

Muslim Immigrant Consumer Awareness And Policy Implications Of Halal Food In Malaysia

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Abstrak

This study attempts to investigate the awareness of halal food consumption among muslim immigrants in Malaysia. This is because Malaysia is the halal center of the world. Qualitative research approach case study method with data collection techniques through interviews, direct observation and documentation with a total of 9 Muslim immigrants in Malaysia. The location of the study is centered in Kampung Baharu. The results showed that Muslim immigrants' consumer awareness is high due to policies carried out by the Malaysian government such as halal labeling and halal policies that are able to increase their awareness. Providing halal assurance to consumers, both domestic and international, the government has created a business ecosystem conducive to the growth of the halal industry. The Malaysian government has given full support to the development and promotion of Malaysia as the world's halal center. This support is manifested in various programs and policies that support the halal industry.

Keywords: Halal Food; Awareness; Immigrant; Policy Implication; Business Ecosystem.

1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is known as a multicultural country with a harmonious mix of ethnicities and cultures. The majority of Malaysians are Muslim (61.32%), Buddhist (19.84%), Christian (9.24%), Hindu (6.27%) and other (3.33%). Islam is the official religion of Malaysia which is followed by about three-fifths of the 28,334,135 people. This is a great potential in the development of the halal industry in Malaysia, especially in the field of halal food. Because in Islam there is a command to consume halal and thayyib food (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 168), namely all foods can be consumed except those prohibited in the Qur'an (Q.S. Al-Maidah: 3), which provides goodness and health for the body.

Food is a basic necessity of life in meeting the nutritional and energy needs essential for growth. To meet these needs, cooperation with various parties



involved in the halal food industry is needed. The scope of halal food products is not limited to meat and poultry only. It also extends to other types of food such as confectionary, bakery products, canned and frozen foods, dairy products, organic foods, beverages and herbal products. (Laluddina, Haneef, Saada, & Khalida, 2019). It not only focuses on the substances contained in the food but also the process of producing the food, which includes various activities, including processing, preservation, distribution to consumers, all in accordance with Sharia law. The industry is a global and complex network of diverse businesses that supply halal food products to Muslim consumers around the world. (Ibrahim, Nor, & Ahmad, 2023). Even the demand for halal products is increasing in non-Muslim countries as consumers prefer to consume halal food and consider it a healthy option (Laluddina, Haneef, Saada, & Khalida, 2019).

The global halal market has grown rapidly. Halal food is an important sector in Malaysia because it is no longer an industry that only fulfills the food needs of around 60 percent of Malaysians who are Muslim but also becomes an economic force domestically and globally. Evidently based on the State of the Global Islamic Economy ([SGIE](#)) Report 2023, Malaysia maintains the first rank out of 80 countries included in the assessment. SGIER is an assessment of the development of Islamic economics in the world with 80 countries included in the assessment. SGIER is an assessment of the development of Islamic economics in the world with 80 countries included in the assessment. Not surprisingly, out of 6 indicator parameters, Malaysia ranks first in 3 sectors, namely *Islamic finance*, *halal food*, and *media and recreation*. Meanwhile, *Muslim-friendly travel* ranked fifth, *modest fashion* ranked second, and *pharmaceuticals and cosmetics* ranked third. (State of the Global Islamic Economy Report, 2023).

Malaysia has become the halal center of the world. Various programs and policies have been implemented to support the achievement of this target. Halal Certificate is one of the Malaysian government initiatives designed to assist Muslim consumers in choosing halal food. (Riza, Ariffin, Hamdan, & Ramli, 2022) However, the success rate of this government initiative depends on the collaboration of all levels of society, one of which is the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) business actors. The Malaysian government encourages SMEs to apply for halal certification to ensure that the products sold are safe and acceptable to Muslim consumers (Hamid, Ahmad, & Abdullah, 2022). The existence of halal certification as a marketing strategy that will increase the growth opportunities of the halal industry in the domestic and global markets.

In 2015, the number of food establishments applying increased by 29% from 2011 to 2015 as shown in Figure 2.

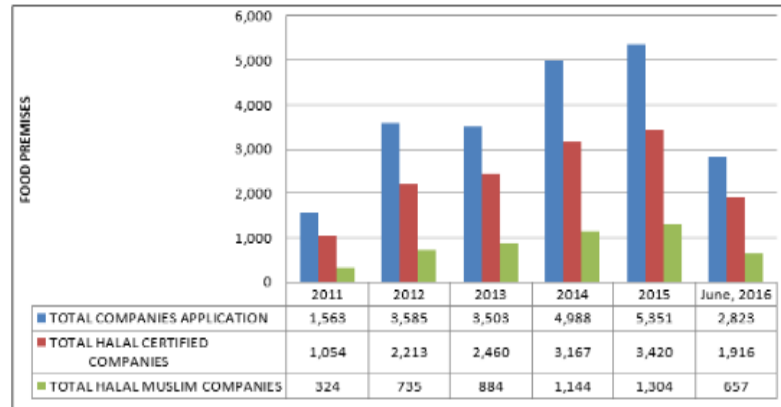


figure 1: Halal Certification Application Statistics for the Whole of Malaysia 2011-2016 (JAKIM, 2016)

The food industry has become a trend in Malaysia today. The number of halal food places received halal food certification increased by 30% from 2011 to 2015. In addition, the total number of halal certified food premises owned by Muslims also increased by 25 from 2011 to 2015. This increase in the number of applications is due to a consistent increase in the number of halal-certified food premises (Rahim et al., 2020).

The Malaysia Halal logo has also had a huge impact on the halal industry. It is undeniable that this logo is very beneficial for Muslims.



Figure 2: Malaysian Halal Logo Usage Trends

19 places that display the halal logo have a valid halal certificate holder status. This explains that international franchises and restaurants have a high level of commitment and compliance with the Malaysian Halal Logo specifically in Malaysia and also internationally (Zaini, 2022).

Based on the results of research conducted by Riza, et al. (2022) shows that not only the government but all parties including associations, organizations, and individuals have their own specific roles in ensuring that food is halal and the production process is in accordance with sharia requirements. In line with research conducted by Hamid, et al. (2022) that the readiness of business behavior to maintain and ensure that food is halal will affect consumer awareness in choosing halal food. As the results of research conducted by Arsil, Tey, & Brindal (2018) the results of research conducted by Arsil, Tey, & Brindal (2018) on Muslim consumers in Indonesia and Malaysia show that the decision to buy halal food is driven by primary personal values which are identified as a better sense of personal security as an effort to seek a "better future" and "go to heaven." Other personal values are related to tradition, benevolence and achievement. In line with research conducted by Khalek, et al. (2015) on urban Millennials living in Malaysia shows that the intention to consume halal food is largely influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control towards halal food. The research conducted by Ambali & Bakar (2013) shows that the level of awareness of consumption of halal food and products among Muslims in Shah Alam, Malaysia is increasing. The demand for halal products has increased because it is assisted by potential factors identified including *religious beliefs, exposures, the role played by ḥalāl certification via ḥalāl logo/label and health related reasons*.

Previous research has extensively discussed various aspects of the halal industry, ranging from production to demand for halal products. However, attention to the experiences of immigrant Muslims, especially in a multicultural context such as Malaysia, has been limited. This research aims to uncover new dimensions in the study of halal food consumption by examining the awareness, perceptions, behaviors, policies and challenges faced by immigrant Muslims in Malaysia. Using interviews and ethnographic methods, this study will identify factors that influence halal food choices among Muslim immigrants and offer more inclusive policy recommendations. The results of the study are expected to provide more effective policy recommendations to improve the accessibility and quality of halal products, so as to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse Muslim community and contribute to the sustainable development of the halal industry. It is also expected to provide benefits to the community, especially for

Muslim immigrants, by increasing their access to halal products that suit their preferences and needs, as well as providing input for halal industry players to develop more innovative products and services. The results of this study are expected to enrich the existing literature on consumption studies and provide policy recommendations that can improve the quality of life of immigrant Muslim consumers in Malaysia.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative research approach with a case study method with data collection techniques through interviews, direct observation and documentation. The object of this research is Muslim consumer awareness and the implications of halal food policies in Malaysia. While the research subjects are Muslim immigrants who have consumed and felt the implications of halal food policies in Malaysia. In depth interviews were conducted to explore a deeper understanding of the meaning and significance of halal food in the daily lives of respondents. Case studies were conducted on Malaysian muslim immigrant communities to understand how they adapt to the availability of halal food in the destination country. Through participatory observation, researchers sought to understand the cultural meanings contained in halal food consumption practices. Document analysis was conducted to complement primary data obtained from interviews and observations, and to gain a broader understanding of the socio cultural context of halal food consumption. The documents analyzed include journal articles, and social media data related to the issue of halal food. Researchers use triangulation to guarantee the validity of data or the validity of the data obtained whether it is appropriate or relevant to the facts that occur in the field (Sugiyono, 2021).

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Awareness of Muslim Immigrants in Malaysia in consuming halal food

Malaysia is a unique country in that the majority of its population is Muslim but it remains multi-religious and multi-racial consisting of Malays, Chinese, Indians and other races. It is not surprising that in Malaysia there are people from various countries who come together and form groups or communities that have their own characteristics. Apart from the religious beliefs, customs and traditions inherited by each race from their ancestors, the environmental influences and cultural traits of their country of origin affect their

way of life with particular reference to their habits, perceptions and attitudes towards food and products consumed.

About three fifths or 61.32% of the total Malaysian population is muslim with a high level of consumer awareness of halal food. Based on the results of interviews with Muslim immigrants living in Malaysia, Mali (43 years old), said *"I only eat halal food when I enter a restaurant and there is no desire to eat non-halal food."* As stated by Wiwin (34 years old), *"I have no desire to buy non-halal food, finding halal products is easier so I don't have to worry about availability."* Danis (47 years) added that *"my desire to buy halal products is the highest, afraid of sinning if I buy non-halal food."* Tutik (42 years old) also added *"I do not want and have no desire to try non-halal food."*

Based on the results of these interviews, it shows that Muslim immigrants in Malaysia understand, feel and realize that the food they consume must be halal. This is evidenced by the restaurant's efforts to always sell halal food. In addition, the existence of religious beliefs and fear of sin when doing something prohibited by religion is a form of consumer awareness when consuming halal food. The existence of halal labeling also helps consumers in choosing products, Mali (34 years), said *"The use of product names is very helpful for determining the choice of halal products, there is rice brand "Cap Masjid" which is definitely halal and does not worry when buying it."*

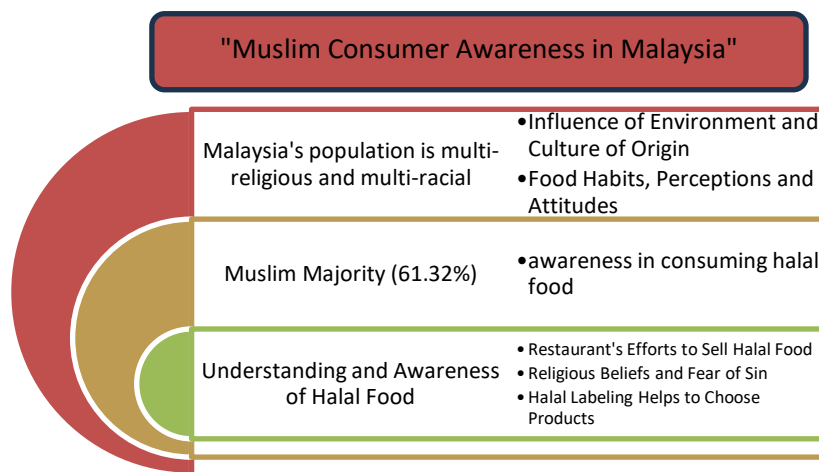


Figure 3: Muslim immigrants' awareness in consuming halal food

So it can be concluded that the awareness of Muslim immigrants is very high in consuming halal food as indicated by each respondent having understood, felt, realized and tried to buy halal food. It is also influenced by the efforts of restaurants to sell halal food, religious beliefs and fear of sin, halal labeling helps choose products.

Implications of Halal Food Policy in Malaysia

The Malaysian government has given full support to the development and promotion of Malaysia as the world's halal center. This support is manifested in various programs and policies that support the halal industry. Based on interviews with Muslim immigrants in Malaysia, Affandi (48 years old) and Tutik (42 years old), said that *"The halal policy in Malaysia is easier, many activities related to the halal industry are organized by the government."* While Mali (43 years old) and Marzuki (59 years old) said that *"halal is very well maintained and halal food here is very guaranteed, because there are special supervisors related to halal food."* Marzuki (59 years old) also said *"When selling non-halal goods, they cannot be mixed with halal ones, they must be separated."* This shows the strict policy implemented by the Malaysian government towards halal food.

Even in Malaysia, finding non-halal food is more difficult because of this policy. Lina Murniawati (42 years old) said that *"Here it is very difficult to find, difficult to get non-halal food because there is a very strict policy regulating non-halal food."* Likewise, Muhammad Syahirulamin Bin Mazalan (33 years old) also said that *"related to halal in Malaysia is very strict, Malay people are prohibited from going to places that sell non-halal goods."* Marzuki (59 years old) confirmed that *"Muslims can be fined if they enter a non-halal restaurant, halal here (Malaysia) is very guarded, there is supervision from the government regarding this halal"*. Not only buyers of non-halal food are fined, it turns out that sellers will also be sanctioned as stated by Danis (47 years), *"Food permits are very tightened, halal food in Malaysia has special officials authorized to supervise it, even sellers who sell non-halal food will be sanctioned."*

The Malaysian government is implementing halal certification for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). This will greatly help Muslim consumers in choosing food. As Affandi (48 years old) stated that *"There is an obligation to have halal certification for SME business actors."* The existence of halal certification ensures that the products sold are safe and acceptable to Muslim consumers. In addition, there is a policy of halal labeling on packaging that is easily visible to consumers. This was conveyed by Marzuki (59 years) that *"In food packaging there is a large halal labeling that makes it easier for consumers to see"*. Another obligation for business actors is to have a trading license as stated by Arif (37 years old), an immigrant who works as a sausage seller, *"Here, sellers who want to sell must have a trading license"*.



Figure 4: Malaysian government policy implementation

Based on the results of the interview, it can be concluded that the Malaysian government has implemented a halal food policy by making strict policies by assigning special supervisors related to halal food to impose sanctions on sellers or buyers of non-halal food, the obligation to have halal certification, labeling that is easy for consumers to read and a Business License (SIB).

Factors Influencing Halal Food Choices

a. Country of Origin

There are significant differences in halal food preferences between immigrants from different countries. These differences are influenced by a variety of factors, including cultural background, culinary traditions and availability of ingredients in the country of origin. Immigrants from the Middle East tend to prefer lamb and mutton-based dishes, while immigrants from South Asia are more familiar with spice-rich and vegetarian cuisine. In addition, preferences for types of food preparations, such as marinated or fermented meats, also vary between countries. Research by Cook, I., & Crang, P. (1996) shows that culinary culture has a strong influence on individual food choices, including in the context of halal food consumption. Another factor to consider is the level of urbanization and modernization in the country of origin, which can affect consumer expectations of halal food products. Immigrants from more urbanized countries may be more open to processed and ready-to-eat halal food products.

b. Socioeconomic Status

Affordable prices and good quality make halal food more attractive to various social groups. Research by Jamarahman, A. I. B. A., et al., (2023) identified the factors that influence the choice of halal food in terms of social status in Malaysia. Based on data from 228 respondents, this study found that price, attitude, and peer influence have a significant relationship with halal food consumption trends. Positive attitudes towards the hygiene and quality of halal food also play an important role. In addition, influence from peers and family greatly influences an individual's decision to consume popular halal food. These results suggest that social status, reflected in price preferences and attitudes, as well as social influence from the surrounding environment, are highly influential in the choice of halal food.

c. Product Availability and Price

Factors that influence the choice of halal food in terms of products include various complex and interconnected aspects. In research Rejeb et al. (2021) explaining halal food consumption in Malaysia, some of the main factors found to influence this trend are price, attitude, and peer influence. Price plays an important role as consumers tend to choose products that are affordable but still meet halal standards. Consumers' attitude towards halal food is also significant, where the belief in the hygiene and quality of halal food increases their preference. In addition, peer influence also contributes, where recommendations from friends or family can influence purchasing decisions. This study shows that the combination of these factors increases the popularity of halal food among consumers in Malaysia

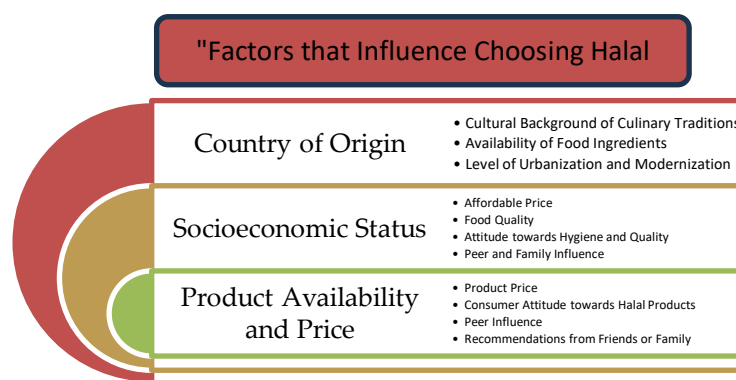


Figure 5: Factors Influencing Halal Food Choices

There are several factors that influence Muslim consumers' purchasing behavior towards halal products in Malaysia. These factors include price, attitude, and peer influence. This study found that the price factor has a significant positive influence on the consumption of trending halal food. The

attitude factor also influences the consumption of halal food, albeit with a weaker degree of strength and negative direction. In addition, peer influence shows a positive relationship with trending halal food consumption. All of these factors significantly influence Muslim consumers' choice of halal products in Malaysia, which suggests that purchasing behavior is influenced by a combination of economic, social, and psychological factors. (Karoui, 2016) .

The impact in the business growth of food industry in Malaysia.

The Malaysian government's policy towards Halal certification has recently been described as an increasingly important market force, helping to strengthen the position of Muslim countries as consumers and producers on the global stage. Interestingly, the Halal industry not only attracts the attention of Muslims but also Non-Muslim users, as it is considered a symbol of global quality assurance and a lifestyle choice (N. M. N. Muhammad, F. M. Isa, and B. C. Kifli, 2009).

In Malaysia, where 60% of the population is Muslim, the Halal certification and logo have an advantage in capturing a larger market share (N. A. Ahmad, T. N. T. Abaidah, and M. H. A. Yahya, 2013). By obtaining Halal certification, businesses gain market signals, Islamic attributes, and better marketing (S. Z. S. Marzuki, C. M. Hall, and P. W. Ballantine, 2012). The value of Halal certification in business attracts a broader interest beyond religion and contributes to Malaysia's position as a tourism destination and global Halal market hub, in line with the government's targets. Rahman et al. (2011) noted that in 2010, tourist expenditure on food and beverages reached RM9.72 billion, as reported by Tourism Malaysia. Therefore, the demand for food services in general, and Halal food in particular, is expected to grow rapidly in the country.

Bustamam (2010), in his case study, showed that a Malaysian company producing Halal pharmaceutical gelatin, which had obtained Halal certification, successfully expanded its business to China, India, Turkey, Sri Lanka, Canada, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Brunei, and Indonesia. Machfud et al. (2011) in their research emphasized that Halal certification is now seen as a marketing tool that provides a competitive advantage for producers, as well as offering other benefits such as consumer trust, compliance with Islam, and hygiene and safety standards. Halal certification also serves as a mechanism for authorities to monitor Halal food in the food industry.

As an example of business success, the research showed that food exports from Singapore to the UAE increased by 67% within a year after the UAE

recognized the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS), as quoted from the International Enterprise Singapore website. Liow, in his book "Marketing Halal, Creating New Economy, New Wealth," revealed that his company, which produces frozen food in Malaysia, managed to expand its market by 100% after obtaining Halal certification. He also found that European companies with Halal certification were able to expand their markets geographically from Europe to Asia.

Discussions on business growth in the Islamic perspective are often found in literature reviews, with business success being measured in two dimensions (M. A. Islam, M. A. Khan, and O. Z. M. Obaidullah, 2011):

1. Financial performance versus other types of success,
2. Short-term success versus long-term success.

The term success is defined in various forms such as business survival, profit, return on investment (ROI), sales growth, number of employees, happiness, and reputation. Happiness and reputation are two types of business growth and success terms that differentiate the Islamic values definition from the general understanding in other literature. Other research highlights that the purpose of business in Islam is not only focused on material aspects (Faizal et al., 2013). According to M. Z. Muhammad et al. (2013), the Islamic concept of business growth emphasizes a balance between material and spiritual needs. Muslim business owners, in accordance with Islamic business ethics, must adhere to rules that prohibit the sale of goods and products that do not comply with Islamic law. This motivation drives them to follow Islamic rules for business growth, which is based on satisfaction in providing Halal products or services to the Muslim community. The ultimate goal in Islam is to obtain blessings from Allah. Business is considered a *fardhu kifayah* (collective obligation), where profit is merely an incidental outcome of fulfilling this obligation. However, profit is still encouraged to prosper the community. This study also emphasizes that in business, Muslims believe that success is not only measured by the end result but also by the means and methods used to achieve it. Islamic business ethics are fundamentally the same as business ethics practiced worldwide, with the main difference being that they are practiced due to an awareness of Islamic values.

4. CONCLUSION

The awareness of immigrant muslim consumers in Malaysia towards halal food is very high. Muslim immigrants tend to consume only halal food and demonstrate a deep knowledge and understanding of the importance of halalness in their diet. This is supported by the Malaysian government's strict policies regarding halal food, including halal product labeling, strict supervision by authorities, and mandatory halal certification for businesses. The success of this policy is also evident from the high level of trust and convenience of Muslim consumers in choosing halal food in Malaysia. The policy implications resulting from this study emphasize the importance of collaboration between the government, businesses, and communities in ensuring the halalness of food products consumed by the public. The Malaysian government needs to continue to strengthen existing policies and improve education and information on halal products. In addition, attention to factors such as country of origin, socio economic status, and product availability and price are also important in influencing the choice of halal food among consumers. Thus, comprehensive and inclusive policies can support the sustainable development of the halal industry and improve the quality of life of Muslim consumers in Malaysia.

Future research is recommended to focus on a more in-depth analysis of the specific factors that influence halal food preferences among different groups of Muslim immigrants in Malaysia. In addition, further research can also explore the long term impact of halal policies on economic and social growth in Malaysia, including how these policies affect the tourism sector and exports of halal products. Longitudinal studies that observe changes in consumer behavior and policy effectiveness over time will provide valuable insights for future policy improvements and marketing strategies for halal products.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS:

We state that there are no known conflicts of interest linked with this publication, and that there has been no significant financial assistance for this work that could have influenced its outcome.

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