

Determinants of Willingness to Purchase Halal Pre-Cooked Food in Shandong Province: The Role of Awareness, Trust, and Acceptance

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Abstract

China is one of the world's major economies and its increasing emphasis on the halal industry has driven the rapid expansion of the halal food market. This reflects both growing domestic demand and the growing global importance of halal-certified products. Against this backdrop, the convenience, nutritional value and ability to cater to diverse consumer groups of halal pre-cooked meals have gained widespread attention. However, the factors influencing consumer willingness to purchase halal pre-cooked meals remain understudied, particularly in Shandong Province, where the potential for halal consumption is increasing. This study used a quantitative survey and statistical analysis to examine the impact of three core constructs namely halal awareness, halal trust and halal acceptance on consumer willingness to purchase, surveying 500 consumers in 17 major cities in Shandong Province. The study examined whether halal cognition influences acceptance, whether halal trust strengthens acceptance, and how acceptance translates into willingness to purchase. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study enriches and expands existing research on halal consumer behaviour by integrating halal awareness, trust and acceptance into a unified willingness to purchase model. In practice, the study provides policymakers, halal certification bodies and food companies with insights to help them develop more effective consumer education programmes and marketing strategies, enhancing consumer trust and promoting product adoption. Ultimately, the study emphasises that fostering consumer confidence and knowledge is key to the sustainable development of China's halal food industry.

Keywords: Halal Awareness, Halal Trust, Halal Acceptance, Willingness To Purchase, Pre-Cooked Meals, Shandong Province

Introduction

In recent years, the halal food industry has been drawing growing attention worldwide—not only because of its importance to religious markets, but also due to its strong and continuing

growth in the global food economy. Today, the consumer base for halal food extends far beyond religious adherents, as more and more consumers prioritizing ethics, food safety, hygiene and quality view it as a reliable choice (Rahman et al., 2024). This shift indicates that halal food has transcended purely religious boundaries, gradually becoming part of the broader contemporary wave of ethical and sustainable consumption. With the industry's rapid expansion, halal food has grown into a force to be reckoned with in the international food market. The values it emphasizes can meet the dietary needs of Muslim communities and respond to the widespread demand in modern society for sustainable, transparent, and responsible consumption.

In this context, demand for halal pre-cooked meals has shown a significant upward trend. As urban life grows busier, many people are turning to meals that are easy to prepare, save time, and still support a healthier lifestyle. Halal pre-cooked meals perfectly align with this demand, gradually becoming a new favorite among consumers. Their popularity can be attributed to both religious beliefs and shifts in modern lifestyles and social consumption habits.

However, despite the rising market heat for halal pre-prepared meals, research on Chinese consumers' purchasing motivations remains limited. According to the World Religion Database (2020), Muslims are a minority of the Chinese population, at a mere estimated 1.8% or more than 22 million they are still one of the largest Muslim populations outside of Muslim-dominated states, and non-Muslim groups are also showing increasing interest in halal food. Halal products are becoming more popular because of a strictly enforced commitment to hygiene, ethical standards, and quality control. Halal certification is a sign of quality assurance in many nations with a majority of non-Muslim population (Saleh & Rajandran, 2024).

The study focuses on the motivations for Chinese consumers purchasing halal pre-cooked meals, with a particular focus on halal awareness, consumer trust, and acceptance. Conducting this empirical research in a country with a predominantly non-Muslim population provides a new perspective on halal consumption behavior. This study helps to develop a deeper understanding of market characteristics in regions with smaller Muslim populations. The findings will provide valuable insights for food regulatory authorities, halal certification bodies, and food companies, helping them make more targeted improvements in knowledge dissemination, certification system development, and market strategy, thereby promoting the healthy development of China's halal food market.

Specifically, the aim of this study is to address the following research questions:

RQ1. Is there a relationship between Halal Awareness and Halal Acceptance?

RQ2. Is there a relationship between Halal Trust and Halal Acceptance?

RQ3. Is there a relationship between Halal Acceptance and Willingness to Purchase?

This study examines these issues with the aim of providing theoretical insights and practical implications for the halal food industry. Not only does it deepen the academic understanding of consumer behavior within the halal sector, it also offers actionable recommendations to businesses and policymakers to help them enhance consumer trust and drive market growth

Literature View*Willingness to Purchase*

Willingness to purchase typically refers to a consumer's readiness or inclination to buy a specific product or service. In the halal food context, it describes the extent to which consumers are prepared to choose halal-certified products. This willingness is shaped by multiple factors, such as cultural traditions, religious beliefs, health considerations, ethical concerns, and the accessibility of products in the market (Saleh & Rajandran, 2024b). Research has shown that trust in certification, awareness of halal principles, and perceptions of product authenticity play especially important roles in influencing willingness to purchase (Karimah & Darwanto, 2021). Researchers and food marketers can be confident that the intention to purchase halal food products can be increased by strengthening attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and food safety awareness.

Halal Awareness

Halal awareness refers to consumers' understanding of issues related to the concept of halal (Julpa & Napitu, 2023). It encompasses their knowledge of halal concepts, including dietary regulations and certification processes, as well as the differences between halal and non-halal products. Awareness serves an educational function, informing consumers of the health, safety, and ethical benefits of halal products and fostering broader acceptance and trust. In marketing, halal awareness denotes consumers' familiarity with halal products, which significantly influences their purchasing behavior. This awareness can enhance product appeal and shape purchasing decisions. In China, most people are not fully aware of the importance or even the existence of the halal food industry (Kartika et al., 2022). Therefore, raising awareness is crucial for promoting halal products to non-Muslim communities.

Halal Trust

Halal trust refers to consumers' confidence that halal products are authentic, comply with Islamic principles, and are produced through transparent and reliable processes. Trust is rooted in belief and fostered by reliability, honesty, consistency, and competence (Julpa & Napitu, 2023). Consumer trust is critical in the food and beverage sector and is influenced by various factors, including supply chain transparency, food packaging labels, certifications, and the credibility of food chain actors (Shafariah & Gofur, 2024). For Muslim consumers, halal trust means that food is prepared in accordance with the rules set out in the Quran and Sunnah (Ambali & Bakar, 2014). For a wider audience, it demonstrates that the company is reliable, consistent, and trustworthy. When people trust a brand, they are more likely to accept it and purchase from it, while also feeling more connected to the brand (Koc et al., 2024)

Halal Acceptance

Halal acceptance refers to the growing recognition, understanding, and adoption of halal dietary practices within different communities, including non-Muslim populations. For non-Muslim consumers, acceptance may stem from perceptions of halal products as safe, healthy, and ethically produced, whereas for Muslim consumers, it is rooted in religious compliance (Wibowo & Ahmad, 2016). In the Chinese context, enhancing acceptance is crucial for expanding the halal market beyond its traditional consumer base and is therefore a key determinant of willingness to purchase halal pre-cooked foods. This phenomenon signifies a broader movement toward inclusivity and acknowledgment of diverse dietary practices. As

awareness grows and the halal product market expands, halal food is likely to become more integrated into mainstream food culture, benefiting consumers and the food industry alike.

Hypotheses Development

Halal Awareness and Halal Acceptance

Halal awareness refers to consumers' understanding and grasp of halal principles, certification processes, and product authenticity. Higher levels of awareness reduce uncertainty and enhance consumer confidence in product quality and religious compliance. Halal awareness is triggered from four major sources namely; religious belief, halal certification, exposure and health reason (Shaari et al., 2020). Halal awareness not only improves consumers' ability to recognize halal standards but also strengthens their positive attitudes and perceptions toward halal products (Purnomo, 2024). When consumers understand the health, ethical, and religious benefits of halal food, they are more inclined to incorporate it into their daily consumption, indicating a significant positive correlation between halal awareness and halal acceptance.

H1: There is a positive relationship between Halal Awareness and Halal Acceptance.

Halal Trust and Halal Acceptance

Trust is widely recognized as a key factor in consumer decision-making, particularly when product quality cannot be directly verified. Within the halal food market, trust encompasses consumer confidence in the authenticity of halal products, supply chain transparency, and the credibility of certification bodies. Higher levels of trust can promote acceptance of halal food by reducing perceived risk and uncertainty (Julpa & Napitu, 2023; Koc et al., 2024). Furthermore, visible halal certification marks, endorsements from religious authorities, and transparent communication from producers all help bolster consumer confidence, thereby increasing acceptance. Thus, trust plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer attitudes and driving the adoption of halal products.

H2: There is a positive relationship between Halal Trust and Halal Acceptance.

Halal Acceptance and Willingness to Purchase

The acceptance of halal products reflects consumers' willingness to adopt them into their lifestyles and consumption habits. Acceptance typically mediates between cognitive and affective factors, such as cognition and trust. Behavioral outcomes include purchase intent. Existing research confirms that the higher the understanding and of halal products, the higher the possibility of consumers deciding to buy halal food (Purnomo, 2024). In the halal prepared food sector, acceptance is particularly crucial because consumers must simultaneously perceive the product as both religiously compliant and fulfilling convenience and lifestyle needs. Consequently, higher halal acceptance is expected to directly enhance purchase intent.

H2: There is a positive relationship between Halal Acceptance and Willingness to Purchase.

As shown in Figure 1, the theoretical framework of this study aims to explore the relationships among halal awareness, halal trust, halal acceptance and willingness to purchase. Within this framework, halal awareness and halal trust are regarded as crucial antecedent variables influencing consumer attitudes. They enhance overall consumer halal acceptance by strengthening confidence in product authenticity, supply chain transparency, and certification credibility. Halal acceptance, as a mediating variable, further influences consumers'

willingness to purchase. This framework reveals the process through which awareness and trust shape consumer acceptance and highlights the critical role of acceptance in translating these attitudes into purchasing behavior.

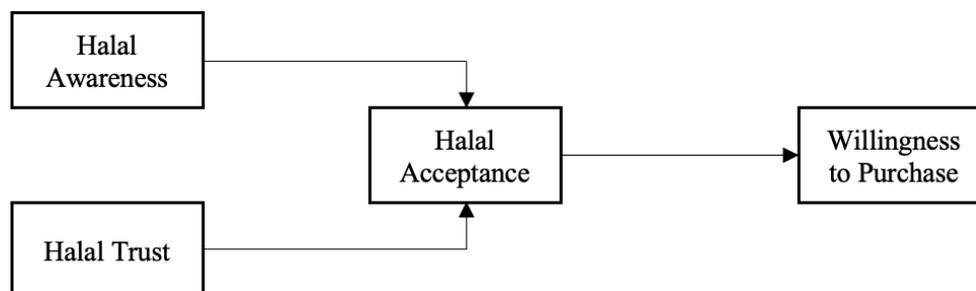


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

Sample and Sample Size

The study was conducted in Shandong Province, China, which represents one of the key regions with growing potential for halal food consumption. A total of 500 respondents were surveyed across 17 major cities, ensuring a balanced representation of demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education, income, and religious affiliation. Comrey and Lee (1992) provided the following guidance in determining the adequacy of sample size: 100= poor, 200 = fair, 300 = good, 500 = very good. Therefore, the chosen sample size of 500 was deemed adequate to ensure reliability, validity, and generalizability of the findings. This sample size is sufficient to provide adequate statistical power to support inferential statistical analyses such as multiple regression or structural equation modeling. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling, targeting consumers with prior awareness or experience of halal food products.

Research Instruments

The primary research instrument was a structured questionnaire designed to measure the following constructs: halal awareness, halal trust, halal acceptance and willingness to purchase. The questionnaire comprised closed items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). The measurement items were adapted from established studies to ensure construct validity, and were then confirmed by marketing experts. The questionnaire was first developed in English and then translated into Chinese using a back-translation technique to maintain linguistic and conceptual equivalence. A pilot test involving 50 respondents was conducted to refine the wording and improve clarity prior to the large-scale collection of data.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection took place over the course of one month, from June to July 2025. Researchers approached respondents in public venues such as supermarkets, shopping centers and university campuses, as these locations typically offer halal food. Participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous to potential response bias. Both paper-based and online questionnaires were employed to reach and enhance convenience for participants. Prior to data collection, ethical review approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, and informed consent was secured from all respondents. A total

of 500 questionnaires were returned. During data screening, no missing data were identified, but two cases were flagged as outliers. After excluding these, the final dataset consisted of 498 valid responses, which were used for further analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Demographic Profiling

As shown in Table 1, the sample comprised 201 males (40.4%) and 297 females (59.6%), indicating a higher proportion of females. The majority were in the 36–45 (38.4%) and 26–35 (34.6%) age groups, while the younger (19–25, 12.2%) and older (46–55, 11.2%; 56–65, 2.8%; 66–75, 0.8%) age groups were less represented. In terms of religion, 7.4% of respondents were Muslim, while 92.6% were non-Muslim, reflecting the demographic composition of Shandong Province. In terms of monthly income, the majority of respondents (46.4%) earned 3001–6000 RMB, followed by 30.8% who earned 6001–10000 RMB. Meanwhile, 10.8% earned below 3000 RMB, and 12% earned above 10000 RMB. Overall, the demographic distribution suggests that the sample is diverse in terms of gender, age and income levels, while also highlighting the predominance of non-Muslim consumers in the study area.

Table 1

Respondents Profile

Demography		Freq.	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	201	40.4
	Female	297	59.6
Age	19–25	61	12.2
	26–35	173	34.6
	36–45	192	38.4
	46–55	56	11.2
	56–65	14	2.8
	66–75	4	0.8
Religion	Muslim	37	7.4
	Non-Muslim	463	92.6
Monthly Income	=< 3000	54	10.8
	3001–6000	232	46.4
	6001–10000	154	30.8
	=> 10001	60	12

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for four key variables during the pre-intervention phase: Halal Awareness (HFA), Halal Trust (HFT), Halal Acceptance (HFC), and Willingness to Pay (WTP). Mean scores for each construct ranged between 2.955 and 3.280, indicating respondents generally maintained moderate levels of awareness, trust, acceptance, and purchase intent toward halal pre-cooked meals. Among these, Halal Trust (mean $M=3.280$, standard deviation $SD=0.805$) exhibited the highest mean, indicating strong confidence among participants in Halal-related products and institutions. In contrast, Halal Awareness ($M=2.955$, $SD=0.889$) had the lowest mean, reflecting relatively limited understanding of Halal principles and certification systems among respondents. The response distributions were close to normal, with skewness values ranging from -0.348 to 0.047 and kurtosis values ranging from -0.568 to 0.106 — both within the acceptable range of ± 1 (Kline, 2011). This

indicates no significant deviation from a normal distribution and supports the suitability of the data for subsequent statistical analyses, such as correlation and regression studies.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
HFA	1.0	5	2.955	0.889	-0.100	-0.558
HFT	1.0	5	3.280	0.805	-0.348	0.106
HFC	1.2	5	3.108	0.877	-0.049	-0.568
WTP	1.0	5	3.088	0.900	0.047	-0.378

Halal Awareness (HFA), Halal Trust (HFT), Halal Acceptance (HFC), Willingness to Purchase (WTP)

Regression Analysis

Two regression models were constructed based on the conceptual framework to test the proposed hypotheses (refer to Table 3). Model 1 examined the influence of halal awareness (HFA) and halal trust (HFT) on halal acceptance (HFC), while model 2 verified the role of halal acceptance (HFC) in purchase intent (WTP).

Model 1: Predicting Halal Acceptance

Model 1 predicts Halal Acceptance (HFC). Regression analysis revealed this model to be statistically significant ($F = 72.423$, $p < 0.001$), with a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.226. This indicates that 22.6% of the variance in halal acceptance can be explained by halal awareness and trust. The regression equation is as follows:

$$HFC = 1.232 + 0.314 \times HFA + 0.290 \times HFT + \epsilon.$$

Both predictor variables were significant. Halal awareness ($\beta = 0.318$, $t = 7.595$, $p < 0.001$) and halal trust ($\beta = 0.264$, $t = 6.302$, $p < 0.001$) had a positive effect on halal acceptance. These results support H1 and H2, indicating that a greater awareness of halal principles and stronger trust in halal products and institutions significantly increases acceptance among consumers.

Model 2: Predicting Willingness to Purchase

The second regression model was also significant ($F = 115.111$, $p < 0.001$) with an R^2 value of 0.188. This indicates that halal acceptance explains 18.8% of the variance in willingness to purchase. The regression equation is:

$$WTP = 1.709 + 0.445 \times HFC + \epsilon.$$

Analysis indicates that halal acceptance significantly and positively influences willingness to purchase ($\beta = 0.434$, $t = 10.729$, $p < 0.001$). This finding supports H3, confirming that consumers who accept halal products are more willing to purchase halal pre-cooked meals.

Table 3

Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	Standardized β	t-value	p-value
H1	HFA \rightarrow HFC	0.318	7.595	< 0.001
H2	HFT \rightarrow HFC	0.264	6.302	< 0.001
H3	HFC \rightarrow WTP	0.434	10.729	< 0.001

Halal Awareness (HFA), Halal Trust (HFT), Halal Acceptance (HFC), Willingness to Purchase (WTP)

Discussion*Research Question 1: Halal Awareness and Halal Acceptance*

The regression results indicate that halal cognition exerts a significant positive influence on halal acceptance ($\beta=0.318$, $t=7.595$, $p<0.001$), supporting H1. This suggests that consumers with a better grasp of halal principles are more likely to accept halal pre-cooked meals. This finding suggest is consistent with previous studies indicating that cognition plays a vital role in reducing uncertainty and fostering positive consumer attitudes. In the context of Shandong, where non-Muslim consumers generally lack halal knowledge, enhancing consumer awareness through educational campaigns, improved product labelling and social media promotion can effectively increase their understanding. This, in turn, would significantly increase their acceptance of halal pre-cooked meals.

Research Question 2: Halal Trust and Halal Acceptance

The findings also indicate that halal trust significantly influences halal acceptance ($\beta=0.264$, $t=6.302$, $p<0.001$), thereby supporting H2. This suggests that consumers are more likely to accept halal pre-cooked meals when they have confidence in the authenticity of halal products, the transparency of the supply chain, and halal certification. This aligns with prior research concluding that trust is fundamental to consumer decision-making, particularly in the halal industry where consumers cannot verify production processes directly. Consequently, in China's halal food market, improving the credibility of certifications and setting up traceability systems could effectively boost consumer trust and increase acceptance of halal pre-cooked meals.

Research Question 3: Halal Acceptance and Willingness to Purchase

The second regression model shows that acceptance of halal products ($\beta=0.434$, $t=10.729$, $p<0.001$) is a significant predictor of willingness to purchase, thereby validating H3. This finding demonstrates that consumer acceptance plays a crucial mediating role in transforming cognition and trust into actual willingness to purchase. This aligns with existing literature indicating that positive consumer attitudes and acceptance of halal products are important factors influencing purchasing behaviour. In the Shandong halal pre-cooked meals sector, acceptance reflects Muslim consumers' endorsement of religious compliance and non-Muslim consumers' recognition of the health, safety and convenience of halal food. Therefore, enhancing consumer acceptance could expand the halal food market in China.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, firstly, this study explored how halal awareness, halal trust, and halal acceptance shape consumers' willingness to purchase halal pre-cooked meals. Based on regression analysis of 498 valid responses collected in Shandong Province, the results show

that both halal awareness and halal trust exert a significant positive effect on halal acceptance, and that acceptance in turn strongly enhances willingness to purchase. These findings support all three proposed hypotheses and demonstrate the mediating role of acceptance in translating awareness and trust into actual buying behavior. On the theoretical side, the study contributes to halal consumer research by offering a unified framework for understanding willingness to purchase. On the practical side, it underscores the importance of strengthening consumer awareness and building trust as key levers for improving acceptance and stimulating demand—insights that are particularly valuable in a non-Muslim majority context such as Shandong.

In addition, this study makes a significant contribution to the theoretical understanding and contextual knowledge of halal consumer behaviour, particularly in non-Muslim majority environments. In theory, it advances the discourse on halal consumption by empirically validating an integrative model linking halal awareness, halal trust and halal acceptance as precursors to consumers' willingness to purchase. By positioning halal certification acceptance as an intermediary variable, this study improves upon existing consumer decision models. The findings suggest that acceptance acts as a cognitive-affective bridge, translating cognition and trust into behavioural intention. This finding extends the application of the Theory of Planned Behavior. It also extends the Attitude–Trust–Intention framework into the halal consumption domain. This provides a more nuanced understanding of how belief-based cognition and institutional trust collectively shape consumer action. Furthermore, the findings broaden the scope of halal marketing research by demonstrating that 'halal' functions not only as a religious identifier, but also as a multidimensional concept that encompasses ethical, health-related and quality-oriented value. This study addresses a significant knowledge gap regarding halal consumption in Shandong Province, China. This is an area of particular interest as it has a relatively small Muslim population, yet the halal market there is expanding rapidly. Unlike prior studies conducted in Muslim-majority contexts. This study reveals how cultural, social and informational factors interact. These factors shape consumer attitudes within the emerging halal market. These insights enrich the global literature on halal marketing and position China as a significant and distinctive case in the evolving landscape of halal consumption research. They demonstrate how faith-based food systems can adapt to and thrive in non-religious consumer environments.

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