E-B
Environment - Behaviour
Proceedings Journal

ABRIC2024Penang
https://fbm.uitm.edu.my/abric/

e-IPH
e-International
Publishing House Ltd.,
United Kingdom

The 6th Advances in Business Research International Conference 2024
DoubleTree Resort by Hilton Penang, Batu Ferringhi, Penang, Malaysia, 30 May 2024
Organised by: Faculty of Business and Management, UiTM Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Does Consumers' Propensity towards Halal Organic Food Purchase Matter? Malaysian evidence

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Abstract
Demands for Halal (or permissible) organic products have been increasingly emerging in recent times. This study aims to investigate the consumers' propensity to purchase halal organic food products in Malaysia. Specifically, it examines whether halal awareness, attitude, social influences, brand trust, product safety, and promotion affect purchase intentions. Using a non-probability sampling technique, 250 online survey questionnaires were distributed to targeted respondents, yielding 200 usable responses. Data were analysed using Smart PLS (version 4.0) statistical software. The findings revealed that attitude and social influence significantly impact consumers' willingness to purchase halal organic food products. The study further discusses managerial implications.

Keywords: Intention, Halal Organic Food, Attitude, Social Influences, Perceived Behavioural Control, Sustainability

1.0 Introduction
Concerns about conventional agricultural practices, food safety, human health, animal welfare, and the environment have contributed to the increased global interest in organically produced products. In a progressively developing nation such as Malaysia, its population has gradually become distinctive in addressing health and well-being issues. The demand for organic food products is expanding rapidly, leading to an escalated awareness of healthy lifestyle practices (Bahrainizad & Abedini, 2023; Pang et al., 2021). Consumers believe it could contribute to global sustainability by preserving the environment and human health (Mohd Suki et al., 2022; Ayub et al., 2020). Conversely, Ismail et al. (2018) stated that Halal (or permissible) products have also gained a broader global market over the last few decades. Although there is a surge in demand for Halal products, the Halal concept still needs to be better understood by non-Muslims due to limited awareness and information on Halal consumption and its benefits (Chong et al., 2022). This limited awareness restricts the organic business sector's ability to effectively enter and develop the Halal organic food market. Despite further insights into non-Muslims' behaviour toward Halal consumption are warranted, limited evidence on such awareness towards the relatable benefits further

restricts the sustainable business sector's ability to enter and develop the Halal organic food market effectively. As such, a greater understanding of how Malaysian consumers view Halal organic foods should be undertaken because it could help food producers potentially produce and market their products effectively. Considering the above concerns, this study aims to examine the factors influencing Malaysian consumers' purchase intention toward Halal organic food. In particular, the objective of this study is to investigate the influence of Halal awareness, attitude, social influence, product safety, brand trust, and promotion amongst consumers on their propensity to purchase Halal-based organic food in Malaysia.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Halalness (Permissibility)
Recent studies have revealed that religion is not only a factor influencing global consumption behaviour, but it is also influenced by the extent of religiosity itself (e.g., Bahrainizad & Abedini, 2023; Chua et al., 2017). The issues about organic food are similar to the Halalness (or permissibility) context that advocates serving healthy, safe food products and a symbol of hygiene (Bahrainizad & Abedini, 2023). Halal food consumption refers to foods permitted under Islamic law (Ariff & Sidek, 2015). In Islamic dietary law, halal food principles are founded on halal (permissible) and tayyib (excellent and wholesome). It must also be clean, pure, safe, harmless, and high-quality. The Quran underscores the importance of tayyib alongside halal in verses such as Surah Al-Baqarah (2:168), Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:88), Surah Al-Anfal (8:69), and Surah An-Nahl (16:114) (Ariff & Sidek, 2015).

2.2 Intentional Behaviour
Chong et al. (2022) and Li and Jaharuddin (2020) found that non-Muslim consumers' views of Halal products in the market are also heavily influenced by behavioural intentions. Their lack of acceptance and exposure towards Halal products is primarily a result of unfamiliarity, inability to differentiate between green products and organic food products, and the limited number of such customers observed in Malaysia. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) suggests that behaviours can be anticipated when they are intentional (Ajzen, 2015). TPB posits that a person's intention to engage in a behaviour is primarily shaped by three factors: attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. Drawing from TPB, intention in this study context reflects an individual's effort to make Halal organic food purchases based on attitude, social influence and perceived behavioural control of knowledge regarding halal awareness, product safety, and promotion. Actual purchasing behaviour will increase if they intend to purchase the said product (Vizano et al., 2021).

2.3 Halal Awareness
Consumers nowadays are becoming more conscious of Halal certification and labelling of the product ingredients (Ariffin et al., 2019a). This is because many retailers have failed to display their Halal certificates as they prefer to use the term "pork-free" as a strategy to convince customers (Ariffin et al., 2019b). Chong et al. (2022) and Riptiono (2020) mentioned an incremental observation amongst Muslim and non-Muslim communities toward Halal products, perceived as healthier and more secure. Ramadani (2022) further stated that awareness does not necessarily lead to understanding consumers. Instead, it is an ability to be more conscious because of concern towards Halal food products in the market. Hence, it is essential to raise consumer awareness about Halal products and their benefits, as it would contribute to consumers' propensity to purchase Halal organic food products. It is believed that if a consumer does not have prior awareness of a product, there is an excellent likelihood that they will not plan to purchase it, whether the products are Halal or non-Halal (Arlisa et al., 2021; Bashir et al., 2018; Mansor et al., 2020).

2.4 Attitude
Attitude is one of the significant factors in determining a potential behaviour of interest (Ajzen, 1991). Riptiono (2020) stated that Muslim consumers must have a positive attitude towards Halal products, especially on food and beverages, because, in Islam, it is vital for every Muslim to emphasise cleanliness and authenticity. The authors found that attitudes differ for non-Muslim consumers based on their religious viewpoints, such that those having a high level of religiosity would be more motivated to follow religious standards as compared to consumers with a low degree of religiosity. In Malaysia, non-Muslim consumers' attitudes positively influence their purchasing intention towards Halal food products (Pang et al., 2021). Non-Muslims were perceived to be more interested in Halal products if there are potential benefits observed in following the Halal concept during food production (Lee et al., 2017). Ariffin et al. (2019a) found that perceived Halal organic food plays a substantial role in non-Muslims' purchase behaviour since there is a significant positive interest in attitudes towards such organic food products.

2.5 Social Influence
Social influence, also known as subjective norms, is an individual's perception that most people who are important to him or her think that he or she should or should not perform the behaviour in question (Ajzen, 1991). Subjective norms in Malaysia play an important role in purchasing since family, friends, and colleagues act as focal referencing points (Putit & Muhammad, 2015; Sohail et al., 2022). Recent studies (e.g., Garg & Joshi, 2018; Sohail et al., 2022) found that subjective norms significantly influenced consumers' purchase intention of Halal-based products. Afendi et al. (2014) further discovered a positive relationship between social influence and purchase intention on Halal organic food products. On the other hand, Hossain et al. (2019) stated that product pricing can also influence subjective norms based on an individual's decision on whether to buy organic food products.

2.6 Product Safety

Product safety refers to product usage that is safe to be used, adheres to legal requirements and is not harmful to the consumers. It includes the hygiene and cleanliness of the products. In Malaysia, *Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia's* (**JAKIM**) Halal certification is controlled by the Malaysian Halal Standard that covers all product production processes (Ramlan et al., 2022). Accordingly, the hygiene concept is given much consideration when producing Halal organic food products, and it includes all the aspects to ensure safety without any potential harm to human health (Marmaya et al., 2019).

2.7 Promotion

Nowadays, promotions, specifically advertising, positively influence consumers' inclination to purchase the desired products or services. Advertising is a non-personal entertainment that promotes goods or services via mass media to reach the target audience (LaMarco, 2019). Generally, Muslim customers tend to examine the Halal status of products or services initially to determine whether these products are considered Halal (permissible) or Haram (forbidden). Liang et al. (2016) stated that promotion could influence consumers to purchase Halal organic food products targeted in a vast market because of effective communication strategies that further enhance the unique characteristics of the food products. However, little research has been conducted to explain the underlying value of marketing promotion in measuring consumer intention to purchase (Haider & Shakib, 2018).

2.8 Brand Trust

Trust reflects a crucial attribute of attitudes that can influence human conduct, especially when it comes to buying and selling (Nurrachmi et al., 2020). Abdullah et al. (2023) on the other hand, described brand quality as referring to cleanliness and freshness, which can potentially evoke brand trust. When a brand is declared Halal, this may result in its ability for the brand concepts to convince the consumer of Halal brand purchase intention (Ali et al., 2017). Trust is essential to the brand-consumer relationship as it ensures that customers can exhibit positive value from the brand. As such, consumers must consider a brand trustworthy and credible.

Following the above literature review, we proposed the following theoretical framework.
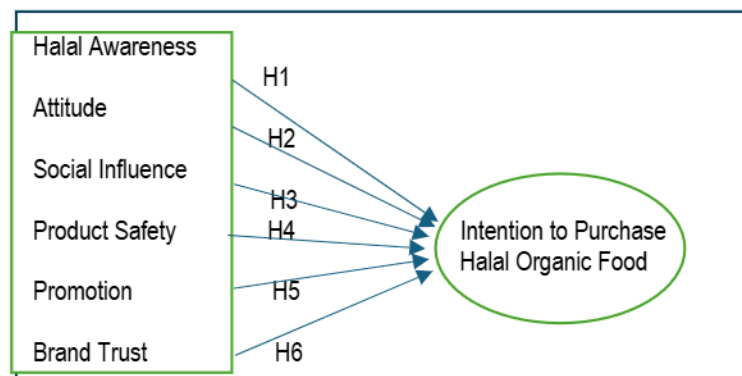

Figure 1 – Theoretical Framework

3.0 Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design by using a non-probability sampling technique. An online data collection of 250 questionnaire surveys was observed, and a subsequent return rate of 200 usable feedback was received. Sample sizes between 100 and 200 would be fitting and adequate (Hair et al., 2019). The research instruments used to measure all items for the survey questionnaire were adopted from previous research and adapted to this study. Data was analysed using SmartPLS 4.0 statistical software version 4.1.0.2 (Ringle et al., 2024) for descriptive and multivariate analyses. Web power websites were applied to assess multivariate normality. The Mardia's multivariate skewness and kurtosis were also scrutinised to determine any potential non-normality of data. Furthermore, the common Method Bias was tested since a single source approach was applied in the data collection stage.

4.0 Data Analysis And Findings

4.1 Descriptive Statistical Analysis

In this study, 200 usable data were collected and analysed to determine the demographic characteristics of targeted respondents. For gender, the highest percentage was female at 70.6% (n=141), followed by male respondents at 29.4% (n= 59. The age group ranged from 18 years and above. This study's highest age group was those between 36 and 40, at 71.9%(n= 144). Most of the respondents are single at 72.4% (n= 145). Moreover, the majority has at least a bachelor's degree qualification at 45.7%% (n= 91.4). In terms of ethnicity, most respondents were Malay at 76%% (n= 152)., followed by Chinese at 10.9%% (n= 22)., and Indians at 7.2% % (n=14). and others at 5.9%% (n= 12) respectively. Islam is the man religion at 80.1% % (n= 160), followed by Buddhism at 10% % (n=20)., Christianity at 2.3% % (n=4.6%9)., Hinduism at 4.5%% (n=9). and others at 3.1%% (n= 6.2). The analysis was based on 200 usable data from targeted respondents, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Demographic Profile

Profile	Descriptive Profile	Per cent	Frequency (n=200)
Gender	Female	70.6	141
	Male	29.4	59
Age	18 - 27 years old	71.9	144
	28 – 37 years old	7.7	16
	38 – 47 years old	11.8	24
	Above 48 years old	8.1	16
Marital Status	Single	75.1	145
	Married	24.9	55
Education	Postgraduate Degree	9.9	20
	Undergraduate Degree	45.7	91
	STPM/Matriculation/Diploma	32.1	64
	High School	12.3	25
Ethnicity	Malay	76.0	152
	Chinese	10.9	22
	Indian	7.2	14
	Others	5.9	12

4.2 Multivariate Statistical Analysis

The researchers have employed partial least squares (PLS) modelling using SmartPLS 4.0 version 4.1.0.2 statistical software to examine both measurement and structural models. Since data was collected using a single source, we first tested the issue of Common Method Bias, as suggested by Kock (2015), in testing the entire collinearity issue. As shown in Table 2, all the variables were regressed against a common variable, and the analysis yielded a VIF of less than 3.3; thus, single-source bias is not a severe issue with the data being analysed.

Table 2. Full Collinearity Testing

Attitude	Brand Trust	Halal Awareness	Promotion	Product Safety	Social Influence
2.549	3.068	1.754	1.732	2.698	2.452

4.2.1 Measurement model

Using a 2-step approach, the measurement model was initially applied to assess the instruments' validity and reliability, and the structural model was subsequently used to examine the hypothesis developed. In Step 1, we measured the loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and the composite reliability (CR) for the measurement model. Hair et al. (2019) state that the loading values should be ≥ 0.5, followed by the AVE at ≥ 0.5 and the CR at ≥ 0.7. As shown in Table 3, the AVEs are all higher than 0.5, and the CRs are all higher than 0.7. The loadings were also acceptable, with six loadings less than 0.708 (Hair et al., 2019). We then assessed the discriminant validity using the HTMT criterion suggested by Henseler et al. (2015) and updated by Franke and Sarstedt (2019).

Table 3. Measurement Model

Construct	Item	Loading	AVE	CR
Attitude	ATT1	0.834	0.628	0.853
	ATT2	0.814		
	ATT3	0.712		
	ATT4	0.825		

	ATT5	0.769		
Brand Trust	BT1	0.780	0.588	0.893
	BT2	0.810		
	BT3	0.776		
	BT4	0.624		
	BT5	0.764		
	BT6	0.816		
	BT7	0.784		
Halal Awareness	HA1	0.759	0.513	0.765
	HA2	0.714		
	HA3	0.684		
	HA4	0.735		
	HA5	0.686		
Promotion	MP2	0.818	0.589	0.831
	MP3	0.718		
	MP4	0.773		
	MP5	0.738		
	MP6	0.786		
Purchase Intention	PI1	0.773	0.650	0.897
	PI2	0.778		
	PI3	0.759		
	PI4	0.844		
	PI5	0.803		
	PI6	0.874		
	PS1	0.691		
Product Safety	PS2	0.783	0.589	0.833
	PS3	0.789		
	PS4	0.756		
	PS5	0.814		
Social Influence	SI1	0.779	0.595	0.829
	SI2	0.786		
	SI3	0.809		
	SI4	0.779		
	SI5	0.698		

Note: MP1 was deleted due to low loadings

In Table 4, the values of HTMT were all lower than the criterion of ≤ 0.90. Hence, the target respondents understood that the six constructs were distinct. These validity tests have revealed that all the measurement items are valid and reliable in this study.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Attitude	Attitude	Brand Trust	Halal Awareness	Marketing Promotion	Purchase Intention	Product Safety	Social Influence
Brand Trust	0.808						
Halal Awareness	0.711	0.710					
Promotion	0.625	0.670	0.611				
Purchase Intention	0.872	0.733	0.645	0.620			
Product Safety	0.807	0.862	0.677	0.590	0.749		
Social Influence	0.792	0.791	0.644	0.718	0.829	0.799	

4.2.2 Structural Equation Model

The structural equation modelling measures of path coefficients, standard errors, t-values, and p-values were examined. Further assessment was subsequently carried out through multivariate skewness and kurtosis as recommended by Jammalamadaka et al. (2021). The results showed that the data collected was not multivariate normal; Mardia's multivariate skewness was at (β = 1565.775, p< 0.01), and Mardia's multivariate kurtosis was at (β = 3938.498, p< 0.01). Following Hair et al.'s (2022) suggestion, reporting path coefficients, standard errors, t-values, and p-values for the structural model using a 10,000-sample re-sample bootstrapping procedure was observed.

As shown in Table 5, it summarises the criteria that are used to test the hypotheses developed. Firstly, we tested the effect of the six main predictors on Purchase Intention; the R^2 value was 0.673, indicating that these predictors explained 67.32% of the variance in Purchase Intention. In testing the six hypotheses, we followed said procedures by bootstrapping the direct effect for H1 - Halal Awareness→Purchase Intention (β = 0.049, p> 0.05), H2 - Attitude→Purchase Intention (β = 0.434, p< 0.05), H3 - Social Influence→ Purchase Intention (β = 0.287, p< 0.05), H4 - Product Safety→Purchase Intention (β = 0.080, p> 0.05), H5 - Promotion→Purchase Intention (β = 0.048, p> 0.05), and H6 - Brand Trust→ Purchase Intention (β = 0.046, p> 0.05). Additionally, the confidence interval bias was corrected by 95%, and intervals were displayed at 0 for the relationships of attitude →Purchase Intention and social influence→Purchase Intention, thus confirming the findings. Therefore, H2 and H3 were supported. However, H1, H4, H5, and H6 were not supported.

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Standard Beta	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	BCI LL	BCI UL
1	Halal Awareness-> Purchase Intention	0.049	0.068	0.721	0.471	-0.080	0.189
2	Attitude -> Product Intention	0.434	0.074	5.877	0.000	0.282	0.573
3	Social Influence -> Purchase Intention	0.287	0.081	3.564	0.000	0.138	0.451
4	Product Safety -> Purchase Intention	0.080	0.087	0.922	0.356	-0.086	0.252
5	Promotion ->Purchase Intention	0.048	0.065	0.746	0.455	-0.074	0.181
6	Brand Trust ->Purchase Intention	0.046	0.080	0.576	0.565	-0.111	0.204

5.0 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

From the data analyses and findings, only two hypotheses (H2 and H3) were significantly accepted. The overall variance in intention was substantially explained at 67.3% by these predictors in this study. H2 - Attitude significantly influences purchase intention towards Halal organic food products among Malaysian consumers. It is also the strongest predictor (B=0.434) of purchase intention. This finding supports several recent studies. Pang et al. (2021) revealed that positive attitudes of non-Muslim consumers had a positive and significant influence on purchase intention towards Halal food products. Kamalul Ariffin et al. (2019) and Nora & Sriminarti (2023) also confirmed that attitude significantly influenced consumers' intention to purchase halal organic foods.

Consumers' rising concern over health nowadays opens another potential opportunity for Malaysian Halal food producers. Both the Muslim and non-Muslim consumers in Malaysia have favourable attitudes towards Halal organic food. For Muslim consumers, choosing Halal food is obligatory and is considered a religious requirement based on Islamic teachings. Non-Muslim consumers, on the other hand, value Halal because of the health benefits that it provides, which are essentially voluntary based on an individual decision rather than a religious obligation and requirement. Given this, having a significant positive attitude could lead to a greater propensity to undertake purchase intention amongst Malaysian consumers, which later transforms into actual purchase behaviour. As Halal-certified food products guarantee hygiene and cleanliness, the concept is parallel to fulfilling the needs of health-conscious consumers on how they want their food to be produced or prepared. Thus, H2 were supported.

Additionally, H3 - Social influence, is found to be significant and has a positive impact on purchase intention towards halal organic food products among Malaysian consumers. Social influence is the second strongest predictor (B= 0.287) towards purchase intention. This finding supports Garg & Joshi (2018) and Sohail et al. (2022), who revealed that social influence affects consumers' purchase intentions of halal products. Saleki et al. (2020) also emphasised that social influence significantly affects purchase intention towards organic food. Hence, social influence, such as the opinion of friends, relatives, and close family members, helps consumers gain knowledge and build confidence in halal organic food. In addition, Malaysian consumers require preliminary affirmations and opinions from significant others to determine the extent to which it can influence their propensity to purchase Halal organic food. Nevertheless, this finding is not surprising, as Malaysia is a Muslim country, and Halal-based products are generally in demand, widely used, and accepted by the community. Also, it justifies the fact that consumers' adoption of new products is mainly motivated by social recognition and approval influences (Putit et al., 2021). Thus, H3 was supported.

Meanwhile, H1, H4, H5 and H6 were rejected. Halal awareness, product safety, promotion, and brand trust did not significantly influence Malaysian consumers' intention to purchase halal organic food products. Although a recent study by Aslan (2023) found a significant impact of halal awareness towards purchase intention of culinary products among Muslim customers in Turkey, halal awareness has been found to be insignificant (P > 0.05, B=0.068) in the halal organic food context. The respondents found that awareness of halal products is insignificant in determining their purchase intention. Although Jannah and Al-Banna (2021) mentioned

that consumers' halal awareness was determined by knowledge and halal certification, the respondents in this study may have already gained sufficient prior knowledge on perceived halal awareness, safety and trust towards overall organic products, hence indicating that other factors are deemed more important than knowledge. Thus, H1, H4, H5 and H6 were rejected.

6.0 CONCLUSION

In essence, this study was aimed to investigate whether halal awareness, attitude, social influences, product safety, promotion and brand trust influence Malaysian consumers' propensity to purchase Halal organic products. Following the given results, it implies that companies must constantly review their existing strategies within the halal organic food-based business sector. There is a need to apply new effective marketing strategies to ensure continuous sustainability of product availability and business performance in the long run. Several limitations were observed. The study was conducted via quantitative research. Hence, qualitative research using focus group could be further undertaken to explore other potentially significant issues affecting consumers' willingness to purchase halal organic products. Since this study only examined the direct relationship between the independent and dependent variables, future research could focus on the mediating effect of attitude on the relationship between the variables observed. Future research could falso urther investigate continuance acceptance of such behaviour amongst consumers across different nations.

Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper contributes towards the understanding of individuals' sustainable consumption behaviour and sustainable production of food products and services within the industrial business sectors. It also contributes to the achievement of Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), that includes SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 13 (Climate Action) respectively

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