

Factors Influencing Adherence to *Halal* Food Consumption Among *Muallafs*: Reviewing the Theory of Planned Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

Muallafs, individuals who convert to Islam, often face challenges in adapting to new religious practices, including adherence to Islamic dietary laws. Halal food consumption, which involves permissible food and specific slaughtering practices, is a fundamental aspect of these laws. Despite the increasing number of converts, research on Muallafs' adherence to halal food consumption remains limited. This paper aims to address this gap by expanding the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) to understand the factors influencing Muallafs' dietary practices. Through library research, this review paper will discuss factors such as attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, pre-conversion eating habit as well as the role of religiosity as an extension of the theory of planned behaviour. Given that improper guidance can lead to confusion and potential apostasy among Muallafs, understanding these factors is crucial for providing the necessary support and nurturing in their transition to Islam. By shedding light on the lifestyle changes and challenges faced by recent Muslim converts, this paper seeks to offer a comprehensive framework for future research and practical interventions to support Muallafs in maintaining halal dietary practices, thereby reducing the likelihood of confusion and apostasy.

Keywords: *New convert, Muslim convert, consumer behaviour, religiosity, pre conversion habit*

1. Introduction

The person who accepts the teachings of Islam and converts is called *Muallaf* (Fakhruddin & Awang, 2020). The word *Muallaf* comes from the Arabic word *Mualafun*, which means people who convert to Islam (Rahmawati & Desiningrum, 2020). As a result of this religious conversion, a growing population of *Muallaf* are navigating their way through various aspects of their recent conversion to Islam, including religious practices such as food consumption (Sintang & Hambali, 2018; Abdillah & Sjafe, 2019).

One of the key aspects of Islamic dietary laws is the consumption of *halal* food, which refers to food that is permissible according to Islamic principles. This includes the prohibition of consuming pork and blood, as well as the requirement for animals to be slaughtered in a specific manner (The Religious Council Negara Brunei Darussalam, 2007). However, the term is not just limited to the usage of food and beverages; it also encompasses activities that are lawful and complementary to the teachings of Islam (Asnawi *et. al.*, 2018).

Despite the growing number of individuals converting to Islam, the research on the *Muallafs*' adherence to *halal* food consumption is an understudied area of research and should be investigated because they are a group of people who are new to the teachings of Islam. Therefore, they need to be given more support, guidance and nurturing of the Islamic teachings (Abd Rahman *et al.*, 2022; Yahya *et al.*, 2021; Utsman *et al.*, 2019; Awang & Khambali, 2015). In the case where the *Muallaf* is not guided properly, they are at the risk of being easily confused and might find it difficult to practice the teachings of Islam. This is especially true since the primary reason behind the increase in apostasies amongst the

Muallaf has been discovered to stem from their difficulties in practising the Islamic teachings (Kasim et al., 2017), and so it is vital to mitigate these issues of confusion and apostasies among the *Muallafs*. This paper reviews the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) to better understand *Muallaf*'s behaviour towards their adherence to *halal* food consumption. It also aims to identify other factors, such as religiosity and pre-conversion habits, that influence them and to suggest these factors as an extension of the TPB.

2. The Theory of Planned Behaviour

The TPB is a psychological theory that connects beliefs to behaviour (Ajzen, 2020) and was derived from the theory of reasoned action (TRA), which the same individuals, Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein, first developed in 1980 (Madden *et. al.*, 1992). This theory sought to forecast an individual's desire to perform a behaviour based on their behavioural intention, which is driven by two factors: the person's attitude and subjective norm as shown in Figure 1.

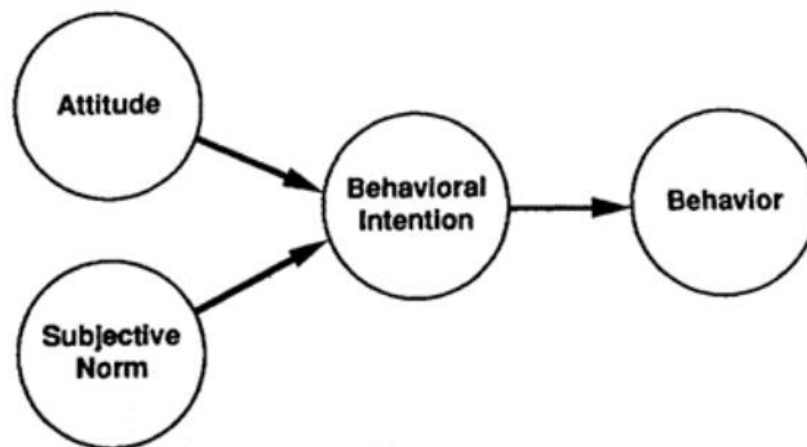


Figure 1: Theory of reasoned action
Source: Madden *et. al.* (1992)

However, TRA ignores the fact that people have imperfect decision-making abilities (Eid, 2020). Thus, TPB has an additional factor of perceived behavioural control, as shown in Figure 2. The perceived behavioural control, which was absent from TRA, was incorporated into TPB to tackle the flaws that existed in TRA (Ajzen, 2020).

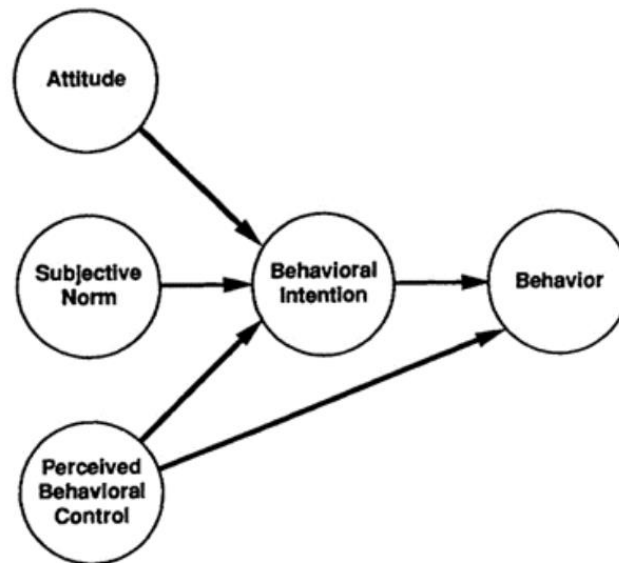


Figure 2 Theory of planned behaviour
 Source: Madden *et. al.* (1992)

3. Factors Influencing Behavioural Intention

With the inclusion of perceived behavioural control, TPB is used to understand and determine a person's behaviours based on their attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control. This ultimately influences an individual's behavioural intentions (Ajzen, 2020), eventually influencing them to either encourage or discourage them from performing the behaviour.

3.1 Attitude

Attitude refers to an individual's positive or negative evaluation of a behaviour (Ajzen, 2020). In this case, the *Muallafs'* dietary choices towards *halal* food consumption. Individuals with a positive attitude towards their religious dietary restrictions are more likely to embrace and adhere to them, incorporating them into their daily lives and consciously selecting appropriate and nutritious foods (Khalek *et al.*, 2015). Contrary to that, individuals with a negative attitude may struggle with accepting and adhering to dietary restrictions, leading to potential conflicts between their religious beliefs and their dietary practices.

Whether or not an individual would do a particular behaviour is typically determined by their psychological preferences (Wibowo *et. al.*, 2020). One of the determinants of Muslim consumer purchases is their attitude (Rahman *et al.*, 2021; Abd Rahman *et al.*, 2015), which has a significant role when it comes to societal and individual decision-making around dietary habits and purchases (Bonne *et al.*, 2007).

Muslims worldwide are generally known to have a positive attitude towards consuming *halal* food and beverages, which undoubtedly will positively influence their intention to do so (Asnawi *et. al.*, 2018). Similarly, in the context of Malaysian *Muallaf*, they are found to have a high mean (mean: 3.62) of ensuring that they are adhering to *halal* food practices when purchasing their groceries (Kawangit & Guleng, 2016). They would do so by checking the *halal* logo and inspecting the product's content prior to purchase.

Additionally, the Bruneian *Muallaf* have also been shown to have a good stance towards practising *halal* food consumption (Ahmad & Salihah, 2023).

Although Muslims and *Muallafs* are discovered to have a high attitude towards *halal* food consumption, there is a gap in research on the impact of *Muallafs*' attitude on consumer behaviour during social eating. Ariffin et al. (2019) and Khalek (2015) have also mentioned that there is a need to broaden the study of consumer attitudes.

3.2 Subjective Norm

The subjective norm refers to the influence of social and cultural factors on an individual's behaviour (Ajzen, 2020). Individuals who perceive high subjective norms are more likely to adopt and maintain religious dietary restrictions as part of their identity and religious practice (Jamarahman et al., 2023). Therefore, influences from the *Muallafs*' intensity of social interactions within the religious community and the perceived approval or disapproval of others can influence their subjective norm and subsequently affect their adherence to *halal* food consumption.

Due to fear, a person would often imitate the behaviour of those they admire or consider important to them to avoid rejection or feeling left out (Higgs & Ruddock, 2020). They would also engage in an activity motivated by the people closest to them (Asnawi et al., 2018). Thus, when there is a high degree of public approval for an individual to engage in a behaviour, the individual will be more inclined to perform such behaviour.

Based on the research findings by Awang et al. (2017) regarding the challenges faced by *Muallafs*, particularly during family gatherings, the research concluded that several principles indicate the social circle of Chinese Malaysian *Muallafs* in Terengganu is very supportive of their adherence to *halal* food consumption. It was found that some non-Muslim family members even went to the extent of ordering *halal* food from Muslim caterers, reflecting their respect for the *Muallafs*' conversion to Islam. They also ensured that utensils used for serving food and drinks were not contaminated. Additionally, whenever *Muallafs* stayed at their parents' house, their non-Muslim family members took them out to *halal* restaurants to ensure the *Muallafs* adhered to *halal* food practices.

Brunei Darussalam is generally known to have a strong image of a '*negara zikir*' (nation devoted to God) and has a national principle of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (Malay Islamic Monarchy) (Ahmad Kumpoh, 2011). This fact may influence the *Muallaf* to lead an Islamic lifestyle even prior to converting to Islam, as the majority of the population are Muslims, and the authority figures within the community emphasise the teachings of Islam (Ahmad & Salihah, 2023). Aside from these factors, the momentous event of declaring Islam as the country's official religion through Brunei Darussalam's first constitution in 1959 was also suggested as a factor related to the religion's growth (Ahmad Kumpoh, 2011). Moreover, the social influence, or the subjective norm, is likely to be higher in the Muslim community as they tend to be more collectivist (Khalek, 2014).

Although previous findings have revealed that subjective norm influences consumers *halal* food consumption, there are others who deny this result due to the participants' differences in beliefs (Khalek et al., 2015). Ariffin et al. (2019) also mentioned that although

Indonesians are open and tend to share their experiences with their family and friends, the sharing of information has little impact on the individual's purchasing decision. This may be due to the reason that consumers see themselves as independent when they are purchasing halal products (Bonne et al., 2007).

Due to these contradicting results and the lack of research on the impact of *Muallafs'* subjective norm towards their *halal* food consumption behaviour, there should be research done to analyse the impact of subjective norm towards the *Muallafs'* adherence to *halal* food consumption. Furthermore, Wibowo et al. (2020) supports this statement.

3.3 Perceived Behavioural Control

Perceived behavioural control is defined as the availability to conduct the activity due to the individual's confidence and capability (Ajzen, 2020). It refers to the individual's assessment of their ability to perform the behaviour that they intend to engage in (Bonne et al., 2007). The more a person is confident and has the capability to control the available resources (such as their expertise on behaviour, their availability of cash and time, as well as their information about the behaviour), the greater their ability for execution (Lim et al., 2022).

In the context of the *Muallafs'* dietary choices post-conversion, perceived behavioural control refers to the individual's perception and availability of their ability to adhere to religious dietary restrictions. Therefore, *Muallaf*, who have a high level of perceived behavioural control, would be more confident in their ability to overcome challenges and obstacles to adhere to *halal* food consumption. Such a situation could be observed from the study of Awang et al. (2017) where their non-Muslim social circles are knowledgeable on the concept of *halal* food, making it easier for them to practice *halal* food consumption during social eating with their non-Muslim family and friends. Moreover, perceived behavioural control was found to be the second factor influencing young Muslims to consume *halal* food in Malaysia, which may be due to the fact that *halal* food is easily accessible in Malaysia (Khalek et al., 2015).

The gap in the study of Awang et al. (2017) is that it was done using qualitative research, while the study of Khalek et al. (2015) focused on the consumer's intention to purchase *halal* food but not on the consumer's behaviour. For this reason, there is still a need for research on the consumption behaviour of the consumer, especially the *Muallaf*. Khalek et al. (2015) highlighted the need to further this study.

4. Extending the Theory of Planned Behaviour

Theoretically, fresh additional predictors can be added to the TPB, so long as it increases the motivation for behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Thus, this sub-section will explain the inclusion of religiosity as an influential factor in the attitude. The pre-conversion habit and religiosity are incorporated as an additional predictor of the *Muallafs'* behaviour to adhere to *halal* food consumption, as well as religiosity as the moderating variable towards the predictors. The original variables of TPB may not include factors such as pre-conversion habits and religiosity because it was designed for general behavioural research rather than focusing specifically on religious behaviours. Hence, since the proposed research on *Muallafs'*

adherence to halal food consumption is more specific to religious behaviours, these factors are included to extend the TPB.

4.1 Pre-Conversion Habit

Generally, habit is considered one factor that tends to affect human behaviour automatically (Ajzen, 2000). Previous studies such as Vanany et al. (2019) and Amalia et al. (2020) have successfully included habit as a factor that influences an individual's consumption decision. Additionally, past behaviour has frequently been included in past TPB and TRA research (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000). However, the quantitative research on the *Muallafs'* pre-conversion habit is a factor which is yet to be researched. Quantitative research is particularly valuable for testing hypotheses, identifying patterns and trends in *Muallafs'* behaviour regarding halal food consumption, and providing insights into the generalizability and replicability of the research.

For this review paper, the *Muallafs'* pre-conversion habit is measured to understand their frequency of consuming non-*halal* food prior to converting to Islam. The reason for this is to discover its effect towards their adherence to *halal* food consumption after converting to Islam. The *Muallafs'* pre-conversion habit is assumed to have an influence due to it being a setting event. This means that as they are used to their pre-conversion habit of consuming non-*halal* food, it has become the norm in their daily lifestyle. Thus, once they have converted to Islam, it may take a certain amount of time for them to fully acclimate to halal food consumption, which would then affect their behaviour post-conversion.

These assumptions are based on the discovery that Thai *Muallafs* have admitted to the difficulty in obtaining halal food, having very limited options and eventually getting bored of having to eat the same foods. This is not an uncommon scenario faced by Muslims living in countries with limited halal food choices who have felt this tedium (Ahmad *et. al.*, 2023). However, the difference is that the Thai *Muallafs* would feel guilty due to their desire of wanting to eat non-*halal* food, which they were accustomed to consuming prior to converting to Islam (Charoenwong et al., 2017).

Similarly, the Manggaraian *Muallafs'* pre-conversion habit initially deterred them from converting to Islam. Consuming pork and dog meat has been a historical custom for them, and abandoning these traditions posed a significant dilemma (Lon & Widyawati, 2019). Around thirty percent of Chinese *Muallafs* in Malaysia have also acknowledged struggling to completely avoid consuming pork meat after converting to Islam (Paoliello, 2019).

The facts provided above indicate that individuals with a strong pre-conversion habit of consuming non-*halal* food may find it more challenging to adhere to religious dietary restrictions. Therefore, with the information that the *Muallafs'* pre-conversion habit might play a role in their post-conversion consumption behaviour, the new addition of pre-conversion habit is suggested to be incorporated into the TPB in the case of *Muallafs'* adherence to *halal* food consumption.

4.2 Religiosity

A person's dedication to a certain religious group is known as their religiosity (Nora & Sriminarti, 2023) which past researchers have claimed can be measured and interpreted to understand its significance or implications (Dasti, 2014). Abou-Youssef et. al. (2011) found a noticeable difference in the levels of religiosity among Muslims, as some may be more pious than others. With reference to past literature, the author summarizes that religiosity could be incorporated into the TPB as a moderating variable as well as an influential factor in the attitude and the Muallafs' adherence to halal food consumption.

According to Amalia et al. (2020) and Maidah et al. (2021), the consumer's religiosity has been found to influence their attitude towards halal food consumption. When an individual accepts and receives new teachings, such as Islamic teachings, it may lead them to change their attitude (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000). Similarly, it has been proven that Muslims' awareness of halal food and products is positively affected by their religious belief (Ambali & Bakar, 2014). Therefore, in the case of *Muallafs*, religiosity may be an influential factor in shaping their attitude toward *halal* food consumption.

From another aspect, religiosity could also be used to measure *Muallafs*' adherence to *halal* food consumption as it influences an individual's behaviour and shapes their lifestyle (Maidah et. al., 2021). Moreover, it is the most influential factor in *halal* food consumption or purchasing behaviour (Asnawi et al., 2018; Amalia et al., 2020). Soesilowati (2010) found that the higher a person's religiosity, the more concerned they are about their *halal* food consumption indicating that a consumer's religious commitment, as well as their knowledge and understanding of religious teachings regarding the requirement to consume only *halal* food, would motivate them to adhere to *halal* food consumption. As newly converted Muslims, *Muallafs*' religiosity may influence them to be conscious and, in turn, make them adhere to *halal* food consumption.

From a different perspective, religiosity could also be used as a moderating variable. Circling back to the Thai *Muallafs* who felt guilty for bearing the intention to consume non-*halal* food that they had prior to converting to Islam, it could be assumed that their intention is moderated by their high level of religiosity that can be discerned from their coping mechanisms when faced with personal, health or economic difficulties. The findings of Charoenwong et al. (2017) stated that the Thai *Muallaf* would perform their prayers, and they would have *tawakkul* (to have complete faith and trust in Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala) when they are faced with such challenges.

The Thai *Muallafs* understood their responsibility as devoted Muslims because the believers are repeatedly told only to consume halal food by the verses in the Al-Quran. Although they have the intention to consume non-*halal* food, they do not do so because of their commitment to the teachings of Islam. This indicates that a higher level of religiosity in an individual will lead to a greater behaviour to adhere to *halal* food consumption as a sign of their adherence to their faith (Rahim & Junos, 2012). However, it has also been discovered that a person might strictly adhere to dietary practices and consume halal meat without adhering to other religious teachings and practices (Bonne et al., 2007). Hence, there is a contradiction of past literature reviews on the effect of religiosity.

The study of Awang et al. (2017) mentions that the *Muallaf* would need to be able to think critically by considering the religious factor of the situation in order to find the best

method to preserve their family ties and faith in Islam. To do this, the Muallaf would need to have the knowledge and understanding of the Islamic teachings so that they could practice what they preach.

As indicated in the existing literature of Memon *et. al.* (2020), Nora and Sriminarti (2023) and Rafiki *et. al.* (2023), religiosity is commonly known to moderately affect the consumption behaviour of Muslims at large when it comes to their attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control and habit of purchasing *halal* food. Therefore, religiosity can be included as the moderating variable since it has been proven to influence the attitude, beliefs, and behaviour of an individual when it comes to their consumption behaviour (Mokhlis, 2009). Measuring the effect of *Muallafs'* religiosity towards the predictors is crucial to understanding further the *Muallafs'* reason for choosing to either adhere or not to adhere to *halal* food consumption.

5. Measurement Strategies in TPB: Direct Measurement vs. Intervening Variable

In the original TPB, behavioural intention acts as an intervening variable between the predictors and behaviour. Although numerous review papers indicate that TPB can strongly predict a person's behaviour, researchers have raised questions about whether TPB fully includes the factors that may influence a person's intention to perform a certain behaviour. This concern arises because the difference between a person's intention to perform a behaviour and their actual performance of that behaviour averages only 28 to 40 percent (Rise *et al.*, 2010).

For this reason, some researchers still measure both intention and behaviour, but most focus only on intention, neglecting the measurement of actual behaviour. Additionally, some researchers measure the predictors directly in relation to behaviour, without assessing intention.

Researchers who measure only intention argue that external factors can disrupt the relationship between intention and actual behaviour, making intention less accurate as a predictor (Shah Alam & Mohamed, 2011; Hanafiah & Hamdan, 2021). Conversely, researchers who measure predictors directly to behaviour argue that because data are collected simultaneously, it is impractical to measure both intention and behaviour at one point in time (Ashraf, 2019). They argue that while intention reflects future behaviour, actual behaviour reflects what has already occurred. Thus, they believe it is better to measure actual behaviour, as past behaviour is often the best surrogate for future behaviour, even though it is not always a perfect predictor (Hoffman *et. al.*, 1999). Therefore, this underscores the critical need for future research to explore whether predictors should be measured directly to behaviour or by incorporating an intervening variable of intention between predictors and behaviour.

6. Conclusion

While robust in predicting various behaviours, the TPB may not fully capture the unique influences on the dietary practices of recent Muslim converts. We can gain a more comprehensive understanding of *Muallafs'* behaviour by integrating additional variables such as pre-conversion habits and religiosity.

Recognizing these influences can inform targeted interventions and support systems to help *Muallafs* navigate their new religious and dietary practices. Future research should continue to refine the extended TPB model, incorporating empirical studies to validate these additional factors. By doing so, scholars and practitioners can better address the challenges *Muallafs* face, ultimately fostering a supportive environment that facilitates their adherence to *halal* food consumption.

This comprehensive approach enhances theoretical understanding and provides practical insights for religious leaders, community organizers, and policymakers who want to support *Muallafs* in their spiritual journey.

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