

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF CONSUMERS' INTENTION TO PURCHASE HALAL FOOD AMONG GEN Z IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to develop a conceptual framework that provides insights and aids in understanding the factors that influence consumers' intention to purchase halal food among Gen Z in Malaysia. This concept paper explains the relationship between attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control towards purchase intention on halal food among Gen Z in Malaysia. Based on an extensive literature review, this paper proposes a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship and relevant insights on its development. The study uses a descriptive research approach in order to gain fruitful insights as well as to explain the relationship between attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control that influence purchase intention on halal food among Gen Z in Malaysia. A structured questionnaire will be given to the respondents in assessing their purchase intention on halal food. The results of this study discovered the importance of consumers' purchase intention of halal food products. It is hoped that this paper would serve as a reference to Malaysian Statutory bodies and halal food industry specifically on the current purchase intention of halal food among Malaysia's Gen Z.

INTRODUCTION

The term "halal" comes from an Arabic word which is defined as lawful or allowed in the Islamic law (Nursalwani & Zulariff, 2017). A halal product refers to the process, starting from its source of raw materials to the distribution and delivery process to the consumers (Hashim & Mat Hashim, 2013). Muslim consumers ought to have a positive attitude and awareness on halal food consumption as having halal food is part of religious obligations. The Qur'an states that Muslims have to give important emphasis toward the use of halal products that do not contain forbidden ingredients, for example, Surah Al-Ma'idah Verse 5:90:

"O you who believe! Khamr (all kinds of alcoholic content), gambling, Al-Ansaab, and Al-Azlaam (arrows for seeking luck or decision) are Rijs of Shaitaan's (Satan) handiworks. So, avoid (strictly all) that (abomination) in order that you may be successful."

In terms of food consumption, this verse states that Muslims are prohibited from eating the flesh of pork and its derivatives, as it is sinful and impiety to do so. These prohibitions have been stated by the Islamic law as guidelines to all humankind from committing any wrongdoings.

The halal food industry has gained significant importance and a growing market share in the global food market as it is gaining equal popularity among both Muslim and non-Muslim consumers (Ali et al., 2017; Syed et al., 2021). Halal food is widely consumed for two primary reasons: first, Muslims have a greater tendency to consume halal food while adhering to their Islamic beliefs and teachings, which allow them to consume only halal food; and second, non-Muslims prefer halal food because of the concepts of hygiene, quality, and cleanliness associated with it (Ansawi et al., 2018; Syed et al., 2021).

Today, the halal industry has become a viable product and service market across the world. The increasing demand of halal food products continues due to the increasing awareness of Muslims on their obligation to consume products according to the religious requirements. Halal food constitutes the largest segment of the halal industry, the demand for which is globally on the rise. According to the State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2018/2019, Muslim consumer expenditure reached \$ 1,128 billion, equivalent to 17% of total expenditure on food and beverages. Meanwhile, the Malaysian Halal industry is valued at \$ 30 billion and is expected to grow further by 25% within the next 5 years (Organ, 2018). Malaysia's halal industry offers a variety of opportunities for manufacturers of products and services as the demand for both increases with the growing global population and acceptance from the community.

Nowadays, the industry of halal food is in higher demand due to increased awareness among Muslims about the sanctity of Islam while the non-Muslims are becoming more sensitive toward the hygienic foods. Halal food industry has great market potential and becomes the primary choice of both Muslim and non-Muslim consumers, which has subsequently contributed towards a positive impact on the economy of Malaysia (Muhammad et al., 2020). Malaysia is one of the countries which holds the status of world's leader for the halal economy (Hearsey, 2018). As Malaysia is aiming to position itself as a global food hub, the government of Malaysia has developed several strategies to support this initiative. In achieving the aim, there are various measures and efforts that need to be taken especially in ensuring Muslim consumers are more aware of what they consume as well as applying halal and Sharia-compliant procedures (Ambali & Bakar, 2014). In addition, attitudes of consumers, particularly the Muslim consumers, will contribute toward the future progress of the halal industry in Malaysia.

As a multiracial country that is known for its tolerance towards the practice various religions, Malaysia has been recognized as a halal hub as well as being an example for other countries (Widodo, 2013). In addition, the halal products and services sector are one of the important sectors contributing to Malaysia's economy. For example, the global halal market value in halal food is estimated at US\$547bn per year. This phenomenon has created interests from food producing countries worldwide. This latest trend of the change in behaviour among Muslim consumers is due to two crucial reasons, namely, the increasing number of Muslims around the world and the raising awareness among current generations (Ahlam et al., 2015). Malaysian consumers' awareness of halal food and products is influenced by media exposure, religiosity, health reasons, and halal certificates, where health reasons are the biggest factor determining their level of awareness. However, according to Abdul Khalek (2014), the participation of Malaysia in the halal market is still poor. In addition, about 80% of halal products in Malaysia are manufactured by non-Muslim producers. Thus, it has become a huge challenge for the Muslim society in Malaysia to contribute more halal products in its local and international economy .

Generation Z (also known as Gen Z) refers to the generation born between 1997-2012, following millennials. This generation has been raised on the internet and social media, with some of the oldest finishing college by 2020 and entering the workforce. Gen Z is quite remarkable in its consumption style; it is one of the countries that is becoming a benchmark in offering the newest products. The shopping habits of millennials and Gen Z today have various methods, offline and online, which adds platforms wide enough for them to shop. Gen Z Muslims live in a time where the development of digital

technologies is so fast, the flow of information is very fluid, and they generally have quite different attitudes than previous generations (Meola, 2021).

Gen Z is important for the current and future progress of the halal industry in Malaysia. Nevertheless, Gen Z has less awareness of halal labels on food products and restaurants. A study by Krishnan, Che Omar, Zahran, Syazwan and Alyaa (2017) found that some of Gen Z individuals lacked awareness on the use of the halal label approved by Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) in consuming food products and drinks in specific restaurants or products purchased. The reason for this to happen is partly due to the lifestyle of Gen Z whereby they are widely exposed to technologies and social media exposing them to popularity especially on the consumption of trending items. Due to this, Gen Z is not aware of the halal status of the products they consume (Krishnan et al., 2017). Based on these observations, this present study will develop a conceptual framework on the factors that influence purchasing intention of halal food among Gen Z in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to the probability that a consumer in a particular situation of purchasing and choosing a certain group of products in the future (Crosno et al., 2009). In other words, purchase intention comes about when consumers feel that there is a need that must be available. Purchase intention can influence the consumers' purchasing decision in the future (Omar et al., 2012). According to Varinli et al. (2016), the purchasing intention of halal products headed the process before actual purchase, as the intention reflects future behaviour of the consumers.

Previous studies have indicated a few variables that influence purchase intention among people. According to Latiff et al. (2019), purchasing behavioural intention is influenced by awareness, knowledge, attitude, as well as food labels. Meanwhile, Vanany et al. (2019) found that attitude has a significant effect toward purchase intention on halal food, whereas subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and halal awareness have insignificant effect toward purchase intention.

However, Rachbini (2018) reported that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control have a significant effect toward purchase intention. On the other hand, Amalia et al. (2020) reported that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control possess a significant effect toward purchase intention.

Furthermore, Bashir (2019) found that consumers' purchase intention has a significant effect on their purchasing behaviour of halal food products. This is because consumers who have a high purchase intention would increase the consumers' buying behaviour towards halal food products.

Theory of Planned Behaviour

The main constructs of this study were taken from the "Theory of Planned Behaviour (henceforth, TPB)" that has been used in numerous studies related to consumers' behaviour and social psychology (Ajzen, 1991). There are a few studies on halal food consumption intention to purchase halal food using TPB as their theoretical framework in determining consumers' intention to purchase and consume halal food and products (Ajzen, 2002). Generally, TPB (Ajzen, 1985) identifies the influences that predict and change behaviours. Behavioural intention is influenced by a person's attitudes; beliefs about whether individuals who are important to the person approve or disapprove of the behaviour; and perceived control over performing the behaviour. For several years, existing research studies have examined the behaviour of purchasing Halal food as a conscious behaviour (Bashir et al., 2019; Iranmanesh et al., 2020; Shah Alam and Mohamed Sayuti, 2011) and used TPB as their primary model. In TPB, intention is the single factor that can influence the behaviour, and intention itself is determined by three constructs, that is, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Bashir et al., 2019; Holdsworth et al., 2019). To be more precise, attitude portrays a consumer's favourable evaluation in carrying out the behaviour. Subjective norms consider the perceived expectation of influencing others when an individual performs a particular behaviour. Meanwhile, perceived behavioural control shows the degree

of confidence of someone to carry out the behaviour within the given situation (Bashir et al., 2019; Holdsworth et al., 2019).

Attitude and Purchase Intention of Halal Food among Gen Z

According to Garg and Joshi (2018), attitude is an expression of feeling, which reflects feelings of pleasure or displeasure towards an object. Any changes in attitude can lead to changes in behaviour (Hook & Lucier, 1995). Therefore, it can be assumed that attitude towards halal food will affect individual's purchasing intention. Khan and Azam (2016) found that attitude was found to be most significant in predicting the purchase intention of halal-certified products. Similarly, Gornaz et al. (2010) indicated that consumers' attitudes towards halal food are a significant predictor of intention. A similar result on attitude can be seen in Afendi et al. (2014) and Lada et al. (2009). Other studies also confirmed that consumer attitude towards halal food has a significant and positive influence on purchasing intention (Abd Rahman et al., 2015; Bashir, 2019; Mukhtar & Butt, 2012). However, a study by Marmaya et al. (2019) shows that the attitude of Gen Y did not influence their behavioural intention to buy halal food. Therefore, in this study, we postulate:

H1. There is a significant relationship between attitude and behavioural intention to purchase halal food products among Gen Z.

Subjective Norms and Purchase Intention of Halal Food among Gen Z

Subjective norms can be defined as social influences related to consumer perceptions of what should or should not be done (Amin, Hamid, Tanakinjal & Lada, 2006). According to Haque et al. (2015), subjective norms explain that a behaviour is performed by referring to the expectation and approval of people that are considered to be important (i.e. family, friends and religious figure). A study by Mukhtar and Butt (2012) found that subjective norm appears to be the strongest of all the the predictors for choosing Halal products. In another study by Lada et al. (2010), it was found that subjective norm is the most influential predictor of purchase intention. In Malaysia, subjective norms play an important role whereby family members, friends, and colleagues become an individual's strong referent point (Ahlam et al., 2015). Furthermore, Marmaya et al. (2019) revealed that subjective norms and perceived behavioural control influence behavioural intention among Gen Y consumers to purchase halal food. Therefore, in this study, it is hypothesized:

H2. There is a significant relationship between subjective norms and behavioural intention to purchase halal food products among Gen Z.

Perceived Behavioural Control and Purchase Intention of Halal Food among Gen Z

Perceived behavioural control can be defined as the feeling of being in control or the confidence in performing a behaviour (Syed and Nazura, 2011). According to Ajzen (1991), perceived behavioural control refers to an individual's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing a particular behaviour. Amalia et al. (2020) stated that perceived behavioural control would strongly influence consumers' purchase intention toward a product. A previous study by Aiedah et al. (2015) indicated that Gen Y consumers' preferences in consuming halal food are predominantly influenced by their attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control toward halal food. Perceived behavioural control also indicates how strongly people hold and attach to their fundamental beliefs, which determine their behavioural intention (Vabo & Hansen, 2016). In the context of halal food, being attached to Islamic teaching is fundamental for Muslim consumers that guide their decision-making purposes (Al-Kwafi et al., 2019). Therefore, in this study, it is hypothesized:

H3. There is a significant relationship between perceived behavioural control and behavioural intention to purchase halal food products among Gen Z.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

Based on the review of literature in the previous section, there are three main factors that potentially influence purchase intention on halal food among Gen Z in Malaysia. For this study, the proposed model

is constructed by the following variables: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control which will lead to the influence of purchase intention on halal food among Gen Z in Malaysia. Understanding the factors that affect purchase intention of Halal food has implications for the public policymakers in Malaysia especially in formulating a strategic national policy of halal development and to improve the national halal economics globally. The proposed conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1:

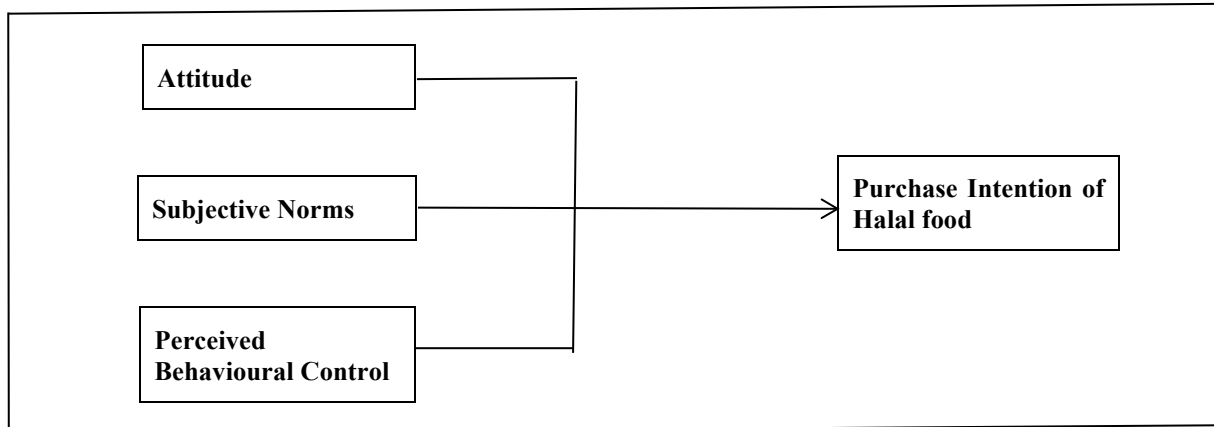


Figure 1: The Proposed Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

The paper attempts to study on the factors influence purchase intention toward halal food among Gen Z in Malaysia. The proposed independent variables are attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control while purchase intention is the dependent variable for this study. The study will use descriptive research approach for the purpose of gaining fruitful insights as well as to explain the relationship between attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control that influence purchase intention on halal food among Gen Z in Malaysia. A structured questionnaire will be distributed to the respondents in assessing their purchase intention on halal food. The answered questionnaires will be analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and Structural Equation Model (SEM).

CONCLUSION

This study will be conducted on the factors that influence purchase intention toward halal food among Gen Z in Malaysia. The proposed independent variables will be explaining the relationship of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control that influence purchase intention on halal food among Gen Z in Malaysia. The findings from this research should be useful to various businesses associated with halal including halal producers, distributors, halal restaurant owners, and halal marketers. Hence, this study would help to further develop the halal food market and the halal industries in Malaysia by using a more precise data as well as having a better understanding of the current customer trends. As part of an ongoing research, the authors will seek for the measurement items from the literature and empirically validate the proposed framework.

Additionally, the findings of this study will also provide new potential marketing strategies for halal food products that can be implemented to cater to a wider target market. Moreover, it also provides consumer behavioural input for public policymakers in Malaysia to formulate a strategic national policy of halal development as well as to improve the national halal economics globally. All these can be achieved by drawing up a more holistic Third Industrial Master Plan 2006–2020 that aspires for Malaysia to be the global leading Halal hub.

Meanwhile, for the food providers, they should strengthen their endeavours to always preserve the halal status of their halal-claimed foods from farm to fork. In addition, the governments should involve the surroundings of Gen Z (e.g. family, neighbourhood, social media) in educating them about purchasing halal foods. In terms of religiosity, it is worth to involve Islamic teaching communities in strengthening the Gen Zs' purchase intention on halal foods.

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