surah al-Baqarah verses 172-173, “O believers! Eat from the good things We have provided for you. And give thanks to Allah if you (truly) worship Him (alone) (172). He has only forbidden you (to eat) carrion, blood, swine, and what is slaughtered in the name of any other than Allah. But if someone is compelled by necessity driven by desire nor exceeding immediate need will not be sinful. Surely Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful (173)” (Al-Baqarah, 2: 172-173).

The aforementioned verses highlight the importance for Muslims, particularly in Malaysia to exercise caution in adhering to *halal* regulations when procuring and consuming imported food products, given the extensive range of imported food items that are manufactured, cultivated, and supervised by foreign governments. Muslim individuals commonly rely on the existence of the *halal* logo as a determining factor when making food purchases, as it provides them with a higher level of assurance regarding the validity and suitability of the products for consumption.

Moreover, the *halal* logo is often regarded as a trustworthy indicator due to its association with food and beverage products that adhere to legal, hygienic, and safety norms. As a result, the *halal* logo indicates that restaurants and eating establishments are inclusive and accommodating towards Muslim individuals, allowing them to consume the offered food items. Furthermore, considering the educational objective pertaining to *halal* practices, it is imperative to emphasize the importance of promoting awareness among Muslims regarding the significance of maintaining vigilance in relation to the hygiene and safety aspects associated with their dietary choices. There is a growing apprehension among Muslim consumers regarding the *halal* matter, indicating a noticeable global phenomenon. It is essential for individuals to possess a comprehensive understanding of the concept of *halal*. Their concern while consuming imported food items is crucial for averting ambiguous and questionable food products and will aid consumers in gaining a clearer understanding that will aid them in making purchasing decisions in accordance with their beliefs and preferences.

The perception of and cognitive responses to the settings in which a person lives, eats, drinks, and uses goods are regarded to be a component of consciousness. In the context of *halal*, awareness is regarded as encompassing both first-hand knowledge of something and/or being informed of recent events that have an impact on foods, drinks, and other *halal* commodities. Therefore, the act of disseminating *halal* information can be perceived as a means of enhancing comprehension of the permissible dietary choices for Muslims (Nurhayati & Hendar, 2020).

Furthermore, in countries that have a significant Muslim demographic, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, there is a notable preference for *halal* items. Consequently, consumers exhibit heightened awareness of the *halal* concept when engaging in food procurement. According to Khan et al. (2020), customers' decisions to use or buy *halal* products are influenced by how much information they have about *halal*. In this case, *halal* literacy and *halal* awareness are two broad categories that can be utilised to organise knowledge in the context of purchasing *halal* meals. While these two notions exhibit certain similarities, they possess distinct meanings and implications for research.

The level of awareness of *halal* practices is significantly influenced by a company's marketing strategies and its capacity to ensure the accessibility of its products to consumers. According to Al-Qaradhawi (n.d., as cited in Daud (2016), the acquisition of *halal* literacy occurs through religious instruction that delineates what is permissible (*halal*) and what is forbidden (*haram*). *Halal* literacy refers to the comprehension of the allowed and prohibited aspects as dictated by *Shariah* law. The assessment of customers' understanding of *halal* and *haram* (forbidden) principles in accordance with Islamic teachings is conducted. The significance of *halal* literacy is increasingly recognised throughout the Muslim community. It is imperative for anyone adhering to the Islamic faith to possess a comprehensive understanding of the principles governing *halal* (permissible) and *haram* (prohibited) practices within the context of Islam. It, therefore, makes it more reasonable to study *halal* awareness in nations where *halal* products are more widely utilised and accessible (Khan et al., 2020).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, questionnaires were prepared and distributed based on the objectives of the study that have been formed to observe Muslim consumers' *halal* awareness and purchase intention towards imported food products. The questions for the questionnaires are gathered from previous research with an estimation of 300 respondents among Muslim consumers that purchase *halal* imported food products in Malaysia. The questionnaires are administered by using Google Form which are cost-effective and time-effective to carry out the data collection with a large group of respondents. Besides, a traditional approach of coming face-to-face with the respondents will also be carried out. This questionnaire is divided into two parts, namely optional questions, and subjective questions. Optional questions were given a choice for the respondents to choose from a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) answers.

DATA ANALYSIS

The study focuses on those who identify as Muslims and reside near Universiti Teknologi MARA, located in Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan. Yeow (2019) asserts that 300 respondents are sufficient to represent the entire population. Thus, 300 Muslim consumers responded to the questionnaires, including students, teachers, residential college employees, visitors, and the researcher's acquaintances.

Based on the collected data, the majority of respondents were identified as female, with a frequency of 220, or approximately 73% of the total population. In contrast, the male respondents constitute 83 individuals, accounting for around 27% of the total population.

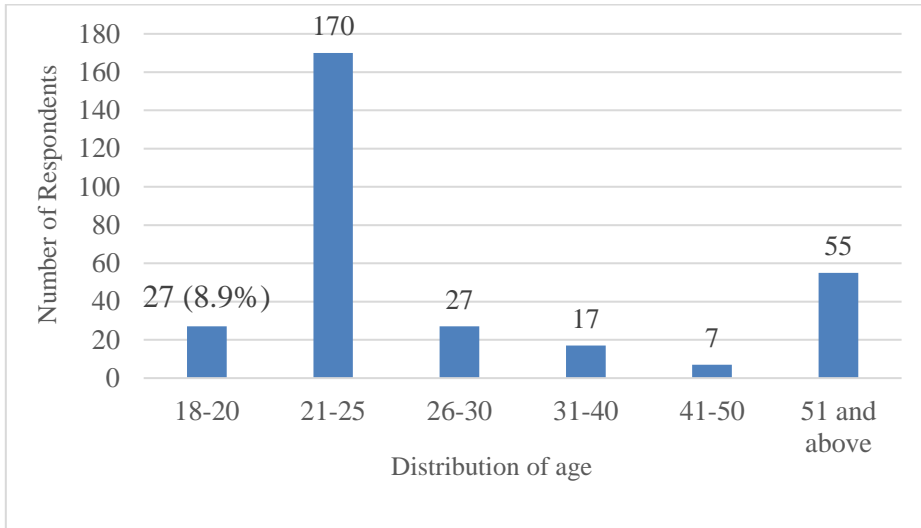


Fig. 1. Distribution of age

Source of Fig. 1: Data from the questionnaire

Figure 1 displays the age distribution of the respondents. It can be seen that 28 respondents, or 8.9%, were between 18 and 20 years of age. The majority of respondents (170, 56.1%) are young adults aged 21 to 25. A total of 27 respondents, accounting for 8.9% of the sample, fall into the age range of 26 to 30. The age categories of 31 to 40 and 41 to 50 account for 5.6% and 2.3% of the population, respectively. Finally, 18.2% of respondents were over the age of 55, according to the data.

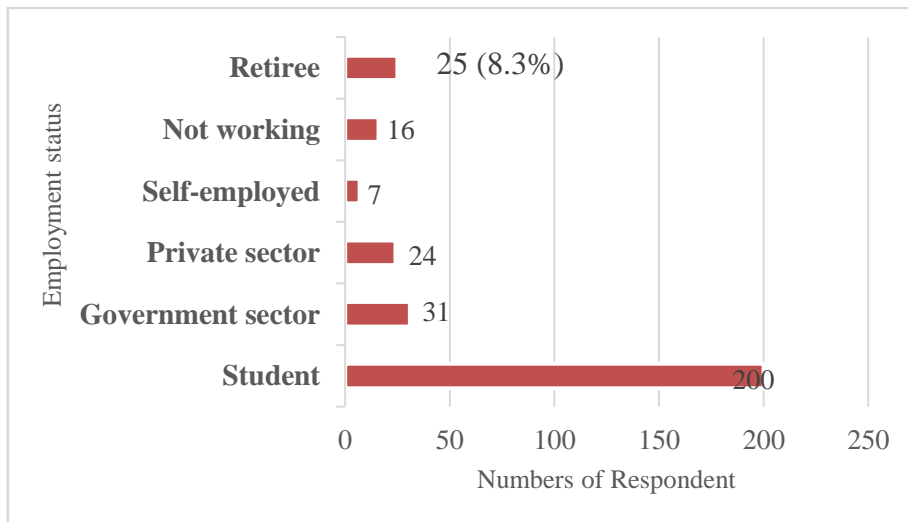


Fig. 2. Employment status

Source of Figure 2: Data from the questionnaire

Figure 2 depicts the employment status of the respondents who participated in this study. The present investigation was conducted at UiTM Shah Alam, where the predominant proportion of respondents (66% of the overall sample) consisted of students. Subsequently, a total of 10.2% of the respondents, encompassing those affiliated with the academic and administrative personnel of the residential college, are employed by the government. Lastly, a total of 7.9% of individuals are employed in the private sector, while 2.3% are engaged in self-employment. Furthermore, a notable portion, 5.3%, are now unemployed, while 8.3% are classified as retirees.

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of halal awareness

Variable /Dimension	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Halal Awareness	5.00	4.66	0.37	High
I understand the Islamic laws of <i>halal</i> and <i>haram</i> for food and drink.	5.00	4.66	0.55	High
I believe that my knowledge of <i>halal</i> and <i>haram</i> is above average.	4.00	4.37	0.69	High
<i>Halal</i> food products are important.	5.00	4.90	0.31	High
I am highly conscious of <i>halal</i> product consumption.	5.00	4.76	0.47	High
A <i>halal</i> certificate provides a guarantee that the product is <i>halal</i>	5.00	4.50	0.76	High
I am always concerned about <i>halal</i> issues	5.00	4.67	0.60	High
For me, <i>halal</i> ingredients are important when purchasing Western imported food products.	5.00	4.79	0.53	High

Source of Table 1: Data from the questionnaire

Based on Figure 1 is established that everything is of a high degree. In relation to the awareness of *halal*, the respondents exhibit a significant level of understanding. The observed phenomenon can be attributed to the progress of information technology, which has enhanced consumer awareness and facilitated the effortless accessibility of information with a single click on a search engine. The respondents exhibit a high level of awareness regarding the significance of *halal* food products, as indicated by a mean score of 4.90.

The median value for a majority of the things, however, is 5.00, which surpasses the mean value of the items. Consequently, a significant correlation exists between the purchasing inclination of Muslim consumers and their level of familiarity with halal products.

DISCUSSION

The emergence of a diversified food market in Malaysia can be attributed to the evolving lifestyles of consumers and their increasing demand for a diverse range of food products. A wide range of foreign food and beverage products are commonly found in numerous grocery stores, and there is a growing trend among Malaysian customers to purchase these items. Nevertheless, there exists a limited body of scholarly research that has examined the notions of consumer consumption and food purchasing behaviours. Similarly, there is a scarcity of research that exclusively focuses on the imported food sector in Malaysia.

The study examined the level of consumer awareness regarding imported *halal* food goods. The primary objective of the study was to examine the key product qualities that impact Muslim customers' purchasing decisions when it comes to imported items. The respondents prioritise the product features that distinguish imported food commodities from local cuisine.

Based on the findings, most respondents agree that taking *halal* awareness into account is essential in the decision-making process for purchasing imported food products. This finding illustrates the significance of the feature to the respondents, who consider it a decisive factor.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research did not focus on the origin of imported food goods. The outcome could vary depending on whether consumers believe the products are from either Western or Eastern nations. To learn more about consumers' purchase intentions and how they relate to the place of origin of food products, more research is required.

In addition, the factor that was studied for this research was limited to the consumers' *halal* awareness. Further research should be carried out to investigate other factors such as product taste, nutrition, brand image, country of origin, and religiosity.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the analysis, it can be concluded that in Malaysia, there exists a substantial association between consumers' awareness of halal standards and their propensity to purchase imported food goods among Muslim customers. The paper concludes by acknowledging its shortcomings and providing recommendations for future researchers undertaking similar investigations.

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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

Each author of this article made significant contributions to the research and the preparation of the manuscript. The individual contributions of the authors are as follows:

Sakinatul Raadiyah Abdullah and Nur Farhana Sahat carried out the research to describe conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, and Writing - Original Draft. Farahdina Fazial played a central role in designing the research, developing the research methodology, conducting data analysis, and drafting the initial manuscript. Shahirah Said and Mohd Muhsinul Nidzam Abdullah Writing - review & editing. All authors have read and approved the final version of this article. They have agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work, ensuring its accuracy and integrity.

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