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**Young consumers' attitude towards *halal* food outlets and JAKIM's *halal* certification in Malaysia**Aiedah Abdul Khalek<sup>a\*</sup>  
Taylors University, Malaysia**Abstract**

The attitude of Muslims on *halal* food is imperative in determining the Muslims' behavior towards consuming *halal* food. There are several studies on consumers' attitude in purchasing *halal* food in Malaysia focusing on consumers in general. But less attention is given to young Muslim consumers' on their attitude of *halal* food outlets and Malaysia's Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM)'s *halal* certification. Therefore, this paper focuses on young people who will determine the future of *halal* industry in this country. The main objectives of this paper are a) to identify the attitude of young Muslim consumers towards *halal* food outlets, b) to determine their attitude towards *halal* certification issued by JAKIM and c) to identify the relationship between subjective norm and perceived behavioral control towards the attitude of young consumers in choosing *halal* food outlets. The framework of consumers' attitude in this study is based on the Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior which postulates three conceptually independent determinants of behavioral intention: attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control. Data were collected through self administered questionnaires and the respondents comprised of Muslim students between 16 and 35 years old from Higher Learning Private Institutions. The findings of this study revealed young Muslims' positive attitude towards *halal* food outlets and JAKIM's certification. However, the subjective norms have less significant influences compared to attitude and behavioral control of young consumers in choosing *halal* food outlets. The study suggests that to increase positive attitude of Muslim consumers, relevant bodies and media should augment the promotion and publicity of *halal* certification issued by JAKIM to increase awareness among young Muslim consumers in Malaysia. Future research may look into the relationship between the three independent variables of the Planned Behaviors Theory towards young consumers' intention to choose *halal* food products in different geographical locations in Malaysia.

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## 1. Introduction

*Halal* is an Arabic word which means lawful or permitted as prescribed by Islam. Malaysia's Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) defines *halal* food as food not made of, or contained any part of animal which is forbidden by Islam (for example pork) and free from any unlawful or impure element. *Halal* food should be prepared, processed or manufactured hygienically and safe to consume. It also includes the process of slaughtering, storing, displaying and the preparing of the food itself (Shahidan & Md Nor Othman, 2004). Consuming *halal* food is not only observing the religious obligation for Muslims, but also maintaining the standard of food offered by the food providers.

The *halal* food industry is one of the fastest growing food industries and expected to increase further in the world market (Suddin Lada 2009). There are more than two billion Muslims in the world populated in 112 countries, who are the current consumers of *halal* food (www.mida.gov.my, 2011). Muslim consumer is a fast growing market resulted by religious conviction on *halal* and the remarkable acceptance of *halal* concept through the process of assimilation in the global society (Syed Shah Alam, 2011). Furthermore, in most Muslim countries, the consumption of *halal* food is a part of complying with the state law (Jamal, 2003). Unfortunately Malaysia's participation in the *halal* market is still inadequate compared to the neighboring country namely Thailand as the fast emerging *halal* hub in the region (Syed Syah Alam 2011). In Malaysia, manufacturers and food operators use *halal* logo as a way to ensure consumers that their food or products are *halal* compliant. Indirectly, *halal* certification provides confidence to consumers on the *halal* food which they consume. Malaysian government has made it compulsory for food and products which are declared as *halal* to have JAKIM's *halal* certification. JAKIM is an acronym for Malaysia's Department of Islamic Development under the Prime Minister's Department which is the only authorized organization to issue and monitor the *halal* certification in Malaysia.

It is vital for Muslim consumers to have a positive attitude and awareness on *halal* food consumption as it is part of the religious obligation. The attitude of consumers' particularly Muslim consumers will contribute to the future of *halal* industry in this country. Therefore, the main objectives of this study are a) to find out the attitude of young Muslim consumers towards *halal* food outlets and b) to identify their attitude on *halal* certification issued by JAKIM and c) to identify the relationship between subjective norm and perceived behavioral control towards the attitude of young consumer in choosing *halal* food outlets. This study therefore seeks to answer these research questions:

*RQ1*: What are the attitudes of young consumers towards *halal* food outlets in Malaysia?

*RQ2*: What are the attitudes of young consumers towards JAKIM's *halal* certification in Malaysia?

*RQ3*: What is the influence of subjective norms towards the attitude of young Muslim consumers on *halal* food outlets?

*RQ4*: What is the influence of perceived behavioral control towards the attitude of young Muslim consumers' on *halal* food outlets?

## 2. Literature Review

Religion influences consumers' behaviour in many societies (Delener, 1994 ; Pettinger, 2004). It is also a factor in deciding food purchasing and establishing food habits in individual and society (Bonne, 2007). Other than religion, the intention to consume or to purchase food is also related to positive or negative attitude, social pressure and behavioral control of individual. The theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) has been used in a number of studies related to consumers' behavior and social psychology (Ajzen,

1991). Besides, there are few studies on *halal* food consumption using TPB as their theoretical framework in determining consumers' intention to purchase and consume *halal* food and products (Ajzen, 2005).

In Malaysia, consumers' attitude on *halal* food is closely associated with *halal* certification as verified and issued by JAKIM. *Halal* logo reflects that the food is permissible to be consumed by Muslims and indicates the respective food outlets have undergone strict inspection before the certification is issued. *Halal* certification in Malaysia provides competitive advantage for manufacturers and quality assurance for consumers. The introduction and enforcement of this *halal* certification generally increase the understanding of Muslims in Malaysia to consume Islamic compliance products and food (Shahidan & Md Nor Othman, 2004). The consumption of animal products is mainly given attention and regulated according to individual religious teaching (Shatenstein and Ghadirian, 1997). Golnaz R. and Zainalabidin (2010) point out in their study that *halal* certification is important only for Muslims because they are required to consume *halal* food as according to Islamic teaching.

A study conducted by Syed Shah Alam (2011) on attitude towards *halal* meat purchasing confirmed that attitude, subjective norms and behavioral control have significant impact on intention to purchase *halal* food. However, in a separate study by Liou and Contento (2001) in Chinese American society reveals that a subjective norm has no significance towards their food behavioral intention. In other similar studies but using Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) find that attitude and subjective norms positively relate to the intention of choosing *halal* products among consumers (Suddin Lada, 2009, Arshia Muktar 2012). In fact, according to Suddin Lada (2009), subjective norms play the most influential factor in the context of multiracial and multicultural society. However, past studies did not focus on the attitude of Muslim young consumers' in choosing *halal* food outlets in Malaysia. In view of the fact that young consumers have different characteristic and preferences of their behavioral intention, this study is initiated to find out their attitude towards *halal* food outlets and *halal* certification in Malaysia.

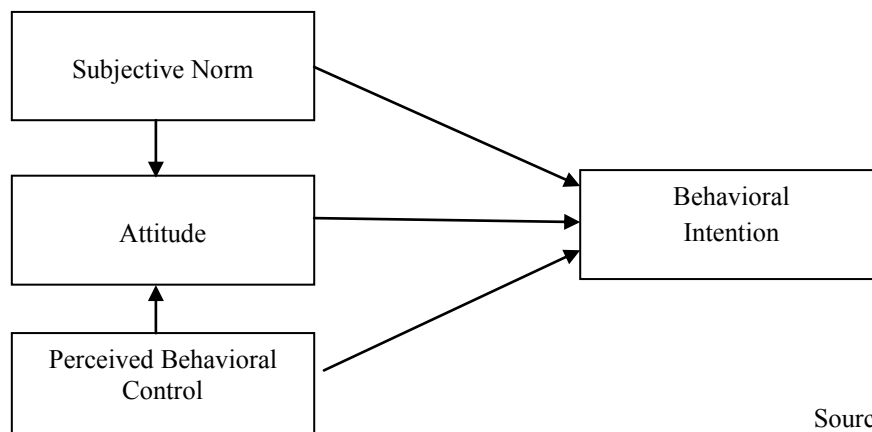
### **3. Methodology**

The participants for this study are young Muslim consumers in Higher Learning Institutions in Klang Valley. A questionnaire was administered using random sampling method for the data collection. The respondents comprise of Muslim students aged 16-35 years old from five Higher Learning Institutions. 250 questionnaires were distributed and a total of 207 questionnaires were completed by respondents. Prior to the actual survey, 50 questionnaires were used to facilitate a pilot study for this research. The questionnaire used a 5-point *Likert* scale indicating strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. Descriptive and correlation analyses were used to explain the findings.

#### *3.1 Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical framework of consumers' behavior in this study is based on the Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). According to this theory, intentions to perform the behaviors are influenced by three independent determinants; attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control. In this study, attitude towards the behavior is referred as the respondents' favorable or unfavorable evaluation to perform certain behavior. The second determinant, subjective norm is a perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior. Perceived behavioral control is a belief about control of the opportunities and resources by an individual in performing the behavior (Ajzen,2005).

The research framework used in this study is based on TPB model as shown in the figure 1.



Source: Ajzen (1991)

**Fig. 1.** A Schematic diagram of TPB

The framework shows that attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control have certain influence towards behavioral intention, and in this study, towards Muslims intention in choosing *halal* food outlet with *halal* certification. In this study, attitude is also characterized by religious' based evaluation on the importance of consuming *halal* food for Muslims. Borne (2006) describes that Muslims consume *halal* meat to abide by their religious teaching. In addition, human behavior is guided by the expectations of others such as friends, family and societal norms (Van Hooft et al., 2006). In relation to the fact that Malaysia is a collectivistic society, people tend to perceive themselves as interdependent with their society in performing their behavior (Karijn et al, 2007). Equally important is the third independent variable, perceived behavioral control which also contributes to the prediction of behavior (Ajzen, 1980). In this study, perceived behavioral control is referred to as the ability and availability to purchase and consume *halal* food.

Using the TPB as a research model, Chang (1998) discovers the significant influence of subjective norms to attitudes towards behavioral intention. He suggests that consumers' attitudes are formed with the influence of subjective norms. In addition, this study also looks into the relationship between the influences of perceived behavioral control to the formation of young consumers' attitude in choosing *halal* food outlets. Hence, based on Chang's suggestion the following hypotheses are yield:

*H1:* There is a positive relationship between subjective norms and attitude of young Muslim consumers in choosing *halal* food outlet.

*H2:* There is a positive relationship between perceived behavioral control and attitude of young Muslim consumers in choosing *halal* food outlet

#### 4. Findings and hypotheses testing

A total of 207 questionnaires were answered by Muslim respondents from five Higher Learning Institutions in Klang Valley. The questionnaire was pre-tested to determine its feasibility and reliability. 50 respondents were selected to complete the pilot test. Reliability test was conducted to ensure the

internal consistency of measurement items and the Cronbach's alpha was calculated. Table 1 below shows the reliabilities of four constructs which are acceptable since Cronbach's alpha exceed 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978)

Table 1 Reliability Coefficient

Dimension	Number of item	Cronbach's alpha
Attitude	14	0.754
Subjective Norm	5	0.699
Perceived Behavioral Control	5	0.852
Behavioral Intention	3	0.719

#### 4.1 Demographic Analysis

Table 2 shows the profile of respondents. 110 respondents were female (53.1%) and 97 (46.9%) were male. Majority of the respondents (98.6%) were between 16-28 years old. 95 respondents (45.9%) acquired formal knowledge about *Halal* concept in *Fardhu Ain* Class (KAFA). Prior to the study, respondents have had a background knowledge on the concept of halal, acquired formally from *Fardhu Ain* classes (45.9%), schools (28.7%) and higher learning Institutions (5.2%), and non-formally from internet (22.7%), family (28.5%), books (15.1%), magazines (10.1%), television (4.8%), friends (3.9%), and radio (2.4%).

Table 2 Demographic Profile of Respondent (n=207)

Demographic variables	Details	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	110	53.1
	Male	97	46.9
Age	16- 18 years old	48	23.2
	19 - 28 years old	156	75.4
	29 - 35 years old	3	1.4
Education	Certificate	34	16.4
	Diploma	79	38.2
	Degree	41	19.8
	Post Graduate	11	5.3
	Others	42	20.3
Formal Knowledge about <i>Halal</i>	Fardhu Aid Class (KAFA)	95	45.9
	Primary School	55	26.6
	Secondary School	46	22.2
	College	4	1.9
	University	7	3.4

Table 2 Demographic Profile of Respondent (n=207) (continued)

Non-Formal Knowledge about <i>Halal</i>	Books	31	15.0
	Magazines	21	10.1
	Newspaper	26	12.6
	Radio	5	2.4
	Television	10	4.8
	Internet	47	22.7
	Family	59	28.5
	Friends	8	3.9
Origin	Malaysia	179	86.5
	Asia	9	4.3
	Middle East	6	2.9
	Europe	1	.5
	Central Asia	7	3.4
	Others	5	2.4

#### 4.2 Descriptive Analysis

This study intends to find out the attitude of consumers towards *halal* food outlet and JAKIM's *halal* certification. The descriptive analysis was used to answer the research questions and to achieve its objectives. First research question; what are the attitudes of young consumers towards *halal* food outlets in Malaysia? The data collected from questionnaires showed that young Muslim consumers in Private Higher Learning Institutions have positive attitude toward *halal* food outlets. The finding revealed that majority of the young consumers totaling 95.1%, agreed that eating *halal* food is important to them. 79.2% of them agreed that they will not dine in a non-*halal* food outlet. However, half of the total respondents (57%) were not aware that not all fast food and chain coffee shops are *halal*. The subjective norms had less significant influences towards respondents' attitude in choosing *halal* food outlets. For example 71.5% of respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that family influenced them in choosing *halal* or non-*halal* food outlet. On the other hand, 78.2% agreed that peoples' perception affect their decision in choosing *halal* or non-*halal* food outlet.

Second objective is to determine the attitude towards *halal* food outlet and *halal* certification issued by JAKIM. In the survey conducted, the findings showed that respondents agreed *halal* food outlets should have a certified *halal* logo. In fact, 86.5% of the respondents agreed *halal* certification in Malaysia should be in the authority of Malaysia Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM). Besides only 92.3% of the respondents able to recognize and be aware of the latest *halal* logo certified by JAKIM.. This study also demonstrates that behavioral control had significant influence towards attitude on *halal* food outlets and JAKIM's certification. 80% of respondents agreed that it is easy to find *halal* food outlets in Malaysia, however only 62.3% of respondents agreed that it is easy to find *halal* food outlets with JAKIM's certification.

The first and second hypotheses were tested using the correlation analysis and the results are presented in table 3. The result indicates that subjective norms have positive relationship towards attitude in choosing *halal* food outlets ( $\beta=0.232^*$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Behavioral control was also found to be positively related to attitude ( $\beta=0.406^{**}$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

Table 3: Result of Correlation Analysis

Variables	Attitude	Subjective Norm	Perceived Behavioral Control
Attitude	1.000		
Subjective Norm	0.232*	1.000	
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.406**	0.313*	1.000

Note: \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

## 5. Discussion

This study reveals that young consumers' attitude is positive towards *halal* food outlets and JAKIM's *halal* certification in Malaysia. Their attitude might be influenced by religious belief, mass media and peoples around them. JAKIM's *halal* certification also plays an important role in shaping the attitude of Muslims towards *halal* food. The attitude towards *halal* certification indirectly reflects the trust of Muslim consumers towards *halal* certification in Malaysia. The consumers' trust is crucial in determining the *halal* food consumption among Muslims. The successful *halal* market also depends on observance of religious obligation, and it is essential to make it compulsory for the *halal* food operators to have *halal* certification (Aitelmaalem, et al., 2005).

This study also illustrates that subjective norms play less significant role towards choosing *halal* food outlets compared to behavioral control of young consumers. This study discloses that family's perception does not play as much importance as compared to other people when it comes to young consumers' behavioral intention. Probably, this is because the respondents of this study are young consumers in urban areas like Klang Valley who are more independent in making decision in choosing food. In contrast, Suddin Lada, Geoffrey and Hainuddin (2009) describe Malaysia's subjective norm is significant where family, friends and colleague are strong determinant points in choosing *halal* products. Syed Shah Alam and Nazura (2011) also stress the fact that Malaysia with a predominantly Muslim population practices a collectivistic culture which subjective norms normally play an important role in Muslims' *halal* food purchasing. In addition, subjective norms are positively related to attitude of young Muslim consumers in choosing *halal* food outlets. This is in line with the finding of other studies which show that attitude is not independent from the influence of subjective norms (Tarkiainen and Sundqvist 2005, Chang 1998, Suddin Lada et. al. 2009). Government and marketers may incorporate the element of attitudes and social pressure in their campaigns and advertisement in promoting *halal* food outlets and JAKIM's certification in Malaysia. (Sudin Lada, 2009).

The limitation of this study is the narrowed geographical location of respondents. Therefore, the finding of this study is generalizable only to young Muslim urban consumers. Future research may broaden the geographical locations in Malaysia in order to represent young Muslim consumers both from the urban and rural areas. Also, there could be possible research which looks into the relationship between the three independents variables of the Planned Behaviors Theory towards young consumers' intention to choose *halal* food products in Malaysia.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendation

The result of this study showed that young Muslim consumers particularly in Malaysian Higher Learning Institutions have a positive attitude towards *halal* food outlets and JAKIM's *halal* certification. Surprisingly, family does not play an important role in promoting *halal* food outlets among their family

members. The insignificant role of subjective norms is contradicting with other studies which focus on Muslim consumers in general (Arshia Mukhtar 2012, Syed Shah Alam, 2011, Suddin Lada 2009, Karijn 2007). This might happen because the respondents of this study are urban young consumers who normally are more self-determining in making decision of their food inclination. The role of Muslim family to educate their young family members on *halal* food should be escalated in our society. In addition, the misunderstanding of chain coffee shop and fast food should be given extra attention by government bodies. Therefore, government and relevant bodies should take into consideration the factors that influence consumers' attitude and awareness on *halal* food outlets and the *halal* certification in Malaysia.

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