

# Non-Muslim travelers influence in choosing halal food

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the factors influencing non-Muslim travellers in choosing halal food in Malaysia. This study used judgmental sampling, and about 384 are randomly selected but only applicable to local non-Muslim travellers. Questionnaires were distributed to respondents at five Malay delicacy restaurants in Kuala Lumpur and were used for data analysis. The statistical analysis for social science (SPSS) was used to analyse and interpret. Regression results show a significant positive relationship between factors of food assurance, acculturation and personality traits in influencing non-Muslim travellers choosing halal food. Of these three factors, food assurance proved to have the most significant impact on halal food choice. The implications and limitations of the study are also discussed.

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is considered a highlighted element in a country and is the primary income source for many developing countries (European Commission Tourism Unit, 2017). It creates a positive impact on the development of a region or city. Studies have shown an interest in halal tourism in the tourism industry, driven by the growing number of Muslim populations worldwide (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Jafari and Scott (2014) defined Islamic tourism as "The encouragement of tourists likely to meet the requirements of Sharia law", which focuses on Islamic law and its requirements to meet the tourist needs and thus suits the definition of halal tourism.

The halal industry has become a viable product and services market throughout the world. This industry is booming among halal-conscious travellers from or within an Islamic country (Zulkifli & Yaakob, 2011). According to the State of the Global Islamic Economic report, produced by Thomson Reuters in collaboration with Dinar Standard, the global Muslim travel market was worth \$140 billion in 2013, representing 11.5% of global expenditure. The same report also shows that the segment is worth \$238 billion

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in 2019 and represented 13% of global expenditure. The Muslim consumer market has been acknowledged as another essential segment for businesses across sectors. The increased interest has led researchers to begin to focus their research on halal tourism. Halal tourism has been defined as offering tourist packages and destinations designed specially to meet Muslim concerns and meet Muslim needs. The essential components of halal tourism include a halal restaurant, halal shipping, halal food shops, halal transportation, Islamic banking, Islamic travel packages and halal Spa. Besides, the hotels in such destinations do not serve alcohol and have separate swimming pools and spa facilities for men and women. As suggested by Akyol and Kilinc (2014), halal tourism consists of different sectors related to the tourism industry, tailored to comply with the halal requirements. Malaysia is seen as in the perfect position to tap this halal tourism market by luring visitors worldwide and non-Muslims to this country to provide halal products and services and promote Malaysia as a halal destination. Similarly, Alqudsi (2014) mentioned consumers' choice of food is dependent on individual and environmental factors, such as marketing, information, and food properties. Alqudsi (2014) further highlights the study on Malaysian consumers perception's buying choice, knowledge, and understanding of halal food requirements offers an excellent opportunity to halal suppliers as consumers are willing to pay a premium for halal products.

There is a notably enormous change in consumer demand for food. Due to different cultural backgrounds and religions, there are different perceptions and experiences of food on consumers. Food is defined as anything taken orally to the body as a source of energy and is a necessary need among people. Consumers today are more concerned over health-related issues when opting for and accepting halal food, such as consuming clean and hygienic food in promoting better health to keep them healthy and enhance their quality of life. Also, there is the capability to take advantage of the non-Muslim community attention regarding food, although the halal concept relates to the Muslim society in specific (Alam & Nazura, 2011).

Halal food is known to be accepted by Muslim consumers. However, there is limited research on acceptance among non-Muslim travellers. There is also a lack of understanding regarding halal values and insufficient information about its benefits for many non-Muslims. Golnaz et al., 2012. Similarly, Golnaz et al., 2010, added that the stigma on halal foods among non-Muslims is formed on the very basis of their shallow knowledge of Islamic dietary codes and rules. This is the crucial reason non-Muslims are exposed to halal beliefs only through religious somewhat necessary expertise on the halal concept. Efforts should be taken in educating them to understand the context of halal food benefits not only to Muslims but also to everyone in general. Therefore, this study aimed to determine the acceptance level among non-Muslim travellers. Therefore, this study is conducted to understand the factors that influence the acceptance of non-Muslim travellers in choosing halal food.

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1 Halal Food Choice (HFC)*

Halal food is frequently related to healthy food. Understanding the factors influencing consumers on choosing halal food is essential in describing their reasons. Islam has provided general guidelines and states the specific motives of the halal concept, including preserving life, safeguarding future generations, and maintaining self-respect and integrity (Muhammad et al., 2007).

Today's consumers put health as their priority, which gives an advantage to halal food producers, as food consumption shares the same value with the halal concept. This concept can be explained by considering aspects of the cleanliness of the food, the source of the food and the method of handling and preparing the food. This is to avoid harmful effects on the body when consuming the food. Cleanliness is an essential quality for acquiring the halal status of processed food (Dayang-Aniza, 2012). A study by Abdul-Basit and Sahilah (2010) regarding perceptions of halal buyers found that consumer interests also include their concern for unlawful food purchases, harmful to health.

Consumers go through the selection, consumption, and disposal of a product or service to satisfy their needs (Bettman et al., 1998). It often involves comparison and information search processes among available options (Dhar & Sherman, 1996). Unfortunately, choices will be difficult to be made in unfamiliar situations (Chen, 2007). Understanding consumer choice is deemed to be a challenging task; therefore, when making food choices, individuals will generally collect related information through various sources such as friends and family, online reviews, advertising media, habits and familiarity – before selection made (Browning et al., 2013).

Curiosity regarding the determination of non-Muslim on HFC aroused aligned with the increasing acceptance towards halal food (Krishnan et al., 2017). The population of the world in 2017 reported a total of 61.3% Muslim population in Malaysia, which drives the growing interest in halal tourism (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Likewise, there is also a positive response towards the principle of halal food among non-Muslim in recent years (Wibowo & Ahmad, 2016). As this happens, HFC is no longer viewed solely as a religious requirement.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) was used in several studies related to consumers' behaviour and social psychology. Several studies on halal food consumption used TPB as their theoretical framework in determining consumers' intention to purchase and consume halal food and products. In this study, the factors were modified to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in determining the acceptance of non-Muslims on halal food. Using the TPB as a conceptual framework, attitudes such as health reasons and food quality were positively related to choosing halal products among consumers. In this study, attitude perception is measured using food assurance aspects of food assurance aspects such as 'halal food is healthier, halal food is more hygienic, and halal food is safe to eat. The subjective norm in this study refers to acculturation influences which include friends and colleagues' influences and their willingness to learn and accept new and other cultures. The perceived behaviour control of TPB in this study refers to the personality traits, including willingness to try new food and food familiarity. The study also showed that religious belief, exposure, and logo were determinants in predicting halal acceptance among consumers. A survey conducted by Syed and Nazura (2011) demonstrated that attitude, subjective norms and behavioural control significantly impact intention to purchase halal food.

## *2.2 Factors Affecting Halal Food Choice*

Non-Muslim travellers' acceptance of halal food could be due to several determinants. There are three factors in this study that may influence the acceptance of halal food for non-Muslim travellers. First, food assurance schemes developed to raise consumer awareness and ensure a specific range of benefits regarding the products' consequences. Halal logo credibility, health-conscious, animal welfare standards and food safety issues often linked to food assurance (Abdul et al., 2009; Mak et al., 2012; Eden et al., 2008; Holleran et al., 1999). Similarly, people have become particular in health, hygiene, and animal welfare issues in society today (Abd Latif et al., 2014; Mathew et al., 2012). The halal concept is not merely related to religious requirements but viewed as standards of health and hygienic cuisine style (Ismail & Nasiruddin, 2014). Cutler (2007) stated kosher foods are deemed safer and cleaner than non-halal food, especially in the tourism view. The emergence of food assurance issues and importance executed a certain degree of rationalisation (Mak et al., 2012) among tourists in food choices and directed them to halal dining. Rezai et al., 2011, stressed that food assurance is explained from other contexts, including food safety.

The second factor, acculturation influence, is cultural and psychological views through intercultural contact (Berry, 1997). Acculturation occurred through the fundamental of immigration and in multiracial countries (Jamal, 1996). Furthermore, the acculturation process influences human behaviour on food choice (Wibowo & Ahmad, (2016); Schnettler et al., 2013). Food acculturation and adaptation occurred through the exchange of knowledge, which includes formal and informal education, exposure to media, television, magazine and newspaper and the degree of social interaction among a different ethnic group. (Ishak et al.,

2013). Halal food acceptance among non-Muslims depends on the benefits and knowledge of halal (Berry, 1997). Acculturation of halal foods among different cultures increases the acceptability and usage of halal foods among non-Muslims (Ayyub, 2015).

The third and last factor is personality traits. Mak et al. (2012) proposed food-related personality traits as a pervasive prerequisite embedded within an individual characteristic when coming to various food-related behaviours. In the tourism literature, tasting on local delicacy is claimed to be an exciting yet pleasurable experience. Hence, for non-Muslims tourists, a halal logo serves as the benchmark of foods' quality (Grunert, 2006). It is an inclination for them to consume halal foods rather than unfamiliar local dishes. Still, individuals unfolded their strategies to simplify the food choices process (Furst et al., 1996).

Based on the above statements, therefore, the present study believes that there are significant relationships between food assurance, acculturation influence and personality traits on choosing halal food for non-Muslims.

### **3. Methodology**

The population of this study involved all the non-Muslim travellers in Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur. The sample size used in the study amounted to 382. This sample size fits with the investigations following the table of population and sample size (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). According to World Population Review, 2019, the amount of population in Kuala Lumpur is 7,780,30. Five top Malay delicacies restaurants in Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur, were chosen for these studies. Kampung Baru (translated to the new village) has come a long way since the British colony in 1900. While Kampung Baru is still retaining its village lifestyle within the city, the place has become must-visit heaven for food lovers. Aside from the Malay traditional houses, it is popularly known as a food haven offering various good Malay food (Funtaste, 2019). There are hundreds of Malay restaurants listed in Kampung Baru, and many famous and recommended by multiple bloggers, youtube, online media and sources, including from <https://www.jomjalan.com.my>, [saji.my](https://saji.my), [tripadvisor.com.my](https://tripadvisor.com.my), [hungrygowhere.com.my](https://hungrygowhere.com.my) and many others. The five most recommended Malay restaurants in Kampung Baru and chosen for this study are Nasi Lemak Antarabangsa, Suraya Seafood, Ayam Penyet Wong Solo, Rosdet Tom Yam and Hale's Kitchen. Data were collected for two weeks in November 2019 from visitors who patron these restaurants. 384 questionnaires were distributed and used for analysis. Researchers approached non-Muslim travellers who are aged 18 and above who patronises the restaurant to complete the questionnaire. For this study, the non-Muslim travellers were from both Malaysian and foreigners. Screening questions on respondents' backgrounds, such as their nationality (for foreigners) and State of origin (for Malaysian), were asked before they were allowed to answer the questionnaire. A self-administered questionnaire was used as the main primary data for the research. The questions are prepared in English, and it is comprised of two sections. Section A (demographic portfolio), Section B (travellers' perception of food assurance, acculturation influence and personality traits on halal food choice). Questions for the demographic profile contains five items, and it was adopted from Mahdzar (2019). Food assurance, acculturation influence and personal traits articles were adopted from (Chua et al., 2017); food assurance was measured of three items. Both acculturation influence and individual characteristics were captured using three things each, respectively. In this study, three-item measures were employed to assess non-Muslim travellers choosing halal food as the ultimate dependent construct. Before data collection, a pilot test was conducted to survey a sample of 30 respondents to test target respondents with knowledge related to the study topic in answering questions about the factors influencing non-Muslim travellers in choosing halal food at the Malay restaurant around Kuala Lumpur. The data collected in the pilot test were tested for the reliability of which Cronbach's Alpha value is showing accepted reliability of greater than 0.70 (food assurance is 0.833, acculturation influence is 0.811, the personal trait is 0.8766, and halal food choice is 0.884). Descriptive, Correlational Analysis and Regression

Analysis are then used to explore the strength of the relationship between three variables of non-Muslim travellers' acceptance of halal food.

## 4. Result and Discussion

### 4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Based on Table 1, the highest mean value for non-Muslim travellers' patronising halal food restaurant factors for food assurance was (Halal food is safe to eat according to proper manner slaughter), Acculturation Influence (I am willing to know and learn about other cultures), Personality Trait (I like to try new food) and Halal Food Choice (I recommended halal food to my family and friends). According to non-Muslim visitors at these restaurants, the least important factor is Personality Trait (I will consume halal food during my trip due to familiarity).

Table. 1. Factors Affecting Non-Muslim Visitors Halal Food Choice

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Halal food is healthier	384	3.62	1.208
Preparation of halal food is hygienic	384	3.62	1.152
Halal food is safe to eat according to proper manner slaughter.	384	3.73	1.219
I started consuming halal food due to friends and/ or colleagues' influences.	384	3.53	1.258
I consume halal food when I am with Muslim's friends and/ or colleagues	384	3.78	1.268
I am willing to know and learn about other cultures	384	3.79	1.173
I like to try new food.	384	3.88	1.911
I will consume halal food during my trip due to familiarity.	384	3.48	1.247
I will choose halal food even if I am not familiar with the restaurant	384	3.54	1.997
I recommended halal food to my family and friends	384	3.82	1.119
I used to gather information about halal food from my family and friends.	384	3.62	1.120
I always share my experience on halal food with my family and friends	384	3.74	1.026

### 4.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 2 exhibits the Pearson Correlation Matrix for all the independent variables, namely food assurance, acculturation influence and personality traits, followed by the dependent variable, non-Muslim visitors' halal food choice at Kampung Baru restaurants. Results of the correlations between the entire variables were statistically significant. However, there are low association between the non-Muslim travelers' halal food choice and food assurance ( $r = 0.237$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ), acculturation influence ( $r = 0.206$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ), and personality trait ( $r = 0.201$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ) since r-value are less than 0.30.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Matrix for Study Variables

	Food Assurance	Acculturation Influence	Personality Trait	Halal Food Choice
Food Assurance	1	.162**	.038	.237**
Acculturation Influence	.162**	1	.102*	.206**
Personality Trait	.038	.102*	1	.201**
Halal Food Choice	.237**	.206**	.201**	1

### 4.3 Regression Analysis

To see whether there is a significant relationship between the three factors of food assurance, acculturation influence and personality traits for non-Muslim travellers on halal food in Kampung Baru restaurants, a single step multiple regression was conducted. The nine items in independent factors (food assurance, acculturation influence and personality traits) and 1 item in the dependent (halal food choice) were collapsed and entered into the equation. The outcomes demonstrated a significant relationship between food assurance, personality trait, acculturation influence and halal food choices. The factors influencing non-Muslim travelers in Malaysia explained 11.6% (R-square = 0.116, F – change = 16.693,  $p < 0.000$ ) of the variance in halal food choice. It showed that all factors influencing halal food choice were significant; thus, the hypothesis is manifestly supported. Besides that, Table 2 shows the value of the beta coefficient for this study. The beta coefficient indicates which variables are important to the model by looking at the largest value while ignoring the negative signs. This study suggests that among the factors influencing halal food choice, food assurance (0.206) is the strongest influence and followed by personality trait (0.177) and acculturation influence (0.155). This finding is consistent with the existing literature where consumers concern over food assurance was among the main reasons they choose halal food. Healthy and food safety is indeed a concern by all consumers generally. Local authorities should provide guidelines to ensure consumers and travellers alike are protected from consuming food that can damage health. This finding is also consistent with Mathew (2014) and Grunert (2006) where they concluded that food quality and food safety are the utmost concern of consumers today.

Food-related personality traits in this study also proved to be an essential element for non-Muslim in accepting and choosing halal food. The findings supported the views of (Ahmad et al., 2013), where non-Muslims also enjoy the advantages of halal food with branding as confidence in the cleanliness and quality of the food compared to similar food but do not have a halal logo certification.

Acculturation influence such as consuming halal food due to friends or colleagues' influences, when they are with their Muslim's friends or colleagues; or their willingness to know and learn about other cultures although showed the least significant effect but is an essential factor influencing non-Muslims acceptance for halal food. The result confirmed the findings of (Sudin Lada et al., 2009), where family, friends and colleagues were strong determinant points in choosing halal products in Malaysia.

Table 3. Coefficient Halal Food Choice

Model	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant		9.602	.000
Food Assurance	.206	4.207	.000
Personality Trait	.177	3.655	.000
Acculturation Influence	.155	3.158	.002
Dependent Variable: Halal food choice			

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research examines the factor influencing halal food choices among non-Muslim travellers in Malaysia. This research indicates food assurance, acculturation and personality traits positively correlate with halal food choices among local non-Muslim travellers. The non-Muslims are getting aware and understand the context of halal products and services. The culture assimilation among Malaysians exposes and attracts non-Muslim travellers to consume halal products. It is essential to understand the attributes that non-Muslim travellers sought for in every purchase of halal food. This research will give advantages and give food operators and food officials insights in understanding the important factors in offering halal food services and concentrating on these factors that affect their visitor food consumption behaviour intentions in accepting and choosing halal food. It is important to note that this research has provided new insights of non-Muslims on their positive attitude and intends to acknowledge and select halal food. This is an excellent opportunity for Malay restaurants to consider the non-Muslim community seriously as one of their target markets.

Furthermore, the current raising concern over health today among consumers, including non-Muslims, may open another opportunity for these Malay restaurants. This is because non-Muslim consumers value Halal because of the health benefits it provides. Halal certified food products guarantee hygiene and cleanliness and fulfil the need of health-conscious consumers on how they want their food to be produced or prepared. Similar to any research study, this study also had some limitations. Convenience sampling was employed to select the sample from restaurants around Kg. Baru, Kuala Lumpur. Thus, results may not be generalised to a broader population. The selection obtained using one State, such as in Wilayah Persekutuan (Kuala Lumpur) may cause gaps in this study that may have different points of view on halal food. Respondents in other states may have different perceptions of Kuala Lumpur due to social norms and cultures. Therefore, additional studies with other Malaysia and testing perceptions on their behavioural intentions should be conducted to increase the opportunity to make comparisons and gain further insights.

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