

Knowledge and Attitudes of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Muslim Students on their Practices of Choosing Halal Food Products and Premises.

Mariam Abdul Latif^{1*}, Hazriani Harris¹, Suhaimi Ab Rahman²

¹Faculty of Food Science and Nutrition, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Jalan UMS, 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

²Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, 43400 Seri Kembangan, Selangor, Malaysia

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*Corresponding author: Mariam Abdul Latif, Faculty of Food Science and Nutrition, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Jalan UMS, 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia, E-mail: mariam@ums.edu.my

Abstract

The objective of this study was to examine the knowledge and attitudes of Muslim students on their practices of choosing halal food. It was conducted on 367 Muslim students who are currently pursuing undergraduate studies in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). Random sampling method was used to recruit the respondents. The questionnaire used was a closed-ended and divided into four parts: A) The Practices of Choosing Halal Food, B) The Knowledge on Concept of Halal Food, C) The Attitudes on Choosing Halal Food, and D) Respondent's Demographic. All data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 16.0. This study showed the practices of choosing halal food among the respondents were satisfactory. The respondents' knowledge on halal food concept was good. The respondents' attitudes on choosing halal food were positive. The relationship between knowledge and practices of the respondents were not significant ($r=0.04$, $p>0.05$). However, the relationship between their attitudes and practices were found to be significant ($r=0.73$, $p<0.05$).

Keywords:

Halal food, Food products, Food premises, Muslim students, University students.



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Introduction

The global population of Muslims in 2007 were 1.7 billion [1]. According to Jabar Zaman et al. [2], there were more than 1.2 billion Muslims consumed halal foods. The demand for halal food increases with the increase of Muslim population globally. Based on the estimated expenditure per capita of food is US \$0.85 (RM3.23) per day, hence the estimated market value of global halal food products is US \$560 billion (RM2.12 trillion) per year. In Malaysia, 60% of the population are Muslims and if one is estimated to spend RM1.00 per day, the demand for halal food products is expected to exceed RM5 billion per year [3].

Halal food refers to clean and healthy food that comply with the teachings of Quran and Sunnah, Ijma' and Qiyas [4]. According to Riaz et al. [5], halal food is defined as food that is free of any illegal material for Muslims consumption. The Quran has declared that all good and clean food are halal. The plants- and animals-based foods are permissible except the items that are specifically indicated by the Quran and Sunnah. Khamr or alcohol, blood, pork, carrion and animals that are not slaughtered by the name of Allah SWT are forbidden for Muslims consumption [2].

Golnaz et al. [6] stated that halal food covers two main aspects: the food-stuff used and its preparation method. Both aspects are crucial and should be noted. If one violates the Islamic guidelines whether the foodstuff used is illegal or the preparation method does not comply with the Islamic food guidelines, the food's halal status will be doubted. Zunirah et al. [3] also expressed that a food product can be halal if the raw ingredients used is lawful and its processing methods adhere to the Islamic guidelines. But, if the final product is contaminated by any illegal material, it is no longer halal even if it contains ingredients from halal sources.

In Islam, Allah SWT has set that each Muslim must consume only halal and quality (good) food in which contains adequate minerals and vitamins. Halal and good food not only improves the physical health and concentration power of a Muslim, but also increases their godliness and gratitude towards Allah SWT [7]. The practices of consuming halal food are crucial because it is very much involved and has a very strong relationship with the Muslims' well-beings [3].

Halal food intake which is consuming food from a halal and good source or halal taysyiba has been described in some Quran verses. In the Quran, Allah SWT said:

“O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth (that is) lawful and good and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.” (Quran, 2:168)

“O you who have believed, eat from the good things which We have provided for you and be grateful to Allah if it is (indeed) Him that you worship.” (Quran, 2:172)

“And eat of what Allah has provided for you (which is) lawful and good. And fear Allah, in whom you are believers.” (Quran, 5:88)

The advancement of technology in food processing industry in Malaysia has produced a wide range of food products that use additional flavorings or preservatives that are doubtful in its halal status. Moreover, importing food products from non-Islamic countries such as United States and Thailand also contributes to these problems. The halal status of those food products is likely to be doubtful as the exporters or producers may not understand or

comply to the Islamic way during food processing. Zainalabidin et al. [8] mentioned that the current halal food product market has been affected due to some cases that arisen such as the non-halal fat ingredients of bakery products. Zunirah et al. [3] also pointed out, through the raids executed by the authorities in Malaysia, the results were surprising and proved that the producers did not comply with the Malaysian Standard on Halal Food (MS 1500: 2009). Those confiscated halal-labelled food products were found to contain unlawful ingredients.

Not to mention, the escalating numbers of food premises in Malaysia that offers a variety of mouth-watering dishes for their customers. Those food premises with valid halal signs will attract more customers especially the Muslims. However, the misuse of halal signs among the food premises in Malaysia has created doubts among the Muslim customers. Asyraf et al. [4] reported that there were two food premises in Kuala Lumpur had been shut down due to displaying a fake halal sign on food premises.

In addition, there is a situation in which a Muslim does not adhere to the Islamic way of life. Asyraf et al. [4] mentioned that there are Muslims who do not comply with the Islamic law especially in the aspects of consumption and preparation of halal food. Zunirah et al. [3] noted that the level of awareness on halal products among Muslim consumers is still low based on the survey conducted by Kaseh Dia Consultancy Sdn. Bhd. in 2008. This negative phenomenon reflected by today's Islamic society on halal food is worrying. The low level of understanding and concern regarding the halal status among the Muslim society shows the lack of awareness among them on this matter.

As a consequence of lack of awareness on the concept of halal food among the Muslim society, a study has been executed to examine this situation. The researcher aimed to gather information on knowledge and attitudes of UMS Muslim students on their practices of choosing halal food. University students are one group of consumers who often visit the food premises and purchase variety of food products from the stores. The practices of choosing halal food among them need to be studied. Furthermore, their knowledge regarding the concept of halal food will be tested and expected to be satisfactory due to high educational background. The students' attitudes on choosing halal food will be evaluated whether they give an emphasis on halal status. The researcher hopes that the outcome of this study can be a source of information to certain parties such as Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM), Jabatan Hal Ehwal Agama Islam Negeri Sabah (JHEAINS) and peer researchers.

Materials and Methods

A pilot study was conducted in March 2013 to evaluate the effectiveness and reliability of the questionnaire used. The respondents (n=40) involved were the Muslim students of UMS which were randomly selected. They were asked to complete the questionnaire and provide feedbacks. All data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 16.0. Based on the reliability test, the questionnaire used in this study has a coefficient value of 0.9 which was good [9] and acceptable [10].

The actual study was conducted in April 2013 at the main campus of UMS. Based on the student population data provided by the Academic Services Division of UMS, total number of Muslim students in the main campus was 7593 students. The sample size required was 367 respondents as calculated using Sample Size Determination of Krejcie and Morgan [11]. The random sampling was used to select the respondents. The inclusion criteria were

Muslim students aged between 19-26 years and currently pursuing undergraduate studies.

The survey was executed from course to course accordingly. The course’s lecturer’s permission was obtained prior to the distribution of questionnaires. The questionnaire used was a closed-ended and comprises of four parts. The first part contains 10 questions with a 5-point Likert scale that examine the practices of choosing halal food in terms of food products (6 questions) and food premises (4 questions). The second part has 15 questions that evaluate the knowledge on halal food concept in which the scoring point is 1 mark for correct answer and 0 marks for wrong answer. The third part consists of 10 questions with a 5-point Likert scale that examine the attitudes on choosing halal food product (6 questions) and food premises (4 questions). The final part contains 5 questions on demographic profile which includes gender, states of origin, residing areas, discipline areas and years of study.

The data analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 16.0. The results were presented as frequencies (N) and percentages (%) for the categorical variables. The median differences between groups of continuous variables were analysed using Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Walis tests whereby the median values were reported. The relationship between continuous variables was defined using Spearman Correlation. A probability value of $p < 0.05$ was considered to be significant.

Results and Discussion

Demographic profile

This study involved a total of 367 Muslim respondents of which 23.2% (n=85) of them were males and 76.8% (n=282) were females. More than half of the respondents came from Peninsular Malaysia (55.3%, n=203), while others were the locals of Sabah/Sarawak (44.7%, n=164). In terms of residing areas, there were 52.0% (n=191) lived in the urban areas while another 48.0% (n=176) dwelled in rural areas. By discipline areas, most of the respondents were the social science students (57.2%, n=210); only 42.8% (n=157) enrolled in the science stream. There were about 37.3% (n=137), 30.2% (n=111), 17.7% (n=65) and 14.7% (n=54) of them were in the first, second, third and fourth year of their courses, respectively.

Practice of choosing halal food

The aspect of choosing halal food products or food premises should not be taken lightly by the Muslim consumers. They should give prominence to the products or premises’ halal status. Based on Table 1, a majority of respondents prioritized the halal logo when purchasing food products (75.5%). They were concerned with the halal logo on product packaging (76.8%). Food products with the JAKIM halal logo were the main choice among the respondents (73.0%). They were confident to purchase food products with a valid halal status (76.8%). Hayati et al. [12] stated that halal logo on the packaging of food product is more crucial and meaningful to the Muslim consumers compared to other logos such as the ISO certification.

However, in this study, there were a few respondents did not prioritize the halal logo on product packaging (0.5%) (Table 1). They would not avoid products without halal logo (1.9%). The respondents also felt uncertain to purchase halal-labelled food products (0.5%). This might be due to the issue of misuse of halal logo by irresponsible food producers. Zainalabidin et al. [8] mentioned that today’s halal food products market has been affected following the fraud incident of halal logo on product packaging such as the non-halal fat ingredients of bakery products.

Halal Malaysia [13] stated that it is fundamental for the Muslim consumers to have knowledge on the recognised foreign halal certification bodies apart from JAKIM. This is to avoid confusion and to convince the consumers when choosing halal food products or food premises. The present study found out that some respondents neither refuse nor accept the food products with halal logo other than JAKIM halal logo (22.6%) (Table 1). This might be due to the lack of knowledge on halal logos by foreign Islamic bodies which also led to doubt among the respondents during purchasing the products.

In terms of premises, most of the respondents prioritized the halal certification when choosing food premises (64.9%) (Table 1). A majority of them would not visit the food premises that serve alcohol or pork (80.7%). They also would avoid food premises that do not exhibit their halal certificates (61.9%) and felt very confident to choose premises that show their halal certificates (74.7%). This shows that most of the respondents understood the importance of consuming halal food in daily life and they practiced it. In Islam, the concept of halal has its specific motives such as preserving religion sanctity, sustaining life, securing property, protecting future generations and maintaining integrity and dignity of individual [3].

However, there were a few respondents who visited the food premises that do not exhibit their halal certificates (1.6%) and also serve alcohol or pork (1.9%) (Table 1). This situation is in line with Asyraf et al. [4] who stated that there are indeed Muslims who do not practice the Islamic way of life especially in the aspects of consumption and preparation of halal food. The present study also noted that some respondents felt uncertain to choose food premises that exhibit their halal certificates (0.3%). This might be due to the fraud issues of halal signs by the food premises in Malaysia that raises doubts among the respondents. In Kuala Lumpur, two food premises have been shut down due to exhibiting fake halal signs in their premises [4].

In Islam, the aspect of choosing food products or premises should not be taken lightly as it can compromise the faith of Muslims. Halal and haram should be used as the decisive factor for every act [7]. In this study, the association between respondents’ demographic profile and practices was also evaluated. The results showed that there is no significant difference between groups in each demographic profile on practices of choosing halal food products or premises among the respondents as $p > 0.05$. Therefore, it is concluded that the students’ practices were the same regardless of their gender, states of origin, residing areas, discipline areas or year of study.

Questions	Scale ⁶ , N (%)				
	1	2	3	4	5

Food products					
I prioritize the halal logo when buying food products in the store	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	16 (4.4%)	74 (20.2%)	277 (75.5%)
I am concern with the halal logo on food product packaging	2 (0.5%)	0 (0.0%)	16 (4.4%)	67 (18.3%)	282 (76.8%)
My main choice is the food products labelled with JAKIM halal logo	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.3%)	23 (6.3%)	74 (20.2%)	268 (73.0%)
I will not doubt the food products with halal logo other than JAKIM halal logo	40 (10.9%)	80 (21.8%)	83 (22.6%)	82 (22.3%)	82 (22.3%)
I will avoid food products without halal logo	7 (1.9%)	0 (0.0%)	21 (5.7%)	96 (26.2%)	243 (66.2%)
I am confident to purchase food products with a valid halal status	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.5%)	9 (2.5%)	74 (20.2%)	282 (76.8%)
Food premises					
I prioritize the halal certification when choosing food premises	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	27 (7.4%)	102 (27.8%)	238 (64.9%)
I will not visit the food premises that serve alcohol or pork	7 (1.9%)	3 (0.8%)	10 (2.7%)	51 (13.9%)	296 (80.7%)
I will avoid food premises that do not exhibit their halal certificates	6 (1.6%)	5 (1.4%)	44 (12.0%)	85 (23.2%)	227 (61.9%)
I am confident to choose food premises that show their halal certificates	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.3%)	18 (4.9%)	73 (19.9%)	274 (74.7%)
5-point Likert scale: 1: strongly disagree; 2: disagree; 3: neutral; 4: agree; 5: strongly agree.					

Table 1. Practices of choosing halal food products and premises among respondents.

Questions	Feedback			
	Right		Wrong	
	N	(%)	N	(%)
Halal is an Arabic word meaning lawful or permitted	336	-91.60%	31	-8.40%
Tayyib is an Arabic word meaning clean, good and wholesome	300	-81.70%	67	-18.30%
Halalan Tayyiba is defined as forbidden, prevented and unsafe to be consumed by humans	262	-71.40%	105	-28.60%
Halal food refers to clean and healthy food that is in line with the Islamic dietary law	341	-92.90%	26	-7.10%
Animals such as chickens or cows, although not slaughtered according to the Islamic law, are still halal to be eaten by Muslims	360	-98.10%	7	-1.90%
Animals like pigs, if slaughtered according to the Islamic law, will be halal for Muslims consumption	360	-98.10%	7	-1.90%
Pork, blood, carrion, animals that are not slaughtered by the name of Allah SWT and alcohol are forbidden to be eaten by Muslims	295	-80.40%	72	-19.60%
Muslims are allowed to eat halal food that being served in worship rituals	284	-77.40%	83	-22.60%
Muslims are forbidden to eat food that uses alcohol as one of its ingredient	333	-90.70%	34	-9.30%
Muslims are encouraged to eat at food premises that serve alcohol	343	-93.50%	24	-6.50%
Muslims are allowed to eat food that contains preservatives derived from animal fats that are not slaughtered in the name of Allah SWT	324	-88.30%	43	-11.70%
JAKIM and JAIN are the competent authorities that responsible in issuing the halal logos and certificates by Section 29 of the Trade Descriptions (Certification and Marking of Halal) Order 2011	288	-78.50%	79	-21.50%
Halal logo in Malaysia that is recognized by JAKIM is as below:	349	-95.10%	18	-4.90%






				
<p>JAKIM recognizes the halal logos from foreign countries as follows:</p> <div style="display: flex; flex-wrap: wrap; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> </div>	205	-55.90%	162	-44.10%
<p>Handling of food products that do not comply with the hygiene, sanitation and food safety requirement will cause the products' halal status to be suspended by JAKIM/JAIN</p>	312	-85.00%	55	-15.00%

Table 2. Knowledge on concept of halal food among respondents.

Knowledge on concept of halal food

As shown in Table 2, a majority of respondents knew the meaning of ‘halal’ (91.6%), ‘tayyib’ (81.7%) and ‘halal food’ (92.9%). They also realized that the definition of ‘halalan tayyiba’ were false (71.4%). In Islam, pork, blood, carrion, animals that are not slaughtered by the name of Allah SWT and alcohol are unlawful to be consumed by Muslims. In the present study, 80.4% of respondents were well-aware of this matter. They also knew that Muslims are neither allowed to consume food that uses alcohol as one of its ingredient (90.7%) nor to eat at food premises that serve alcohol (93.5%). Most of the respondents were aware that Muslims are forbidden to eat food that contains preservatives derived from animal fats that are not slaughtered in the name of Allah SWT (88.3%).

JAKIM is the qualified authority to issue the halal logos and certificates as stated by the Trade Descriptions (Certification and Marking of Halal) Order 2011. Most of the respondents (78.5%)

in this study were aware of this law (Table 2). A majority of them also knew that the handling of food products that do not adhere to the requirement of hygiene, sanitation and food safety will cause the halal status of products to be terminated by JAKIM (85.0%). The respondents were well-informed of the halal logo in Malaysia that is recognized by JAKIM (95.1%). However, the halal logos from abroad that are accepted by JAKIM were only aware by 55.9% of respondents.

Overall, most of the respondents have a good level of knowledge regarding the concept of halal status as more than 71% of them have provided positive feedbacks (Table 2). This situation is expected following the high education background of respondents. However, in terms of foreign halal logo in Malaysia, almost half (44.1%) of respondents were not aware of this matter. The present study also evaluated the association of respondents’ demographic profile and knowledge on concept of halal food. As presented in Table 3, states of origin, discipline areas and year of study were the factors that are significantly associated with knowledge ($p < 0.05$).

Characteristics		Knowledge on concept of halal food		p-value
		Median		
Gender				0.21
Male	n=85	13		
Female	n=282	13		
States of origin				0.03*
Peninsular Malaysia	n=203	13		
Sabah/Sarawak	n=164	13		
Residing areas				0.25
Urban	n=191	13		
Rural	n=176	13		
Discipline areas				0.02*
Science	n=157	13		
Social science	n=210	13		
Year of study				0.02*
First	n=137	13		
Second	n=111	13		
Third	n=65	13		
Fourth	n=54	13.5		
*Values are significantly different between groups in each demographic at p<0.05.				

Table 3. Association between demographic profile and knowledge on concept of halal food among respondent.

Attitudes on choosing halal food

Table 4 shows the attitudes of respondents on choosing halal food products and premises. A majority of respondents made halal logo as their main criteria when purchasing food products (81.5%). They made priority towards the halal-labelled food products (82.6%). JAKIM-halal-labelled food products were their chief choices (76.6%). The respondents felt very convince to purchase food products with valid halal status (78.7%). Choosing halal and quality (good) food is indeed demanded in Islam as Allah SWT said in Quran, “... and He makes lawful for them the good things and prohibits for them the evil...” (7:157).

However, a few respondents were highly sceptical of food products with halal logo other than JAKIM halal logo (17.7%) (Table 4). Some of them were found to be on the fence; they were neither convinced nor suspicious of food products with foreign halal logo (28.9%). This might be due to the respondents’ unfamiliarity of halal logos from overseas that recognized by JAKIM. Yet, 64.9% of respondents have revealed positive

attitudes on choosing halal food products following their avoidance of food products without halal logo.

In terms of food premises, most of the respondents strongly agreed that halal status of premises is their main criteria when making selection (76.8%) (Table 4). They avoided food premises that serve alcohol or pork (85.6%) because it did not comply with the Islamic dietary guidelines. Most of them felt very certain to choose food premises that exhibit their halal certificates (73.0%). They also have shown positive attitudes in choosing halal food premises following their ban of food premises that did not exhibit their halal certificates (62.1%).

The present study also examined the association between respondents’ demographic profile and attitudes on choosing halal food. As expressed in Table 5, year of study was significantly associated with the respondents’ attitudes (p<0.05). The second year students achieved the highest median scores, 4.70, of attitudes on choosing halal food compared to others. Overall, the respondents in this study have positive attitudes on choosing halal food products and premises. In Islam, the Muslims are indeed convinced to consume only halal food because it is deeply related with their faith and well-being [14,15].

Questions	Scale ^δ , N (%)				
	1	2	3	4	5

Food products					
Logo halal is my main criterion when purchasing food products	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.3%)	10 (2.7%)	57 (15.5%)	299 (81.5%)
Food products with halal logo are important to me	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (2.5%)	55 (15.0%)	303 (82.6%)
Food products with JAKIM halal logo are my main choice	1 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)	21 (5.7%)	64 (17.4%)	281 (76.6%)
Food products with halal logo other than JAKIM halal logo never doubt me	65 (17.7%)	106 (28.9%)	106 (28.9%)	60 (16.3%)	30 (8.2%)
Food products without halal logo will be avoided by me	14 (3.8%)	2 (0.5%)	23 (6.3%)	90 (24.5%)	238 (64.9%)
Food products with valid halal status convince me to purchase it	0 (0.0%)	4 (1.1%)	11 (3.0%)	63 (17.2%)	289 (78.7%)
Food premises					
Halal certification is my main criterion when choosing food premises	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	13 (3.5%)	72 (19.6%)	282 (76.8%)
Food premises that serve alcohol or pork will be avoided by me because it is discouraged in Islam	10 (2.7%)	0 (0.0%)	14 (3.8%)	29 (7.9%)	314 (85.6%)
Food premises that do not show their halal certificates will be avoided by me	4 (1.1%)	2 (0.5%)	39 (10.6%)	94 (25.6%)	228 (62.1%)
Food premises that exhibit their halal certificates convince me to choose it	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.3%)	19 (5.2%)	79 (21.5%)	268 (73.0%)
5-point Likert scale: 1: strongly disagree; 2: disagree; 3: neutral; 4: agree; 5: strongly agree.					

Table 4. Attitudes on choosing halal food products and premises among respondents.

Relationship between knowledge and attitudes on practices of choosing halal food

The present study found that there was no association between the respondents' knowledge on halal food concept and practices of choosing halal food ($r=0.04$, $p>0.05$). This finding proves that the practices showed by Muslim students regarding selection of halal food products or premises are not related to their level of knowledge. If a Muslim student has a good foundation on the concept of halal food, his/her practices in daily life does not necessarily comply with the Islamic dietary guidelines.

In relation to attitudes on choosing halal food, the results showed that there was a significant association between attitudes and practices of respondents ($r=0.73$, $p<0.05$). This finding manifests that if the respondent has a positive attitudes on choosing halal food, he/she will have a good practices regarding this matter. For example, if the person only concerns with halal status of products or premises, then, only the halal options will be selected. In this study, it is evident that the attitudes of a Muslim student on choosing halal food products or premises will obviously influence his/her practices.

Characteristics		Attitudes choosing food on halal	p-value
		Median	
Gender			0.1
Male	n=85	4.5	
Female	n=282	4.6	
States of origin			0.84
Peninsular Malaysia	n=203	4.6	
Sabah/Sarawak	n=164	4.6	
Residing areas			0.95
Urban	n=191	4.6	
Rural	n=176	4.6	
Discipline areas			0.39

Science	n=157	4.5	
Social science	n=210	4.6	
Year of study			<0.01*
First	n=137	4.6	
Second	n=111	4.7	
Third	n=65	4.6	
Fourth	n=54	4.45	
*Values are significantly different between groups in each demographic at p<0.05.			

Table 5. Association between demographic profile and attitudes on choosing halal food among respondents.

Conclusion

The present study revealed that Muslim students in the main campus of UMS have good practices of choosing halal food products and premises. Their level of knowledge on the concept of halal food is evidently satisfactory. The students' attitudes regarding selection of halal food products and premises were also good. The practices showed by the students were found to be significantly related to their attitudes. Muslim students who are concerned with halal status of food products or premises will put it into practice during decision making of choosing halal products or premises in their daily life.

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