Halal Meat Issue: How Far Does the Preferred Halal Brand Matter?

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Abstract

Recently, there has been a raised concern about halal authenticity, prompting a Malaysian Halal authority investigation. Ensuring halal meat compliance is complex, requiring slaughterhouses to follow Standard Operating Procedures and Syariah guidelines. This study examines consumer choices regarding halal meat brands, focusing on the impact of pricing strategies on product quality. From the insights of 112 WhatsApp questionnaires, this quantitative, cross-sectional study demonstrates that product quality significantly shapes consumers' brand preferences within the halal meat market. The findings underscore the significance of product quality as a determinant factor in consumer decision-making processes within the Halal meat market, shedding light on the complex interplay between pricing, quality, and preferred Halal brands. These results have implications for industry practices and government policies, as Muslim Malaysians prioritize JAKIM-certified firms, stressing the importance of high halal standards and transparency. Further research on halal meat from the industry perspective is highly recommended.

Keywords: Halal meat; Preferred halal brand; Pricing; Product quality

Introduction

The world Muslim population has grown by leaps and bounds, thus making the world's and Malaysia's halal sectors crucial to economic expansion (Basarud-din, 2022; Husin et al., 2023). Halal meat faces various issues, including concerns about animal welfare during slaughter, debates over the necessity of stunning (Govindaiah et al., 2023), challenges in labeling and transparency regarding production methods, economic and environmental impacts of meat production, inconsistencies in certification processes, and cultural and religious sensitivities in multicultural societies. These issues encompass debates over the humane treatment of animals, ethical standards in meat production, transparency for consumers, environmental sustainability, and the intersection of religious practices with broader societal norms. Today, the Muslim community sees the halal logo (Ghazali et al., 2022) as a fundamental benchmark for most consumers when purchasing a halal product. Prince and Wahid (2023) emphasized that halal-organic meat influences consumer satisfaction and that meat-purchasing behavior influences healthy life expectancy, health and food related quality, and tranquility. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the public is always cautious when choosing goods, even if the words or logos of halal from local or foreign authorities are displayed. The increase in the halal product market at the global level shows encouraging demand. The increase in the number of Muslims causes an increase in demand for halal food products.

Halal issues are not only viewed as religious concerns but also as a way of life (Husin et al., 2021). Everyone has their justification for choosing the right food. Religious factors dominate values, habits, and attitudes, shaping the individual's lifestyle and further affecting their behavior in making decisions, especially as consumers of food products. Wong et al. (2023) emphasized that all criteria generated and complied with should follow Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and requirements. Finding halal food for the well-being of life for Muslims is a must. Therefore, every Muslim individual needs to slaughter animals such as cows, chickens, or goats according to the method prescribed in Islam to ensure that the food prepared is halal and suitable to eat (Halal Toyyiban). Tieman and Che Ghazali (2012) explain that Muslims want to ensure that the food and products used are halal, including production, preparation, management, and storage, and they need to be guaranteed of their status. Al-Khatib et al. (1995) and Bonne et al. (2007) reiterated that Muslim consumers who follow the teachings of Islam and have an utterly Muslim identity would make a high demand for halal food that complies with Islamic law. Muslim consumers now want clear product ingredient information, and they also do not easily trust the halal mark, and that trust decreases if the product is from a non-Muslim country (Ismaeel & Blaim, 2012). Hence, it is crucial to have this study to find out what matters in buying halal product meat so that Muslims are confident in ensuring their belief and lifestyles are Syariah compliant.

The main challenge of the halal issue in Malaysia is from a legal point of view because Malaysia does not have a Halal Act that applies to the whole countries in the world. Malaysia needs to have its slaughterhouse abroad to overcome the issue of doubts about the halal status of imported meat. Chairman of Islamic Defenders Organizations (PEMBELA) Aminuddin Yahaya said that the slaughterhouse could be built through a government-owned company (GLC) in any country that exports meat to this country (Utusan Malaysia, July 21, 2022).

According to a report by Utusan Malaysia on May 17, 2022, halal difficulties in Malaysia

emerged when 'The Hood Man,' a former worker at an offshore slaughterhouse, publicly stated there was video footage of animals being slaughtered wrongly. As a result, JAKIM and the Department of Veterinary Services stopped the plant's license while a thorough investigation was conducted. Additionally, SICHMA, the organization responsible for halal certification, was sent a warning letter and could have its certification status revoked. Halal certification has achieved the highest level of acceptance, particularly within Malaysia's food industry (Harun et al., 2023). Also, Muslim consumers in Malaysia typically look for authentic Halal Certification for their purchases (Bahjam, 2022). Products from the facility were prohibited from being imported into Malaysia, and those already on the market were given to the Veterinary Services Department. This emphasizes the importance of comprehending the connection between halal meat pricing, product quality, and brand preference among Malaysian consumers to satisfy their needs better.

As Muslims need to make decisions within the parameters of what is permissible by our beliefs, they have a choice between halal and haram, and of course, they should choose halal products (Husin et al., 2015). Eating halal food guarantees everyone on this earth will be blessed in life and the afterlife. The JAKIM-issued halal logo can be used to confirm if food goods are halal in Malaysia; nevertheless, Muslim parents should check the ingredients to ensure they comply with Sharia law, and this advice should be revisited regularly. As a result, the halal emblem is insufficient; the cooking procedure also needs to be hygienic and free of anything forbidden, or that does not follow Shariah. Aslan (2023) shows that the halal logo status is necessary to prove that a product is halal, and the level of perception of halal among consumers can be classified into two, namely high level and medium level. One important thing that needs to be paid attention to is to delve into the factors that cause clear doubts on the part of consumers towards a product labeled halal in Malaysia.

More Muslims are aware of their obligation only to eat Halal food, there is a growing demand for Halal cuisine. At the same time, there has been a surge in global awareness of the significance of food safety, particularly regarding Halal cuisine. Technological advancements allow food product components to be accurately and quickly analyzed. Furthermore, the increased demand for these items results from the Halal certification, which offers quality assurance and wholesomeness. Riansyah and Sundari (2024) highlight that product quality significantly influences consumer purchasing decisions for a prominent packaged meat brand. Ensuring high-quality standards, including halal certification, has been crucial in building consumer trust and maintaining a strong market presence. Understanding the decision-making processes of halal-conscious consumers offers valuable insights for developing effective marketing strategies, enabling businesses in the halal industry to align their offerings with the ethical, religious, and quality expectations of their target market (Arifin et al., 2022; Mahliza, 2023). Regression analysis confirms a positive relationship between product quality and purchasing decisions, underscoring its critical role in consumer preferences. Thus, this study aims to investigate the dynamics of consumer preferences for Halal meat brands, particularly emphasizing the relationship between pricing strategies and product quality. The rationale for this study develops from the increasing global demand for Halal products, directed by the growing Muslim population and reinforced awareness of food safety, halalan and toyyiban compliance. Moreover, concerns over improper halal certifications and doubts regarding imported meat's halal status highlight the importance of understanding factors influencing consumer trust and preference. Exploring these dynamics is key for attending consumer

concerns, enhancing industry transparency, and guiding policy formulation to advocate stringent Halal standards.

Methodology

The method used in this research is a quantitative method where data is collected using a questionnaire distributed to respondents. Two statistical software programs have been used to analyse the data collection. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.0 was used for descriptive statistics in the first part. This was followed by an explanation of the preliminary data analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM) 3.0 to determine whether the hypotheses are relevant to the research findings. The respondents in this study are Malaysian Muslim citizens who are aware of the consumption of halal meat. The hypotheses tested in this study were taken from the literature review described earlier, namely pricing (PRC), which has a positive and significant effect on preferred Halal Meat Brand (HBP) and product quality (PQ) as a mediating variable.

In this study, G*Power was used to help sample the number of respondents, G*Power is a stand-alone power analysis program for many statistical tests commonly used in the social, behavioural and biomedical sciences. It is freely available online for Windows and Mac OS X platforms (Faul et al., 2007). Based on Figure 1, the minimum sample size is 112 respondents with an effect size of 0.15, and the number of predictors is three.
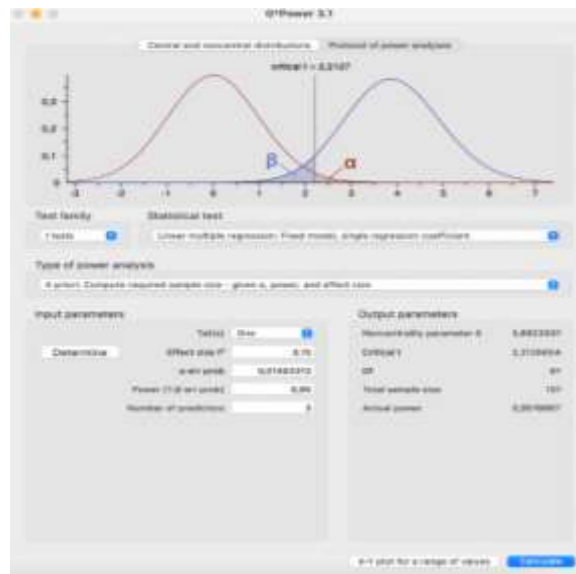

Figure 1. G*power Analysis

A total of 112 respondents who participated in this study were asked to choose a scale of 1 to 5 (strongly disagree = 1, to strongly agree = 5) to state how important it is for consumers of halal brand products. Google Forms was used to disseminate the questionnaires online, and the results were collected over the course of one month, from January 15, 2024, to February 17, 2024,

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics Test

Figure 2 lists the top five halal meat brands available in Malaysia: Ramly, Allana, AzZain, Ayamas, and Colla Meat. It turns out that Ramly is the most popular brand among consumers, having been chosen by 61 respondents with a 54% preference, while Allana is the least popular brand, with only 2% of consumers choosing it. Ramly meat is more popular in Malaysia because it has been selling halal meat for over 40 years and is well-known for its halal burger meat. Muslims will probably only eat food that have been certified as halal as the brand goes, regardless of how it looks or tastes (Ismail, 2023). Meanwhile, for gender, it can be seen in Figure 3 that most respondents based on gender are women, as many as 85 people, with a percentage of 76%. In Figure 4, we can see that the education level of most respondents is at the Bachelor Degree level with a presentation of 87%, and the least is the SPM education level of 2%; this is also in line with Figure 5 where respondents with total income above RM10,971 is the most with a presentation of 50%.
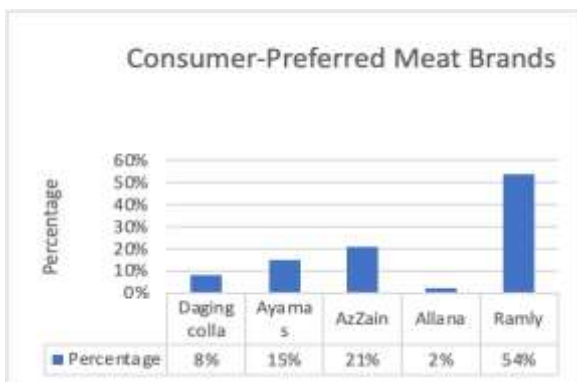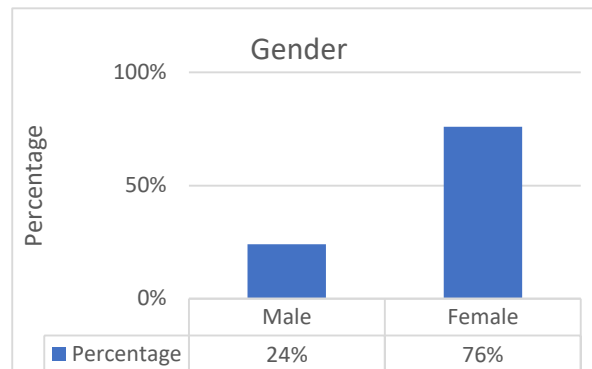

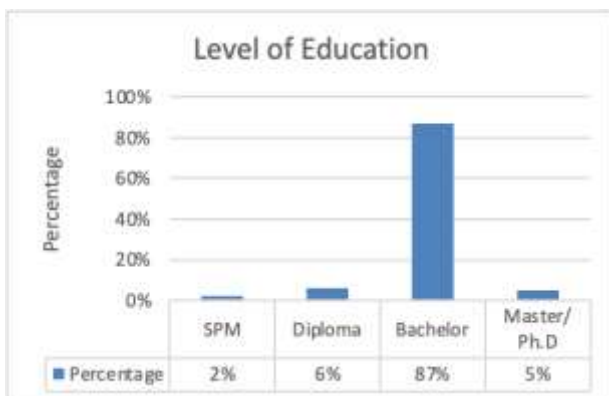Figure 2: Preferred Meat Brands

Figure 3: Gender

Figure 4. Level of education

Figure 5. Monthly household income

Measurement Model Analysis

The researcher subsequently conducted a concurrent validity analysis of the model. The results are illustrated in Figure 6. PLS-SEM analysis shows loading indicators, Composite Reliability - CR (γ), and AVE for each reflective construct. The loading value of an item must be greater than or equal to 0.5 to ensure that the AVE achieves a score greater

than 0.5 and a minimum CR value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). Analyzing the external loading values of each of the three constructs of 18 statement items found that one item had a loading of 0.90 or more. In contrast, 6 items have a minimum loading of 0.80, and the rest have a minimum loading of 0.60, making a total of 13 statement items. The values for all remaining item elements below 0.60 are PRC2, PRC4, HBP1, HBP2, and PQ1, which contain values below the unacceptable value.

The convergent validity analysis shows that most of the items (13 out of 18) meet the threshold for validity with loadings of 0.60 or higher, significantly supporting the model's constructs. High loading values, one item above 0.90 and six items above 0.80, indicate strong reliability and internal consistency. However, five items (PRC2, PRC4, HBP1, HBP2, and PQ1) were below the 0.60 threshold, indicating a need for deletion to enhance the model's validity and reliability.
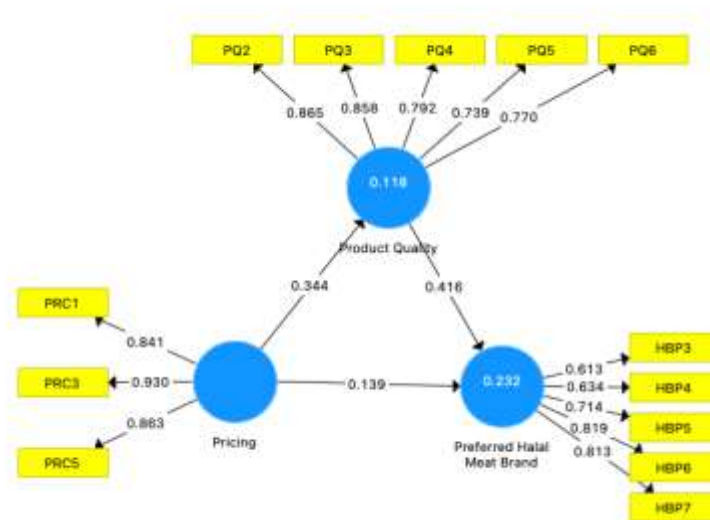

Figure 6. Initial Broad Model

Discriminant Validity

Table 1 shows that the model results meet the Fornell-Larcker criteria: The square root of the AVE for a construct should be higher than its correlation with any other construct in the model. This demonstrates that the construct shares more variance with its own items than other constructs, supporting discriminant validity.

Table 1. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	HBP	PQ	PC
Preferred Halal Meat Brand (HBP)	0.879		
Product Quality (PQ)	0.344	0.806	
Pricing (PC)	0.282	0.464	0.724

HTMT is defined as the average item correlation value across constructs compared to the mean (geometric) correlation method for items measuring the same construct, and the suggested threshold value is less than 0 (Benitez et al., 2020). Table 2 shows that all values are less than 0.85, indicating discriminant validity. In conclusion, all discriminant validity criteria, namely the Fornell-Larcker and HTMT criteria, provide strong evidence for constructing discriminant validity.

Table 2. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	HBP	PQ	PC
Preferred Halal Meat Brand (HBP)			
Product Quality (PQ)	0.401		
Pricing (PC)	0.340	0.530	

Structural Model

This step evaluates the path coefficients' statistical significance and relationship. The researcher needs to run Bootstrap to evaluate the significance of the path coefficient and its value, usually in the range of "1 and þ1 (Hair et al, 2011). Table 3 shows the path coefficient (β) and the importance of the structural model. Further discussion of the hypothesis submitted is reported using the path coefficient results in the hypothesis testing section. Pricing does not affect the Preferred Halal Meat Brand. Where the p-value is greater than the value of 0.05, if we look at the Pricing on Product Quality value, the direct effect value is (4,927 > 1.96 and 0.000 < 0.05), and the results are significant. This means that hypothesis H2 can be accepted. This proves that pricing affects Product Quality. Furthermore, the value of the direct effect of Product Quality on the Preferred Halal Meat Brand is 3.563> 1.96 and 0.000 <0.05. These findings suggest halal meat brands should emphasize product quality and strategic pricing to build consumer preference.

Table 3. Significance Testing Results of the Structural Model Path Coefficients (N=112)

Path	β	t-statistic	p-value	Effect size	Decision
H1: Pricing -> Preferred Halal Meat Brand	0.139	1.456	0.146	0.093	Not Significant
H2: Pricing -> Product Quality	0.344	4.927	0.000	0.070	Significant
H3: Product Quality-> Preferred Halal Meat Brand	0.416	3.563	0.000	0.093	Significant

Note: S= Significant; NS = Not Significant; β, Coefficient; f2 = Effect Size

Mediation Analysis

Analyzing the mediation effect required a bootstrapping procedure. The objective was to assess the mediating effect of Product Quality (the intermediate variable) on the relationship between permissible exogenous and endogenous latent changes. This requires a "bootstrap" procedure, which is supported by using the default Bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa). This is the best approach to attracting the mediator's attention when it comes up. In addition, this method is exceedingly suitable for PLS-SEM models because it makes no assumptions about the shape of the distribution that is allowed. Therefore, it can be applied to measure mediating effects (Ramayah et al., 2018). The analysis in Table 4 shows that product quality is crucial in mediating pricing and preference for halal meat brands. With an indirect effect (β = 0.144), t-statistic of 2.648, and p-value of 0.008, this relationship is significant. This means that pricing influences consumers' perception of quality, which then affects their brand preference, highlighting quality as key in connecting pricing to brand choice in the halal meat market.

Table 4. Mediating analysis (Indirect Effect Assessment)

Indirect Path	β	t- statistic	p-value	Decision
Pricing-> Product Quality->Preferred Halal Meat Brand	0.144	2.648	0.008	Significant

The study demonstrated that most muslim Malaysians are aware and cautious of Halal

meat products. Halal meat brands are essential for respondents who want to buy halal meat. They strongly feel that the meat they bought with the Halal logo. They would only buy their preferred halal meat brand, even if slightly more expensive, to oblige their responsibility and ensure their practices are good muslims. The Activists of the muslim Consumer Association (PPIM) asserted that more frequent monitoring is done on the slaughterhouses involved in whether they comply with the guidelines set by the government. Matters related to halal and haram should not be taken lightly because these matters are the primary source of food for Muslims in this country.

Health and Safety Perceptions

The study acknowledges the inherent limitations of online surveys, including potential biases such as self-selection and limited access to specific demographic groups. However, efforts were made to minimize these biases by designing a straightforward, concise questionnaire and targeting respondents within a specific context—Muslim consumers aware of halal meat consumption. Additionally, while the data collection was conducted in a single geographic area, this focus aligns with the study's aim to explore localized consumer behavior, which offers valuable insights specific to the halal meat market. The questionnaire was distributed using purposive sampling by directly approaching consumers visiting the local wet market. Consumers were first asked whether they were purchasing meat; if they answered "yes," they were invited to complete a brief questionnaire to understand their preferences regarding halal meat. The questionnaire was then administered through Google Forms, but respondents were directly approached and selected around the local wet market. Only consumers meeting this criterion were selected for participation, and the entire process was conducted promptly and with respect for their privacy. Future research should address these limitations by expanding geographic scope and employing stratified sampling techniques to improve representativeness and mitigate bias.

Conclusion

Muslim Malaysians prioritize firms bearing the JAKIM halal label to ensure that they adhere to Islamic norms and are extremely aware of and cautious while buying their preferred halal meat products. Price determines their preferred brand, and product quality is the mediator when purchasing their halal meat brand. This study highlights the need for continued government oversight and more openness to uphold halal standards and give customers comprehensive details about the source and preparation method of the meat. The study's implications on the halal meat issue highlight several essential areas that can affect government policy and industry operations to satisfy Muslim customers' needs. The results highlight the significance of upholding strict halal standards and being transparent about sourcing and processing, and Muslim Malaysians give top priority to companies that have earned the JAKIM halal certification. We strongly recommend some interesting future studies on halal meat, such as Digital Verification and Blockchain Technology, Consumer Preferences Across Regions, the impact of Halal Standards on International Trade, and Health and Safety Perceptions.

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