

ANALYSING MUSLIM CONSUMERS' PERCEPTION ON LOCAL HALAL MEAT IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM: INSIGHTS INTO PRICE, HALAL LOGO, DOUBTS, AND PURCHASE GUIDANCE

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ABSTRACT

The perception of Muslim consumers regarding local halal meat in Brunei Darussalam is particularly important, as it reflects their strong preference for locally produced meat. Therefore, for the halal meat industry in Brunei Darussalam to grow significantly and economically, producers of local halal meat and the government must understand consumers' perceptions of local halal meat. This study emphasises selected aspects of Muslim consumers' perceptions towards local halal meat, focusing on 4 protruding elements: price, halal logo, issues or doubts that arise, and advising consumers on purchasing meat. Thus, this study aims to analyse the level of Muslim consumers' perception of local halal meat in Brunei Darussalam. Hence, to achieve this, a quantitative method was adopted, utilising convenience and snowball sampling methods to survey 170 respondents through a personal approach. The collected data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Results revealed that Muslim consumers in Brunei Darussalam had a generally high level of perception towards local halal meat. This suggests that they are attentive to factors such as price, the presence of a halal logo, potential ambiguities related to halal status, and the importance of receiving proper guidance when purchasing meat. These concerns reflect their active interest and awareness in making informed decisions when buying local halal meat. This inadvertently conveys an essential signal to producers and the government to strengthen the halal meat industry in Brunei Darussalam by improving and addressing any gaps in producing meat that aligns with consumers' preferences.

Keywords: *Perception, Local Halal Meat, Price, Halal Logo, Issues.*

1. Introduction

The perceptions of Muslim consumers towards local halal meat in Brunei Darussalam are of paramount importance due to their significant preference for locally sourced meat. Brunei Darussalam, with a predominantly Muslim population, also a nation adhering to stringent halal rules (Brunei Today, 2010), places importance on the compliance of meat and animal products with Shariah standards. Consumers value halal integrity, impacting their purchase preferences and reliance on the local halal meat sector. Thus, comprehending consumers' perceptions is essential for the sustainable development of the local halal meat sector, as it allows producers and policymakers to tackle apprehensions, bolster trust, and amplify market demand.

Numerous factors affect consumers' behaviour, such as pricing, the availability of halal certification (Usmandani & Darwanto, 2021), doubts about halal integrity, and the impact of consumers' awareness on informed purchasing decisions (Fatmi et al., 2020). These factors are essential in establishing consumers' trust and influencing the viability of locally produced meat compared to imported options.

Despite the presence of a meticulously regulated halal certification system in Brunei Darussalam (Brunei Today, 2010), certain consumers might nevertheless harbour enquiries or scepticism regarding the validity of local halal meat, especially in relation to sourcing,

slaughtering practices, and comprehensive religious adherence. Addressing these issues is essential for cultivating trust and guaranteeing that consumers persist in endorsing local halal meat producers. Moreover, price sensitivity is a crucial factor, as consumers may evaluate the cost-effectiveness of local meat compared to imported alternatives. The presence and significance of halal certification, especially the certified halal logo, significantly affect purchase decisions, as it is a crucial signal of a product's adherence to Shariah law.

With that, the study has emphasised four important aspects of Muslim consumers' perception mainly on price, halal logo, issues or doubts that arise, and advising consumers on purchasing meat. This research aims to elucidate how Muslim consumers in Brunei assess and select local halal meat by examining these aspects. Strictly emphasise, there has been little research addressing consumers' perception on the local halal meat in Brunei Darussalam. Therefore, based on the background, the study seeks to analyse the level of perception of Muslim consumers on local halal meat in Brunei Darussalam. Thus, the objective could be found by finding the answers to this question;

a) what is the level of perception of Muslim consumers towards local halal meat in Brunei Darussalam, focusing on price, halal logo, doubts, and purchase guidance?

This study is very significant in terms of its contribution to halal meat industry, particularly the government and producers. It can provide information to the government and producers on the level of perception and awareness on the local halal meat. From here, producers can improve and enhance the formulation of more efficacious marketing tactics, while the government can bolster regulatory enforcement, and elevate consumers' awareness activities. Perception of Muslim consumers on local halal meat could be an advantage in developing and providing halal product lines that would cater the worldwide market. This research aims to promote the long-term development and viability of the local halal meat industry while effectively addressing consumers' concerns.

2. Literature Review

i. Meaning of Halal

The word halal comes from Arabic and simply means "permissible". It defines as something that is allowed for Muslims (Ismail et al., 2022). In the Al-Qur'an, whenever halal is mentioned in relation to food, it is often paired with the word '*Thayyiban*'. In Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 168, Allah says:

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ كُلُوا مِمَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطَوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ ۚ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ ﴾

"O Mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] **lawful and good** and do not follow the footsteps of satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy".

The word '*Thayyiban*' means good, which highlights that food should be wholesome and pure from its source (Consumers association of Penang, 2006). In Islam, halal food isn't just about avoiding pork, carrion, or alcohol, nonetheless, it also means the food must be safe, clean, and ethically sourced. This includes ensuring that animals are slaughtered in the name of Allah and avoiding land animals without external ears or carnivorous creatures (Aghwan, 2021; Consumers association of Penang, 2006).

Furthermore, simply labelling food as halal is not enough. It must also meet the '*thayyib*' (good) criteria, ensuring cleanliness, safety, and quality. Since food production involves multiple stages such ingredient selection, preparation, manufacturing, storage,

transportation, and distribution, the concept of halal should apply to the entire supply chain, starting from its source (Ismail et al., 2022).

ii. Meaning of Consumers' Perception

A previous study conducted by Thiruvengatraj & Vetrivel (2017) defined perception as a subject of study within the field of consumer behaviour science. By analysing research conducted by experts in consumer behaviour, it can be concluded that perception is a significant personal component that influences consumer behaviour. Hence, they interpreted consumer perception as the cognitive process via which a consumer chooses, arranges, and analyses information or stimulus inputs to develop a coherent understanding of a brand or product.

Sinha and Ali (2020) reported that consumer perception refers to the decision-making process by which people or consumer groups select, acquire, use, and discard products and services according to their own requirements and preferences. It entails comprehending consumer behaviours in the market and the fundamental motivations that drive such behaviour. Bouhid et al. (2021) defined consumer perception as the cognitive process of recognising and evaluating many elements that impact individuals' choices while making purchases.

iii. Effects of consumer perception on the halal food products

The impression of consumers towards halal food products has a substantial impact on their purchasing behaviours and general attitudes. This was highlighted in a previous study conducted by Amat et al. (2014), where consumers often perceived halal food as being safer and more nutritious to consume, as it undergoes a strict certification process that ensures high standards are met. The impression that halal products undergo rigorous quality control enhances their desirability, leading consumers to choose halal food products over non-halal ones.

The research paper by Thiruvengatraj and Vetrivel (2017) also discussed how consumer perception has a significant impact on the accomplishment or failure of an organisation. A consumer's perception of a product or service is influenced not only by their personal experience with it, but also by variables such as cost, quality, the credibility of the producer, marketing strategies, packaging, and various psychological factors. For example, a favourable perception of a certain restaurant in an area may result in increased sales, but a bad impression about a particular item or company would lead to financial losses. Hence, the way a consumer perceives a product or service not only influences their purchasing decisions but also has a direct impact on the company's overall success and financial viability. Hence, big companies invest significant funding to shape consumer views.

Accordingly, the study by Thiruvengatraj and Vetrivel (2017) stated that the price of a product significantly influences consumer perception. While most consumers tend to favour affordable products, there remains a segment of discerning and sceptical buyers who view significantly lower-priced items unfavourably compared to other available options. Even when a product meets quality standards, many of these consumers perceive it as cheap and unsuitable. Therefore, pricing should be a fundamental element of a well-rounded marketing strategy. By implementing such a strategy, businesses can position lower-cost products as attractive choices that offer high quality at a more competitive price.

3. Materials and methods

Data collection

To achieve the stated objective, a quantitative approach was adopted. Data was collected through questionnaires and later analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Instrument

The questionnaire was structured in a statement format, requiring respondents to indicate their level of agreement using a 5-point Likert scale. On this scale, “1” represents “Strongly disagree”, while “5” represents “Strongly agree”, with “3” indicating a “Neutral stance”. This approach was chosen to ensure ease of response for participants while also facilitating the researcher's interpretation and data analysis.

The indication of numbers is stated in the table below:

Table 1: Quantitative Method

Likert Scale	Likert Description
1	Strongly Disagree
2	Disagree
3	Neutral
4	Agree
5	Strongly Agree

The questionnaire was designed to gather primary data and is structured into two sections. The first section collects demographic information about the respondents, while the second section explores consumers' perceptions of local halal meat in Brunei Darussalam.

Sample and sampling method

This survey employed convenience and snowball sampling methods, using a personal approach to gather responses from 170 participants. The sample consisted of Muslim consumers who purchased local halal meat in Brunei Darussalam. The majority of respondents were from the Brunei-Muara district, with a smaller number from Tutong, Belait, and Temburong.

Mean score and standard deviation

To determine the level of Muslim consumers' perception of local halal meat in Brunei Darussalam, it can be measured based on the interpretation of the mean score, categorised below.

Table 5. Level of Muslim consumers' perception measurement

Mean Score	Interpretation
1.00 – 1.80	Very Low
1.81 – 2.60	Low
2.61 – 3.20	Medium
3.21 – 4.20	High
4.21 – 5.00	Very High

Source: Moidunny (2009)

4. Results and Discussion

Results

Responses from 170 Muslim consumers were analysed to assess their perceptions of local halal meat. Their perception was evaluated using five key items, with the results measured through mean score interpretation to determine the overall perception level and key findings.

Demographic analysis

The demographic profile of the respondents is shown in Table 2 below. Major respondents were from females, which made up of 122 (71.8%) and the rest were 48 (28.2%) from males. As for the age, the majority of survey respondents were between 18-24 years of age (28.2%), followed by 25 to 34 (27.2%), while above 61 were the least (1.2%). As for marital status, the respondents were 50.0% single compared to 48.8% who were married. The highest frequency of educational background among the respondents was among Bachelor's degree respondents with a total of 64, which was valued at 37.6%, while the least was among Vocational Education or IBTE Schools with only 10 respondents (5.9%). As for the occupation, the data indicated that 61 respondents were from the government sector and this was reported as the highest percentage with 35.9% among all, and the lowest one recorded was 1 respondent from I-ready with a percentage of 0.6%. The monthly earnings identified by the majority were \$2,001-\$2,500, which comprised of 36 respondents for a total of 21.2%. The majority of the respondents who filled out the survey were Brunei-Muara' consumers, with highest percentage of 37.1% with 63 respondents. Followed by consumers from Tutong and Belait which carried 44 respondents (25.9%). The least number of consumers were from Temburong, with a percentage of 11.2% with 19 respondents.

Table 2. Demographic profile of respondent

Demographic variables		Number (N = 170)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	48	28.2
	Female	122	71.8
Age	18-24	48	28.2
	25-34	46	27.2
	35-44	39	22.9
	45-54	28	16.5
	55-60	7	4.1
	Above 61	2	1.2
Marital status	Single	85	50.0
	Married	83	48.8
	Others	2	1.2
Education Level	Secondary Education	31	18.2
	Higher post-secondary schools (Sixth Form Education)	13	7.6
	Vocational Education or IBTE Schools	10	5.9
	Higher National Diploma (HND)	27	15.9
	Bachelor's Degree	64	37.6

	Master's Degree	25	14.7
Occupation	Government Sector	61	35.9
	Semi-Government sector	8	4.7
	Private Sector	20	11.8
	Self-Employed	9	5.3
	Unemployed	9	5.3
	I-ready	1	0.6
	Student	54	31.8
	Retired	8	4.7
Monthly Income	Below \$500	32	18.8
	\$501-\$1,000	19	11.2
	\$1,001-\$1,500	6	3.5
	\$1,501-\$2,000	19	11.2
	\$2,001-\$2,500	36	21.2
	\$2,501-\$3,000	13	7.6
	\$3,001 above	17	10.0
	None	28	16.5
Religion	Islam	170	100.0
District	Brunei-Muara	63	37.1
	Tutong	44	25.9
	Belait	44	25.9
	Temburong	19	11.2

Muslim consumers' perception on local halal meat in Brunei Darussalam

Table 3 depicts the perception of Muslim consumers about the local halal meat in Brunei Darussalam. The researcher has emphasized four important points on local halal meat mainly on the price, halal logo, issues or doubts that arise, and advising consumers on purchasing meat. The results are disclosed as follows:

i. Price

With regards to price of local halal meat, 94 of the respondents with 55.3% “Strongly agree” that the price of local halal meat should be cheaper than the price of imported halal meat. Followed by 38 respondents who “Agree” upon the statement, while the lowest response was 4 respondents who answered “Disagree”. Among all respondents, only 34 respondents with the percentage of 20.0% who were “Neutral” with the statement mentioned.

ii. Halal logo

As to halal logo, a total of 136 respondents out of 170, with a percentage of 80.0%, were “Strongly agree” that local abattoirs should clearly mark the meat packaging with easy-to-spot halal labels, while 29 respondents (17.1%) were “Agreed” to the statement mentioned. The lowest percentage was valued at 2.9%, with a total of 5 respondents who were at “Neutral”.

As for the next statement, the results showed that 120 respondents with the highest percentage of 70.6% were “Strongly Agree” on the statement that “As a Muslim consumer, I would prefer local halal meat labelled with Halal logo”. In contrast, only 8 respondents responded “Neutral”. Those who “Agree” were valued at 24.7% with 42 respondents.

iii. Issues or doubts that arise

In respect of uncertainties, results showed that 109 (64.1%) respondents were “Strongly agree”. In comparison, 52 (30.6%) gave their opinion as agree to the statement “Clear and well explained guidelines are needed for the consumers to navigate religious conflicts if there are issues or doubts arise on local halal meat. While 8 (4.7%) respondents remained “Neutral”, yet 1 (0.6%) respondent was “Disagreed” with the statement mentioned.

iv. Advising consumers on purchasing meat

As for advising consumers on purchasing meat, a total of 85 (50.0%) respondents showed their responses as “Strongly agree”, 69 (40.6%) as “Agree” and 16 (9.4%) gave “Neutral” response that the “Meat sellers should be able to advise their consumers if the consumers are uncertain about all aspects of meat”.

Table 3. Muslim consumers’ perception on production of halal meat products

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
(PRICE)					
The price of local halal meat should be cheaper than the price of imported halal meat.	-	4 (2.4%)	34 (20.0%)	38 (22.4%)	94 (55.3%)
(HALAL LOGO)					
a) Local abattoirs should clearly mark the meat packaging with easy-to-spot halal labels.	-	-	5 (2.9%)	29 (17.1%)	136 (80.0%)
b) As a Muslim consumer, I would prefer local halal meat labelled with Halal logo.	-	-	8 (4.7%)	42 (24.7%)	120 (70.6%)
(ISSUES OR DOUBTS THAT ARISE)					
Clear and well explained guidelines are needed for the consumers to navigate religious conflicts if there are issues or doubt arise on local halal meat.	-	1 (0.6%)	8 (4.7%)	52 (30.6%)	109 (64.1%)
(ADVISING CONSUMERS ON PURCHASING MEAT)					
Meat sellers should be able to advise their consumers if the consumers are uncertain about all aspects of meat.	-	-	16 (9.4%)	69 (40.6%)	85 (50.0%)

Mean score and standard deviation

Table 4 shows the mean score and standard deviation of the four significant components, where the mean score and standard deviation for price were 4.31 and 0.871, respectively. While for halal logo (local abattoirs should mark the meat packaging with easy-to-spot halal labels), the mean score and standard deviation were 4.77 and 0.487, respectively.

Meanwhile, for “As a Muslim consumer, I would prefer local halal meat labelled with halal logo”, the mean score and standard deviation were 4.66 and 0.566, respectively. Regarding the mean score and standard deviation for issues or doubts that arise, they were reported as 4.58 and 0.612, respectively. Lastly, the mean score and standard deviation for advising consumers on purchasing meat were 4.41 and 0.657, respectively.

Table 4. Mean score and standard deviation

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
(PRICE)		
The price of local halal meat should be cheaper than the price of imported halal meat.	4.31	0.871
(HALAL LOGO)		
a) Local abattoirs should clearly mark the meat packaging with easy-to-spot halal labels.	4.77	0.487
b) As a Muslim consumer, I would prefer local halal meat labelled with Halal logo.	4.66	0.566
(ISSUES OR DOUBTS THAT ARISE)		
Clear and well explained guidelines are needed for the consumers to navigate religious conflicts if there are issues or doubt arise on local halal meat.	4.58	0.612
(ADVISING CONSUMERS ON PURCHASING MEAT)		
Meat sellers should be able to advise their consumers if the consumers are uncertain about all aspects of meat.	4.41	0.657

Generally, based on the results shown above, the level of consumers’ perception on local halal meat is very high. This is based on the overall average mean score which of 4.55 with a standard deviation of 0.447, indicating that responses were relatively consistent. This level of perception can be measured using the mean score categories outlined in Table 5.

The highest mean score among all statements was a mean score of 4.77 with a standard deviation of 0.487, particularly for the statement under halal logo, where “*local abattoirs should clearly mark the meat packaging with easy-to-spot halal labels*”. The data presented indicates that majority of the respondents were inclined to strongly agreed and agreed upon the statement, while barely any remained strongly disagreed. Hence, the high proportions of respondents who expressed support for the agreement suggests that the consumers held a favourable impression of the subject under consideration.

Meanwhile, followed by the next statement under halal logo also, where “*as a Muslim consumer, I would prefer local halal meat labelled with halal logo*”, it was ranked second highest with a mean score of 4.66 with a standard deviation of 0.566 for high standard deviation. The data showed that the majority of respondents strongly agreed and agreed with both of the statements, while only a small number remained neutral. The high proportion of respondents who expressed support for the agreement showed that they have positive perception regarding this matter.

On the other hand, statement from issues or doubts that arise, where “*clear and well explained guidelines are needed for the consumers to navigate religious conflicts if there are issues or doubt arise on local halal meat*”, the statement was perceived as having the third highest mean score among all statements with mean score of 4.58 with a standard

deviation of 0.612. The data presented illustrates that a large proportion of the respondents expressed strong agreement with the statement. Conversely, very few respondents remained neutral upon this notion. Therefore, the significant percentage of respondents who indicated their agreement with the statement indicated that the consumers had a positive perception of the item being discussed.

Moreover, statement under price, *“the price of local halal meat should be cheaper than the price of imported halal meat”* has the lowest mean score among all statements with mean score of 4.31 with a standard deviation of 0.871, yet according to the table of mean score interpretation above, Muslim consumer’s perception was very high. A tiny proportion of respondents were impartial or neutral, according to the statistics; however, the majority of respondents firmly agreed that the price of local halal meat should be cheaper than that of imported halal meat. Positive perceptions towards this matter were demonstrated by the large percentage of respondents who voiced support for the consensus.

Last but not least, the statement under advising consumers on purchasing meat, where *“meat sellers should be able to advise their consumers if the consumers are uncertain about all aspects of meat”*, has the second lowest mean score of 4.41 with a standard deviation of 0.657. The figures indicate that a very small percentage of respondents were neutral. Yet, majority of the respondents strongly agreed to the statement. Since the majority of the respondents had expressed support for the view, it showed that they had a positive perception about this matter. Above all, those five statements mentioned earlier have a very high mean score according to the mean score interpretation.

Discussion

i. Price

A tiny proportion of respondents were impartial or neutral, according to the above statistics; however, the majority of respondents firmly agreed that the price of local halal meat should be lower than that of imported halal meat. Positive perceptions towards this matter were demonstrated by the large percentage of respondents who voiced support for the consensus.

The first explanation for this is income factors. To put it another way, consumers with lower revenue or incomes are more attentive to pricing and frequently seek the best possible value when purchasing local halal meat and meat products. Hence, if more affordable local halal meat is available, it will enable consumers to extend their spending capacity even further, which will lead to increased accessibility of halal meat to a larger group of consumers, especially those with fewer financial resources.

Second, local production incurs a small cost rather than imported ones. Typically, local meat travels fewer distances from farm to market, meaning that halal meat from local sources may have a better production process (from animal welfare to the consumption point) with traceability and transparency. This offers higher quality and should be cheaper (Ali & Suleiman, 2017a). Compared to imported meat, which often entails travelling long distances, the costs incurred are larger than those of local meat. In terms of quality, it is more easily exposed to contamination (Mohamed et al., 2016). This was also stated in previous literature, where the lengthy and intricate supply chain for halal meat and meat products raises the risk of cross-contamination or violating Shariah standards before it reaches its final destination (Ruzulan et al., 2021).

Therefore, local halal meat should be more affordable compared to imported halal meat. Local meat is a better option as it offers potential signs of its halal status. The reason for this

is that Muslims, especially those who live in the country, are aware of the supplier of the meat within the country.

Lastly, local halal meat should have incurred lower cost in terms of its auditing, inspecting, monitoring and its certification compared to meat that are imported. Being an Islamic country that has also imposed Sharia law has assured that Brunei Darussalam has its own halal Certification that is very strict, rigorous and stringent (Brunei Today, 2010). It is officially a government certification, and qualified and experienced members of the Islamic Religious Council of Brunei Darussalam also conduct auditing. From this perspective, local halal meat abattoirs and companies may not need to exceed their budget for this type of auditing, as it originates from their country. In comparison to imported meat, monitoring officers from Brunei will be sent to the neighbouring country to witness and observe the slaughtering process, from start to finish, including transportation.

ii. Halal Logo

a) Importance of clear halal labelling on meat packaging by local producers

The data presented indicate that the majority of respondents were inclined to strongly agree or agree that local abattoirs and meat companies should clearly mark meat packaging with easy-to-spot halal labels, while only a small number remained strongly disagree. Hence, the high proportion of respondents who expressed support for the agreement suggests that the consumers held a favourable impression of the subject under consideration.

The importance of clearly labelling meat and meat products with easily recognisable halal certifications lies in several key factors. Firstly, the presence of a halal logo on meat helps build trust and confidence among Muslim consumers toward the producers (Wel et al., 2022; Fatmi et al., 2020a). This is because the halal logo plays a crucial role in consumers' purchasing decisions, serving as a symbol of quality assurance that reflects the purity, safety, and overall quality of the food (Wel et al., 2022; Usmandani & Darwanto, 2021; Fadholi et al., 2020; Sumpin et al., 2019). Additionally, past research on meat quality suggests that animals should be free from physical and emotional stress before slaughter (Aghwan et al., 2016). This consideration extends to all aspects of animal handling, slaughtering, welfare, meat quality and consumption (Aghwan et al., 2016). As a result, proper halal labelling reassures consumers that the meat complies with Shariah law (Sumpin et al., 2019).

Secondly, meat with a halal logo has a competitive advantage in meeting market requirements and attracting a broader consumer base, especially since the majority of Bruneian consumers are Muslim (Ahmad et al., 2013). This is because, in Brunei Darussalam, meat cannot be sold without a halal logo. Producers are required to display the halal certification throughout the entire sales process, as mandated by the Halal Meat Act (Chapter 183).

Thirdly, the halal logo plays a crucial role in influencing consumers' decisions to purchase meat (Usmandani & Darwanto, 2021). When the halal logo is displayed, it helps reassure Muslim consumers about the authenticity and quality of the meat, making them more likely to buy it. This, in turn, can boost the profitability of halal meat producers (Ruslan et al., 2017a; Usmandani & Darwanto, 2021; Perdana et al., 2018). On the other hand, the absence of the halal logo can raise doubts among consumers, potentially affecting their purchasing decisions (Wel et al., 2022; Ishak et al., 2016). This uncertainty could lead to cancellations, resulting in financial losses for producers (Ruslan et al., 2017a; Usmandani & Darwanto, 2021; Perdana et al., 2018). Furthermore, producers who deliver high-quality meat on time are likely to earn positive recognition from consumers (Aghwan, 2018). It is

also essential for producers to recognise that consumers play a vital role in the supply chain (Aghwan & Regenstein, 2019).

Lastly, meat bearing the halal logo signifies that it has been produced in accordance with halal guidelines. In other words, for producers to ensure the halal integrity of the meat, every stage of the food chain, from farm to consumption, must follow halal principles (Wel et al., 2022; Soon et al., 2016; Sumpin et al., 2019). This includes processes such as preparation, slaughter, hygienic handling, packing, labelling, and serving of the meat (Wel et al., 2022; Ruslan et al., 2017a). It also demonstrates that the producers have taken animal welfare into account (Aghwan, 2021; Aghwan et al., 2016). To ensure the meat is safe and hygienic for consumers, the halal slaughtering process must be properly carried out (Aghwan et al., 2016). Therefore, if the meat is certified halal, it reflects that all procedures involved in its preparation comply with halal requirements.

b) Consumer preference for halal logo on locally produced halal meat

The data presented indicates that the majority of respondents strongly agreed and agreed that they prefer local halal meat and meat products labelled with halal logo, while only a small number remained neutral. The high proportion of respondents who expressed support for the agreement showed that they have a positive perception regarding this matter.

The importance of halal-labelled meat for Muslim consumers is justified by the fact that the presence of the halal logo has increased awareness among Muslim consumers about the significance of consuming meat that complies with Islamic rules and principles (Wel et al., 2022; Ambali & Bakar, 2014). This has led to greater awareness of the need to purchase only meat that is certified halal by the Brunei government. It demonstrates that Muslim consumers prioritise fulfilling their religious duties, as every Muslim is instructed to seek what is “Halal/permissible” and avoid what is “Haram/prohibited” (Ruslan et al., 2017a). This was clearly stated on Surah al-Baqarah verse 168:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ كُلُوا مِمَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ ۚ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ﴾

Means: “O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] lawful and good and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy”.

Secondly, the halal logo plays a crucial role in consumers’ decisions to purchase meat (Usmandani & Darwanto, 2021). When the halal logo is displayed, it helps reassure Muslim consumers about the meat’s integrity and quality, making them more confident in their purchase (Ruslan et al., 2017a; Usmandani & Darwanto, 2021; Perdana et al., 2018). However, the absence of the halal logo raises doubts among consumers, which can influence their purchasing decision and possibly lead to cancellations (Perdana et al., 2018). It is essential to note that the absence of the halal logo poses a risk of mixing halal and non-halal items, which can create uncertainty and confusion among consumers (Wel et al., 2022; Aghwan, 2022; Ishak et al., 2016). This uncertainty should be avoided, as it may lead to the consumption of haram products. Based on the hadith Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) recorded in Sahih al-Bukhari:

(إِنَّ الْحَلَالَ بَيِّنٌ وَإِنَّ الْحَرَامَ بَيِّنٌ وَبَيْنَهُمَا مُشْتَبِهَاتٌ لَا يَعْلَمُهُنَّ كَثِيرٌ مِّنَ النَّاسِ فَمَنْ اتَّقَى الشُّبُهَاتِ اسْتَبْرَأَ لِدِينِهِ وَعِرْضِهِ وَمَنْ وَقَعَ فِي الشُّبُهَاتِ وَقَعَ فِي الْحَرَامِ كَالرَّاعِي يَرْعَى حَوْلَ الْحِمَى يُوشِكُ أَنْ يَرْتَعَ فِيهِ أَلَا وَإِنَّ لِكُلِّ مَلِكٍ حِمًى أَلَا وَإِنَّ حِمَى اللَّهِ مَحَارِمُهُ)

Means: *“Verily, the lawful is clear and the unlawful is clear, and between the two of them are doubtful matters about which many people do not know. Thus, he who avoids doubtful matters clears himself in regard to his religion and his honour, and he who falls into doubtful matters will fall into the unlawful as the shepherd who pastures near a sanctuary, all but grazing therein. Verily, every king has a sanctum and the sanctum of Allah is his prohibitions. Verily, in the body is a piece of flesh which, if sound, the entire body is sound, and if corrupt, the entire body is corrupt. Truly, it is the heart.”*

Thirdly, when the halal logo is displayed, Muslim consumers can save time by not needing to inquire with the meat seller about the source of the meat or whether it contains non-halal substances. This eliminates any hassle during the purchasing process, making it easier for consumers to buy the meat (Julkifli & Aghwan, 2024).

Fourthly, before making a purchase, consumers have the right to know what they are buying. The presence of the halal logo on the meat ensures that consumers are informed about the product they are considering. This means that requiring the halal logo on meat helps protect consumers from dishonest or unethical business practices (Ambali & Bakar, 2014; Usmandani & Darwanto, 2021; Rahman et al., 2018). According to the interviews, it also helps prevent consumers from purchasing meat from questionable sources, such as meat obtained through illegal activities. Muslim consumers are particularly cautious about the halal status of their food, as consuming halal food is both essential and obligatory in Islam (Ruslan et al., 2017a; Mohamed et al., 2008; Fadholi et al., 2020).

Lastly, meat with the halal logo offers essential reassurance to Muslim consumers (Ruslan et al., 2017a; Usmandani & Darwanto, 2021; Sumpin et al., 2019). In other words, consumers develop trust and confidence in local producers and the government for providing halal, high-quality meat, allowing them to make purchases without doubt or hesitation. This aligns with findings from existing literature.

iii. Issues or doubts that arise

The data presented illustrates that a large proportion of the respondents expressed strong agreement that clear and well-explained guidelines are needed for consumers to navigate religious conflicts if issues or doubts arise regarding local halal meat. Conversely, very few respondents remained neutral on this notion. Therefore, the significant percentage of respondents who indicated their agreement with the statement indicates that consumers had a positive perception of the item being discussed.

The justification behind this is, first, for clarity. To put it another way, precise and well-explained guidelines from the government, as well as local meat producers, will offer consumers a comprehensive understanding of the concepts of halal and the prerequisites for its production. This level of transparency will enable consumers to make well-informed decisions and minimise any ambiguity or doubt about the halal status of the meat and meat products.

Secondly is consumers' confidence and assurance that the local meat and meat products are truly halal. To put it simply, concise and comprehensive guidelines from the government and local meat producers will foster confidence in consumers regarding the reliability and integrity of halal meat. Consumers can be assured that the products comply with halal regulations once they are informed and aware of the procedures implemented throughout the production process (Wel et al., 2022).

Muslim consumers place a high value on the genuineness and integrity of halal meat. Accordingly, consumers can be assured and guaranteed that the meat they consume fulfils the Islamic dietary requirements through halal certification. Considering Brunei is known to have one of the strictest halal certifications (Brunei Today, 2010), consumers will have greater trust in the security and high quality of meat produced locally. From this perspective, local meat producers who adhere to Islamic law regulations regarding halal meat can establish trust and reliability with Muslim consumers, leading to repeat business and recommendations from other consumers as well.

For this reason, also, producers must adhere to specific requirements in order for the halal meat to be considered lawful such as; the slaughterer must be a Muslim, the tools used must be sharp and are not from bones, nails and teeth and the slaughtering must be done to slaughter in Allah's name; where otherwise, the meat will be prohibited from consumption. Hence, it is a mandate from Allah that the Muslims need only to purchase halal meat for their daily consumption (Ruzulan et al., 2021).

Above all, if the government and local meat producers can navigate any religious conflicts that arise from the issue of halal meat, consumers can ensure that the meat is coming from reliable sources that have been duly certified as halal. The halal certification that local meat producers have obtained indicates that the meat has been slaughtered and processed in accordance with Islamic dietary law. Consumers need transparency so that they can make decisions aligned with their religious beliefs by acquiring knowledge about which ingredients and components are halal and haram.

Thirdly, conflict resolution. When a dispute, misunderstanding, or doubt arises over the status of halal meat and meat products, clear standards will serve as a basis for resolving the issues. Here, consumers can utilise these guidelines to ascertain and ensure if the meat fulfils the requisite standards.

Lastly, protecting consumers. Another way of saying, precise and explained guidelines that are provided by the government or local meat producers aim to safeguard the consumers against possible fraudulent or deceptive practices within the halal meat industry. Establishing explicit criteria and guidelines ensures that consumers receive precise and reliable information about the status of meat, thereby deterring unethical conduct such as deceptive labelling or ambiguous sources of meat.

iv. Advising consumers on purchasing meat

The aforementioned data indicates that the majority of respondents are strongly agreed and agreed with the statement, despite the fact that a sizable portion of them were neutral to the statement "Meat sellers should be able to advise their consumers if the consumers are uncertain about all aspects of meat". With a higher percentage of respondents agreeing, it demonstrated that they have a good perception regarding the matter.

The reason behind this is, first, some consumers may have lack of knowledge regarding issue of halal and haram matters related to meat, such as its sources. Thus, when consumers are uncertain about specific or particular features of meat, it is the duty of meat sellers to aid consumers in making well-informed decisions regarding their purchases. Meat sellers are in a great and ideal position to provide guidance and assistance to the consumers, as they generally possess specific knowledge and skills related to the issue of halal and haram meat. They are also experts in various cuts, types of meat, preparation techniques and procurement procedures for meat and meat products.

In addition to that, assisting uncertain consumers presents an opportunity for meat sellers to educate them on various aspects of meat, including distinct cuts, preparation methods, dietary details, and the source of the meat. This can indirectly enhance consumers' understanding and appreciation of local meat and meat products.

Secondly, establishing trust between consumers and meat sellers. To put it another way, meat sellers can cultivate trust and establish positive, amicable connections with their consumers by providing valuable and accurate guidance. From the trust, consumers are more likely and inclined to revisit meat sellers that they have bonded with and have confidence in, since they are assured that their demands and concerns will be attended to.

Lastly, assisting issues arise from consumers. To put it simply, certain consumers may have specific dietary requirements, health, or ethical concerns related to meat consumption. In order to allay these worries and aid consumers in deciding what fulfils their requirements and needs, meat sellers may provide and offer good advice and information.

To illustrate, some consumers may see health and safety issues as an important factor in purchasing meat and meat products. Even if certain products are halal, there may be specific components that are not safe or healthy to consume. Thus, through comprehension and knowledge of the components or ingredients mentioned on the product's packaging from the meat sellers, consumers can make wiser decisions and steer clear of any allergies or detrimental additives. In other words, if consumers understand the products, including their ingredient composition, it will directly influence Muslim consumer purchase behaviour and attitude (Yousaf & Malik, 2013).

5. Conclusion

It can be concluded that the level of Muslim consumers' perception of local halal meat in Brunei Darussalam was notably high. This indicates that consumers are concerned and aware of the price, the halal logo, and any potential ambiguities, as well as the need for guidance on purchasing meat, which suggests that they are interested in purchasing the meat. From the findings, consumers expect meat sellers to possess expertise and provide guidance on any inquiries related to meat products. This expectation signifies that consumers perceive sellers as essential players in upholding the principles of halal and fostering confidence between producers and consumers. The consensus on this matter highlights the importance of providing precise advice and guidance in influencing purchasing decisions. Moreover, consumers have a strong preference for clear halal labelling on meat packaging, making it easier for them to identify products that meet halal standards. This preference underscores the importance of clear and easily visible halal labels to prevent any ambiguity or uncertainty. Additionally, the need for explicit guidance to prevent potential religious conflicts underscores the importance of honesty and open communication among producers, dealers, and consumers. Ultimately, there is a strong consensus that local halal meat should be more affordable than imported meat, indicating that price is a crucial determinant of consumer purchasing decisions. The preference for halal-labelled local meat and meat products, along with a willingness to seek information about suppliers and brands, portrays a thorough, informed, and trustworthy image of local halal meat. The above findings reveal an important signal to producers and the government to strengthen the halal meat industry in Brunei Darussalam by improving and addressing any gaps in producing meat that aligns with consumers' preferences.

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