

Halal Awareness among Muslim Undergraduates at a Malaysian University

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Abstract

Halal awareness, in essence, refers to a Muslim's knowledge of the term "halal," his or her comprehension of the halal process, and their perspective on the significance of consuming halal foods or other products. This study was carried out to investigate the undergraduates' knowledge and attitude about halal concept, as well as their awareness of halal certification in consuming halal products. It also aims to compare the undergraduates' knowledge, attitude, and level of awareness of the halal certification between both genders, secondary school academic background (Islamic religious and non-religious schools) and age. The online questionnaire was distributed via WhatsApp and administered through a Google Form. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software, Version 26, was used to process and analyse the data. The study found that a high level of halal awareness among Muslim undergraduates was a result of high knowledge, a positive attitude, and an appreciation of the significance of halal certification. However, one intriguing finding regarding the respondents' misinterpretations of the term "pork-free" needs to be addressed. In addition, no statistically significant differences in halal awareness were discovered when gender, age, or secondary education (Islamic religious school vs. non-religious school) were taken into consideration.

Keywords: Muslim Undergraduates, Halal Awareness, Knowledge, Attitude, Halal Certification.

Introduction

Halal is a crucial concept in Islam. All Muslims must understand the distinction between what is halal and what is haram, as this is the foundation of Islamic teaching that governs their lives. The term halal is derived from the Arabic word that denotes what is legal or permissible, whereas in Islam, halal refers to food, actions, or possessions that are permitted by Shariah or Islamic law (Jallad, 2008). Haram, on the other hand, refers to anything whether it is a food or a way of life that contradicts Islamic teaching.

Halal plays an important role in Malaysia. As a Muslim-majority country, Malaysia's Muslim population accounts for approximately 60% of the total population. Consumers of halal products in this country include both Muslims and non-Muslims. Halal rules and regulations are clearly stated in the Trade Description Act 2011, which sets out the Order on Halal status, definition of Halal and Halal certification requirements in Malaysia. The Halal concept is not only related to food and beverage products but also extended to consumer goods, food premises and slaughterhouses. In Malaysia, the Malaysian Islamic Development

Department (JAKIM) and the State Islamic Religious Department (JAIN), also known as the State Islamic Religious Council (MAIN), primarily govern Halal. The government established this institution to enforce, monitor, and implement the halal food regulations (Yusoff & Adzharuddin, 2017).

Halal food production methods are only necessary for Muslim companies; however, with the increasing demand for Halal products, non-Muslim companies in Malaysia are beginning to adopt Islamic values when producing their products (Ili & Abd-Razak, 2015). The halal concept in product production must adhere to all of JAKIM's rules; otherwise, the halal status will change, and consumers will lose faith in the halal status.

Literature Review

Definition of Halal Food

Halal is a nutrition and preparation rules that Muslims are allowed to use according to Sharia' or Islamic Law. The Al-Quran addresses halal concerns and lists all halal (allowed) and haram (forbidden) ingredients in Muslim diet food. Halal is now a widely used concept, with more countries accepting halal practises in the food industry and other fields associated with the use of the halal name. The concept of *halalan toyyiban* is highly emphasised in Islam. Muslims' food must be made from clean, permissible ingredients that adhere to *Shariah* (Islamic law) and be free of any harmful ingredients. In addition, the preparation, processing, storage, packaging, handling, and transportation must all be *Shariah* compliant (Yusoff & Adzharuddin, 2017). Muslims are also prohibited from consuming blood, alcohol, pork, carnivorous animals, and any meat products that do not adhere to Islamic slaughtering methods (Abdallah et al., 2021). In addition, there is a term known as *shubha* that denotes whether a food is potentially halal or haram. Food labelled *shubha* should be avoided due to uncertainty about its halal status (Isa & Ismail, 2015). In Malaysia, the halal concept encompasses both religious aspects as well as food safety and hygiene. Halal food preparation must be strictly free of non-halal elements and adhere to JAKIM's good manufacturing practices.

Halal Awareness

Awareness, according to Gafoor (2012), is defined as being conscious and knowledgeable; being constantly aware, informed, and alert. Most religions forbid or prescribe certain behaviours, including food consumption, so one's faith and beliefs guide one's awareness. Knowledge, experience, understanding, attitude, and exposure to Islamic teaching all have an impact on halal awareness. Muslims who are halal-aware understand what Shariah (Islamic law) permits and forbids. They understand that it is their responsibility to be informed about the ingredients in the foods, beverages, and other products they consume (Khalek & Hayaati, 2015). Their understanding of what is permissible in Islam also influences their purchasing intentions. Simultaneously, this will make a person more aware and conscious of what is permitted or prohibited by Islamic teaching (Azam, 2016; Shaari & Ariffin, 2010). In short, halal awareness is a Muslim's knowledge of the concept of halal, his or her understanding of the halal process, and his or her attitude on the importance of consuming halal food or products (Jalasi & Ambad, 2021).

Halal Certification

Halal certification is the process of obtaining permits from a government-approved specialised institution to place halal labels on products. Halal certification entailed the official recognition of all aspects of product preparation by the established body. Before a product can be certified as halal, the institution must conduct research, review, analyse, and decide whether the products manufactured, such as food, medicine, or cosmetics, are Shariah compliant, adhere to good manufacturing practises, and are safe to use (Aziz & Chok, 2013; Pramugari et al., 2021). In other words, halal certification is significant because it indicates that the food is halal, safe, and suitable for Muslim consumption.

In Malaysia, the Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) is a legally mandated competent authority for Halal certification. JAKIM is Malaysia's only Halal certification body, certifying both domestic and export products (Taip & Ismail, 2017). However, for this study, the halal certification did not refer specifically to JAKIM only but also the halal certification from other countries such as Thailand, The Central Islamic Council of Thailand (CICOT), LPPOM MUI (Institute for the Study of Food, Drugs and Cosmetics) of the Indonesian Ulema Council Indonesia and others.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the fact that JAKIM has been in charge of coordinating, approving, and monitoring halal certificates in Malaysia, as well as enforcing halal ordinances in Malay, halal awareness and halal issues among Malaysian Muslims remain a source of contention (Abdullah et al., 2021). There are premises or foods available that have not been halal-certified by JAKIM. As a result, the attitude of taking the halal aspect for granted is becoming increasingly concerning. For instance, the viral issue of cereal biscuits containing pork-sourced ingredients. The same is true for sweets, which have been produced in China since the 1940s but are now widely available in the Malaysian market, becoming the preferred choice of many Muslim consumers. The manufacturer made no claims about the halal status of the product and had never applied for halal certification. When Malaysia's Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) declared the product's halal status, Muslim consumers panicked because laboratory testing revealed an illegal pork source. However, in the case of the sweets, the manufacturer could not be held responsible because no halal label was applied to the product; rather, the scenario demonstrates that halal awareness among Muslim consumers remains low (Taip & Ismail, 2017).

Malaysian youth make up 43% of Malaysia's total population (The Asia Foundation, 2012). A sizable proportion of Malaysian youth consume Halal food products. Due to Malaysia's diversity, which includes different races living in the same place, both Muslim and non-Muslim Malaysians share everything, including food. However, Muslims must still follow halal rules when eating and cannot consume food from other races that contains haram elements such as alcohol or pork parts. As a result, it is critical to look into how well these young Muslims understand the concept of halal when it comes to eating their food.

Methodology

In this study, the purpose of the questionnaire is to determine Muslim undergraduates' awareness of the halal concept. Section A focused on respondents' demographic information, whereas Section B focused on undergraduates' knowledge and attitudes toward the halal

concept, as well as their awareness of halal certification in consuming halal products. The participants of the study were 96 undergraduates from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan, Pulau Pinang. A Google Form was used to administer the online survey, and the questionnaire was distributed via WhatsApp. The data was processed and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software Version 26

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to

- i. investigate the undergraduates' knowledge and attitude about halal concept, as well as their awareness of halal certification in consuming halal products.
- ii. compare the undergraduates' knowledge, attitude, and level of awareness of the halal certification between both genders, secondary school academic background (religious and non-religious schools) and age.

Results and Discussion

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.941	.946	20

The reliability test in Table 1 shows the value of Cronbach's Alpha was $\alpha = .94$, indicating that the questionnaire is reliable.

Table 2

Levels of Halal Awareness

Range (Mean score)	Description
1.00-1.80	Lack of awareness
1.81-2.60	Low level of awareness
2.61-3.40	Medium level of awareness
3.41-4.20	High level of awareness
4.21- 5.00	Complete level of awareness

Table 2 lists the five levels of awareness, ranging from 1.00- 1.80 mean scores (lack of awareness) to 4.21-5.00 mean scores (complete level of awareness).

Table 3

Respondents' Demographic Information

Respondents' classifications	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	31	32.3%
Female	65	67.7%
Secondary education		
Islamic Religious school	37	38.5%
Non-Religious school	59	61.5%
Ages (years)		
18 – 20	56	58.3%
21 - 22	0	0.0%
23 – 24	37	38.5%
>24	3	3.1%
Programme		
Diploma	56	58.3%
Degree	40	41.7%

Table 3 illustrates the demographics of the respondents for this study. 32.3 percent of the 96 respondents were males, while 67.7 percent were females. Majority of them (58.3%) were diploma students, while 41.7% were degree students. 58.3% of the undergraduates were between the ages of 18 and 20, 28.5% were between the ages of 23 and 24, and 3.1% were over the age of 24. 61.5% of them did not attend Islamic religious schools, while 38.5% did.

Undergraduates' Halal Awareness

The study examines undergraduates' understanding of the halal concept, attitudes toward what is halal and haram, and awareness of halal certification of the products they buy, eat, and drink to investigate their level of halal awareness. Table 4 displays the mean scores for these three variables.

Table 4

Halal Awareness Variables

Item	Halal Awareness	Mean	Rank
	Knowledge		
Q1	I understand what is halal	4.52	1
Q2	I understand Islamic teachings on halal food consumption	4.43	2
Q11	I know about halal food from people around me (friends, family, society)	4.14	3
Q8	I am capable enough to distinguish between forbidden foods and permitted foods in Islam	4.04	4
Q12	I think the government has provided sufficient information about halal and haram food products	3.86	5
Q9	I have enough information about halal food products	3.78	6
Q10	I often access or search for information about halal food products	3.64	7
	Attitude		
Q20	Buying the halal product has become my life style	4.34	1
Q4	When buying food products definitely in your mind is the food must be halal	4.29	2
Q6	I don't mind consuming food by non-Muslims as long as it is certified halal	3.82	3
Q5	I will only consume food that is prepared by Muslims	3.57	4
Q3	I think pork-free products are halal	3.28	5
Q7	I don't mind consuming food by non-Muslims even though you are not sure of the halal status	2.16	6
	Awareness on the role of Halal certification		
Q13	I know that the JAKIM halal logo is from Malaysia	4.32	1
Q14	I acknowledge that JAKIM is an institution that issues halal certification in Malaysia	4.32	2
Q15	For me halal certification and logos are essential to ensure that the food is halal	4.22	3
Q19	I know there are some countries that also issue halal certification and logo for food products	4.13	4
Q16	The first priority when I buy a food product is the presence of a halal logo(not necessarily from JAKIM)	3.90	5
Q17	I will not buy food products that do not have a halal logo on the packaging	3.90	6
Q18	If I do not find a halal logo, I will check the ingredients to make sure they are from halal sources	3.83	7

Undergraduates' Knowledge on Halal

Table 4 reveals that the majority of respondents (mean score = 4.52) understood what is halal and the Islamic teaching on halal (mean score = 4.43). They were also exposed to halal

through their surroundings (mean score = 4.14) and were able to differentiate between what is forbidden and permitted in Islam (mean score = 4.04). The findings also show that they agreed that the government had provided enough halal information (mean score = 3.86), had enough halal information (mean score = 3.78), and frequently searched for information about halal food products (mean score = 3.64). The results indicate that these Muslim undergraduates were well versed in the concept of halal. This is consistent with the findings of Akin and Okumos (2020), who discovered that knowledge and attitude influence awareness; thus, respondents with high knowledge and a positive attitude lead to higher levels of awareness.

Undergraduates' Attitude Towards Halal

As shown in Table 4, the analysis on undergraduates' attitude towards halal reveals that the respondents had very positive attitude towards halal. Majority of the undergraduates agreed that buying halal products was a way of life for them (mean score = 4.34), and they would always consider the halal status when buying and eating food (mean score = 4.29).

The analysis also reveals interesting findings on the undergraduates' attitudes towards consuming halal food. The majority of the undergraduates showed a high mean score for Question: I don't mind consuming food by non-Muslims as long as it is certified halal (mean score = 3.82), a medium level of agreement on I will only consume food that is prepared by Muslims (mean score: 3.57), and a low mean score (m = 2.16) for Question 7: "I don't mind consuming food by non-Muslims even if I am not sure of the halal status (mean score = 2.16). All of this suggests that even though respondents did not mind eating food made by non-Muslims, they were very concerned about the food's halal status. The majority of respondents said they would avoid eating at locations where the food's halal status is in doubt. These graduates have a high level of awareness regarding the importance of eating halal food, as evidenced by their positive attitude toward the halal lifestyle and concept. This demonstrates a high level of consciousness regarding leading a halal lifestyle. A person's attitude toward a particular action reveals how much they enjoy or loathe carrying it out. These Muslim undergraduates' optimistic outlook demonstrates a high level of general awareness of adhering to Islamic teachings (Pramugari et al., 2021).

However, the results also demonstrate a high degree of agreement on Question 5: "I think pork-free is halal" (mean score = 3.28). The fact that the respondents appeared to have a misunderstanding of the term "pork-free" indicates that they were not aware that pork-free should not be categorised as halal. According to Dr. Asyraf Wajdi Dusuki, a former Chairman of the Islamic Da'wah Foundation Malaysia (YADIM) the "pork-free" label does not imply that the food is halal. Pork-free food is not regarded as halal because, despite being free of pork, it may still contain other non-halal ingredients like alcohol or meat that was not slaughtered in accordance with Shariah Law and the food may not have been prepared in accordance with the law (Balakrishan, 2016). This suggests the importance of educating the Muslims about the distinctions between pork-free and halal foods in order to avoid confusion, particularly among young Muslims.

Undergraduates' Awareness of Halal Certification

The results reveal that the respondents' awareness of halal certification was also very high. The mean scores for the following questions were the highest (as shown in Table 4): Question 13: I know that the JAKIM halal logo is from Malaysia (mean score = 4.32) ,Question

14: I acknowledged that JAKIM is an institution that issues halal certification in Malaysia (mean score= 4.32) Question 15 For halal certification and logos are essential to ensure that the food is halal(mean score =4.22) and I know there are some countries that also issue halal certification and logo for food products (mean score=4.13). Additionally, the means scores for other items were also high, demonstrating that all participants were aware of the significance of halal certification and conscious of whether the goods or food they were going to eat adhere to Islamic principles. It is evident that these students considered halal certification to be the key factor when deciding what food or product to consume. The results support Ambali and Bakar (2013) findings that JAKIM had succeeded in raising Muslims' awareness by introducing the Halal logo and certification. As a result, Muslims tend to be more aware of the value of consuming products that adhere to Shariah.

Undergraduates' Level of Awareness between Gender, Secondary School Academic background (Islamic religious and non-religious schools) and Age.

Table 4, 5 and 6 below illustrate the undergraduates' knowledge, attitude, and level of awareness of the halal certification between both genders, secondary school academic background (Islamic religious and non-religious schools) and age.

Table 5

Results of the t-test on gender differences in halal awareness

Independent Samples Test	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	df	P-value
Knowledge on halal	Male	4.0922	.91663	.278	94	.781
	Female	4.0418	.78601			
Attitude on halal	Male	3.4839	.76902	-.920	94	.360
	Female	3.6231	.65436			
Awareness on the role of halal certification	Male	4.0138	.98378	-.549	94	.584
	Female	4.1231	.87550			
Overall Awareness	Male	3.8823	.83542	-.376	94	.707
	Female	3.9446	.72047			

The average halal awareness scores for both genders are shown in Table 5, and they were relatively high, indicating high halal awareness. However, the result of the t-test illustrated there is no significant difference in term of gender, suggesting that gender does not have any influence on the respondents' halal awareness.

Table 6

Results of the t-test comparing religious and non-religious academic backgrounds for halal awareness

Independent Samples Test	Secondary education	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	df	P-value
Knowledge on halal	Religious school	3.9537	.85387	-.980	94	.329
	Non-Religious school	4.1235	.80832			
Attitude on halal	Religious school	3.5541	.77385	-.268	94	.789
	Non-Religious school	3.5932	.64272			
Awareness on the role of halal certification	Religious school	4.0811	.92737	-.057	94	.955
	Non-Religious school	4.0920	.90380			
Overall Awareness	Religious school	3.8784	.78895	-.471	94	.638
	Non-Religious school	3.9534	.73934			

Table 5 compares the level of halal awareness between the undergraduates who attended Islamic religious schools and those who did not. Both groups had high level of halal awareness but the t-test results show that this demographic variable has no impact on the undergraduates' level of halal awareness.

Table 7

Results of the Anova Test between Age Groups

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Knowledge on halal	Between Groups	2.310	2	1.155	1.719	.185
	Within Groups	62.489	93	.672		
	Total	64.799	95			
Attitude on halal	Between Groups	2.602	2	1.301	2.817	.065
	Within Groups	42.951	93	.462		
	Total	45.553	95			
Awareness on the role of halal certification	Between Groups	2.454	2	1.227	1.503	.228
	Within Groups	75.888	93	.816		
	Total	78.342	95			
Overall Awareness	Between Groups	2.383	2	1.192	2.137	.124
	Within Groups	51.857	93	.558		
	Total	54.240	95			

Table 7 shows the results of the ANOVA Test between age groups. However, the ANOVA shows that these results were not statistically significant.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the current study has a small sample size, the findings indicate that all undergraduates had a high level of basic knowledge about the halal concept as well as a very positive attitude toward consuming halal products. They were also concerned and aware

of the importance of halal certification in ensuring a product's halal status. All of these factors, including knowledge, a positive attitude, and an understanding of the significance of halal certification, have contributed to a high level of halal awareness among the Muslim undergraduates. Nonetheless, one intriguing finding regarding respondents' misconceptions about the concept of pork-free need to be addressed.

Furthermore, when gender, secondary education (Islamic religious school or non-religious school), or age were taken into account, no statistically significant differences in halal awareness were discovered. This is due to the fact that all of the respondents, who are Muslims, were brought up with the idea of halal and had grown up eating halal food. This is also a result of societal exposure and the government's ongoing campaign to increase Malaysians' awareness of halal. In light of this, it can be said that halal is important in the lives of all Muslim undergraduates, regardless of whether they were male or female, attending religious or secular institutions, or what age they were.

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