

The Impact of Halal Knowledge and Attitudes on Purchase Intention: Insights from Sabah, Malaysia

Nurul Atiqa Mohd Tahir¹, Aizul Azri Azizan², Sharifudin Md Shaarani³, Noor Qhairul Izzreen Md Nor⁴, Umi Hartina Mohamad Razali⁵ and Ahmad Riduan Bahauddin^{3,5*}

¹Faculty of Food Science and Nutrition, Universiti Malaysia Sabah 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

²Nutrition and Health Research Group, Faculty of Food Science and Nutrition, Universiti Malaysia Sabah 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.

³Faculty of Science and Technology, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, 71800, Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

⁴Food Security Research Laboratory, Faculty of Food Science and Nutrition, Universiti Malaysia Sabah 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.

⁵Halal Research Group, Faculty of Food Science and Nutrition, Universiti Malaysia Sabah 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.

*a_riduan@ums.edu.my

ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess the knowledge and attitudes of the Muslim community in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia, towards halal products and their influence on purchasing halal food products. A questionnaire was filled out by 390 respondents in total. The survey was administered both in person and online. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation to evaluate relationships between knowledge, attitudes, and purchase intentions. Findings from this study revealed that the majority of respondents demonstrated an acceptable understanding and attitude toward halal principles and their application to food products. Knowledge and attitude towards halal also showed a significant positive correlation with the intention to buy halal food products ($p < 0.05$). In conclusion, enhancing consumer knowledge and fostering positive attitudes are critical drivers of purchase intention for halal products. Continuous awareness campaigns and targeted promotions are essential for sustaining the growth of the halal industry by increasing awareness and promote halal products.

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1. Introduction

The Halal concept has drawn more attention due to the rising demand for Halal food worldwide and the growth of the global Muslim population. The global halal market is estimated to be worth more than 2.3 trillion USD and the value of halal food is reaching 700 billion USD per year (Azam & Abdullah, 2020). Moreover, Muslims around the world who consume halal food and beverages are worth about 1.13 trillion USD and are expected to increase by 3.5% annually (Gul et al., 2022). There is significant demand for various food products, including meat, poultry, and pharmaceuticals, not only in Islamic nations but also in nations in Europe and South America. Hence, increasing the number of halal products in the market could result in different obstacles for manufacturers and regulators in understanding consumer behaviour and purchase intention toward halal products (Billah et al., 2020).

Nowadays, consumers' understanding of the need to maintain a healthy diet influences their eating patterns (Lim et al., 2022). As part of Islamic theology, halal food products are also seen as being healthy in addition to being safe and hygienic (Maulina et al., 2020). However, the intention to buy halal food is influenced by various factors, including religious commitment, social norms, economic conditions, and cultural concerns (Billah et al., 2020). Several previous studies have suggested that knowledge and attitude towards products could be key factors influencing purchase intentions for food products. The information or insight that makes it possible for people to use a product is known as product knowledge. Customers use halal products because they align with their values, emphasizing superior quality, benefits, and safety. In addition, the willingness to buy halal food products increases with product knowledge and attitudes toward halal products (Öztürk, 2022).

Customer attitudes can influence purchase intention since the more positive consumer attitudes regarding halal food are, the more likely consumers are to purchase halal food. Attitude is defined as a person's generally constant appraisal and disposition to react or respond to attitude objects (Legowati & Albab, 2019). Direct experience with the products, verbal information gained from others, exposure to mass media advertising, and various forms of direct marketing all contribute to the establishment of buying attitudes. Attitude reveals how much a person likes or dislikes a particular conduct. Attitude can be defined as a feeling of support and partiality, or as a feeling of unsupportiveness and impartiality toward the object of attitude itself. In the halal context, the attitude and halal certification have a substantial impact on consumers' purchasing intentions for food goods at halal-certified providers (Legowati and Albab 2019). This shows that customers with a positive attitude toward halal food, a high degree of awareness about halal food, and halal certification in food items are more inclined to purchase halal food. (Hidayati & Sunaryo, 2021; Fuadi et al., 2022; Öztürk, 2022)

On the other hand, culture significantly influences customer behaviour towards food products in any industry. It can influence consumers to buy or not buy a particular food product since it establishes acceptable norms. Furthermore, the beliefs and cultural background of a multicultural population could influence knowledge and attitudes toward halal products, even among individuals of the same faith (Mutsikiwa & Basera, 2012; Iner & Baghdadi, 2021). Despite extensive research on halal knowledge and attitudes, limited studies have explored their impact on purchase intention in multicultural contexts. Hence, this study aims to examine how halal knowledge and attitudes influence purchase intention in a culturally diverse population in Sabah, Malaysia. Understanding these relationships could inform strategies for halal food producers and policymakers to better cater to diverse consumer needs.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Study Design and Sampling Method

This quantitative study employed a cross-sectional design. A cross-sectional design was chosen to examine the relationships between halal knowledge, attitudes, and purchase intentions within the diverse cultural setting of Kota Kinabalu at a specific point in time. A set of questionnaires was distributed to the respondents as the data gathering tool in this study, and a simple random sampling method was used to recruit subjects.

2.2 Respondents and Sample Size

Respondents in this survey were Muslim consumers between the ages of 20 and 60 who had lived in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia, for at least five years. The age range of 20–60 was chosen to include both younger consumers, who may be influenced by trends, and older consumers, who are more likely to make informed purchasing decisions based on knowledge and attitudes (Mokhtar et al., 2020). The study was conducted in Kota Kinabalu due to its accessibility, density of people, and cultural setting. It was anticipated

that there would be 304,838 Muslims living in Kota Kinabalu in 2023. Therefore, 384 samples in total are required for this study in order to represent the Kota Kinabalu population (Kracie & Morgan, 1970).

2.3 Research Instrument

A set of questionnaires was designed as a study tool to collect all of the data. These items in the questionnaire were adapted from prior studies to reflect the cultural and socio-economic characteristics of respondents (Table 1). It was separated into four parts: A through D. Part A asked respondents for demographic information (age, gender, education level, and income level), while Part B asked them to answer halal knowledge-related questions. Furthermore, Part C consisted of questions about respondents' attitudes regarding halal products, while Part D asked about their desire to purchase halal food products in the market. A 5-point Likert scale was used to assess the respondents' responses ranging from 1 – strongly agree to 5 – strongly not agree. Table 1 shows the questionnaire items and sources of the previous studies conducted. Before data collection began, this questionnaire was tested for reliability and validity. We included 60 consumers who purchase halal food products to assess the questionnaires' validity and reliability. The Cronbach's alpha values for the constructions ranged from 0.75 to 0.90, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Table 1 Questionnaire item/construct and the references

Construct/Questionnaire Items		References
Part B - Halal Knowledge (HK)		
HK1	I understand Islamic law regarding halal and haram products	Nurhayati & Hendar (2020), Maichum et al. (2017)
HK2	I have the knowledge to distinguish between permitted and prohibited products	
HK3	I have a deep understanding of the inputs, processes and effects of halal food before purchasing	
HK4	I understand about halal labels and halal certification of food before buying	
HK5	I know the latest issues regarding substances that are prohibited by Islam because they are harmful to the body	
Part C - Attitude Towards Halal Food (AT)		
AT1	Halal food products are safer and cleaner	Ahmad et al. (2015) , Said et al. (2014)
AT2	I have a favourable attitude towards halal food	
AT3	Choosing halal food products is a good idea	
AT4	I feel comfortable consuming halal food products	
AT5	The existence of halal labels on food product packaging is important to me	
Part D - Halal Purchase Intention (PI)		
PI1	I believe that buying Halal products is a good choice	Khalek & Ismail (2015), Garg & Joshi (2018)
PI2	I prefer to buy halal products even if the brand is not very popular	
PI3	I will buy halal products even if the price is a little high/expensive	
PI4	I have high intentions to buy halal food	
PI5	Buying Halal food is important to me	

2.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaires were distributed in person at convenience stores and shopping centres in Kota Kinabalu or online using Google Forms between September and November 2023. 390 completed questionnaires were returned to the researcher out of a total of 423 that were distributed. All analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 22.0 (IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY, USA), with a p-value of ≤ 0.05 indicating statistical significance. All data were subject to the Kalmonogrov-Smirnov test to check the normality of distribution. Descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the distribution and pattern of responses while Spearman correlation test was used to evaluate the relationship between the parameter

(i.e. halal knowledge vs purchase intention). Furthermore, based on respondents' responses on the Likert scale, levels of knowledge were further classified as low to high, and attitudes toward halal as positive to negative (Table 2).

Table 2 Classification of respondent's level of knowledge and attitude towards Halal.

Means Score (Likert scale)	Level of Knowledge/ Attitude Towards Halal
3.50 - 5.00	High/Positive
2.50 - 3.49	Medium/Neutral
1.00 - 2.49	Low/Negative

*Likert scale; 1 – Strongly agree, 5 - Strongly disagree.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Distribution

The study participants' demographic data was divided into four key categories: gender, age, race, and level of education (Table 3). Female respondents outnumbered males by 122. Female respondents accounted for 65.90% of the total, with male respondents accounting for 34.62%. The 20-29 age group had the highest frequency compared to other age groups, with 154 persons (39.49%). Meanwhile, the Bajau race had the largest frequency in this study, with 111 individuals (28.46%), and the majority of respondents (35.64%) possessed a diploma, followed by secondary school (29.49%) and a degree (24.87%), according to education level.

Table 3 Demographic distribution among the respondents

Demography	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	20 – 29 years old	216	39.49
	30 – 39 years old	87	22.31
	40 – 49 years old	75	19.23
	50 years and older	12	2.56
Gender	Male	135	34.62
	Female	257	65.90
Ethnicity	Bajau	111	28.46
	Bugis	93	23.85
	Melayu	22	5.64
	Melayu-Brunei	29	7.44
	Others	35	7.18

Education	Primary School	17	3.08
	Secondary School	115	29.49
	Diploma	139	35.64
	Bachelor Degree	119	24.87
Total		390	100.0

3.2 Level of Halal Knowledge among the Respondents

Table 4 shows the distribution of respondents' halal knowledge. The mean score values were separated into three categories of knowledge levels: low, medium, and high. The study found that the majority of 229 respondents (58.72%) had a mean score value between 3.5 and 5.0, indicating a high degree of knowledge of halal. Following that, 123 respondents (31.54%) had a mean score value of 2.5 to 3.49, indicating a medium degree of knowledge. The study's findings revealed that the majority of respondents in this study had some knowledge of halal concepts and principles as most of them had a medium or high level of knowledge while only 9.7% of respondents had a low level of halal knowledge.

Table 4 The frequency distribution of respondents' levels of knowledge

Level	Means Score	Frequency	Percentage
Low	1.00 - 2.49	38	9.7
Medium	2.50 - 3.49	123	31.6
High	3.50 - 5.00	229	58.7
Total		390	100.0

The high level of halal knowledge among the majority of respondents may be attributed to the cultural and religious significance of halal in the study area, as well as efforts by local authorities to promote halal awareness. In addition, the 9.7% of respondents with low knowledge may reflect gaps in access to halal education or differences in levels of religiosity. This highlights the need for targeted educational initiatives to address these disparities (Rafiki et al., 2024). According to a study by Musthofa and Buhanudin (2021), Muslim consumers' understanding of halal food goods ranges from inadequate to highly understood. This is because being a Muslim does not imply that one is adequately knowledgeable about the idea of halal. It is possible to argue that customers who are more knowledgeable about halal are more curious about the food items they eat than those who are less knowledgeable. As a result, consumers with low halal knowledge only use their beliefs while consumers with high halal knowledge tend to refrain from making decisions until they know for sure that what they are going to eat comes from a halal source (Musthofa & Buhanudin, 2021). Muslim consumers who have sufficient knowledge have a fairly high level of curiosity about new products to buy or products that they have not bought before. They will automatically look for clear and reliable information about new products. Similar to Ahmad et al. (2015), where 93.6% of respondents correctly identified the JAKIM-recognized halal logo, this study's high percentage of respondents with medium and high levels of knowledge suggests that educational efforts are having a positive impact, though confusion about halal concepts persists.

3.3 Attitude Towards Halal Products among the Respondents

Based on Table 5, the mean score of Muslim consumers in Kota Kinabalu generally has a positive

attitude towards halal food products. The study found that the majority of 242 respondents (62.05%) had a mean score value between 3.5 to 5.00, which is a positive attitude towards halal food. Next, 119 respondents (30.51%) had a mean score value between 2.5 to 3.49, which is a neutral attitude towards halal products.

Table 5 The frequency distribution of respondents' attitude levels

Level	Means Score	Frequency	Percentage
Negative	1.00 - 2.49	29	7.4
Neutral	2.50 - 3.49	119	30.5
Positive	3.50 - 5.00	242	62.1
Total		390	100.0

The study's findings showed that a significant portion of participants had a positive perspective on halal products. This suggests that people's positive views on halal items may be a reflection of their acceptance of them. Given that the age range of study participants is likely to use digital marketing platforms in their daily lives, it may be the result of marketing and promotion techniques used by businesses and authorities on halal certification (Yuliani et al, 2023). According to Khalek (2015) study in the Klang Valley, young customers had positive opinions regarding halal cuisine and JAKIM certification. He argues that JAKIM halal certification has a significant impact on Muslims' attitudes regarding halal cuisine. The good attitude toward halal certification appears to indirectly reflect Muslim customers' beliefs about halal certification in Malaysia. Prabowo et al. (2015) found that Malaysian consumers had a more positive attitude toward halal food goods than other products, such as cosmetics. In addition, consumers with a favourable attitude are more likely to consume halal cuisine (Vanany et al., 2020).

3.4 Relationship Between Halal Knowledge and Attitude Towards Halal Product Towards Purchase Intention

The findings of the Spearman Correlation Test revealed a significant relationship between consumer knowledge and intention to purchase halal food products. The current study's correlation value is $r=0.71$, $p<0.05$ which showed a strong positive relationship between these two parameters. Similarly, there is a significant correlation between customer attitude and purchase intentions for halal food products ($r=0.80$, $p<0.05$). This suggests that a consumer's inclination to buy is correlated with their knowledge about halal and their thoughts about halal items. Previous research has found a significant association between knowledge and a tendency to purchase food products. This result is consistent with the findings of Nurhayati and Handar (2020) findings that support the view that there is a link between knowledge of halal products and intention to purchase halal items.

Since intention is often influenced by increased information and a good attitude, halal knowledge and attitude have an impact on purchase intention (Awan et al., 2015). Information regarding halal products has a significant impact on customers' understanding of them as well, and eventually, awareness will boost the desire to buy halal. Muslims need to learn about halal items and realize how important it is to consume them if they want to achieve the highest degree of devotion to God. This is due to the fact that halal food is not limited to flavor, such as cleanliness, health, or a pleasant alternative, in contrast to the majority of conventional marketing researchers (Zaid et al., 2024). Additionally, this can result in an acceptance of halal goods. Additionally, when marketers in the halal product market segment are planning and carrying out marketing decisions, knowledge of halal products is an essential source of information (Hasan, 2016). In this case, the government should create a continuous education program and improve halal compliance and monitoring to boost

consumers' confidence that the food they eat is halal. This will eliminate any doubts regarding the legitimacy of food products' halal status, which may help consumers adopt a more positive attitude toward halal products. Nevertheless, it has been demonstrated that increased efforts to raise awareness of halal products and boost the desire to buy halal products are both beneficial. This is achieved through a variety of halal product marketing campaigns (Harun et al.,2022).

4. Conclusion

This study found that the majority of Muslim respondents had a solid understanding of halal concepts and principles, as well as a favourable attitude toward halal items. Furthermore, knowledge and attitude significantly influence purchasing intentions for halal food products. However, a portion of the population still has limited knowledge and a negative attitude toward halal foods, implying that campaigns to raise halal awareness and understanding among the general public should be designed and implemented continuously to maintain people's encouraging interest and attitude, which may aid in the long-term sustainability and expansion of the halal businesses, especially local halal economy.

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