

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTITUDE, SUBJECTIVE NORMS, PERCEIVED BEHAVIORAL CONTROL, AND PURCHASE INTENTION ON HALAL CHOCOLATE AMONG GEN Z

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Abstract: Halal chocolate is becoming more popular in Muslim countries, including Malaysia. Despite this growth, few studies have been conducted to determine the factors that influence the intention to purchase Halal chocolate. The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and Generation Z (Gen Z) Muslims' willingness to purchase Halal chocolate in Malaysia. An online survey was distributed using various social media platforms among 145 Gen Z Muslims aged 18 to 24 years. A correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the variables. The analysis indicates significant relationship between attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and Gen Z Muslims' purchase intentions towards Halal chocolate. This study contributes to a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of Muslim consumers behavior, particularly that of Gen Z Muslims. Practical implications of this study include findings that can be used by Halal chocolate producers and manufacturers to expand their market, as well as by the government and its organizations to encourage Halal chocolate consumption in the country while increasing revenue for the Halal food industry.

Keywords: Consumer behavior, intention, Halal chocolate, Generation Z, Muslims.

INTRODUCTION

The Halal food industry has matured, but it continues to expand globally. The global Halal food market was worth \$2,221.3 billion (RM10,590.05 billion) in 2022 and is expected to grow at an annual rate of 11.1% to \$4.1 trillion (RM19.05 trillion) by 2028 (Herminingsih, 2023). With this growth, research interest in Halal food has also increased, as reflected in a spate of studies on the topic (see, for example, Ali et al., 2020; Ali et al., 2018; Aslan, 2023; Khan et al., 2021; Nursalwani & Zulariff, 2017; Syukur & Nimsai, 2018). Despite the rapid expansion of this important industry, Halal food literature is still in its infancy (Haleem et al., 2020). Consequently, there is still more to discover.

Previous studies looked at Halal food in general without focusing on specific Halal foods. This study, on the other hand, goes above and beyond by focusing on Halal chocolate, a topic that has received little attention. It was reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic, Facebook Malaysia indicated that 21% of Malaysians searched for chocolate online (Durai, 2022). Perhaps eating chocolate gives people a feel-good factor or a serotonin rush, which has helped them cope with the pandemic. Although chocolate is popular with everyone, Muslims are only allowed to consume Halal chocolate. While commercial and retail availability of Halal chocolate is limited, it is growing in popularity in

Muslim countries such as Malaysia. Hence, Malaysia is banking on an increase in global demand for religiously approved sweets and treats.

Because of the prospective expansion in the Halal chocolate market, this study is looking into the acceptance of Halal chocolate among Malaysian Gen Z Muslims. Gen Z Muslims are being targeted since there has been a paucity of empirical study explaining Halal food consumption among Muslims, as well as little previous research exploring Halal consumption from the perspective of Gen Z, with a focus on Halal chocolate. In this study, Gen Z refers to people aged 18 to 24 who were born between 1999 and 2008. The study of Gen Z Muslims is important and significant because they are among the largest, accounting for 11.7 % of the population, or approximately 3.86 million people (Kemp, 2022). In addition, they are among the most profitable group of consumers in Malaysia for the current and future of the Halal industry.

The primary goal of this study is to investigate the key variables in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in relation to Gen Z Muslims' Halal chocolate purchasing intentions. The TPB was a seminal work of Ajzen (1991), and it is an extension of Ajzen's (1985) Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). Despite the fact that TPB is one of the most widely used models for understanding consumer behavior, research findings within the TPB framework are mixed due to differences in research factors, measurement instruments, and sampling, resulting in disparate results. Given the contradictory empirical research findings, a TPB-based study on this topic is still needed and relevant. The TPB operationalizes three conceptually distinct determinants of behavioral intentions, namely attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control over intentions.

Attitude is broadly defined as the psychological tendency to evaluate a specific behavior either positively or negatively (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 6). In the context of this study, evaluation can be interpreted as a question of whether purchasing Halal chocolate will have a

favorable or unfavorable impact on the individual. A slew of studies in Halal food research have looked at the relationship between attitude and intention and they reported that attitude is a factor in determining purchase behavior (Ali et al., 2020; Fuadi et al., 2022). Following the majority of studies that found a significant relationship, this study assumes the generalizability of a finding to the intention to purchase Halal chocolate.

Subjective norms, also known as social norms, refer to the social pressure placed on individuals to commit to or refrain from performing a specific behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Subjective norms are strongly influenced by social agents such as parents, family, and friends, as well as social groups such as cultural and religious groups. Muslims in Islamic-majority countries, such as Malaysia, are expected to be more likely to purchase Halal chocolate. A number of studies have found that subjective norms have an impact on customer purchase intent (Aslan, 2023; Khan et al., 2021). Hence, this study predicted that subjective norms would have a significant relationship with the intention to purchase Halal chocolate.

Ajzen (1991) defines perceived behavioral control as an individual's assessment of how easy or difficult it is to perform the desired behavior. To put it another way, it influences a person's perception of how to carry out an intended behavior. It explains two important aspects of behavior: how much control a person has over his or her behavior and how confident a person is in performing or not performing the behavior. When the difficulty of the relevant behavior is higher, perceived behavior control has a greater influence. Past studies have suggested that perceived behavioral control is one of the predictors of the intention to purchase halal (Damit et al., 2019; Suleman et al., 2021). The current study therefore posits that perceived behavioral control influences the intention to purchase Halal chocolate.

Figure 1 depicts the research model the study's goal.

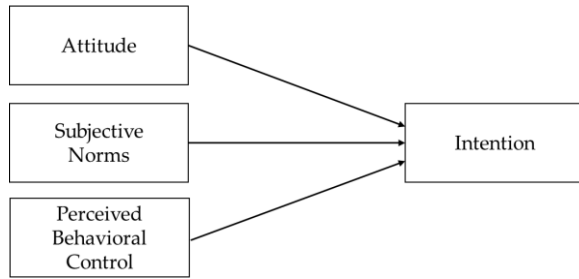


Figure 1. Research model

METHODS

The purpose of this study is to examine relationships between attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and intention to purchase halal chocolate. A questionnaire created in Google Forms was used to conduct an online survey, which was then shared on various social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. Because this study is aimed at Muslims and Gen Z, only Muslim consumers aged 18 to 24 were chosen. With a population of more than one million, the target sample size was at least 384 samples, as suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). Due to time constraints, only 145 samples could be collected. Nonetheless, the sample size of 145 is deemed adequate for the correlation analyses sought in this study, as suggested by Hair et al. (2018) and Cohen (1992).

The constructs involved in this study were attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and intention. The measurement items for each construct were adapted from Ajzen (1991) and tailored to the Malaysian context. To test the questionnaire's validity, a pilot study was conducted with a small group of people chosen at random, and no major changes were made. The constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 representing strongly agree. The data was then analysed using correlation analysis to test the hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One hundred forty-five Muslims from Gen Z took part in this study. Female respondents participated at a higher rate (72.4%) than male respondents (27.6%). Because the study centered on Gen Z Muslims, all respondents were Malays

and Muslims aged 18 to 24. In terms of education, more than half of those polled (62.1%) are pursuing a bachelor's degree.

Table 1 presents the reliability and descriptive analysis of the data.

Table 1. Reliability and Descriptive Analysis

	Number of Items	α	Mean	Std. Dev.
ATT	4	.914	4.2293	.95947
SN	4	.936	4.3552	.94496
PBC	4	.931	4.2086	.95334
INT	3	.961	4.4483	.97846

Notes: ATT – Attitude, SN – Subjective Norms, PBC – Perceived Behavioral Control, INT – Intention.

The Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the items in this study. Nunnally (1978) suggests an alpha of at least 0.7 for basic research reliability. Each variable's Cronbach's alpha projected scale achieves a minimum alpha of 0.7. Thus, the constructs' reliability was deemed high and appropriate for this study.

Based on the descriptive analysis, respondents' attitudes were rated at 4.22, subjective norms at 4.35, perceived behavioral control at 4.20, and behavioral intention to purchase halal chocolate at 4.44. Subjective norms were identified as having the highest mean score of 4.35 among the three components of TPB, indicating that social agents influenced respondents' intention to purchase Halal chocolate. The mean behavioral intention to buy Halal chocolate is quite high (4.44), falling somewhere between agree and strongly agree.

Table 2 shows the correlation results.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis

		ATT	SN	PBC	INT
ATT	Pearson Correlation	1	.753**	.714**	.729**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
SN	Pearson Correlation	.753**	1	.804**	.862**

	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
PBC	Pearson Correlation	.714**	.804**	1	.769**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
INT	Pearson Correlation	.729**	.862**	.769**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	

Notes: ATT – Attitude, SN – Subjective Norms, PBC – Perceived Behavioral Control, INT – Intention.

The correlation coefficient result shows that the subjective norms and the intention to purchase Halal chocolate are significant, with the strongest correlation coefficient being (0.862 $p < 0.00$). Then, the correlation coefficient between perceived behavioral control and the intention to buy Halal chocolate is also significant (0.769, $p < 0.00$). Finally, correlation result revealed that attitude and intention to purchase Halal chocolate is significant (0.729, $p < 0.00$) but lower than the other two factors. The findings show that all three TPB components – attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control – show a significant relationship with the intention to purchase Halal chocolate.

Subjective norms showed the strongest relationship with the Halal chocolate purchase intention among young Muslim consumers in this study. The findings are consistent with those of Aslan (2023) and Khan et al. (2021), who discovered that subjective norms were important in determining customers' purchase intentions of Halal food. Significant others' opinions and influence on Gen Z Muslims are crucial in persuading them to purchase Halal chocolate. Furthermore, because Muslims are a collectivist society, their reliance on the influence of others is strong and valued.

In this study, perceived behavioral control showed the second strongest relationship with Halal chocolate purchase intention among Gen Z Muslims in Malaysia. This result corroborates the

study by Damit et al. (2019) and Suleman et al. (2021), who also reported the significant relationship between perceived behavioral control and purchase intention. The availability and reasonable price of Halal chocolate are the main determinants of Halal consumption, as Muslims were willing to exert effort to obtain Halal chocolate as prescribed by Islam.

Attitude toward Halal chocolate also showed a positive relationship with intention to purchase Halal chocolate. This finding supports the findings of Ali et al. (2020) and Fuadi et al. (2022), who found that attitude was an important predictor of intention to purchase halal food. This study found that purchase intention for Halal chocolate is boosted by Malaysian Gen Z Muslims' favorable evaluation of Halal chocolate. Because attitude is an important predictor of Halal chocolate purchase intention, creating a positive image and perception of Halal chocolate may increase demand. By emphasizing quality assurance and hygiene, Halal chocolate's positive image could be enhanced.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the three core components of TPB; attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, and Malaysian Gen Z Muslims' intention to purchase Halal chocolate. Subjective norms showed the strongest relationship with the young generation intention to purchase Halal chocolate, followed by perceived behavioral control and attitude.

Theoretically this study contributes to the existing literature by utilizing the TPB in examining the relationship between attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control in influencing intention to purchase Halal chocolate among Gen Z Muslims in Malaysia. Practically, this study suggests that Halal chocolate producers and manufacturers incorporate attitudes and social pressure into their Halal chocolate campaigns and advertisements in order to encourage Halal chocolate purchase and, consequently, increase the country's Halal chocolate revenue.

This study, like all others, has limitations. First, the data is limited to a convenience sample, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Second, the current study collected data from participants aged 18 to 24. Third, this study focused solely on Muslim consumers.

Future research on consumer intentions for Halal chocolate or Halal food could broaden the scope of the study to address these limitations. First, to generalise the result, a different sampling technique, such as random sampling, could be used. Second, by incorporating people of various ages, who may have differing perspectives on Halal chocolate purchase intention. Third, because Malaysia is a multiracial and multireligious society, including people from various groups may produce different significant results and provide new insights. Finally, further data analysis such as regression analysis or structural equation modelling can be conducted to investigate the causal relationship between the three components and intention to purchase Halal chocolate.

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