

Influence of Islamic religious practices in marketplace options and consumer buying of food products - A systematic review

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Abstract

A systematic review was conducted on available literature on the specific topic of the influence of Islamic religious practices in marketplace options and consumer buying of food products. A brief overview of the main practices of Islamic dietary law and their relevance to the research topic was provided. A protocol for the search and eligibility of research works was devised and applied to the open source internet database via the prominent search engine, Google. Further, only scholarly articles were considered using the relevant function on the Google Search engine. The final selected works were only six. The systematic review revealed some interesting observations. A majority of the reviewed articles were about the purchasing decisions of the consumers although some of the articles contained suggestions regarding the marketing and packaging of products such that Muslim customers would be better targeted or satisfied. Four out of six studies had a geographic focus. Out of these four, three of the studies explored the subject from the point of view of citizens or Muslims in non-Muslim majority countries. Two of the six studies found that the higher the religiosity of the customer, the greater the value placed on halal labelling as being determinative of buying behaviour. Two out of six studies showed that awareness or knowledge of the product had a significant relationship with intention to purchase, i.e. knowledge or prior awareness of the product had an influence on consumers' decision to buy a product. There are some gaps in the literature in this area and the field would benefit from more research, especially from the research that is conducted from the point of view of the marketplace options and what manufacturers and retailers are considering when labelling *halal* products.

Keywords: Islam, Consumer, Food Purchase, Behaviour, Marketing

Introduction

There are a number of factors that can influence the sale and purchase of products, particularly food items. These can include factors such as perception of brand of product, clever marketing, reliability, cultural factors, demographic factors, purchasing power and so on.

However, one factor that does have an important impact, both in the marketplace options available to consumers as well as the purchasing decisions made by consumers of food products is that of religious practice. In particular, this article will explore the influence of Islamic religious practices in marketplace options and consumer buying of food products by performing a review of available literature.

The review will broadly look into the influence of religious practices in marketplace options and consumer buying of food products, specifically by first understanding Islamic religious practices

as they pertain to food, and then looking into influence of Islamic religious practices in marketplace options and consumer buying of food products.

Islamic Dietary Law

Islamic dietary laws are complex but well known. Some of the important tenets include not eating pork meat or pork products as well as being forbidden to drink any intoxicants such as alcohol (Al-Islam, n.d.). There are also other laws that dictate preparation and serving of food. In relation to this review paper, the most relevant laws include the consumption of *Halal* products.

Halal can be considered the standard of permissible of acceptable diet and dietary practice as prescribed by Islamic traditions in the Holy Quran. *Halal* foods can be considered the following: “free from any component that Muslims are prohibited from consuming according to Islamic law (Shariah) and processed, made, produced, manufactured and/or stored using utensils, equipment and/or machinery that have been cleansed according to Islamic law.” (Islamic Council of Victoria, n.d.).

Influence of Islamic Religious Practices – Systematic Review

In order to conduct a systematic review, search criteria were formulated and then a search was conducted using those terms. After that, the relevant search results were then sorted and analysed.

Selection Criteria and Search

In order to conduct a search of scholarly work relevant to the chosen topic, i.e. influence of Islamic religious practices in marketplace options and consumer buying of food products, was conducted. In order to do so, certain key phrases were searched. Rather than use a specialized database, the search was conducted using Google Search and then the results were narrowed by using the filter provided by the search engine of ‘Scholarly Articles’. It is also important to note that care was taken to focus on studies that were about food products rather than general products, and also care was taken to focus on studies on influence of Islam and Islamic religious traditions and values on marketplace options and consumer buying of products. These were also used as filter to narrow down studies. Care was taken to select recent studies and the oldest study chosen was from 2013; therefore, the research papers that were selected were all published in the period of 2013-2018, i.e. a five-year period.

The following search terms were used:

1. ‘Influence of Islam in marketplace options and consumer buying of food products’
2. ‘Influence of Islam in marketplace options for food products’
3. ‘Influence of Islam in consumer buying of food products’
4. ‘Influence of Islamic religious traditions in marketplace options and consumer buying of food products’
5. ‘Influence of Islamic religious traditions in marketplace options for food products’
6. ‘Influence of Islamic religious traditions in consumer buying of food products’

Using these search terms on Google Search, a number of results were found. For each of the search criteria, due to the constraints of performing an analysis for a short review article and to avoid duplication of studies, search terms past the 3rd page of results on Google Search were not considered. Beyond this step, further filters were applied to narrow down the list of studies pertaining to the review topic. Studies that had to do with influence of Islamic religious traditions

from the point of view of either marketplace options or consumer buying of food products taken into consideration, while others were eliminated. Further, in order to deal with the constraints of a short review article, no more than six studies in total were taken into consideration.

Review

The studies are listed below by name as well as with a description of each of the studies as well as the conclusions that they reached.

1. 'Consumers' Preferences Toward Attributes of Manufactured Halal Food Products' – A study conducted in Malaysia by authors Mohd Ghazali Mohayidin and Nitty Hirawaty Kamarulzaman. The authors posited that consumers' purchasing decisions being influenced factors such as culture and religion was unavoidable and likely. While they conceded that factors of products such as brand, price, promotion, and safety assurance would also influence the consumers' buying decisions, their study was focused on the idea that certification of the food products as *halal* or in compliance with Islamic law was also a determinative factor. Authors contended that Muslim consumers relied on the assurance provided that the product they were purchasing was really *halal*. The study had the participation of two hundred and eighty eight people, who were interviewed about their perceptions and preferences toward food product attributes. Finally, the authors found that a reliable certification of *halal* on products was the highest rated utility when it came to influencing attributes, and of those, it was found to be the most important. This study can be stated to be about the consumers' perception rather than marketplace options. (Mohayidin & Kamarulzaman, 2014)
2. 'Perceived Value and Perceived Usefulness of Halal Labelling: The Role of Religion and Culture' – A study conducted on the shopping experiences of British Muslims by authors Ahmad Jamal and Juwaidah Sharifuddin. Researchers conducted ten in-depth interviews and three hundred and three self-administered questionnaires and then subjected the data to factor analysis and hierarchical multiple regression. The results of their analysis showed them that perceived usefulness, vertical collectivism and religiosity had a positive relation with the intention to buy. The authors also found that the *halal* labelled products held a high value for those with high levels of religiosity. The researchers in their conclusion called for a need for a clear *halal*-product labelling strategy and advocated that with such a labelling in place, a strategy could be formed that would be well approved by British Muslims as well as generate a high level of loyalty, satisfaction and commitment from those customers. The authors also advocated thinking about the value that *halal* labelling might provide food manufacturers and retailers in marketing communications as well as in in-store displays. While this study begins by attempting the understanding of the consumers' experience, the analysis and recommendations made by the authors are geared towards marketers and creating marketplace option. (Jamal & Sharifuddin, 2015)
3. 'Purchasing Decisions among Muslim Consumers of Processed Halal Food Products' – A study by Haslenna Hamdan, Zuraini Mat Issa, Normala Abu and Kamaruzaman Jusoff. This study had an objective of looking into the factors that influenced purchasing decision among Muslim consumers of processed food products. According to the authors, certification of *halal* from a reliable and recognized authority was important for customers to know that the food product that they were purchasing was genuinely *halal*. The authors set out to study variables including characteristics of processed food

products, awareness of *halal* labelling and knowledge of *halal* processed food products. In order to conduct their study, the authors created a set of seven-point Likert scale questionnaires. These questionnaires were then distributed to four hundred customers or consumers who had just finished shopping at supermarkets. The collected data was then subjected to analysis using descriptive statistics, Pearson Correlation Coefficient, multiple regressions, and also cross-tabulation analysis. The study concluded that all the independent variables were significant in determining purchasing decisions among Muslim consumers. On the other hand, the relationships between each of the existing variables (characteristics, awareness and knowledge) was low. Moreover, the study found that the highest or most important or most determinative of the variables for the customer was that of familiarity or knowledge of the *halal* processed food product. This study can be stated to be solely from the point of view of the consumers' perception and point of view rather than about marketplace options. (Hamdan, Issa, Abu, & Jusoff, 2013)

4. 'Islamic symbols in food packaging and purchase intention of Muslim consumers' – A study by authors Mohsen Akbari, Mohammad Hasan Gholizadeh and Masoomeh Zomorodi. The study was focused on packaging of food products and how it related to the purchasing decision of customers. Specifically, the authors set out to study how the placement of Islamic symbols on packaging of food products would influence the purchasing decision of the customers. The authors stated that a consumer's decision to purchase was determined by his or her perception on the extent to which their expectations would be fulfilled by the product in question. The authors used a questionnaire to survey consumers who were Muslim. The authors then subjected the collected data to analysis using partial least squares or PLS. According to the authors, their findings revealed that the placement of Islamic symbols had a positive impact on the purchasing decision of the Muslim consumers. Moreover, their research also found that Islamic symbols on the packaging of food products had an increased value in the perception of customers who had a higher religiosity. Therefore, the more religious the consumer, the higher the impact on purchasing decision of religious symbols on food packaging. This study can be said to be about both marketplace options and consumers' buying decisions as it studies both equally by measuring the impact of the former on the latter. (Akbari, Gholizadeh, & Zomorodi, 2015)
5. 'Determinants of halal purchasing intentions: evidences from UK' – A study by author Reham I. Elseidi. The study had a geographic focus in the United Kingdom. The author's aim through the study was to understand the perceptions among Arabian Muslim consumers in the United Kingdom about *halal* food products. Further, the study intended to explore how these customers would behave towards such *halal* food products in the supermarkets of the United Kingdom. The author explored these topics through the prism of the theory of planned behaviour or TPB. Amongst the factors or variables studied by the author were role of Islamic religiosity and consumers' confidence regarding the halal logo. The author focused on Scotland in the UK to distribute four hundred questionnaires. The consumers who were targeted were those of Arabian descent, predominantly were Muslims and were living in Scotland at the time of the survey. According to the study, the findings revealed the theory of planned behaviour was an appropriate and relevant model to use in order to predict the behaviour of the Muslim consumers with regards to whether they would purchase a product that had been labelled *halal*. The study also showed that regardless of the religiosity of the consumer, whether it was high or low, it

was subjective norms that had the most influence and impact on determining whether a customer would purchase a *halal* labelled product or not. This study can be stated as being mostly about the purchasing decisions of the consumer as that was its focus. (Elseidi, 2018)

6. 'Factors affecting consumers' intention towards purchasing halal food in South Africa: a structural equation modelling' – A study by authors Abdalla M. Bashir, Abdullah Bayat, Samuel Oladipo Oluase & Zul Ariff Abdul Latiff focused on non-South Africans residing in South Africa. This study used the theory of planned behaviour or TPB to explore and understand the attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behaviour control, and awareness of the targeted group of individuals towards the buying of *halal* food products. Self-administered questionnaires were filled out by two hundred and thirty non-South African residents of Cape Town and the data that was collected was analysed through structural equation modelling. The research showed that there was a significant relationship between one of the above-mentioned variables and purchasing of the products. There was a significant relationship between awareness and buying of the *halal* product. The study also showed that while the attitude aspect of the theory of planned behaviour had a significant relationship with intention to purchase the *halal* food product, subjective norms and perceived behaviour control did not. This study can be stated as being mostly about the purchasing decisions of the consumer. (Bashir, Bayat, Oluase, & Latiff, 2018)

Observations and Conclusions

Some observations were readily apparent from the systematic review.

- A majority of the reviewed articles were about the purchasing decisions of the consumers.
- However, many of the researchers and authors did also make suggestions towards the marketing and packaging of products such that Muslim customers would be better targeted or satisfied.
- Two out of the six studies were about the influence of Islamic traditions on both marketplace options available and consumers' decision-making or buying behaviour.
- Two out of the six studies utilized the theory of planned behaviour or TPB as a prism through which to analyse the purchasing or buying behaviour of the consumers.
- Four out of six studies had a geographic focus. Out of these four, three of the studies explored the subject from the point of view of citizens or Muslims in non-Muslim majority countries. Namely, these countries were the UK (where two studies were based) and South Africa. Out of the four, the last study was based in Malaysia which has a majority Muslim population. The remaining two out of the six studies did not reveal any geographic focus.
- Two of the six studies found that the higher the religiosity of the customer, the greater the value placed on *halal* labelling as being determinative of buying behaviour. However, one study showed that regardless of whether religiosity was high or low, subjective norms had a greater influence on buying behaviour of the customer.
- Two out of six studies showed that awareness or knowledge of the product had a significant relationship with intention to purchase, i.e. knowledge or prior awareness of the product had an influence on consumers' decision to buy a product.

It is important to note that there were some limitations to the systematic review. Primarily, the review was hampered by the constraints of writing a brief article. Therefore, only six studies were chosen to be highlighted and reviewed. Also, due to the requirements of a short review article, the selection criteria that were applied were quite narrow. This is an area where more research needs to be done. At present, it is unclear whether the geographic setting has any influence on the subject matter, just as if there would be any influence of the Muslim consumers being the majority of the population or a minority in the population. Similarly, more research needs to also be conducted from the point of view of the marketplace options and what manufacturers and retailers are considering when labelling *halal* products. Also, the link between religiosity and intent to purchase *halal*-labelled goods or other types of consumer products that have been labelled as permitted under Islamic law, needs to be explored further as the research outcomes of different researchers were in contrast with each other. This could be an avenue to explore further to determine whether greater religiosity does indeed imply greater likelihood of purchasing or intending to purchase *halal* food products. It would also be interesting to study how labelling affects non-food consumer products in contrast to food consumer products in the context of *halal* and Muslim consumers.

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