

## Young Muslim Intentions for Muslim-Friendly Korean Restaurants in Malaysia: A Conceptual Paper

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### Abstract

*Muslim-friendly Korean restaurants have become a phenomenon and are being accepted not only in Malaysia but also worldwide. Due to the demand in terms of Korean food, there are many Korean food establishments set up to fulfil the demand especially from the younger generation. However, it is noteworthy that only a few Korean restaurants have halal certification. By looking at the context of Muslim practitioners, any food to be consumed must be from halal sources. However, the acceptance towards Korean food among youngsters has become contradictory for the practicing Muslims. This raises concerns about maintaining the integrity of the halal certification and the need for further investigation regarding the acceptance among young Muslim consumers towards Korean restaurants which are not Muslim-friendly in Malaysia. By addressing this issue, it is important to conduct this study because despite knowing the unclear status, many young Muslim consumers still prefer to dine at these Korean restaurants rather than wait for the restaurants to receive halal certification by JAKIM. This paper is essential to encourage Korean hospitality industry practitioners for applying the halal certification for their business ventures in Malaysia. Furthermore, this paper aims to support the Sustainable Development Goal which is to promote health and well-being for people in Malaysia.*

**Keywords:** Theory of planned behaviour (TPB), Halal certification, Muslim-friendly restaurant, Korean

### ARTICLE INFORMATION

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## 1.0. INTRODUCTION

The halal global business is now expected to increase by over USD 2.3 trillion yearly and given the market new potential as it grows by 20% a year (Farid Ali al-Fijawi & Khalil Al-Juburi, 2021; Siddique, 2020; Abdul Khalek, 2015). By looking at the 1.6 billion global Muslim population nowadays, it is predicted to increase to about 2.76 billion in 2050 (Astuti & Asih, 2021; Mustafa, 2020; Jalil, 2018). With this rise, non-Muslim restaurant owners realize the opportunity and the potential of the halal industry, and they get involved to lead in this world potential market (Aliff, 2021; Nathan, 2020; Quoquab, 2020; Cheong, 2019; Habib, 2011). Looking at the growth of the halal market, various types of businesses that include cosmetic, pharmaceutical, medical, marketing, and financing that go along with the food sector are keen to have their share as well. (Astuti & Asih, 2021; Nathan, 2020; Quoquab et al., 2020; Tunku & Rahman, 2019).

Halal food is not mainly for Muslims, but the non-Muslims are demanding such food that has so many attributes that include safety, hygienic, quality, trust, and traceability (Syed Marzuki, 2020; Ahmed, 2019; Syed Marzuki, Hall & Ballantine, 2014). Because of these, many non-Muslim consumers choose to eat halal food rather than non-halal food. Moreover, the interesting aspect of the Islamic dietary rules is that it is based on the teachings of the Al-Quran and Hadiths. Where eating halal food has a connection to human spiritual development. Even though they are not Muslim, it could influence their perspective and comfort level with the concept of halal food. It highlights the potential connection between personal spiritual growth and dietary preferences (Syed Marzuki, Hall & Ballantine, 2014; Abdul Talib & Abdul Razak, 2013; Ali, 2013; Bohari, 2013; Lever & Miele, 2012; Syed Marzuki, Hall & Ballantine, 2012a; Syed Marzuki Hall & Ballantine, 2012b).

The concept of halal is interpreted as permissible for Muslims to consume, and haram is the opposite of halal (forbidden). Examples of haram food are pork, alcohol, permissible animals without proper slaughtering as outlined in the Al-Quran and Hadiths (Zin, 2021; Balai, 2020; Ahmad, 2018; Zaina, 2015). Furthermore, Islamic Dietary Laws has outlined halal and haram very clearly so that the Muslim followers know their limitations. Within this context, the non-Muslims can also gather much information on halal matters from many reliable sources. Another interesting part under Islamic Dietary Laws is the grey area between halal and haram that is called *syubha/mashbuh* (doubtful).

In essence, Muslims need to avoid consuming *syubha* until it becomes clear to consume. As far as the halal status of the food is unclear or Muslims having doubts about it, the food is considered haram. According to Federal Mufti<sup>1</sup> Territory Office (2018), some marine life forms do fall under *syubha* depending on the opinion of *Madhhab*<sup>2</sup>, like crabs, squids, lobsters, and prawns are haram according to Imam<sup>3</sup> Hanafi. However, according to Imam Maliki, Shafi'I, and Hambali they are permissible to consume. The different Islamic school of thought serve different opinions towards certain food for consumption. However, the Islamic way of life is still directed to the Al-Quran and Hadiths.

As discussed above, every single aspect of Muslim way of life must follow the Shariah in order to become a good Muslim including food consumption. Food restrictions do not close the advantage for a high demand, and this has opened doors for the non-Muslim business owners across the world to explore and exploit the opportunities in a halal market by expanding their potential food and beverage business based on their local cuisine.

There are various kinds of international cuisines being accepted by the Muslim and non-Muslim consumers in Malaysia that include Western, Chinese, Thai, Japanese, Indian, Arab, and Korean cuisines. In relation to this, Malaysians have their own unique tastes and preferences for cuisines, which reflect their lifestyle and self-image when they make every day eating choices

(Yang, 2021; Ni, 2019). Korean cuisine has become one of the most preferred food in Malaysia (Mohd Amin, 2020; Nathan, 2020; Ha, 2019; Jeong, 2018; Lee, 2017). Due to this, young consumers have favourable opinions on Korean cuisine and the demand for Korean food keeps growing and is currently getting stronger every year (Yang, 2021; Ni, 2019). In addition, Korean food has also become a trend among the young generation in Malaysia (Hasniza, 2023; Nathan, 2020; Ing, 2018; Lee, 2017)

With this phenomenon, the existence of Korean restaurants in Malaysia has put so much concern among the local people on the halalness of the food that is being served together with the notion of Halo effect<sup>4</sup>. Taking the Korean influence on various aspects in Malaysia for instance, this paper will focus on Korean Muslim-friendly restaurants and young Muslim consumers. Moreover, this study on the intentions of young Muslim consumers and Korean restaurants is very limited yet significant to the halal food industry in Malaysia (Rashad, 2021; Mohd Amin, 2020; Ni, 2019).

## 2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW

Malaysia is unique with its multicultural food such as traditional Malay, Indian-Muslim, and Chinese cuisines. In fact, there are many international cuisines that are available in Malaysia and have a halal status such as, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), McDonald's, Dominos, Pizza Hut, Burger King, Texas Chicken, and Arabica Restaurant to name a few (Aliff, 2021; Khan A, 2021; Quoquab, 2020; Cheong, 2019; Habib, 2011; Mui, n.d). These restaurants successfully serve halal food for Muslim and non-Muslim consumers in Malaysia. Therefore, local and international restaurants can make profit and at the same time satisfy consumers with the quality of the food that is hygienic, taste of the food, appearance of the food, and also affordable price which are important to meet the demand of consumers in Malaysia.

Halal certification can meet the standard required by the customers as it offers safety in terms of consumable food. However, halal certification is not the only factor that can lead to customer satisfaction. Customers feel that

<sup>1</sup> Mufti is a person who serves as the Muslim community's principal source of information regarding Islamic law. He issues a fatwa when there is a problem or confusion within the society about Islamic law (Mohd, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Madhhab provides an alternative solution to the current problems among the Muslims (Harahap, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> The Imam is the human representative in the religion of Islam (Kunto Baskoro, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Halo effect can be described cognitive bias as people tend to view everything about certain thing in positive way (Yang, 2021; Ni, 2019; Seo, 2017).

there are more to halal, that include trust, traceability, and peace of mind. Halal restaurants in Malaysia can be divided to halal certified and halal claimant restaurants (Syed Marzuki, 2016b; Syed Marzuki, 2012a; Syed Marzuki, 2012b). All of the halal certified restaurants attain the halal certification and halal logo whereas the halal claimant restaurants do not. The halal claimant restaurants are the ones that portray themselves as Malay or Muslim restaurants that serve Malay food or Malaysian kind of food where the owners are Malays, Siamese Malay, Indian Muslims, and Chinese Muslims (Syed Marzuki, 2016).

By looking in terms of consuming food in Malaysia, Muslim consumers are concerned about displaying the halal certification and the halal logo to prevent the consumption of haram food as it is forbidden for Muslims. Hence, JAKIM functions as the national authority to guarantee that the product is based on halal sources and also issues the halal certification for food and services operators in Malaysia (Halimi, 2021; Mustafa, 2020; Ab. Halim, 2018; Syed Marzuki, 2016b; Syed Marzuki, 2012a; Syed Marzuki, 2012b). There are about 122 organization all around the world that are responsible for issuing halal certification and verification but only 86 organizations from 46 countries that are recognized by JAKIM according to JAKIM official website (2020). This halal certification indicates that the restaurants have undergone strict procedures in attaining halal certification by JAKIM as shown in Figure 1.

Due to strict procedure as illustrated above, most of the Korean restaurants display signboards that show “No Pork”, “Pork Free”, and “Muslim-friendly restaurant” because their applications are still pending or they are yet to receive the halal certification by JAKIM (Mohd Amin, 2020). Due to the fact that Korean restaurants are being well accepted and gaining high demand, as these kinds of restaurants can be seen at most major towns and cities nationwide (Rashad Yazdanifard, 2021; Mohd Amin, 2020; Ha, 2019).

### 2.1. An Extended Theory of Planned Behavior

This study intends to apply and extend the TPB model in determining young Muslim consumers’ dining intention towards Muslim-friendly Korean restaurants in Malaysia. This paper identifies the factors that influence dining intention and provide theoretical support to the use

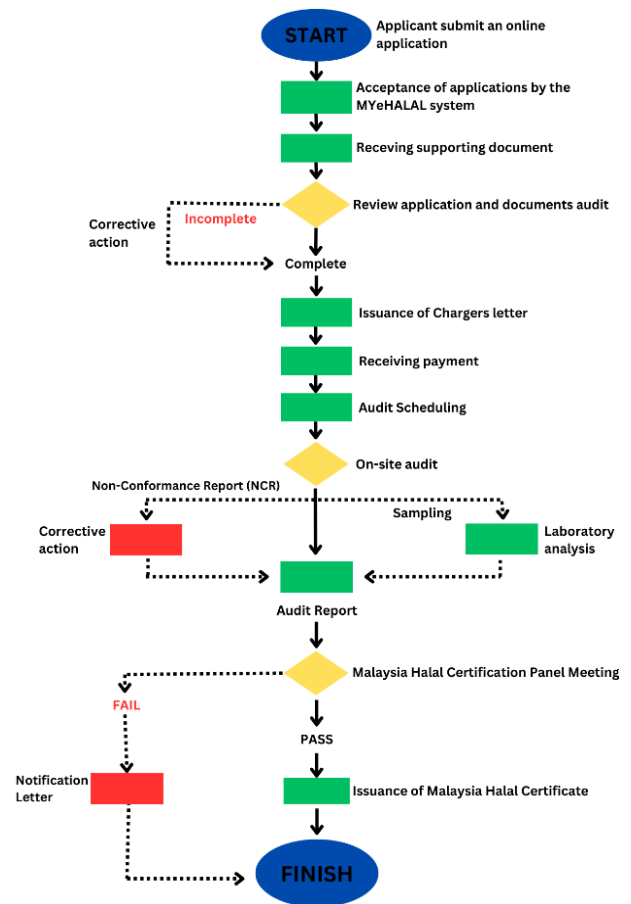


Figure 1: The Flowchart in Receiving a Halal Certification (Amin, 2020)

of extended theory of planned behaviour (TPB) in this context. The conceptual framework is shown in Figure 2.

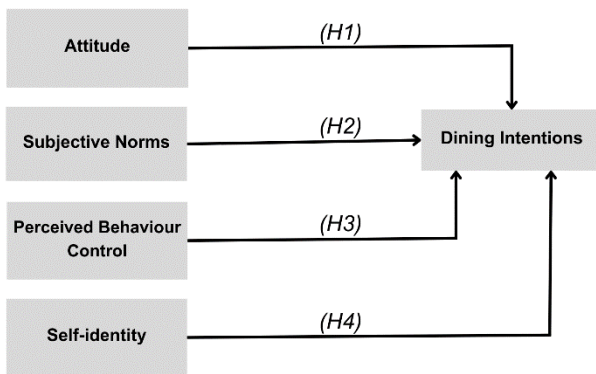


Figure 2: Proposed Conceptual Framework

### 2.1.1. Attitude

Within the TPB model, the initial and influential factor shaping the intentions is attitude. Attitude towards a behaviour reflects a subjective evaluation of an individual or judgment of that behaviour. It results in either a positive or negative stand. According to Ajzen (2020), when an individual holds a more favourable attitude towards a particular behaviour, their intention to engage in that behaviour becomes stronger.

The role of attitudes in influencing the intentions of young Muslim consumers towards dining at Muslim-friendly Korean restaurants has been a limited subject and still ambiguous within the research community (Rashad, 2021; Mohd Amin, 2020; Ni, 2019). While several studies have highlighted the importance of attitudes as reliable predictors of consumer intentions in the context of food choices (Jaihan, 2022; Halimi, 2021; Ha, 2019; Lee, 2015) Yang (2021) found that, attitudes fail to explain consumer intention particularly in terms of purchasing halal Korean foods. Overall, studies on the intentions of young Muslim consumers towards dining at Muslim-

Friendly Korean Restaurants are relatively minimal, and information is inadequate, therefore, additional research is needed to investigate this aspect (Rashad, 2021; Mohd Amin, 2020; Ni, 2019).

*H1: There is a positive relationship between attitudes and the intentions of young Muslim consumers toward dining at Muslim-friendly Korean restaurants in Malaysia.*

### 2.1.2. Subjective Norms

The second crucial factor influencing the intentions is subjective norms, emphasizing the impact of social influences on consumer behaviour. As conceived by Ajzen (2020), subjective norms refer to the social pressure experienced by individuals to correspond to specific behavioural expectations.

In the context of food choices, the subjective norms perceived by young Muslim consumers might be driven by their cultural, religious, and social affiliations in guiding their decision-making processes. Previous research has consistently demonstrated that consumers are influenced by their social groups, particularly those who are close to them (Wongsaichia, 2022; Yang, 2021; Astuti & Asih, 2021; Bai, 2019; Tunku & Rahman, 2019; Xiao, 2019). The level of social support experienced by individuals has been found to have a direct impact on their intentions to engage in specific behaviours. Studies have consistently indicated that the influence of subjective norms on intentions formation, specifically in the context of food choices, tends to be strong.

*H2: There is a positive relationship between subjective norms and the intentions of young Muslim consumers toward dining at Muslim-friendly Korean restaurants in Malaysia.*

### 2.1.3. Perceived Behaviour Control

Perceived behavioural control represents the third determinant in the TPB model and pertains to perception of individual of their ability to perform a specific behaviour (Ajzen, 2020; Ajzen & Kruglanski, 2019; Paul, 2016). This variable is closely associated with the availability of necessary resources and opportunities required to engage in the behaviours.

Perceived behavioural control noted to be a significant predictor of consumers intentions in terms of food choices (Jaihan, 2022; Halimi, 2021; Ha, 2019; Lee, 2015). Based on previous studies in various food choice contexts, perceived behavioural control is an important determinant of explaining consumers intentions. Therefore, present study examines the perceived behavioural control which is an important determinant of young Muslim consumer intentions towards dine in at Muslim-friendly Korean restaurants.

*H3: There is a positive relationship between perceived behaviour control and the intentions of young Muslim consumers toward dining at Muslim-friendly Korean restaurants in Malaysia.*

#### 2.1.4. Self-identity

In this paper, the model as in Figure 2 has been expanded by adding another variable to bring the new key factor which is self-identity. Self-identity is defined as a person who chose products that reflected the way he wanted to be judged and expressed (Sirgy, 2018; Stets & Burke, 2000).

Self-identity is the subjective perception an individual has of themselves, containing their thoughts, beliefs, and characteristics. This self-identity has a remarkable influence on consumers' purchasing decisions including their choices in food purchases, which often reflect their personality, beliefs, and social standing (Povey, 2001; Bonne, 2007). As consumers, individuals tend to align their food preferences and purchases with their self-identity. They seek out products that resonate with their personal values, cultural background, and social image (Sirgy, 2018; Stets & Burke, 2000).

In the case of Korean restaurants, consumers are drawn to it due to various factors, such as their unique cuisine, cultural associations, trends, luxurious and more as Halo effect take parts in viewing the Korean country (Rashad Yazdanifard, 2021; Park, 2021; Astuti & Asih, 2021; Amin, 2020; Mohd Amin Zalina Zakaria & Abdul Rahim, 2020; Nathan, 2020; Ni, 2019; Ha, 2019; Buang, 2018; Hwang, 2018; Ing, 2018; Jeong & Min Choi, 2018; Lee, 2015; Yang, 2012; Ho, 2010; Pettigrew & Charters, 2009). Consumers who identify with Korean food as part of their self-identity are more likely to be motivated to explore and engage with Korean cuisine. Moreover, they identify themselves as "passionate Korean Food Lover" (Mohd Amin, 2020; Ni, 2019).

Furthermore, this variable has been tested in many studies in the food choice context but shows there is no influence on the intentions (Robinson & Smith, 2002; Bonne, 2007; Povey, 2001). There is no updated research that studied about the contribution of self-identity towards Korean restaurants and it is not used or found as an independent predictor in terms of food context study.

This paper argues for its inclusion based on the increasing demand and popularity of Korean food nowadays especially in Malaysia (Ni, 2019). Due to this, it is significant to include self-identity to test the influence of self-identity towards Muslim friendly Korean restaurants. By examining the relationship between self-identity and intentions, the study also aims to uncover the potential influence of self-identity towards dining intention.

*H4: There is a positive relationship between self-identity and the intentions of young Muslim consumers toward dining at Muslim-friendly Korean restaurants in Malaysia.*

### 3.0. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The research findings can offer valuable insights to raise awareness among Korean restaurant managers about applying for halal certification by JAKIM, as the demand for halal certification is growing at an increasing rate among Muslim and non-Muslim consumers in Malaysia (Syed Marzuki, 2020; Ahmed, 2019). Moreover, the findings of this study will enrich existing literature on Muslim-friendly Korean restaurants as well as broaden and deepen the extended theory of planned behaviour. It may also encourage foreign direct investment to participate in Malaysia's halal industry and contribute significantly towards SDG which is health and well-being for people in Malaysia.

### 4.0. CONCLUSION

Considering the importance of the growing halal food industry in the world, the understanding of young Muslim consumers toward Muslim-friendly Korean restaurant becomes necessary. Further investigation is needed as young Muslim consumers nowadays still dine in at Korean restaurant even the status of halal is not clear yet. It is crucial for JAKIM to educate the community, especially in Malaysia, about the distinction between Muslim-friendly Korean restaurants and those that have officially received halal certification. Hence, a conceptual model has been drawn with regards to factors that may likely influence young Muslim consumer's dining intention. These factors include attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, and self-identity which are considered as determinants in examining the intentions of

young Muslim consumers toward dining at Muslim-friendly Korean restaurants in Malaysia.

**Author Contributions:** This paper is completed by the contributions of the authors with respect to the following tasks: Introduction, literature review, conceptual framework and conclusion have been written by Yusuf Saqafi Bin Azam. He has tabulated the past research and came out with a conceptual framework that focus on the intention of young Muslim consumers towards dining at Muslim-friendly Korean restaurants in Malaysia. Reviewing, editing, proofreading and technical support were carried out by Sharifah Zannierah Syed Marzuki and Noorita Mohammad. It is important to do all the necessary checking to fulfil the requirements set by the journal.

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**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest and the writing was done to ensure that all people are more sensitive to the well-being of dining at Muslim-friendly Korean restaurants. This review paper has taken a serious approach in gaining all data and information. Furthermore, this paper maintains equality as far as the write-up is concerned.

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