

UNDERSTANDING AND ACCEPTANCE OF HALAL FOOD AMONG NON-MUSLIMS IN MALAYSIA: CASE STUDY IN KUANTAN TOWN

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Halal is no longer a foreign word to everybody all over the world. It is primarily due to the high demand for halal food around the globe. Knowing about halal food is not necessarily means understanding and accepting it. Thus, this study was conducted to evaluate the level of knowledge and acceptance of halal food among non-Muslims in Malaysia. **Methods:** This cross-sectional study was carried out in Kuantan town, Malaysia involving 100 respondents (male=51, female=49) where 34.0% of them are Buddhist, 31.0% Hindus, 20.0% Christian, and others (15.0%) using a specific questionnaire. **Results:** The results showed that 98.0% of the respondents understand the basic concept of halal food: clean, wholesome, and safe to be eaten. About 74.0% of the respondents also understand that pig, dog, and their descendants, blood, filth (najs), carrion, and non-slaughtered animals are prohibited for Muslims. Other questions about basic concepts of halal food were also correctly answered (between 44.0-93.0%). About 96.0% of the respondents also said that they would accept and consume halal food. **Conclusions:** This study showed an increasing trend of halal food knowledge and acceptance among non-Muslims in Malaysia, where most of them understand that halal food benefits all.

Key words: *Halal* food, *Non-Muslims*, Knowledge, Acceptance Level.

INTRODUCTION

In today's modern world, consumers are expecting high-quality food. For Muslim consumers, the quality is halal, which covers permissible, wholesome, clean, and safe food. As mentioned in the Quran, Allah s.w.t said: "O mankind eat of that which is halal (lawful) and tayyib (wholesome and pure) in the earth and follow not the footsteps of the devil. He is an open enemy for you" (Al-Quran 2:168). Halal now becomes a new benchmark for quality and safety products and services worldwide. Halal has become a standard associated with the end product quality and included all best practices throughout the entire supply chain. Nowadays, Halal is no longer a foreign word to everybody all over the world. The Ninth Malaysia Plan (MP9) and the Third Industrial

Malaysia Plan (IMP3) have identified the halal industry as the new growth area, contributing to the country's economic development. The estimated global halal trade exceeds USD 2.1 trillion, and this emerging global market offers vast opportunities for Malaysian halal producers and service providers. Malaysia is one of the multiracial countries which consists of various ethnicities and religions. The population as in 2018 is about 32.4 million peoples consisting of 62% Malays who are all Muslims, 24% Chinese who are mainly Buddhist or Maoist, 8% Indians who are mainly Hindu with other minorities and indigenous peoples (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018). Most of the ethnicities and religions in this world recommend a variety of foods. Muslims ask for a halal diet; Jews choose a kosher diet where Indian Hindus/Buddhists suggest a vegetarian diet. Different ethnicities and religions may understand differently about halal food. Knowing about halal food is not necessarily means understanding and accepting it. Thus this study was conducted to evaluate the knowledge and acceptance of halal food among non-Muslim consumers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out in the Kuantan district, Malaysia, where respondents were all non-Muslim who conveniently selected at three leading supermarkets. All the respondents were asked to answer a specific self-administered questionnaire. It consists of three parts; the first part is about the respondent's socio-demographic characteristics. Part two contains questions about the basic principle of halal food. Part three comprises questions that assess the acceptance level of halal food. The knowledge about halal food among non-Muslim was accessed by looking at the respondents' frequency of correct answers. The acceptance of halal food by non-Muslim was also accessed by looking at respondents' frequency of chosen to accept or rejects answers. All data were descriptively analyzed and expressed as frequencies and percentages.

RESULTS

A total of 100 respondents were selected in this study, where 51.0% are male, and 49.0% are female. Chinese becomes majority (53.0%) respondents follow by Indian (32.0%) and other races (15.0%). In terms of religion, Buddhists are the largest (34.0%) group followed by Hindus (31.0%), Christians (20.0%), and others (15.0%). Table 1 below shows the other socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

	Characteristic	Frequency	%
Age	<18 years	11	11.0
	18-40 years	70	70.0
	>40 years	19	19.0
Marital Status	Single	36	36.0
	Married	64	64.0
Educational Level	Never been to school	5	5.0
	Primary/ secondary school	36	36.0
	STPM/ diploma	27	27.0
	First degree	17	17.0
	Post-graduate	15	15.0
Occupation	Not working	27	27.0
	Self-employed	36	36.0
	Government sector	16	16.0
	Private sector	21	21.0
Interaction with <i>muslim</i>	Never	19	19.0
	Seldom	37	37.0
	Often	44	44.0

According to accept and reject answers toward the acceptance of halal food, the frequency of respondents is presented in Tables 2 & 3.

Table 2: The frequency of respondents according to accept or reject the answer

No.	Question	Accept (%)	Reject (%)
1.	If someone gives me <i>halal</i> food, I will eat it without questioning.	96 (96.0)	4 (4.0)
2.	Food with a halal logo is safe to be eaten.	78 (78.0)	22 (22.0)
3.	I will look at the halal logo before buying food.	35 (35.0)	65 (65.0)

The Table 3 shows the respondents' frequency according to the correct and wrong answer toward the basic concepts of halal food.

Table 3: The frequency of respondents according to correct and wrong answer

No.	Question	True/False answer	Correctly answered	Wrongly answered
1.	Halal food is clean, wholesome, and safe to eat.	True	98	2
2.	Pig, dog, and its descendent, blood, filth (najs), carrion, and non-slaughtered animals are haram.	True	74	26
3.	Filth (najs) is related to dirty things such as urine, feces, blood, puss, and vomit.	True	68	32
4.	Carrion or slaughtered animal that being slaughtered without following the <i>Shariah</i> law is <i>halal</i> .	False	62	38
5.	Halal food and drinks that are contaminated with haram things are halal.	False	44	56
6.	Halal food must use clean, safe, and halal ingredients.	True	93	7
7.	Food processing, packaging, storing, and delivering cannot be contaminated with haram things.	True	84	16
8.	Food additives such as stabilizer, emulsifier, coloring agent, and gelatin originated from non-halal sources are allowed to eat for Muslims.	False	49	51
9.	Poisonous animals, amphibians, and animals that kill using its teeth are halal.	False	76	24
10.	Doubt (shubhah) food is not recommended to eat for Muslims.	True	71	29

DISCUSSION

Socio-demographic data

In general, the majority (70.0%) respondents are an adult (18-40 years old) who are married (64.0%) and have a high educational level (about 59.0% had tertiary educational level). About 73.0% of respondents have their job either self-employed or work with the government and private sector. About 44.0% of respondents also have good interaction with Muslims, which affects their knowledge and acceptance level toward halal food.

Halal Food Knowledge among Non-Muslims

For questions that have a correct answer (questions 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 & 10) majority (62.0-98.0%) of the respondents correctly answered the questions. It shows that the majority of non-Muslims understand the basic concept of halal food. About 98.0% of the respondents understand that halal

food is clean, wholesome, and safe food to be eaten. About 74.0% of the respondents also understand that pig, dog, and their descendent, blood, filth (najs), carrion, and non-slaughtered animals are haram. About 68.0% of the respondents declared that they understand what filth (najs) is. Most (93.0%) of the respondents also understand that halal food ingredients must be clean, safe, and originated from halal sources. The respondents also understand about doubtful (shubhah) things where the majority (71.0%) answered it correctly. For questions with a false answer (questions 4, 5, 8 & 9), about 38.0-56.0% of the respondents wrongly answered the questions. The respondents might not understand the basic concepts of halal food or confuse the structure of the questions. This study's finding was contrary to the study conducted by Golnaz et al. (2010) in Russia. He found no significant evidence to say that non-Muslims aware of the advantages of halal food. In Malaysia, a good understanding of halal food among non-Muslims may be influenced by good interaction with Muslim people.

Halal Food Acceptance among Non-Muslims

The results showed that 96.0% of the respondents accept halal food, where they answer yes for question 1. About 78.0% of the respondents also believed that food with a halal logo is safe to be eaten. These findings are quite similar to the study done by Muhammad (2007), where he found an increasing trend of halal food acceptance among non-Muslims worldwide due to the health benefits that originated from halal food. He also reported that the rise in acceptance among non-Muslims towards halal food (especially meat) is due to the meat's tastier taste compared to non-halal meat. Bergeaud-Blackler (2006) also stated that a majority of the respondents (56.1%) in his study agree with the statement, "halal meat has a better taste than non-halal meat. About 4.0% of the respondents in this study still do not accept halal food, and about 22.0% of the respondents still doubt halal food safety. This study also found that only 35.0% of the respondents will consider the halal logo while selecting their food. The rejection and doubtful of halal food may also contribute to less interaction between non-Muslims and Muslims. About 19.0% of the respondents never interact with Muslims, and 37.0% of respondents seldomly interact with Muslims. Golnaz et al. (2010) reported that among the reasons why non-muslims still doubt halal food is due to the personal belief that halal food is only for Muslims, and it is one of religious obligation. Other reasons include the thinking of slaughtering activity as cruelty to animals where they think that the animals suffer for approximately two minutes before death by the bleeding.

CONCLUSION

This study showed an increasing trend of halal food knowledge and acceptance among non-Muslims, where most of them understand that halal food benefits all.

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