HALAL RESTAURANTS AND PORK FREE CONCEPT AWARENESS AMONG YOUNG MUSLIMS IN KOTA KINABALU, SABAH

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Abstract:

Halal is an Arabic term that means "permissible" or "lawful" in Islam. It is used to describe what is allowed or permitted according to Islamic dietary laws and other aspects of life. One of the issues in Sabah that seem endless is the halal issue of a restaurant and the issue of Muslims often going to restaurants that do not have a halal certificate and only have the label "Serve No Pork" or "Muslim Friendly". This has become a hot topic that is often discussed by the local community because they think there are still people who ignore the importance of eating at restaurants that are believed to be halal and toyyiban. This paper places its emphasis on young Muslims, as we hold the belief that the perspectives of youthful consumers, especially within the Muslim community, will shape the future of the Halal industry in our nation. Although there is not a single dataset that measures the awareness of pork-free versus halal concepts across Malaysia, but the general trend in Malaysia indicates a steady rise in both halal-certified businesses and consumer awareness. Data will be gathered through questionnaires sent to young Muslims in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. This study employs quantitative methods to analyse and ascertain the degree of awareness and knowledge among young Muslims regarding the concept and practices of Halal. The survey data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The statistical findings of this study aim to explain the level of awareness and knowledge of Muslim youth in Kota Kinabalu regarding the consumption of Halal products, especially in restaurants or eating places. The results showed a negative correlation between halal awareness, and other variables signals potential challenges or areas for improvement in halal perception, strategies, and education in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

Introduction

Approximately 63.5% of the population of Malaysia adheres to the Islamic faith as of 2020, constituting a sizable Muslim population. Malaysia is a nation that has Islam as its official religion. Halal food, according to Islamic dietary regulations, refers to food that is deemed permissible or lawful by the Muslim community. Muslims are required to adhere to Halal standards as prescribed by Islamic teachings. The Halal sector has significant significance in Malaysia. Malaysia is renowned for its expertise in Halal certification across several sectors, including food, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and other commodities. To encourage international investment and commercial partnerships, government authorities have hyped themselves as a major Halal centre. This has increased economic growth, employment creation, and exports. Consumers, regardless of religion, value Halal certification, especially from JAKIM. Since Halal certification ensures products and services meet high requirements, Malaysians see it as a sign of quality and security. Malaysia is well-known for its thriving food sector, offering a wide variety of gourmet choices. A diverse mix of cuisines from different nationalities and civilizations, the nation's culinary landscape caters to a broad spectrum of tastes and dietary needs. Malaysian food is improved by its dedication to offering halal options for Muslim customers and the emergence of pork-free restaurants that serve its multicultural community.

Muslims worldwide have become more aware of halal food and have become more interested in it, especially in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Sabah's unique demographic which includes a significant Muslim population has led to a greater emphasis on the availability of halal-certified eateries. This is in line with Malaysia's broader national strategy to position itself as a global leader in the halal industry which in 2022 halal contributed to 7.4% of the national GDP. It is essential that halal restaurants are readily available, well-known, and accepted in Kota Kinabalu as well as the pork-free concept in order to influence the eating patterns of young Muslims in the city. There remain challenges, despite Kota Kinabalu's growing awareness of halal restaurants and pork-free concepts. Halal certification standards are inconsistent and cross-contamination of halal and non-halal ingredients is a concern in some factories. To ensure that young Muslim visitors feel satisfied and have trust in the organization, it is important to address these issues (Ibrahim and Ismail, 2019). Additionally, Kota Kinabalu offers pork-free dining options to serve its diverse population, including Muslims as well as non-Muslims with dietary restrictions. There has been a growing movement towards pork-free dining among young Muslims, who may be more comfortable dining in non-Halal establishments that do not serve pork products. In Kota Kinabalu, several restaurants have adopted the pork-free concept, making it popular with young Muslims (Hamzah & Jaafar, 2018). As defined by Hassan (2017), Halal education refers to the process of informing and understanding Halal principles, which include the permissible and prohibited conduct in Islam. Schools, religious institutions, and homes can all provide this type of education. Young Muslims should receive halal education during their formative years in order to enable them to distinguish between halal and non-halal products and make halal decisions. As well as offering pork-free meals, Kota Kinabalu caters to the dietary needs of a diverse population, including both Muslims and non-Muslims who

may have dietary restrictions or prefer not to consume pork. The concept of eating pork-free has gained popularity among young Muslims, who may find it more convenient to eat in places that do not adhere to halal rules and do not sell pork. Hamzah and Jaafar, 2018) report that several restaurants in Kota Kinabalu have adopted the pork-free concept, which has contributed to the popularity of this concept among Muslim youth.

Literature Review

As a result of Islamic jurisprudence, Halal is an umbrella concept that encompasses all activities and products that Muslims are permitted to consume. Essentially, it outlines what is permissible in terms of food and beverages under Islamic dietary laws. According to Hassan et al. (2018), Halal standards are based on the Quran and Hadith. Food choices are also influenced by the halal definition. In Islam, Muslims consume only halal products, such as meat, poultry, and processed foods. Food labelling, restaurant menus, and grocery purchases are affected by this definition. Certification and labelling are driven by halal product demand (Haque & Idris, 2020). The ethical and cultural significance of halal food transcends religious observance. Food production employs hygiene standards, humane slaughter practices, and ethical slaughtering practices. Changing dietary habits and traditions are part of Muslim communities' cultural identity (Hamzah & Jaafar, 2018). The Halal concept in Malaysia includes not just religious considerations but also food safety. JAKIM's strict good manufacturing practices are followed in preparing Halal food. Ensure compliance and authenticity in the Halal food industry by understanding the Halal definition for individuals, businesses, and regulatory bodies.

Halal Awareness

Young Muslims are increasingly aware of the importance of Halal awareness, which shows their commitment to Muslim dietary laws and religious beliefs. Consequently, it provides them with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions when choosing the food they consume, the goods they purchase, and the services they engage in. According to Hassan (2017), Muslims' awareness of halal influences their daily practices and plays an integral role in their sense of identity as Muslims. As well as that, halal awareness is the knowledge and understanding among Muslims and non-Muslims of what is considered Halal. The understanding of Halal principles is essential for individuals to make informed decisions regarding what they consume and use on a daily basis. A number of factors influence awareness, including cultural context, educational background, and media exposure (Zain et al., 2019). Additionally, the influence of family and peers is often important for developing halal awareness. Halal dietary practices are taught to young Muslims by their families and communities. It can have a significant impact on their awareness and adherence to Halal principles when they observe the dietary habits and choices of their peers and family members (Ali, 2019). While Halal principles are becoming increasingly well known, challenges still exist. There are many challenges to Halal certification, including inconsistencies in the standards, concerns about cross-contamination, and the need for standardized education and labelling. In order to maintain the trust of young Muslim consumers, Halal awareness efforts need to address these concerns (Hassan et al., 2018). Halal awareness challenges and concerns must be addressed in order to maintain the trust and satisfaction of young Muslim consumers.

There has been an increase in understanding among Muslims regarding halal cuisine consumption in Malaysia over the past few years. The focus on the halal status of the food, as well as the logos and products, may be problematic. There have been complaints regarding Muslim customers, particularly young people who visit the premises with muddled halal logos, but JAKIM has never acknowledged this behaviour. Despite the fact that it is a fake logo and

does not receive acknowledgement from JAKIM, they maintain there is a halal logo placed on the bundling of their food and drink items (Hamidah and Nuraishah, 2017).

Halal Education

Halal education is the process of imparting knowledge about Halal principles and practices. It encompasses religious institutions, schools, and community efforts to educate individuals about what is Halal and Haram (forbidden). Formal and informal education helps ensure that individuals have a strong foundation in understanding Halal principles (Ismail, 2018). An interview with an Islamic education teacher who has taught primary school for more than 15 years unveiled a new aspect of mainstream halal education, where halal education is almost non-existent in primary schools. Manners are briefly discussed in relation to halal food, emphasizes how crucial it is for Muslims to choose halal food. Furthermore, this is done without providing an explanation of what halal cuisine is. Interestingly, this is only thought to apply to standard five primary students, which is surprising (Jais, 2014).

Today, the halal industry's ultimate success depends on management's ability to integrate technical management with Sharia education (Hashim & Shariff, 2016). According to Mohd Shariff (2014), in order to become more competitive in the market, the global halal industry, halal businesses, and human capital operating in a variety of sectors like abattoirs, food product manufacturing, food outlets, pharmaceutical, cosmetic, and healthcare products, as well as the logistics sector, need specialized halal training and development. The benefits of halal education and training bring more certain effects. This is due to the possibility that the preparation could help the halal business by guaranteeing the halal integrity and the level of quality offered and produced by the industry players are raised to a standard to identical with the necessities and in astounding circumstances.

Attitudes toward Halal

Attitudes toward Halal can vary widely among individuals. Some Muslims hold a strong belief in the importance of consuming only Halal products due to their faith and adherence to Islamic dietary laws. Non-Muslims may also hold positive attitudes toward Halal for health, ethical, or cultural reasons. Understanding these attitudes is essential for businesses and policymakers (Khan, 2021). In aspect of halal food, individual understanding towards a specific product's appeal is based on experience and knowledge of the foods that Muslims are allowed to eat (Kamarulzaman et al., 2020). Consumer concerns about their health have given the food sector a chance for food industry players such as organic food. The notion of halal in relation to Muslim products provides additional advantages. The key to remaining healthy is to be mindful in eating, which includes food sources, how food is created and cooked, and the appropriate quality and quantity to minimize the harmful effects on the body. However, determining whether a food item is halal or haram depends on a number of other factors, making consumer faith in halal food considerably more difficult (Ali et al., 2021).

According to Shah Alam and Mohamed Sayuti's (2011) previous study, there is a favourable correlation between Muslim's buying intentions and their attitudes. This implies that Muslims will buy a food product if they find it to be beneficial and aligned with their faith and beliefs. Additionally, according to Khalek (2014), younger generations' buying intentions are determined by their attitudes. When it comes to influencing a consumer's decision to buy, attitude serves as a mediator between them and other factors like product knowledge and brand.

Knowledge about Halal

Knowledge about Halal includes familiarity with halal principles, practices, and certification. This knowledge empowers individuals to make informed choices in their dietary and lifestyle habits. An individual's knowledge about Halal is often influenced by their cultural, educational, and social context (Ali et al., 2019). Knowledge is defined as an understanding of a subject that is acquired by experience, meanwhile halal knowledge refers to how Muslims should understand and apply Islamic teachings about halal and haram (Sadeeqa et al., 2013). The intention to purchase halal is significantly influenced by knowledge (Shaari & Arifin, 2010). Muslims and product makers lost appreciation for halal due to a lack of education, awareness, and understanding of the idea (Wahab, 2004). Purchase intention is influenced by a number of factors, including perceived behavioural control, subjective norm, awareness, knowledge, and attitude toward food labelling (Latiff et al., 2016). According to Said et.al (2014), government organizations do not take the initiative to disclose or provide halal knowledge, information or education.

Problem Statement

The issue of Halal compliance and awareness, particularly concerning restaurants, has emerged as a persistent concern in Sabah, Malaysia. While Halal, signifying "permissible" in Islam, plays a pivotal role in dietary practices and everyday life, there is a growing problem with some restaurants in Sabah labelling themselves as "Serve No Pork" or "Muslim Friendly" without obtaining official Halal certification. This issue is a subject of intense local discussion, reflecting concerns that some individuals are neglecting the significance of consuming food at establishments believed to be genuinely Halal and toyyiban (wholesome and pure). The focus of this research centres on the young Muslim population in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, recognizing that the perspectives and behaviours of young consumers, especially within the Muslim community, hold the potential to shape the future of the Halal industry in the region. The research aims to assess the awareness and knowledge levels of young Muslims regarding Halal concepts and practices, with particular attention to their consumption choices at restaurants and eating establishments.

Methodology

In this study, the purpose of the questionnaire is to determine the young Muslim on awareness and knowledge of the halal concept. This study uses the0 survey method in data collection and in a format of self-administered questionnaire adapted from Musa and Hashim (2022) and then tested for reliability and validity. Section A focused on respondents' demographic information, whereas Section B focused on attitudes toward the halal concept, Section C focused on their awareness of halal when choosing to dine at a restaurant and Section D focused on knowledge of halal to find out their general knowledge about halal. Participants of the study were 146 young Muslims which are in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. A Google Form was used to administer the online survey, and the questionnaire was distributed via WhatsApp. By using a 5-point Likert scale as a guide in the questionnaire where "1" indicates Very Unlikely and "5" indicates Very Likely. The data was processed and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software Version 26.

Findings And Discussions

Table 1: Profile Of Respondents

Demography		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	48	32.9
	Female	98	67.1
Age	13-15	3	2.1
	16-17	1	0.7
	18-20	88	60.3
	21-23	17	11.6
	24-26	10	6.8
	27 & above	27	18.5
Level of Education	Low secondary	4	2.7
	Upper secondary	1	0.7
	SPM	7	4.8
	STPM	2	1.4
	Certificate	1	0.7
	Diploma	103	70.5
	Bachelor Degree	23	15.8
	Master Degree	4	2.7
	PHD	1	0.7
State of Origin	Sabah	140	95.9
	Sarawak	1	0.7
	Peninsular Malaysia	5	3.4
Have you received in-depth formal religious education before other than the National School	Yes	91	62.3
	No	55	37.7

Table 1 shows majority of the respondent are female that is 98(67.1%) people. While the rest, only 48(32.9%) people are male.

Majority of the respondent age is between 18 to 20 years old that is 88(60.3%) people. Followed with age between 27 years old and above, 21 to 23 years old, 24 to 26 years old and 13 to 15 years old that is 27(18.5%), 17(11.6%), 10(6.8%) and 3(2.1%) people respectively. While the rest, only 1(0.7%) people age between 16 to 17 years old.

Majority of the respondent have level of education in Diploma that is 103(70.5%) people. Followed by respondent have education in Bachelor Degree, SPM, low secondary, Master Degree and STPM that is 23(15.8%), 7(4.8%), 4(2.7%), 4(2.7%) and 2(1.4%) people respectively. While the rest, only 1(0.7%) people have education in upper secondary, certificate and PhD respectively.

Majority of the respondent state of origin from Sabah that is 140(95.9%) people. Followed by Peninsular Malaysia that is 5(3.4%) people. While the rest, only 1(0.7%) people from Sarawak.

Majority of the respondent have received in-depth formal religious education before other than the National School that is 91(62.3%) people. While the rest, only 55(37.7%) people are not received in-depth formal religious education.

Reliability Test

Section	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	Interpretation
1. Attitude on halal	0.707	6	Good
2. Halal awareness	0.706	6	Good
3. Knowledge about halal	0.783	3	Good

Attitude towards Halal: Cronbach's alpha value is 0.707, which is considered "good" in terms of internal consistency. This suggests that the Halal attitude assessment items in this study are reasonably consistent in measuring the same concept.

Halal Awareness: Cronbach's alpha value is 0.706, which is also considered "good". This means that the items used to measure Halal awareness are internally consistent.

Halal Knowledge: The Cronbach Alpha value is 0.783, which is not only considered "good" but is actually higher than the previous two measures. This indicates a high level of internal consistency in the items measuring Halal knowledge.

Hypothesis 1: "There is an interaction effect between age and education level on attitudes towards halal practices. Specifically, older individuals with higher education levels are expected to have the most positive attitudes towards halal practices, while younger individuals with lower education levels are expected to have the least positive attitudes."
Level of significant, $\alpha=0.05$

Model Summary	R			
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.177a	0.031	0.018	0.774

a. Predictors: (Constant), Level of Education, Age

A correlation coefficient (R) of 0.177 indicates a weak positive relationship between the predictors (age and education level) and attitudes toward halal practices. Based on the coefficient of determination (R Square), the model is able to explain approximately 3.1% of the variance in attitudes toward halal practices.

The adjusted R Square, based on the number of predictors and sample size, is 0.018. The adjusted value is slightly lower than the R Square, suggesting that the model is slightly overfit or that the predictors are not highly significant in explaining the variance in attitudes toward halal practices.

ANOVAa

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.77	2	1.385	2.315	.102b
	Residual	85.565	143	0.598		
	Total	88.336	145			

a. Dependent Variable: Mean attitude on halal

b. Predictors: (Constant), Level of Education, Age

There is no significant relationship between attitudes towards halal practices and social demographic (level of education and age) with $F_{(2,143)} = 2.315$ and p value is 0.102 ($p>0.05$).

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.905	0.319		12.228	0
	Age	0.014	0.054	0.023	0.26	0.795
	Level of Education	-0.113	0.054	-0.184	-2.096	0.038

a. Dependent Variable: Mean attitude on halal

In this case, the constant term represents the estimated mean attitude towards halal when all other predictors are zero. As a result, the constant is 3.905 in this case. The coefficient for age is 0.014, which indicates that for every one unit increase in age, the mean attitude toward halal should increase by 0.014 units. Still, this coefficient is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p = 0.795$), suggesting that age does not significantly affect attitudes towards Halal. Level of education has a coefficient of -0.113. Based on this negative coefficient, it can be predicted that as the level of education increases by one unit, the mean attitude towards halal will decrease by 0.113 units. At the 0.05 level ($p = 0.038$), this coefficient displays that level of education affects attitudes towards halal practices in a significant manner. Based on the standard deviation of both variables, the standardized coefficient (Beta) for level of education is -0.184, which indicates the standardized effect size of level of education on attitudes toward halal practices. To test the null hypothesis that the level of education coefficient is equal to zero, the t-value associated with level of education (-2.096) is used. Based on the total value of the t-value (assumed a two-tailed test), we can reject the null hypothesis and conclude that level of education significantly influences attitudes towards halal practices.

Hypothesis 2: "There is a significant difference in attitudes towards halal practices among individuals of different age groups. Older individuals are more likely to have more positive attitudes towards halal practices than younger individuals."
Level of significant, α=0.05

ANOVA

Mean attitude on halal

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.834	5	0.567	0.928	0.465
Within Groups	85.502	140	0.611		
Total	88.336	145			

From Anova table above, the value of F (5,140) = 0.928 and p value is 0.465 (p>0.05). We can conclude that there is no significant difference in the level of halal awareness among age groups. The mean square within groups is 0.611, indicating a high variability in mean attitudes regarding halal.

Hypothesis 3: "Education level is positively correlated with more positive attitudes towards halal practices. Individuals with higher education levels are more likely to have more favorable attitudes towards halal practices compared to those with lower education levels."
Level of significant, α=0.05

Correlations

		Level of Education	Mean attitude on halal
Level of Education	Pearson Correlation	1	-.176*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.034
	N	146	1
Mean attitude on halal	Pearson Correlation	-.176*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.034	
	N	146	146

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In accordance with the results presented, the correlation coefficient between education level and attitude towards halal practices is -0.176, which indicates a negative correlation between both variables. Therefore, as education levels rise, attitudes toward halal practices tend to deteriorate. This correlation has a p-value of 0.034, which is lower than the significance level of (0.05), indicating statistical significance.

Hypothesis 4: "There is a significant difference in the level of halal awareness among individuals of different age groups."
Level of significant, α=0.05

Anova

Mean Halal awareness	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.368	5	0.874	1.454	0.209
Within Groups	84.125	140	0.601		
Total	88.493	140			

From Anova table above, the value of F (5,140) = 1.454 and p value is 0.209 (p>0.05). We can conclude that there is no significant difference in the level of halal awareness among age groups.

Hypothesis 5: "There is an interaction effect between age and gender, where the level of halal awareness varies differently across different age groups for each gender."

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.208a	0.043	0.03	0.769

a. Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Age

From this model, summary table show the R-square is 0.043. Therefore, 4.3 percent of the level of halal awareness can be explained by gender and age in the model.

Anova

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3.83	2	1.915	0.592	0.592
	Residual	84.664	143	0.592		
	Total	88.493	145			

a. Dependent Variable: Mean Halal awareness
b. Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Age

There is no significant relationship between halal awareness and social demographic (gender and age) with F (2,143) = 0.592 and p value is 0.592 (p>0.05).

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.501	0.323		10.851	0
	Age	-0.094	0.051	-0.152	-1.839	0.068
	Gender	0.207	0.137	0.125	1.518	0.131

a. Dependent Variable: Mean Halal awareness

There is no interaction effect between age and gender among the level of halal awareness because p value for age and gender is 0.068 and 0.131 is greater than level of significant 0.05 respectively.

Hypothesis 6: "There is a positive correlation between education level and the depth of halal knowledge, meaning that as education level increases, halal knowledge also increases."
Level of significant, $\alpha=0.05$

Correlations

		Level of Education	Mean depth of halal knowledge
Level of Education	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.001
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.993
	N	146	146
Mean Halal awareness	Pearson Correlation	-0.001	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.993	
	N	146	146

There is a negative correlation between education level and mean halal awareness. The coefficient is -0.001. The correlation between these two variables appears to be extremely weak. Statistically, neither level of education nor mean halal awareness is statistically significant, as indicated by p-values associated with the correlation coefficients of 0.993. Based on these findings, any correlation between the variables could likely be a result of random chance rather than a meaningful relationship.
The relationship between education level and the depth of halal knowledge are not significant with r = -0.001 and p value = 0.993. We reject the null hypothesis because p value greater than 0.05.

Discussion

H1: According to the summary, the interaction between age and education level on attitudes towards halal practices appears to be weak, as indicated by the low R Square value. It appears that age and education level may not be sufficient predictors of attitudes toward halal practices. For a more accurate understanding of the relationship between these factors and attitudes toward halal practices, further analysis or inclusion of additional variables may be necessary. ANOVA results indicate that the regression model in which age and education level interact to

influence attitudes towards halal practices does not show statistical significance. Thus, the model predictors (age and education level) do not significantly explain the variability of attitudes toward halal practices. Accordingly, education significantly affects attitudes toward halal practices in this model, while age has no significant impact.

H2: Using the ANOVA analysis, we conclude that there are no statistically significant differences in mean attitudes toward halal between groups at the 0.05 level. The results suggest that any observed differences in mean attitudes toward halal are probably due to random variability within the groups rather than systematic differences between them.

H3: In contrast to the hypothesis, the findings suggest that education level is negatively related to attitudes toward halal practices, which implies that individuals with higher education levels are not more likely to hold favourable attitudes towards halal practices than those with lower education levels.

H4: Based on the ANOVA results, we conclude that there are no statistically significant differences between individuals of different ages with respect to their level of halal awareness. Accordingly, any observed differences in means of halal awareness between age groups may be caused by random variation within them, rather than systematic differences between them.

H5: In this study, age and gender had no significant interaction effect on the level of halal awareness. Halal awareness is not significantly influenced by the predictors (gender and age) included in the model.

H6: This study indicates that there is no statistically significant correlation between the level of education and the depth of halal knowledge. There is a very weak negative correlation observed between the variables, which is most likely caused by random chance rather than being indicative of a meaningful relationship. As a result, the data do not support the hypothesis that education level correlates with halal knowledge depth. A study done by Soon and Wallace (2017) indicates that there is no significant correlation between knowledge of halal brands and the decision-making process of purchasing. Tang et al. (2010) found that the amount of product experience and product knowledge is negatively related to purchasing choices.

Implications

If awareness on halal shows a negative correlation with other variables, it suggests that as one variable increases, the awareness on issue decreases, and vice versa. This could have several implications. It may indicate that the halal awareness made by the governments or other responsible entities is not effectively reaching its target audience. If awareness decreases as other variables increase, it could mean that the halal awareness effort or education about halal made by the responsible entity is failing to connect with consumers. Given stated that halal brand awareness is derived from customers' comprehension and information of the halal items they want to purchase (Wilson & Liu, 2010; Ireland & Rajabzadeh, 2011; Ahmed et al., 2019). In the context of consumer perception, the negative correlation with other variables might suggest that consumers perceive the halal awareness negatively in relation to those variables. Moreover, in the context of marketing or social responsibility strategies the negative correlation with other variables may prompt a reassessment of creating halal awareness campaign or program strategies. It could indicate that current halal awareness efforts are not resonating with the public and the consumers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The concept of "pork-free", "Serve No Pork" or "Muslim Friendly" restaurants, while catering to Muslim customers has been subject of debate for decades. Unlike the halal-certified establishments, pork-free restaurants do not necessarily adhere to all halal guidelines as they may still use non-halal ingredients or cooking methods. Understanding the awareness and

acceptance of halal restaurants and the pork-free concept is vital for the food industry and policymakers. With a rising demand for halal food options, it is essential to assess how well these establishments cater to the needs of the young Muslim population in Kota Kinabalu.

This study found a negative correlation between halal awareness and other variables signals potential challenges or areas for improvement in halal perception, strategies, and education in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. It highlights the importance of continually monitoring consumer perceptions and adapting halal awareness program strategies accordingly to educate or enhance the consciousness about the importance of halal to the society.

The findings from this study can provide valuable insights for restaurant owners, policymakers, and marketing professionals, enabling them to better cater to the preferences and needs of this growing consumer segment. Halal awareness and education among young Muslims are integral components of their daily lives and decision-making processes. Awareness reflects their commitment to Islamic dietary laws, while education equips them with the knowledge to make informed Halal choices. Religious institutions, schools, and the media all play a significant role in shaping young Muslims' understanding of Halal principles. Challenges in Halal education persist, but the impact on consumer behaviour and religious practice is clear, emphasizing the importance of promoting Halal awareness and education among the youth. Further research in this area is essential to better understand the dynamics and effectiveness of Halal education efforts.

Acknowledgement

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