

# **Exploring Halal Groceries Purchase Intention of Muslim Customers at Artisanal Grocery Stores**

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## **Abstract**

Gone were the days where groceries were marketed in boring, old-school grocery stores. In Malaysia, grocery store scene is embracing the emergence of artisanal foods, foreign and locally produced, with and without halal certification as part of the marketplace and has been driven by demand among consumers for authentic, gourmet and specialized groceries. Artisanal grocery stores play a critical role in providing visitors destinations with unique groceries and in growing the food tourism industry by elevating groceries to a whole new level in which line of products available at the stores appear to be distinctive and classy. This study aimed to explore purchase intention of halal groceries by Muslim customers at artisanal grocery stores. Tested variables were Halal Awareness, Halal Certification, Promotions of Halal Products, Attitude and Religious Beliefs. Findings were derived from 100 self-administered questionnaires at two leading artisanal grocers in Malaysia located in Klang Valley. Evidently, Attitude has the most influence on Muslim customers' intention to purchase halal groceries at these stores.

Keywords: Halal, Muslim Customers, Purchase Intention, Artisanal Grocery Stores

## **1. Introduction**

Grocery store can be defined as a retail store that sells foods and household products. Grocery stores generally offer non-perishable foods packaged in bottles, boxes, and cans. Some grocery stores feature bakery and cafe in their stores for more engaging shopping experience. Grocery store has its own impact on people's life. In Malaysia, grocery stores take many forms from the humble mom-and-pop stores to the glorious hypermarkets. However, the growing importance of Internet as grocery shopping platform has caused offline grocers to experience shrinking customer base. Increased competition intensity leave grocery store operators with no choice but to capitalize on their competitive advantage for them to be able to survive in their businesses. Most of them have gone out of their way to try to serve their customers better than the rivals in order to secure their share of the market pie. For example, many grocery stores are now carrying more product categories ranging from the familiar local products to the rare and unfamiliar foreign brands. Some of them even went to the point of hosting various exciting in-store events to lure customers in and create memorable shopping experience. With customers who are exposed to the world culture on the Internet, they are looking for more than just the regular popular brands and in-store events.

Keeping up with the changing taste and preferences of customers, particularly inclination towards the Western shopping culture and lifestyle, many grocers now are transforming themselves into artisanal grocery stores by embedding artisan food and beverage offerings and concept in their stores. Increasingly, consumers want their groceries to have a more down-to-earth feel rather than feeling mass-produced, and artisanal products fit this bill. As a result, grocers are introducing premium brands with products sporting label terms such as “handmade”, “hand-cooked” and “handcrafted” that project a wholesome and authentic image. Authenticity is key to attract consumers who are constantly looking for that unique appeal as they scan retail shelves and online offerings (Sharee & Muhammad, 2018; Muhammad et al. 2016). Therefore, it is not a surprise that grocers are pushing more artisanal products out to the market to meet this growing demand. With current locally produced artisanal food and beverage industry is at early stage, many grocers carry wide selection of imported foreign brands. Hence, it is essential to highlight one of the important issues in Malaysia’s food and beverage product categories which is halal certification. Malaysia is a multi-racial country with 61.3 percent Muslim population which make up a significant customer base for these grocers. Concerning halal certification, many imported foreign artisanal food and beverage brands offered by these grocers do not come with such certification. Nevertheless, Muslims are still patronizing these artisanal grocery stores to get their groceries. Having said that, it is crucial to understand this phenomenon in order to ensure both Muslim consumers and artisanal grocery store operators to preserve the purity of Islamic teachings and practices, at the same time, embracing the opportunity to sell, buy and enjoy the diverse kinds of artisanal food and beverage products.

Within halal food environment, Theory of Planned Behaviour has been used by Nazahah and Sutina (2012) to measure consumers’ intention to purchase, consume and accept halal food products. While, in another research done by Yuhanis and Chok (2012), it has provided evidence of significant relationships between halal certification, halal awareness, food quality, marketing promotion, and brand with halal purchase intention of non-Muslim consumers in Malaysia. Therefore, this study is aimed to explore the relationship of Halal Awareness, Halal Certification, Promotions of Halal Products, Attitude and Religious Beliefs with Purchase Intention of halal groceries among Muslim customers who patronize artisanal grocery stores. In the following sections, literature review, proposed theoretical framework and research questions were presented. Subsequently, data collection method and analysis of the findings were discussed. Finally, conclusion and implications of the study were noted.

## **2. Literature Review**

This section is dedicated to discuss previous empirical research done in relation to the study. Review of the literature covers variables this study intends to examine; Purchase Intention (dependent variable) and independent variables of Halal Awareness, Halal Certification, Promotions of Halal Products, Attitude and Religious Beliefs.

### **2.1 Purchase Intention**

Nurainun, Ma’ruf and M. Shabri (2019) synthesized purchase intention as the willingness to buy or the possibility that the buyer intends to buy a product and it is a preliminary evaluation of the consumer when they have evaluated a product brand that has the highest value. In addition, according to Giovanis, Tomaras and Zondiros (2013), other than price

and product, service quality, too, is one of the factors motivating customers to purchase. Mirabi, Akbariyeh and Tahmasebifard (2015) noted that customers' purchase decision is a complex process in which purchase intention usually is related to the behaviour, perceptions and attitudes of consumers; and purchase behaviour is a key point for consumers to access and evaluate specific product.

In modern marketing environment, with relatively new paradigm of Shariah-complied products and services, a noteworthy change is occurring in which marketers are now moving towards understanding customer perceived values rather than customer centricity (Shakil and Majeed, 2018). Quite a few multinationals have realized the necessity and opportunities of understanding this ever-increasing fragment of Muslim consumers with unique perceived values which is due to the occurrence of world becoming small, interconnected and less restrained (Islam and Chandrasekaran, 2013). Ranjbarian, Sanayei, Kaboli and Hadadian (2012) stated that it is imperative for companies to increase the perceived value, perceived quality and customer satisfaction to be successful. Duly noted, artisanal grocery store operators must establish strong support of halal groceries by making halal foods and beverages available in-store to influence customer purchase intention to buy halal groceries at their stores in order to stay ahead of the competition. However, Madahi and Sukati (2012) described that customer purchase intention has become even more complicated and significant in recent years with customers have access and exposure to all kinds of advertisements, reports and articles about products. In short, tapping the Muslim consumer base is indeed challenging. The following section will discuss the first independent variable to be tested against purchase intention, which is Halal Awareness.

## 2.2 Halal Awareness

Zainalabidin, Hassan, Zin, Azmi and Ismail (2019) quoted that *halal* is a Quranic term means permissible, allowed and lawful. It is an obligation that should be fulfilled by every Muslim. In relation to food, it carries the meaning "permissible for consumption and utilization by Muslims". Halal means allowed and permissible for consumption with relation to Shariah law as long as they are safe and not harmful. The bottom line is that halal food is not just about what the food is, but how it is prepared. The concept of halal emphasizes safety, hygiene and wholesomeness of food. Every Muslim should accept and understand the concept of halal and strongly develop knowledge to identify what is halal and what is not and evinced that halal is not only related to only Muslims but also have connections with and forging ties among the monotheists (Muslims, Christians and Jews) (Wilson, 2014). The word "awareness" in the context of halal literally means having special interest in or experience of something or being well informed of what is happening at the present time on halal foods, drinks and products. Different people have their own level of awareness. Awareness in the context of halal can be explained as the informing process to increase the levels of consciousness toward what is permitted for Muslims to eat, drink and use. Halal awareness is important for Muslim customers in Malaysia because food and beverage products in this country ranged from locally produced by all Malaysian ethnic groups and imported foreign brands.

Muslim consumers influenced by their own understanding of the halal concept. They have the perception that all food products manufactured in Malaysia are automatically halal (Ahmad, Abaidah and Yahya, 2013). Traditional food rules may limit Muslim consumers' food options within Western lifestyle and culture, where any sort of food is potentially available on a supermarket shelf (Giovine, 2013). Halal food production is no longer a regional practice but an international requirement to cater to the Islamic

dietary sector (Stephenson, 2014). It is very important for the Muslim customers to be aware of halal certification especially for imported food and beverage products. Second factor to be examined in this study is Halal Certification.

### 2.3 Halal Certification

Halal certification is a definite indicator in Muslim consumption decision of whether the product is halal. Halal directives and accreditation systems were established to facilitate Muslim consumers in purchasing a product according to the Islamic law. Halal certification can work as an assurance, installing confidence in Muslim consumers and diminishing possible doubt. The emergence of halal food market as one of the largest consumer food markets has encouraged firms to implement halal food certification (Ab Talib, 2017; Ab Talib, Md Sawari, Abdul Hamid and Ai Chin, 2016). However, despite its emergence, there remains a lack of theoretical understanding of what motivates firms to implement halal certification. As suggested by Aziz and Chok (2013), research in halal food and certification lacks theoretical application and is still in its early stages. Similarly, halal certification is in response to external factors, commonly sparked by government regulations, industrial norms or consumer demands.

In the context of halal food certification, firms need to gain recognition from the sensitive Muslim consumers rather than professional associations or industrial networks. As halal food consumption in Islam is regarded as an act of worship (Marzuki, Hall and Ballantine, 2012; Henderson, 2016) and is performed as an effort to safeguard one's faith (Regenstein, Chaudry and Regenstein, 2003), gaining consumer recognition is of the utmost importance compared to industry recognition. The certification of products as halal and halal logo on the product do not only guarantee the Muslims what they eat or consume is according to the Islamic Law but also give confidence to producers to meet up to the halal standards (Arif and Ahmad, 2011). Imported products halal certification is required as condition and assures the quality standards. Companies that take products from the overseas need to make sure that the halal logo and the certification are trusted and recognized by Malaysian halal authority.

Halal certification is an integral element of the halal food market for both consumers and industrialists. Halal certification, whether in the form of certificate, logo, trademark or seal, is an indicator that food products have undergone rigorous and extensive inspections from a legitimate Islamic certification authority and that the sources, ingredients and operations are based on Shariah principles (Rezai, Mohamed and Shamsudin, 2012; Al-Mazeedi, Regenstein and Riaz, 2013; Mohd Nawi and Mohd Nasir, 2014). In addition, halal food certification is a critical element in the halal food market, as it can influence consumer decision (Mohayidin and Kamarulzaman, 2014), confidence (Mohamed, Shamsudin and Rezai, 2013), purchasing behaviour (Shah Alam and Mohamed Sayuti, 2011) and willingness to purchase (Verbeke, Rutsaert, Bonne and Vermeir, 2013). The third factor to be tested in studying purchase intention is Promotions of Halal Products.

### 2.4 Promotions of Halal Products

Literature review by Nasirun, Noor, Sultan and Haniffiza (2019) presented that promotion is also known as a marketing communication (Nganga, 2017) or a communication channel that allows an exchange of information between sellers and buyers in order to create positive attitudes, influence purchasing behaviour and support company's marketing objectives (Wongleedee, 2015). One of the main roles of promotion is the coordination of

all marketing communication efforts to form channels, deliver and persuade customers in purchasing their product and services, or to push the concept (Ismajli, 2013). Similarly, the work of Akyol and Kliniç (2014), recorded that product promotion has an important role on motivation and persuasion for purchasing.

In the context of halal products, Aziz and Chok (2013) noted that promotional activities of halal products play a significant role in predicting the intention to purchase halal products. Hence, promotional efforts highlighting halal products carried out by artisanal grocers enable their customers to be aware of the existence of such products in the store and give the opportunity to customers to consider buying them. Halal products in-store availability can be retailers' key selling point due to the the growing global awareness of and demand for halal products and services as a result of the emergence of Muslim communities worldwide from migration activities and conversion. Next independent variable to be tested against purchase intention is Attitude.

## 2.5 Attitude

Referring to Cheah, Phau and Liang (2015) most of the attitude-behaviour relationship could be obtained from several psychological theories such as Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Although these theories featured elements such as subjective norms, attitude, perceived behavioural control, environmental, cognitive, and affective factors, biological events, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use to predict behavioural intention towards a given subject, in this study, attitude is single out to be tested against purchase intention. Evidently, attitude was attributed to having the strongest influence on purchase intention among other variables (Sehgal and Mittal, 2019; Hsiao and Chen, 2018; Nam, Dong and Lee, 2017; Hung, Kok and Verbeke, 2016). In a study conducted by Bahl and Chandra (2019), the authors quoted from Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) that an attitude is a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object. In other words, attitude can be defined as the way you feel on something or someone's opinion towards something.

To relate attitude in the context of purchase intention of halal products, previous studies have proven that attitude has a significant and positive influence on purchasing intention, which is drawn from consumers' positive attitude towards halal food products (Abd Rahman, Asrarhaghighi and Abd Rahman, 2015; Mukhtar and Butt, 2012; Shah Alam and Mohamed Sayuti, 2011). In short, the more favourable attitude on those brand, the more it can influence the customer to purchase. According to a study by Mukhtar and Butt (2012), it was found that there is a strong relationship between halal food purchase intention and the attitude of the individual to purchase those products. Final independent variable to be examined is Religious Beliefs.

## 2.6 Religious Beliefs

“Religion is perhaps one of the most important social factors that influences the life of its believers” (Mukhtar and Butt, 2012). To put into the context of this study, in general, Islam is a religion that provides holistic guidelines to its followers regarding all facets of life. Thus, it is interesting to know how strongly Islamic teachings impact consumers' decision making (Ashraf, Hafeez, Yaseen and Naqvi, 2017). Hence, marketers and retailers should try to determine how strongly consumers are committed and affiliated to their religion because religiosity exhibits their belief system and strict adherence to the doctrines of their faith as well as consumption style and decision making process. In previous studies,

religion and religious factors, especially related to the religion of Islam are found to have positive influence on purchase intention (Aziz, Bakar, Zaaba and Hassan, 2019; Abu-Alhaija, Yusof, Hashim and Jaharuddin, 2018; Liza and Minarti, 2017; Aisyah, 2016; Hussain, Rahman, Zaheer and Saleem, 2016). In Islam, it is clearly stated that Muslims need to eat or drink that according to the Shariah. In other word, they need to eat or drink that permissible which is halal and should avoid haram things. Therefore, it shows that the religion and religious beliefs are the sources of awareness in consumer purchase intention.

### 3. Proposed Theoretical Framework

The proposed conceptual theoretical framework consists of Halal Awareness, Halal Certification, Promotions of Halal Products, Attitude and Religious Beliefs as the independent variables, and Purchase Intention as the dependent variable as per illustrated in Figure 1.

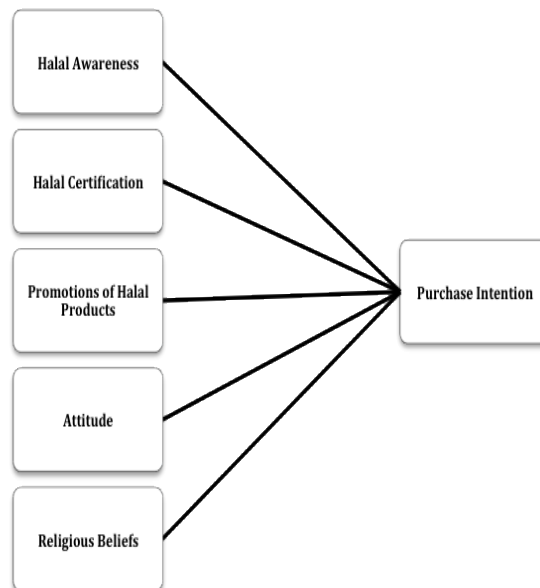


Fig. 1 Proposed theoretical framework

### 4. Research Questions

There are three (3) research questions needed to be answered in this study;

- i. Is there any relationship between independent variables (i.e. Halal Awareness, Halal Certification, Promotions of Halal Products, Attitude and Religious Beliefs) and dependent variable (i.e Purchase Intention)? *Understanding the nature of these relationships helps artisanal grocers to expect how these factors affect Muslim consumers' purchase intention of halal groceries.*
- ii. Which independent variable (i.e. Halal Awareness, Halal Certification, Promotions of Halal Products, Attitude and Religious Beliefs) that has significant influence on Purchase Intention? *Recognizing a factor that has significant influence can assist*

*artisanal grocers to formulate their marketing strategies to capture the lucrative segment of Muslim consumers.*

- iii. What is the degree of Muslim customers' purchase intention to purchase halal products at artisanal grocery stores? *Having an idea of at what level these customers' purchase intention provides artisanal grocery store operators a reality check of how the customers actually feel about their current offerings.*

## **5. Methodology**

This study utilized convenience-sampling technique with a sample size of 100 Muslims who are the customers of artisanal grocery stores. The respondents were intercepted at two leading artisanal grocers in Malaysia located in Klang Valley. Before the questionnaire was administered, the researchers asked a screening question of "Are you a Muslim?" to qualify him or her to proceed to answer the questionnaire. These subjects are selected using this particular technique because they are easiest to recruit for the study and the researchers did not consider selecting subjects that are representative of the entire population. Surely, it would be ideal to test the entire population, but given the limited resources of the researchers, the population is just too large that it is impossible to include every individual. This is the reason why the researchers rely on convenience sampling, because it is fast, inexpensive, and easy and the subjects are readily available.

Questionnaire form was developed and personally administered at two leading artisanal grocers in Malaysia located in Klang Valley. The questionnaire consists of seven (7) sections where Section A is for respondent's demographic profile, Section B to F contain questions measuring all five independent variables of Halal Awareness, Halal Certification, Promotions of Halal Products, Attitude and Religious Beliefs. While Purchase Intention will be measured using questions listed in Section G. Section A contains close-ended questions. Whereas in Section B to G, respondents were required to answer using five-point Likert scale based on five degree of agreement which are 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly disagree.

## **6. Findings**

Data collected from the 100 respondents were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 21.0 software. Data analysis methods used to address this study's research questions were Descriptive Statistics, Pearson Correlation and Regression.

### **6.1 Descriptive Statistics**

In Table 1, Muslim artisanal grocery store customers' profile can be summarized as being female (64 percent), self-employed (49 percent), who are married (68 percent), with monthly income of RM3001 and more, and at least visit an artisanal grocery store once a week (47 percent).

Table 1: Demographics statistics

Item	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	36.0
	Female	64.0
Occupation	Student	10.0
	Private sector	31.0
	Public sector	10.0
	Self-employed	49.0
Marital status	Single	32.0
	Married	68.0
Monthly income	RM1000 -	18.0
	RM2000 -	
	RM2001 -	23.0
	RM3000 and more	59.0
Frequency of visit	Everyday	30.0
	Once a week	47.0
	Once a month	23.0

Table 2 illustrates that only attitude proves to have a positive relationship with purchase intention. Unfortunately, this relationship is rather weak which is recorded at only 0.267. While all other four independent variables (Halal Awareness, Halal Certification, Promotions of Halal Products and Religious Beliefs) are found to have no relationship with purchase intention. Hence, the correlations have addressed the first research question.

Table 2: Correlations

	Halal Awareness	Halal Certification	Promotions of Halal Products	Attitude	Religious Beliefs	Purchase Intention
Halal Awareness	1	0.856**	.760**	0.863**	0.788**	0.189
Halal Certification	0.856**	1	0.880**	0.884**	0.889**	0.171
Promotions of Halal Products	0.760**	0.880**	1	0.823**	0.775**	0.141
Attitude	0.863**	0.884**	0.823**	1	0.808**	0.267**
Religious Beliefs	0.788**	0.889**	0.775**	0.808**	1	0.170
Purchase Intention	0.189	0.171	0.141	0.267**	0.170	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Seeking for the answer to the second research question, Table 3 explains that, extending from the correlations earlier; only attitude has the p-value of 0.015. Hence, attitude has statistically significant influence on purchase intention as its p-value is less than 0.05. From the Standardized Coefficients (Beta) column, the value for Attitude is at 0.596. In other words, we can interpret that for every one-unit increase in attitude variable, it can lead to an increase of 0.596 unit in purchase intention. Since all other four independent variables are not significant in affecting purchase intention, attitude is identified as the only factor that affect Muslim customers' halal groceries purchase intention at artisanal grocery stores.

Table 3: Regression analysis

Variable	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
Purchase Intention	12.452	2.120		5.874	0.000
Halal Awareness	-0.088	0.254	-0.074	-0.347	0.730
Halal Certification	-0.194	0.357	-0.177	-0.544	0.588
Promotions of Halal Products	-0.193	0.257	-0.159	-0.75	0.455
Attitude	0.558	0.224	0.596	2.488	0.015
Religious Beliefs	0.025	0.21	0.026	0.121	0.904
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.049				
F	2.019				

Note: Dependent Variable Purchase Intention



In Table 4, the questions pertaining to purchase intention is recorded using Likert scale of five points. Where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree. From mean analysis, it is found that the level of purchase intention is 4.0575 which falls slightly over the scale of 4 = Agree. Therefore, it appears that the degree of Muslim customers' halal groceries purchase at artisanal grocery stores is considerably high, which directly answers the third research question in this study.

Table 4: Mean analysis for Purchase Intention

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Purchase Intention	100	3	5	4.0575	0.80375
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Finally, in Table 5, is results from the regression analysis; the adjusted r-square ( $R^2$ ) shows that only a really small percentage of 4.90 percent of the variance in the dependent variable (i.e. Purchase Intention) is explained by the independent variables (i.e. Halal Awareness, Halal Certification, Promotions of Halal Products, Attitude and Religious Beliefs). The remaining 95.1 percent of the variance in the Muslim customers' halal groceries purchase intention at artisanal grocery stores can be explained by other factors which are not considered in this study. Therefore, further study should be done to explain more of the variance in the Muslim customers' halal groceries purchase intention at artisanal grocery stores.

Table 5: Model summary

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	SE of the estimate
1	0.311a	0.097	0.049	2.93668

a. Predictors: (Constant), Halal awareness, Halal Certification, Promotions of Halal Products, Attitude and Religious Beliefs

## 7. Conclusion

In a nutshell, attitude is a deciding factor for Muslim customers in their intention to purchase halal groceries at artisanal grocery stores. Malaysia is a multi-racial country with 61.3 percent Muslim population which make up a significant customer base for these artisanal grocers. Hence, it is worrying to find out that a significant majority of Muslims who patronage artisanal grocery stores decided that Halal Awareness, Halal Certification, Promotions of Halal Products and their emphasis on Religious Beliefs are not significant when it comes to purchasing groceries in artisanal grocery stores. Rhetorically, “Are these Muslim customers turning a blind eye when picking up groceries from shelves at artisanal grocery stores?” Indeed, it is a question that needs an urgent answer for the sake of preserving and protecting the faith and well-being of the Muslims.

### 7.1 Implications of the study

With rapid growth of artisanal foods market nowadays, artisanal grocery operators are facing challenges in identifying the factors that might be able to set them apart from the typical artisanal foods' retailers. Thus, it is important for artisanal grocery store owners to foster better understanding and knowledge on factors that actually influence customer

purchase intention, particularly the Muslims. By understanding it, they can plan and develop sensible and responsible business strategies in order to meet and satisfy the customer expectation, especially Muslim customers. In addition, after acquiring useful knowledge in understanding their target customers, they can now gain competitive advantage by creating and concentrating on a niche market of halal certified artisanal groceries.

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