

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND  
MANAGEMENT PRACTICES  
(IJEMP)**[www.ijemp.com](http://www.ijemp.com)**EXAMINING THE AWARENESS OF MUSLIM CONSUMERS  
TOWARDS HALAL FOOD**

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**Article Info:****Article history:**

Received date: 28.04.2023

Revised date: 20.05.2023

Accepted date: 20.06.2023

Published date: 27.06.2023

**To cite this document:**

Ibrahim, I. I., Md Nor, M. N., Ahmad, Z., Razali M. F. M., & Mansor, Z. (2023). Examining the Awareness of Muslim Consumers Towards Halal Food. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Management Practices*, 6 (21), 175-183.

DOI: 10.35631/IJEMP.621014

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**Abstract:**

Due to its recognition as a Muslim country, Malaysia has used this status to establish itself as a global hub for halal products. As the majority population of Malaysia are Muslims, who are also major consumers of halal food, they are expected to have a deeper understanding of the concept compared to other ethnic groups. Despite the majority being Muslim, many foods are still not prepared according to halal regulations, and there are abundant issues with abuse of halal certification and labelling. This study aims to investigate the awareness of halal food among Muslim consumers. The study examines the impact of variables such as halal logo labelling and packaging, exposure to regulatory authorities and enforcement, and consumer attitudes by using a questionnaire distributed to respondents in Northern Malaysia. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was utilized for data analysis, and multiple regressions were conducted to test the hypothesis. The results of the study indicate mixed results in relation to the tested relationship between the variables. Based on the research, there is a significant relationship between the halal logo, labelling and packaging, regulatory authorities' exposure and enforcement, and consumer attitude of customer awareness towards halal food among Muslims in Malaysia.

**Keywords:**

Authorities and Exposure, Consumer Attitude, Consumer Awareness, Halal Logo, Halal Food, Labelling and Packaging

**Introduction**

Malaysia is a nation with a rich mix of ethnicities and cultures. The Muslim community constitutes a majority, and their interests and presence are enshrined in the constitution, which

designates Islam as the official religion of the country (Federal Constitution, 2015). Food is a basic necessity of life, providing essential nutrients and energy for growth. The Muslim population is projected to experience rapid growth, increasing from 1.8 billion in 2012 to 2.2 billion by 2030 (Ruslan et al., 2018). The global halal market makes up over 20% of the entire food industry, and it is expected that demand for halal products will rise up to 50% by 2050 (Munich Personal RePEc Archive (MPRA), 2016). In Malaysia, well-known food companies such as Adabi Consumer Industries, Ramly Group, Aminah Hassan, Ayamas Food Corporation, Faiza Marketing Sdn. Bhd., along with many other Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), specialize in the production of halal food products.

The halal food industry encompasses a range of activities, including processing, preservation, distribution, food service, and beverages, all in accordance with Syariah law. This industry is a complex and global network of diverse businesses that supply halal food products to Muslim consumers worldwide. Research has shown that food fraud involves intentional and careful substitution, tampering, misrepresentation, or packaging of food or food ingredients, along with deceptive labelling practices, in order to maximize profits and minimize losses. Halal food fraud is considered a breach of responsibility by producers or manufacturers who use non-halal ingredients, counterfeit halal logos, physical contamination of halal food, and non-halal logistics services that do not comply with Syariah law. The preparation, processing, and manufacturing of halal food should be carried out hygienically and safely, with strict adherence to the standards set for slaughtering, storing, displaying, and preparing the food itself. Consuming halal food is not only a religious obligation for Muslims but also ensures that food providers maintain high food quality standards (Aiedah, 2014).

The rules of halal and haram in Islamic dietary practices are important and should be followed by everyone involved in the halal industry, including non-Muslims. However, it can be a challenge for non-Muslims to fully understand the implications of these rules. Halal food involves various processes, such as slaughtering, storage, display, preparation, hygiene, and sanitation. This is why Muslim consumers are concerned about the majority of halal food imports coming from non-Muslim countries. In fact, most global halal meat supplies come from non-Muslim countries, including Brazil, Australia, India, France, China, Netherlands, and Spain (Aljazeera, 2017). Many non-Muslim producers are seeking to enter the halal market by obtaining halal certification, recognizing the importance of the halal logo for Muslim consumers' purchasing decisions.

The problem of halal food fraud has become severe in Malaysia, leading consumers to become more selective in their food choices. However, non-Muslims may not fully comprehend the significance of halal rules. This issue has captured public interest, as per Islamic law, permissible food sources should promote human well-being and behaviour (Fadzillillah et al., 2011), and be beneficial rather than harmful (Ruslan, A. A. A., et al, 2018). According to data from the Malaysian Islamic Development Department (JAKIM), over 60% of halal product manufacturers are multinational companies owned by non-Muslims.

Based on the 2010 statistics, the global Muslim population was 1.8 billion, and it is expected to increase to 1.9 billion by 2020 and 2.2 billion by 2030. As the Muslim population grows rapidly, there will also be a significant increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in Muslim-majority countries, estimated to be around 6.8% annually. Muslim consumers in Malaysia typically only accept halal-certified food products authorized by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM). However, some unethical producers take advantage

of the halal food market by using unrecognized or unauthorized halal logos on their product packaging. Some non-Muslim producers also use fake Islamic brand names or symbols to attract Muslim consumers. Additionally, some food operators display Quranic verses or other Arabic characters on their premises as a way to indirectly attract Muslim consumers to their establishment.

The increasing awareness of food safety issues among consumers has a significant impact on producers and manufacturers who prioritize profit over maintaining the quality of food products. For instance, in 2014, the detection of porcine DNA in two Cadbury chocolate products in Malaysia (Cadbury Dairy Milk Hazelnut and Cadbury Dairy Milk Roast Almond) damaged consumers' trust in consuming halal products and resulted in substantial losses for innocent producers or manufacturers. Regaining consumer trust in questionable halal products will take time and effort. The validity of Halal status for restaurants run by Muslims but without formal certification from JAKIM has been questioned, and the consumption in such restaurants is based solely on mutual trust. This study aims to determine Muslim consumers' awareness of Halal food outlets. The low number of Halal Certified Restaurants reported by JAKIM and the existence of food premises and restaurants that claim to be "Pork Free" or "No Pork" despite not having Halal certification indicate that Malaysian consumers are not sufficiently sensitive to the importance of Halal certification among restaurant operators, as reported by Kosmo (2010) and Berita Harian (2016).

## Literature Review

There are four points discussed in Literature Review;

### *Customer Awareness towards Halal Food*

The halal industry is concerned with producing and providing goods and services that align with Islamic law, or Sharia, and avoiding any practices or products that go against Islamic principles. With a global Muslim population of approximately 1.6 billion, the value of the expanding halal industry was estimated to be about \$2.3 billion in 2012, and this figure is expected to continue increasing in the foreseeable future (Francois et al., 2016). Malaysia's Halal Standard (MS 1500:2004) sets out guidelines for the production, preparation, processing, and storage of halal food that comply with good manufacturing practices (GMP) and good hygienic practices (GHP) and are compatible with ISO standards. The current certification approval rate for halal products in Malaysia is approximately 90%, which indicates the effectiveness of the training program (Francois et al., 2016).

JAKIM identifies four primary benefits of halal certification. Firstly, it provides a high level of confidence to consumers, enabling them to make informed decisions about their purchases. Secondly, producers can use the certification as a marketing tool to promote healthy competition in the industry. Thirdly, halal certification provides quality assurance, indicating that products not only meet halal requirements, but also adhere to strict hygiene practices. Lastly, the certification process involves a mechanism to audit and monitor halal products to ensure compliance. In Malaysia, the halal standard was established in 2003 and is enforced by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) through their Halal Certification scheme (Department of Standard Malaysia, 2008). Research shows that consumers' perception of the trustworthiness of halal certifications from various Muslim and non-Muslim countries is the most significant factor in their preference for a product, followed by the interaction of country favourability and brand name country of origin (Rios et al., 2014). Moreover, halal marketing and branding practices of food products are influenced by factors such as sales

promotions and celebrity endorsements, affecting consumers' halal purchase intention (Mohd Aliff et. al., 2015). Nowadays, it is essential for producers to have their products certified with halal certification to distinguish their goods from others in the market.

Furthermore, in the same year, the Malaysian government enacted regulations that made halal certification mandatory for all imported meat, including beef, mutton, veal, and poultry. The meat must originate only from meat plants approved by the Islamic Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Department and the Department of Veterinary Services, Malaysia (Rokshana, et al., 2017). The halal industry is an increasingly significant sector in Malaysia that can make a significant contribution to the national economy. Presently, the industry's contribution is less than 2%, but it is expected to increase to 5.8% in the country's gross domestic plan by 2020. The industry's objective is to ensure the cleanliness and purity of food for Muslim consumers. The researchers suggest that to achieve this, strategic marketing and structured supply chain orientation through halal assurance system should be implemented. Additionally, they propose that the Malaysian halal certification should be consistent with other qualifications, such as Malaysian Standard MS1500 and general guidelines on the production, preparation, handling, and storage of halal foods that comply with the widely recognized and established standards of GMP and GHP, to further enhance its quality.

### ***Halal Logo, Labelling and Packaging***

When Muslim consumers make decisions to buy food products, they are attracted to the halal logo, labelling, and packaging of the product. This aligns with the findings of Mohayidin and Kamarulzaman (2014), who revealed that consumers prefer processed food products that are certified halal. However, hidden non-halal ingredients in food products are a serious problem when manufacturers omit labelling to reduce production costs and increase profits. Halal certification and logo provide assurance to consumers that the product is not only halal but also Shariah compliant. In Malaysia, Muslim consumers generally seek the authentic halal certification issued by the Malaysia Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM). JAKIM has been responsible for halal food certification in Malaysia since 1974, and the introduction of the Halal logo and certification has increased awareness of the importance of consuming products and engaging in services that are Shariah compliant.

Halal logo has become a significant factor for Muslim consumers in deciding which food or drink product to consume, regardless of the issuing institution or country. In Malaysia, manufacturers and food operators use the halal logo to assure consumers that their products comply with halal standards. Halal certification indirectly instils consumer confidence in the halal food they consume. The Malaysian government has made it mandatory for food and products claiming to be halal to obtain JAKIM's halal certification. JAKIM, which stands for Malaysia's Department of Islamic Development, is the sole authorized organization in Malaysia to issue and monitor halal certification. The product label displayed on the package is a primary source of consumer information. Packaging serves the dual purpose of marketing and logistics, providing product information and promotion through the use of colour, size, brand names, and the halal logo, as per Fara Adura et al. (2015).

### ***Authorities' Exposure and Enforcement***

To combat halal food fraud issues, authorities such as the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) and Department of State Islamic Religious (JAIN) should increase their monitoring activities by hiring more enforcement officers. Nowadays, mass media and social media platforms provide consumers with swift information, especially related to halal products

(Sabran and Ramly, 2006). Additionally, strategic collaborations between the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE), and Royal Malaysian Customs Department (RMCD) must be encouraged to strictly control the entry of imported food products into the local market. The introduction and enforcement of halal certification has increased the understanding of Muslims in Malaysia to consume Islamic compliant products and food (Aiedah, 2014), and worldwide, there is growing awareness of halal-certified products. Consequently, new regulations and legislation related to halal products have been implemented in Malaysia (Rasi et. al, 2017).

### **Consumer Attitude**

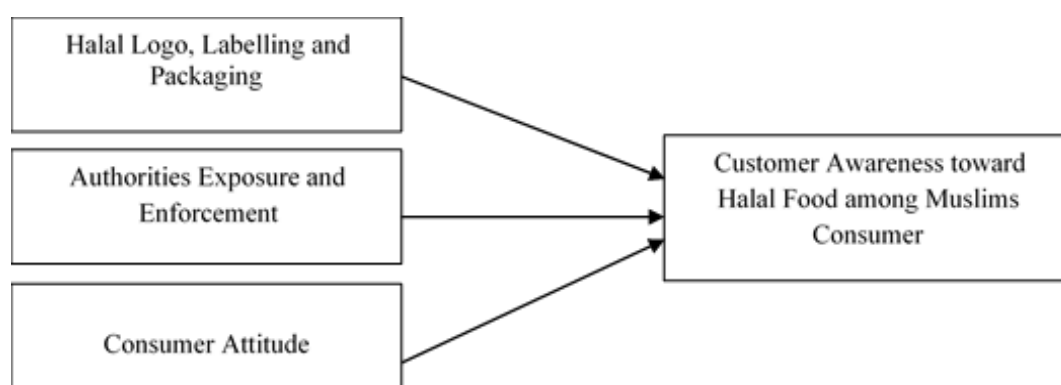
Consumers' negative perception of halal food fraud can impact their attitude towards buying food products. The perception that consumers form is influenced by their level of awareness (Assael, 1995). As consumers become more aware of halal food fraud, they pay closer attention to the ingredients in food products before making a purchase. This awareness leads Muslim consumers to prioritize the halal logo on product packaging over the taste of the food products. Thus, they prefer food products that are certified halal by JAKIM. Having a positive attitude and awareness towards halal food consumption is crucial for Muslim consumers, as it is part of their religious obligation. The future of the halal industry in Malaysia relies on the attitudes and awareness of consumers, particularly Muslim consumers (Aiedah, 2014).

### **Research Objective**

Based on the above review of literatures, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To examine whether Halal Logo, Labelling and Packaging has significant influence with Customer Awareness toward Halal Food among Muslims Consumer;
- To examine whether Authorities Exposure and Enforcement has significant influence with Customer Awareness toward Halal Food among Muslims Consumer; and
- To examine whether Consumer Attitude has significant influence with Customer Awareness toward Halal Food among Muslims Consumer.

### **Research Framework**



**Figure1: Theoretical Framework**

Source: Ruslan et al., (2018)

### **Research Methodology**

To conduct this research, both primary and secondary data sources were utilized. The study employed 384 questionnaires with a five-point Likert scale, was distributed to the public via a mall intercept technique. The survey was conducted at various hypermarkets, shopping malls,



and supermarkets where potential respondents were identified, approached, and administered the questionnaire on the spot. The convenience sampling technique was used to ensure the selection of the appropriate target sample as respondents were readily available and willing to participate at the time of the survey. The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from Ruslan et.al (2018) and consisted of 22 questions, excluding the respondents' profile. Table 1.0 depicts the alpha value and mean for each of the sections.

**Table 1: Reliability Analysis**

Variables	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean
Customer Awareness (DV)	7	0.832	4.671
Halal logo, labelling and packaging	6	0.856	4.633
Authorities' exposure and enforcement	4	0.617	4.600
Consumer attitude	5	0.615	4.620

### Findings Analysis

Table 2 provides summary statistics correlation of the independent variables: Halal Logo, labelling and packaging; Authorities exposure and enforcement; and Consumer Attitude that are positively correlated at 0.01 with the dependent variable, Customer Awareness toward Halal Food Outlets among Muslims Consumer. The highest correlation is between Consumer attitude and Authorities exposure and enforcement ( $r=0.416$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Refer to the table as well, the highest correlation between Independent Variable and Dependent Variable was indicate Consumer Attitude ( $r=0.320$ ) and the lowest Halal logo, labelling and packaging ( $r=0.266$ ). In general, the result shown that all variables have the positive correlation.

**Table 2: Correlation Analysis**

Variables	CA (DV)	HLLP	AEE	CA
Customer Awareness (DV)	1			
Halal logo, labelling and packaging	.266**	1		
Authorities' exposure and enforcement	.282**	.409**	1	
Consumer attitude	.320**	.339**	.416**	1

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

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

Next, a multiple regression analysis in Table 3 was conducted in order to understand the predicted power of the factors towards customer awareness of Halal food outlets among Muslim. The result shows the adjusted  $r^2$  is 0.137, with a different weightage of the standardized coefficient. All variables and positively affected on dependent variable. Hence, it can be concluded that three of independent variables choose by researcher has significant relationship with each other. Previous researcher found that, all independent variable is correlated to dependent variable which each independent variable is significant and there are influence between each other (Ruslan et. al., 2018).

**Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis**

Variables	$\beta$	Sig.
Halal logo, labelling and packaging	.223	.010
Authorities' exposure and enforcement	.203	.014
Consumer attitude	.342	.000
R Square	.144	

## Discussions

The results of the findings indicate that the relationship between independent variable (Halal Logo, Labelling and Packaging, Authorities Exposure and Enforcement and Consumer Attitude) were significant and positively influence the Customer Awareness toward Halal Food Outlets among Muslims Consumer. The finding was supported by Musa & Hashim (2022), Anggraini, I. & Dewanti, D. S. (2020) and Machali et al. (2013) that indicate the higher level of awareness of halal foods will affect on the purchase decision of the Muslim consumer. Another serious concern is the presence of hidden ingredients from questionable sources, which producers may fail to label as non-halal to reduce production costs and increase profits unfairly. Hence, Muslim consumers are expected to buy only halal-certified food products that are kept separate from non-halal products on different shelves or partitions, as indicated by checking the product packaging before making a purchase.

To combat the issue of halal food fraud, authorities such as the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) and the Department of State Islamic Religious (JAIN) need to improve their monitoring activities. This can be achieved by hiring more enforcement officers. JAKIM, being the authorized halal entity, must take strict measures against manufacturers who fail to comply with the Malaysia halal food standard MS 1500:2009. Such proactive actions by relevant authorities will aid in educating Muslim consumers in Malaysia about halal food fraud issues. In today's world, where mass and social media platforms provide swift information, including halal-related information (Sabran and Ramly, 2006), it is important to leverage these platforms to spread awareness about halal food fraud.

The negative perception surrounding halal food fraud has a significant impact on consumers' purchasing behaviour. A person's level of awareness plays a crucial role in shaping their perception, as noted by Assael (1995). As consumers become more aware of the issue of halal food fraud, they tend to pay closer attention to the ingredients listed on food product packaging before making a purchase. This attention increases further if any reports of halal food fraud are published in the mass media. When consumers are informed about the issue, they tend to prioritize the halal certification logo on the product packaging over the taste of the food product itself. Therefore, Muslim consumers tend to choose food products that have been certified halal by JAKIM.

## Conclusion

In a nutshell, Halal certification ensures customers' satisfaction, assurance, and reliance by not only requiring the food served to be halal, but also ensuring that the entire process involved in producing the food is halal as well. Products that are halal certified meet high standards of hygiene, cleanliness, safety, and nutrition that fulfil the needs of consumers, particularly Muslim consumers. Halal certification serves as a symbol of value, health, and ecosystem, providing assurance that the product conforms to Islamic dietary laws and contains only permitted elements. This article provides an overview of Halal certification in Malaysia, starting with its history. One of the initiatives in 1982 was the establishment of a committee on assessment of foods, drinks, and goods consumed by Muslims under the Islamic Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Department. This committee is responsible for inspecting and promoting awareness among halal food producers, distributors, and importers.

The official definition of Halal food in Malaysia is defined by the "Perintah Perihal Dagangan (Penggunaan Perbahasaan "Halal") 1975" act, while the practical guidelines for understanding

the Halal standard in Malaysia are outlined in the Malaysia Halal Standard MS1500:2009: "Halal Food-Production, Preparation, Handling, and Storage - General Guidelines (Second Revision)." In Malaysia, Halal products are typically labelled with the Halal stamp or Halal logo, which is authorized by JAKIM. However, only manufacturers who have been issued Halal certification are permitted to use the Halal stamp or Halal logo (Derahman, et al., 2017). The most significant factor related to consumer awareness and perception of halal food fraud among Muslims is their attitude towards the issue. This study measured consumer attitude in terms of their behaviour when purchasing products. In today's society, consumers tend to follow current trends, which are heavily influenced by social media, especially among younger generations. Therefore, it is recommended that initiatives aimed at increasing consumer knowledge and awareness of halal food fraud be implemented through information sharing campaigns on social media and other relevant platforms. This will help to disseminate information on halal food fraud and raise awareness among the public.

The halal logo, labelling, and packaging are crucial in influencing consumer awareness when purchasing food products. Consumers are more likely to trust products that have been certified halal and labelled accordingly. To increase business and expand their market, producers must ensure that their products carry the genuine halal logo, labelling, and packaging certified by JAKIM. This will assure Muslim consumers that the product they are purchasing is not fraudulent and meets the required halal standards.

The present study focuses on the exposure and enforcement of authorities in halal food products as it has been identified as an influential factor by previous research. The measurement of the effectiveness of authorities is crucial in ensuring responsible food production, especially as there are cases of fraudulent practices in the industry. Additionally, the government's role in enforcing laws and imposing penalties on those involved in halal food fraud is significant in increasing Muslim consumers' awareness when selecting food products. For future research, with different independent variables, it is suggested to extend the population for this research and compare the results with other countries, such Indonesia and Brunei.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to all participants for their valuable contributions during the data collection process, which have greatly enriched the content of the script.

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