

Factors Influencing Intention to Purchase Halal Food Products Among Iranian Muslim Consumers

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Abstract: The growing global demand for halal food has led more countries, including non-Muslim countries to emerge and serve this potential market. Malaysia, as a Muslim country, intends to become a significant exporter of halal food and aspires to become a hub for halal food production. Demand for halal food has also continued to have an upward trend in the Malaysian market itself. Thus, the consumption behavior of Muslim consumers needs to be studied and the influencing factors on Muslim consumers' purchase intentions should be investigated. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to conceptually discuss potential factors (attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, knowledge, acculturation, religiosity, and trust) that influence the intention to purchase halal food among Iranian consumers in Malaysia. The data will be collected through the combination of convenience and snowball sampling by distributing self-administered questionnaires and web-based surveys to 380 Iranian respondents in Peninsular Malaysia. The proposed research model is based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) study of the relationship between intention to purchase halal food factor analysis was conducted to test the validity of the research instrument. The descriptive analysis was carried out using SPSS. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) through AMOS 23 was used to test the hypotheses of the study as well as for assessing the fitness of the conceptual model. The results of this study have significant implications for marketing managers by being able to

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offer better products through a deeper understanding of consumer intent to purchase and add to the body of knowledge, which benefits academia. In addition, this study is useful for relevant policymakers to modify current strategies including developing future strategies and initiatives to increase halal purchase intention by better understanding Muslim consumers' perception of halal food products.

1. Introduction

According to World Population Review (2021), in the 21st century, Muslim population is roughly 1.9 billion, and the number will come to the amount of 2.049 billion in 2030. In more liberal estimation, the value is anticipated to increase from 23 percent to roughly 30 percent of the total world population by 2030 (Grand View Research, 2018). With increasing the Muslim population, global halal market has become one of the fastest-growing business. With the boost in globalization of halal food, many international and non-Muslim businesses have entered the global halal market (Aqdas *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, in order to facilitate the companies and business within the halal food industry, it is beneficial to gain an understanding of the purchase behaviours of consumers in regard to halal food (Pari Ahadi, Fatemeh Saberian, 2019). In addition, the knowledge could help map the guidelines for managers for improvement, so that they could strategize better for their consumers (Khan, Hashim, Iqbal, Bhutto, & Mustafa, 2021).

To understand how consumers make decisions on purchasing and consuming halal food, determining the factors that have a positive effect on their purchase intention should be investigated. Consumer purchasing behaviour is influenced by many factors such as, attitude, subjective norm, religiosity and perceived behavioural control and many others (Mukhtar & Butt, 2012; Wacharajirasophon, 2016). A few determinants from the Theory of Planned behaviour (TPB) have been used in numerous research on consumer behaviour to examine dietary decisions and behavioural intention (Kim, Ham, Yang, & Choi, 2013). According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control influence behavioural intention (Ajzen, 2005). Ajzen (1991) proposed that applying TPB to other research subjects would extend and improve the theory. Conner (2015) proposed moderators and the addition of new factors as two potential strategies to expand the TPB. Hence, in this study some extended variables to the theory to better increase

the predicting power of theory, and they are subjective or perceived knowledge, religiosity, acculturation, and trust.

According to many scholars, religion is a fundamental component of human society and is connected to numerous aspects of a person's life and behaviour (Fulfillment & Shakona, 2013). Muslims use to adhere to their religious values, and they need to be highly involved with products they purchase to ensure conformity with their beliefs. They also require to take measures to ensure these products are compliant with their faith (Nuraini & Sucipto, 2021). However, the extent to which religion plays a role in food consumption is also determined by the religion's food prohibitions and what it means to individuals (Bonne *et al.*, 2007 & Tieman *et al.*, 2012). Muslims may differ in their level of intent to purchase halal food products. Furthermore, Iran is one of the Muslim countries wherein Islam is the religion of 99.4% of the population (90-95% of Iranians are Shi'ah and 5-10% are Sunni) (Eltally, 2019). As a nation, Iran has been very much influenced by the Persian culture that surrounded the country prior to the Islamic civilisation (Zamani-Farahani & Musa, 2012). Modern Iran not only reflects its Islamic faith and culture but also its long history influenced by ancient Persia (Baum & O'Gorman, 2010). Observations also indicate that Iranians have a strong attachment to their heritage and culture (Zamani- Farahani & Musa, 2012). Some argue that this makes Iranians having a higher level of Islamic beliefs but lower levels of Islamic practices. This has been clearly shown in the survey that has been conducted by Maliepaard and Gijsberts (2012) in Netherlands. The outcome reveals variations in religious practise adherence according to country of origin (see Table 1). Immigrants from Turkey, Morocco, and Somalia have a great commitment to this religious practise. The percentage of Iranian religious behaviour practices in Netherlands is lower than in other countries.

Table 1. Religious behavior among Muslim with different origin in the Netherlands

	Turkish (%)	Moroccan (%)	Afghan (%)	Iraqi (%)	Iranian (%)	Somali (%)
Visits a mosque at least once a week	42	44	13	10	5	36
Prays five times every day	27	76	23	38	15	69
Fasted all days during Ramadan	66	93	44	50	16	72
Eats halal every day	80	94	66	69	34	83

Adapted from SCP (Sim'11; Sing'09) in Maliepaard & Gijsberts (2012)

On the other hand, Malaysia and some Islamic countries, in which, there are established and widely received certification system that production of goods, whether made domestically or imported from abroad, must be in accordance with Islamic law. However, in Iran, the halal logo may not always be readily visible. In addition, it is unlawful to offer products that are prohibited by Islamic law in public places throughout cities of the country. As a result, people in Iran will no longer be in doubt that they can be able to purchase products just based on quality and specific brand without seeking for the halal logo. Moreover, the Ministry of Health and Medical Education of Iran (MOHME) as well as Iranian religious leaders will warn people not to use these products in the case of the entrance of any such products into the market. However, some studies which have been conducted on Iranian migrants' living in foreign countries shows that the push factors for them to migrate is that to reject the customs and beliefs that the Iranian government has forced upon them (Kamal & Hossain, 2017). Maliepaard (2012) states that Iranian adherence to the religious practice particularly in consumption of halal food in Netherlands is lower than in other countries. In addition, millions of tourists from the Muslim world visit Malaysia every year because it is a tourist-friendly country. About the actual number of Iranian diasporas in Malaysia, there are no credible official statistics available but according to Kamal & Hossain (2017) their estimated population is around 200,000. They have asserted that Iranian immigrants who reside in Malaysia are among the minority Muslims who favour an increasingly liberal Western way of life. Many female Iranians, particularly the younger generation, do not wear headscarves to cover their hair and are frequently seen dressed in Western attire. Shortly, their lifestyle confuses local Muslims who wonder if Iran is truly an Islamic state.

Moreover, regarding the influencing of religiosity on halal food purchase intention, most of the studies focus on Islam religion as a potential factor affecting on consumers intention behaviour while, the study result of consumer perception of halal products available on the Lebanese market (Farah, 2021) which has been examined across the two main Muslim sects, namely, Sunni and Shi'ah indicates the differences of trust in judgment of and willingness to buy foreign halal products and Muslim products among these two sects. This result and the lack of in-depth studies in moderating role of sect on Iranians' purchase behaviour led the researcher to conduct exclusively on invariance across the sect (Sunni & Shi'ah) as a prospective moderator regarding the effects of trust on intention to purchase halal food products among Iranian consumers. Hence, assessing the moderating of sect (Sunni & Shi'ah) on purchase intention of halal food among Iranian consumers will be the second contribution of the current study to feel the research gap.

In addition to religiosity, this study offers an opportunity to understand the influence of cultural factor on purchase behaviour, via acculturation, which is defined as “a process of adopting the cultural norms of the dominant group while maintaining their minority culture of origin and vice versa”(Ishak & Md Ramli, 2016). As Malaysian consumers in general are very sensitive and highly aware of the need to purchase halal certified products, therefore it is also significant to assess whether acculturation in Malaysian environment will result in changes in purchasing behaviour among Iranians in Malaysia. The finding also may help policymakers by providing further knowledge with insight into the factors affecting consumer intent of purchasing halal food in order to promote halal food products more effectively.

2. Literature Review

This section can be divided up into subheadings. This will provide a detailed and concise description of the experimental observations, their interpretation and the experimental conclusions which can be drawn.

2.1. Concept of Halal Food

The fundamental sources of guidance as stated in Islamic law, the English translation for the term Shari'ah, are the Holy Quran and the life of Prophet Muhammad (Sunnah). Muslim have to follow God's rules, as prescribed in the Quran and Sunnah, which are the central source of laws for what are permissible and prohibited for Muslims. These laws encompass of all rules that dictates all aspects in Muslim life including food consumption. In many communities, food plays a significant part in the social, cultural, and religious life. Muslims must adhere to the halal dietary code, which defines the standards that food must follow. Coined from an Arabic word, halal is a term in the Quran which implies “allowed, lawful, or permitted”; Meanwhile, haram is the opposite meaning of halal, i.e. prohibited (Al-Teinaz & Al-Mazeedi, 2020).

As halal principles are part of Islamic teachings, Individual Muslims must adhere to halal principles in their actions and products, particularly foods because Islam is the one of the strictest religions. As Islam provides comprehensive guidelines regarding what can be consumed, Muslims are required to comply with this guideline of dietary and consume only what are halal. The source of food and drinks including the entire process during acquisition, preparation, etc. must be Shari'ah compliant. It is clear that the concept of halal food comes together with spiritual faith as a command from Allah (s.w.t.). It is also related to reward and penalty in the hereafter. Thus, Muslims must adhere to a set of Islamic dietary guidelines

(halal food) (Elseidi, 2018), by avoiding what are prohibited in Islam. These include liquor, pork, dead meat, blood, and meat of animals that are not slaughtered in the name of Allah. Anything that is not stated as haram is halal for Muslims. Even though the list of haram is very short, it has considerably influenced Muslim consumption behaviours (Bonne *et al.*, 2007; Mukhtar & Butt, 2012).

2.2 Halal Market

As Islam is the fastest-growing religion on earth, the global halal marketplace offer profitable market and huge opportunities for food manufacturers to tap (Shah Alam & Mohamed Sayuti, 2011). The Global Islamic Report approved total the approximate value of global food spending is expected to reach US\$ 1,303 billion in 2023 and rise by US\$ 1,863 billion (Nuraini & Sucipto, 2021). With this large number of Muslims and the huge value of the halal food market, it has attracted food producers to tap in this outstanding opportunity (Rios, Riquelme, & Abdelaziz, 2014). Apparently, halal is gaining global recognition and has been widely accepted. It is not solely a religious matter for some, but halal has become the way of doing business and the standard of choice (Mahir Pradana, 2021). Many companies in the world are trying to obtain an authentic halal certification to expand their market and gain consumer confidence and trust. This allows the companies to access the privilege market (Rios *et al.*, 2014). Marketers can utilize the benefits of halal certificate which help gain trust of target consumers and ultimately the certificate can turn into an added value. On the other hand, consumers also gain benefit through assurance that product they consume are indeed halal (Wacharajirasophon, 2016).

2.3 Malaysia Halal Industry

Market opportunities offered by halal sector are huge, and many countries are trying to tap into the market one of the most important various economic generators, Malaysia is not an exception. Malaysia contribution of global halal market is around US\$10 billion (RM41 billion). It is because halal food products are the main consumption in Malaysia, where Muslims are the majority population. As the majority of the population, Muslims have a substantial purchasing power, and this has an effect on the national demand for halal foods (Aliff *et al.* 2015). As stated in the Third Industrial Master Plan (IMP3), Malaysian government is committed in making Malaysia the global halal hub. Government efforts and initiatives in achieving this aim have officially started since 2006, yet there is much to do in making Malaysian Muslim consumers more aware of what they eat, drink and use pertaining to Shari'ah compliance (Ambali & Bakar, 2013). The goal of HDC (Halal Development

Corporation Berhad) is due to its unique position in terms of halal, Malaysia is the only country with a government agency like the Islamic Department of Malaysia, also known as Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM), which is responsible for looking into matters relating to halal issues such as restaurants, shops, and factories. Malaysia also is a market leader in halal food, with one halal standard applied throughout the country, indicating a successful halal model in Malaysia (Mohamed, Rahman, & Rahim, 2020).

The Malaysian government do not perceive halal merely from the religion aspect, but It set halal as an ambitious goal of making halal industry of Malaysia as a model for other countries (Aliff *et al.*, 2015). This has led to establishment halal ecosystem which include Malaysian halal standard (i.e., MS 1500: 2019), certification and management system. Muslim consumers in Malaysia generally prefer for the JAKIM's official halal certification or logo, which is regulated by the Ministry in the Prime Minister's Department (Shafie & Othman, 2009). Due to Malaysia's multicultural background, not all local companies include the term "Islamic" on their product's packaging or labelling. But for the Muslim community, halal food is one of the most important aspects (Syed & Nazura, 2011). Food products that have received a halal certification, issued by JAKIM, are widely accepted by both Muslim consumers and non-Muslim consumers in Malaysia.

2.4 Consumer Intention

2.4.1. Definition

Intentions are functionally specifiable mental states under the study of psychology (Adams & Mele, 1989). Ajzen (1985) defines intention as "a mental state which precedes action". According to the author, intention is the nature of behavior that will be carried out given suitable opportunity and time. Intention is also a motivation factor that influences behavior and is associated with a plan to execute the behavior. The stronger the intention the higher the tendency to express the behaviors (Ajzen, 1991a). In addition, Martins (2018) stated that intention to purchase denotes the likelihood that consumers will plan or be willing to purchase a specific product or service in the future. An increase in purchase intent indicates an increase in the likelihood of purchasing.

Furthermore, In marketing literature, intention is an important characteristic that businesses use to forecast sales of new products or repeat purchases of current products (Diallo, 2012). Intention could also predict the consumers trend to buy goods or services and whether they will share their purchase experience with friends and family (Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000).

Specifically, purchase intention is the preference of consumer to buy a product or service (Younus, Rasheed, & Zia, 2015).

2.4.2 Theories application in consumer intention studies

Researchers such as Ajzen & Fishbein (1970) and Vermeir & Verbeke (2006) contend that consumer intention is influenced by their psychosocial variables such as attitude, subjective norm, and belief. Ultimately, there are many studies that investigate consumer intention using theories such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein, 1979; Vernon Thomas Sarver, 1983), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991a), the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989), the Theory of Diffusion of Innovations (DIT) (Rogers, 1995), and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). The current study focuses on the Theory of Reasoned Action and its extension, the Theory of Planned Behavior.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) suggests that intention is the best predictor of whether or not a person actually performs a certain behavior or action (Heller, 2013). In particular, the stronger the intention to perform a behavior, the more likely a person will perform the actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991b). In the TRA, intentions are predicted by two variables which are attitudes and subjective norm. Particularly, people are more likely to plan to perform a particular behavior or action if they have a positive attitude toward it and believe it to be important in terms of their subjective norm (friends, family, coworkers, culture) (Heller, 2013).

In 1985, Azjen proposed one variable that extended the TRA model, which is known now as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). He mentioned that a behavioral intention can only be converted to actual behavior if the behavior or action is under volitional control, that is, the person can freely decide to engage in the behavior or not. The general rule for the TPB model indicates that an individual's intention to perform a certain action or behavior is influenced by three variables: attitude toward the particular behavior, subjective norm, and the perceived behavioral control which all these three variables act as an antecedent leading toward the formation of behavioral intention, and ultimately, the behavior. In the field of consumer marketing, the TPB model has been adapted to understand consumer behavior (Ariff, Latiff, Rezai, & Mohamed, n.d.). It has also been applied in the study about consumer willingness to purchase organic and halal food in Malaysia.

2.5 Previous Studies in Consumer Intention to Purchase Halal Products

Various study has been conducted exploring a range of different halal matter. Some are relevant to the marketing effects of halal food certification (Aziz, 2015) while others relate to halal supply chain and logistics (Kadir, Rasi, Omar, & Manap, 2016; Tieman, Che, Jack, Tieman, & Ghazali, 2013) as well as consumer intention. One of the earliest study in consumer intention is conducted by Bonne *et al.* (2007) who studied intention to consume halal meat in France. Over the years, researchers have started to focus on purchase intention related to halal product and services. The scopes of study include halal food, cosmetics, meat, halal products, halal finance, halal pharmaceutical, Muslim made products and retail store. Fatmi, Ahmad, & Kartika (2020) have reviewed multiple articles related to halal purchase intention and found that most studies were conducted in halal food context. For instance, Alam and Sayuti (2011) investigated attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control as predictors of Malaysian consumers' intention to purchase halal food. The findings indicate significant influence of attitude and subjective norm on consumer intention. Perceived behavioral control however does not provide a critical influence in purchase intention.

Additionally, a study on Muslims' purchase behavior of halal cosmetic products also found that attitude, perceived behavioral control, and religiosity had significant relationships with purchase intention (Haque, Chowdhury, & Tarofder, 2018). Abu-Hussin *et al.* (2017) found that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control have an influence on intention to purchase halal-certified products among the Muslim minority in Singapore.

Furthermore, Omar, Rodzi, Talib, and Noor (2019) Siti Nazirah *et al.* (2019) highlighted the relationship between three factors, namely attitude, subjective norm, and customers knowledge towards their intention to purchase halal collagen beauty drinks in Malaysia. The results of the multi-model comparison study showed that knowledge has an indirect effect on subjective norm as well as a partial mediation effect on attitude. As a result, a high level of halal status knowledge will contribute to more positive attitudes and improve subjective norm that will influence Muslim customers' purchase decisions. In addition, they also found that customer attitudes toward Muslim collagen beauty drink manufacturers and the halal logo have a significant impact on their purchasing intentions (Omar *et al.*, 2019).

There are also few studies that were conducted in Indonesia. Vanany, Soon, & Maryani (2019) have examined the affecting factors on consumers' halal-food consumption in Indonesia. Findings from this study provided evidence of significant effect of attitude,

religious self-identity, and moral obligations on halal-food consumption among consumers. Additionally, religious commitment had a positive effect on attitude and religious self-identity and had a positive moderating effect on the relationship between perceived behavioral control and willing to pay (Iranmanesh, Mirzaei, Mehrshad, Hosseini, & Zailani, 2019).

2.6 Determinants of Consumer Intention to Purchase Halal Food

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) describes how behavior is influenced by behavioral intention, in which intention is influenced by attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. However, this study modifies the theory to focus on consumer intention by extension of other factors to the theory. The extension of the theory should be appropriate for halal food related study by which religiosity, knowledge, trust, and acculturation would be included as predictors with the expectation to provide a greater variance. TPB will be developed by testing the mediating of trust and moderating of sect (Sunni & Shi'ah) in the affecting factors on halal food purchase intention among Iranian consumers. Each determinant of Iranian consumers' decision to purchase halal food in Malaysia will be discussed below and the hypotheses provided accordingly.

2.6.1 Attitude

There are various definitions trying to outline the concept of attitudes placing importance on several aspects. According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1970), a person's attitude refers to individual's positive or negative assessment of their behavioural performance. Muhamad (2018) refers to attitude as a function of belief, which could be both positive and negative perception toward objects. Attitude definition by Eagly & Chaiken (1993) perhaps is the most comprehensive. They define attitude as "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour". There are three key features of attitude in this definition, (1) tendency, (2) entity and (3) evaluation (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

Consumer purchase intention has been found to be predicted by attitude, particularly in the context of food. In addition, Alam and Sayuti, (2011) and Garg and Joshi (2018) found that attitude has a strong impact on consumer purchase intention, and that consumers with a stronger positive attitude will have a stronger intent to purchase halal food. The positive relationship between attitude and intention to purchase halal food products was supported by multiple other studies, such as Bashir *et al.* (2019) and Pradana *et al.* (2020). Moreover, attitude has been found to be a predictor of consumers' intention to purchase non-food

products that are halal. For instance, the finding of the research which has been conducted in Indonesia shows the strong association between positive attitude of Muslim women in Indonesia with intention to purchase halal cosmetic products (Made, Clarita, Zimbalist, & Setiowati, 2020). Based on these findings, the current study hypothesises that Muslim consumers who have a positive attitude toward halal food will be more likely to purchase halal foods.

H1: Consumers intention to purchase halal food among Iranian in Malaysia is positively influenced by attitude.

2.6.2 Subjective norm

Ajzen and Driver (1992) defined a subjective norm as a social factor in nature. Additionally, subjective norm is defined as “an individual’s perception that most people who are significant to him or her think he or she should or should not perform the behaviour in question”(Jennings & Seaman, 1988; Miniard & Cohen, 1981; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 302). Subjective norm is known as a person’s awareness of social pressure to engage in the behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1970; Donald *et al.*, (2014) ; Paul *et al.*, (2016); Bukhari *et al.*, (2020)). Mukhtar and Butt (2012) defined Subjective norm as an assessment of important referents to encourage or discourage people from buying halal food. In fact, the extent to which a person believes that consuming halal food is the norm for those who are significant to them is known as a subjective norm.

There are various of studies that found subjective norm as a significant predictor of whether someone will purchase halal food or halal food products (Pratiwi, 2018; Rachbini1, 2018). In addition, Mukhtar and Butt (2012) discovered that subjective norm is a key factor in choosing halal products. Based on the aforementioned earlier studies, the current study hypothesizes that the higher the level of subjective norm, the higher purchase intention of halal foods on the part of the consumer. In this study the following hypothesis is developed:

H2: Consumers purchase intention of halal food among Iranian in Malaysia is positively influenced by subjective norm.

2.6.3 Perceived behavioral control

People's perceptions of their ability to perform a given behavior are referred to as perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 2013). Similarly, to this, Aitken *et al.* (2020) stated that perceived behavioral control refers to the degree of control that an individual perceives over performing the behavior. Moreover, Alam and Sayuti (2011) defined perceived behavioral control as the

feeling of being in control or confidence to perform a behavior. As a result, those who perceive a greater level of personal control have a stronger behavioral intention to engage in a particular behavior (Ajzen, 1991). As a matter of fact, when people believe they have more resources, such as time, money, and skills, their perceptions of control increase, as do their behavioral intentions.

Perceived behavioural control has been found to be positively related to the intention to purchase halal food products (Bashir, 2020; Rachbini, 2018). As a result, the current study hypothesised that individuals who believe consuming halal food is a simple task will be more likely to purchase halal products than those who believe purchasing halal food is a difficult task. This discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

H3: Consumers purchase intention of halal food among Iranian in Malaysia is positively influenced by Perceived Behavioural Control.

2.6.4 Religiosity

Due to the diversity of religious believers' perspectives on their beliefs and practises, religion has been defined variously in previous studies (Wang *et al.* (2020). Many uses definition by Worthington *et al.* (2003): 'religiosity is the degree in which an individual adheres to his or her religious values, beliefs, and practices, and uses these in daily living'. Religious belief has a significant impact on consumer behaviour due to the regulations and prohibitions it sets. Furthermore, religiosity represents an inherent human value which tends to be stable over a fairly long period. An in-depth insight into how religion affects behaviour would be essential to understand consumer choice in a particular context. Many elements of religiosity are observable, and therefore religiosity is regarded as a pragmatic value to marketers (Delener, 1994).

In addition, review of the existing literature found that religiosity is commonly investigated as an antecedent of behavioral intention. In various studies, such as by Ali *et al.* (2018), Elseidi (2018) and Amalia *et al.* (2020), it was found that religiosity significantly affects the behavior of Muslim consumers. It is noted that religiosity has either a positive or a negative influence on the purchasing intention of the different product types-positive influence on religious-related products and either a positive or a negative impact on non-religious related products (Wacharajirasophon, 2016). To be more specific to halal products, a certain study reveals that personal religiosity positively influences the intention to purchase halal products among Pakistani consumers (Mukhtar and Butt, 2012). Especially in the context of halal food, it is understandable that religious belief would influence Muslims to

purchase halal food products (Wacharajirasophon, 2016). In other words, dietary practices can reflect the level of religiosity level. This implies that different levels of religiosity result in various behaviours. Individuals with a high commitment to Islam are expected to have a higher intention to buy halal food despite having a different decision-making style (Syukur and Nimsai, 2018; Usman, 2021). based on the above literature regarding halal food, it is clear that religiosity is adopted as an independent variable. Thus, this study will investigate religiosity as an independent variable to predict consumer intention to purchase halal food among Iranian consumers in Malaysia. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H4: Consumers purchase intention of halal food among Iranian in Malaysia is positively influenced by religiosity.

2.6.5 Trust

Regardless of the ability to observe or having control over the other party, trust is described as the commitment of a group to be exposed to the acts of another group in the expectation that they would take some action that is essential to the trustor (Mayer, Davis, Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2011). According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), trust refers to believing that the entrusted party will not cause harm to the trustor and that negative consequences will not occur.

The importance of consumer trust on consumer intention has been illustrated in multiple studies, in multiple context. Ramon and Eva (2014) investigate the impact of trust on consumer intention to choose a cruise line. The result indicates that the consumers' perception of trust directly and positively influences the consumer intention. Trust also has been extensively investigated as a strategic factor in online transactions due to unique online features of anonymity, lack of control, and uncertainty Liu, Brock, Shi, Chu, and Tseng (2013). Regarding the purchase intention of halal food product, Abdul and Hashim, (2009) conducted a study to investigate Muslim consumers' purchasing decisions for halal food in Malaysia. They identified trust and confidence as the most important factors while choosing halal food. The customer also wanted confirmation that the food was halal, the selling point was halal, and that the halal label/logo persuaded the customer that the food was suitable for consumption by Muslims. Similar results were published by Ali *et al.* (2012) using a Malaysian Muslim sample. They discovered that positive perceptions of the halal logo were connected with food purity, safety, and then cleanliness (Ali *et al.*, 2017).

Based on the literature above a postulated hypothesis 5 is as follows:

H5: Consumers purchase intention of halal food among Iranian in Malaysia is positively influenced by trust.

2.6.6 Knowledge

Knowledge means “the expertise and skills acquired by a person or a group of people through theoretical or practical understanding of a subject” (Ahmat *et al.*, 2011; Maimone & Sinclair, 2010). Knowledge may also reflect the facts, feelings, or experiences that an individual knows. This is the reason knowledge sometimes is commonly interpreted as awareness, consciousness or familiarity, which could be gained by experience or learning (Cavorzin & Rennes-beaulieu, 2014). The literal meaning of “awareness” in the halal context is to have a special interest in or experience of something and/or be well informed of what is happening at the present time in halal food, drinks and products (Ambali & Bakar, 2013). This means that halal food awareness is related to the concepts of “knowledge” and “watchfulness”. Halal knowledge on the other hand expresses the individuals understanding of religious orders regarding the lawful and the prohibited. In the context of Muslim consumers, Hakimi *et al.* (2018) as well as Daud (1989) argue that Muslims who have knowledge are God-fearing, and thus tend to follow the principles of Islam. Increment in their knowledge would influence the consumption pattern, the knowledge guide Muslim consumption behavior to remain faithful to their religious requirements.

Furthermore, according to Utami (2020) an individual knowledge of a product frequently precedes their intention to purchase it. This knowledge also influences their attitude about the product, and hence their purchase intention. Understanding what products that could be consumed and how the production is carried out are examples of knowledge (Vizano, Khamaludin, & Fahlevi, 2021). Knowledge has a key role in influencing consumer behaviour, especially when it comes to halal food Ahmad *et al.* (2015). Muslim are more particular about the foods they choose and eat (Tongsiri & Pimpimol, 2019). Maichum, Parichatnon, and Peng (2017) stated that to be able to choose halal food, consumers must be well-informed and have enough knowledge. In view of that, the finding of previous studies showed a positive significant direction, indicating halal food knowledge exert significantly influence on consumers' purchase intention of halal products (Billah *et al.*, 2020; Purwanto *et al.*, 2021). Religious consumers may be more knowledgeable about a product's religious requirements. They may put more effort into their purchase's evaluation, such as avoiding prohibited items. It means that consumer intentions to purchase halal products are positively influenced by their knowledge (Nurhayati & Hendar, 2020).

Based on the findings from the literature above, we propose hypothesis 6 is as follows:

H6: Consumers purchase intention of halal food among Iranian in Malaysia is positively influenced by perceived knowledge.

2.6.7 Acculturation

Acculturation refers to “a process of result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield *et al.*, 1936). In simple word, it reflects the process in which individuals attain the culture of other society, which could be the host countries. Acculturation involves the psychosocial adaptation of consumers from one culture to another, and this result in changes of individual values, expectations, beliefs (Johnson, 2011) and behaviour (Wamwara-Mbugua, Cornwell, & Boller, 2008). Acculturation plays an important part in shaping consumption behaviours, which include purchasing intention and behavior. Research has shown that highly acculturated consumers tend to make choices that are comparable to those made by consumers of the host country (Quester & Chong, 2001).

While acculturation could have negative consequences for halal purchase intention and behavior of Muslim in the non-Muslim host culture. In the study conducted in France, it was found that the less acculturated a person is with France’s dietary, the more he or she intends to purchase halal meat. Less accultured individual in this study also tend to place more importance on halal meat consumption (Bonne *et al.*, 2007). In Malaysia, a few studies have been conducted to study acculturation impact on halal purchase intention (Lim *et al.*, 2020; Wibowo & Ahmad, 2016). A recent study has shown that intention to purchase halal food products amongst non-Muslim consumers in Malaysia is moderated by the acculturation effect. Multiple researches has found out that Malaysian Muslim consumers are highly aware of the need to purchase halal certified food products (Fischer, 2015). To the extent these Muslim consumers would not accept and consume food products which are not certified as halal by the trusted halal authorities (Ishak & Md Ramli, 2016). In fact, halal food certification has been institutionalize and normalized in the Malaysian society (Halawa, 2018). The current study aim to investigate whether the Intention of Iranian Muslim consumers to purchase halal food products will be affected by Malaysian culture. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Intention to purchase halal food products among Iranian in Malaysia is positively influenced by their degree of acculturation in Malaysian environment.

2.6.8 Mediation of trust

The mediating effects of a particular aspect on purchasing intentions have been extensively researched. Previous research revealed that the ability of trust to mediate is a topic that researchers are very interested in. Some studies have confirmed the mediating of trust in consumers purchase intention. For instance, the findings study of Hong & Cha (2013) have demonstrated that even though there is a relationship between perceived risk and purchase intent that is negative, consumer trust in an online merchant also mediates this relationship. As a result, one possible effort made by online merchants to reduce certain types of risk is to first increase consumer trust, and then ultimately increase the consumer's intention to purchase online (Hong & Cha, 2013). Borzooei and Asgari (2013) in the study of the halal brand personality and its effect on purchase intention, tested the mediation of trust. Through the moderation effect of religious commitment, they revealed the influence of halal brand personality on trust and purchase intention. They stated that brand trust is an essential component of the consumer-brand relationship. Trust contributes to the long-term success of brands and consumers by providing significant benefits.

Hence, this study was conducted to determine the role of mediating variable of trust in developing positive consumer attitude, subjective norm, religiosity, perceived behavioural control, knowledge, acculturation, and intention to purchase halal food product among Iranian in Malaysia to better explain variables that determine intentions to purchase.

H8: Consumers purchase intention of halal food among Iranian in Malaysia is positively influenced by mediating of trust.

2.6.9 Moderation of sect (Sunni and Shi'ah)

The modifications to expand the original theory of planned behaviour (TPB) can enhance our capacity to forecast human behaviour in a variety of circumstances. In the context of halal food, various research investigated into the moderating effects of different variables in the TPB framework. The most notable variables examined were , religiosity (Elseidi, 2018; Muslichah, Abdullah, & Abdul Razak, 2019), gender (Amalia *et al.*, 2020), and cultural dimension (Ali *et al.*, 2020). The finding results of these studies demonstrated that the moderating variables could increase the link between the variables within the TPB framework. Moderating of sect was empirically investigated by Farah (2021) between the effective variables and the consumer intention to purchase a Muslim versus a foreign halal product available on the Lebanese market. This study shows that depending on the country of origin, consumers from these two sects (Sunni and Shi'ah) have different views about halal

food products. Shi'ah customers generally distrust foreign halal products and favour local products, in contrast to Sunni consumers, who have positive attitudes toward both domestic and imported halal food products. This is partly due to the differences in halal rules and definitions between the two sects.

However, the researcher did not find any other studies on the role of Sect as a moderator in the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables. Thus, to close a knowledge gap, the current research tested the moderation of Sect on the relationship between attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, knowledge, religiosity, and intention by conducting the multiple group analysis (MGA) and the following hypothesis is proposed:

H9: Consumers purchase intention of halal food among Iranian in Malaysia is positively influenced by moderating of sect.

2.6.9 Conceptual framework

based on previous research findings, this study modifies the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) model into a conceptual model to understand how consumer intention is developed and to exclusively predict Iranian consumers' intention to purchase halal food in Malaysia. The model would comprise six variables in which attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, religiosity, knowledge, and acculturation as independent variables, and trust (mediator) and consumer intention as dependent variable by including sect as a moderator (as shown in Figure 1).

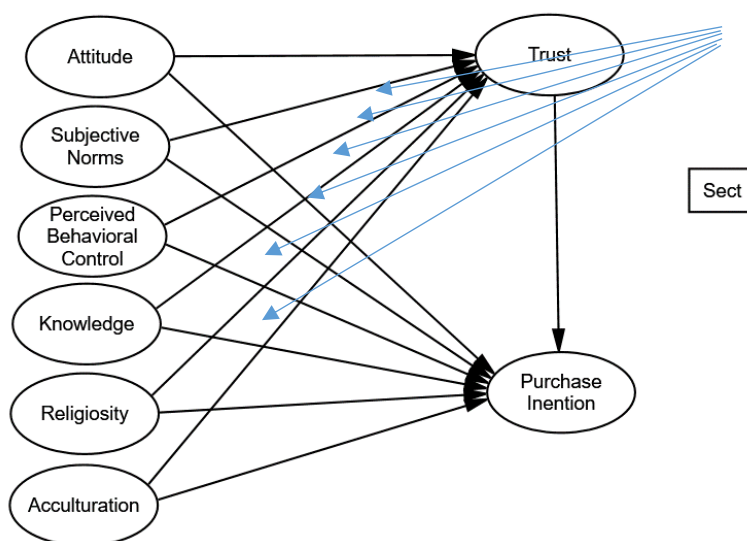


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the intention to purchase halal food among Iranian Muslim consumers in

3. Materials and Methods

A quantitative method will be applied to identify the association between variables proposed. The data required for the study will be gathered through the distribution of self-administered questionnaires and online survey. The survey questionnaire is structured into two main sections. The first section is respondents' background profile which includes attributes such as gender, age, educational level and respondents' sect (Suuni and Shiah). The second section contains questionnaire items for attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, religiosity, knowledge, acculturation, trust, and intention to purchase halal food products. The questions are adapted from previous research in accordance with the existing literature and all items are based on a 5-point Likert scale. In total 50 items will be used for the construct items representing eight different variables. 6 items from Ajzen (2013) and Al-shaabani and Nguyen (2014) will be used for attitude. For subjective norm 6 items will be used from Ajzen (2013) and Wacharajirasophon (2016). 7 questionnaire items for perceived behavioural control and 6 items for intention to purchase halal food will be adapted from Ajzen (2013) and Cooper (2016). For knowledge, 7 items will be used from Omar (2018) and Salehudin (2013). From Teng and Wang (2015) and Wacharajirasophon (2016) will be adapted for trust. For religiosity 6 items will be used from Wacharajirasophon (2016) and finally, from Kizgin, Jamal, Dwivedi, and Rana (2020) and Stephenson (2000), 6 items will be adapted for acculturation. Expert review and pre-test will be conducted by the researcher's supervisor, co-supervisors, and some other perfectional lecturers who will be as the internal reviewers of this research instruments. The initial questionnaire statements will be modified based on the feedback and recommendations. After that, the research instrument will be sent for language proofing to ensure that it reflects the researcher's messages to the respondents.

The target population for this study is Iranian Muslim consumers in Malaysia. This study uses a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected due to their easy accessibility (Explorable.com, 2009; Hair *et al.* 2009). Given the difficulty of reaching the target population, combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling method will be adopted by the researcher to obtain quantitative data. Convenience sampling helps researchers to gather the required data from a large number of respondents, in a comparatively short span of time (Hair *et al.*, 2009) in an efficient manner (Sekaran, 2003) and the least expensive as well (Malhotra, 2007), compared to other sampling methods. Data will be distributed through the self-administered questionnaires and web-based survey Iranian respondents in the Peninsular Malaysia. According to Hair, Anderson, Black, and Babin (2016), a minimum of 150 sample size is required for a model of seven constructs or less,

300-sample size is required for a model with seven or more constructs, and a 500-sample size is required for a model with larger constructs. Since this study has generated eight constructs based on the developed questionnaire, 300 sample size is needed for this study.

After the data collection complete, various analytical techniques such as missing data analysis, normality test, and CMB will be used through the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 26) to carrying out the descriptive and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). For verifying the path relationships of independent and dependent variables, the analyses followed by SEM. For confirmatory analysis, mediation test and multigroup analysis, Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS 23) will be used. Measurement model will be tested, and analysis will be completed by testing the structural model and verifying the hypotheses. Furthermore, the reliability and validity tests will be performed to determine whether the measures accurately represented the constructs. By so doing, the behavior of Iranian consumers in Malaysia will be revealed and recommendations will be offered.

4. Conclusions

According to the literature, in order for a destination to develop effective strategies for the global halal market, reliable information about Muslim consumers' behaviors must be obtained and analyzed. For this purpose, the current study recommends several key factors that may influence the intention to purchase halal food products among Iranian Muslim consumers in Malaysia. Understanding these factors could help the marketing managers by being able to offer the better products through deeper understanding of consumer intent to purchase and add to the body of knowledge, which benefits academia. In addition, this study is useful for relevant policy makers to modify current strategies including developing of future strategies and initiatives to increase halal purchase intention by better understanding Muslim consumers' perception of halal food products. The Theory of Planned Behavior was used as a foundation for testing the factors. As a result, this research proposed a model to strengthen and extend the theory of planned behavior and the findings of this study may have important applications for future study.

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