

# Decoding Islamic Advertising: The Power of Signaling Theory for Halal Food in Malaysian Context

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the key factors influencing Malaysian consumers' behavioral intention for purchasing halal food products. Using a sample of 422 respondents, this research employs a multiple regression analysis to examine the impact of brand, halal logo, purity, religious compliance, and quality on behavioral intention. The findings reveal that while purity does not have a significant effect, brand, the presence of a halal certification, compliance to religious standards, and product quality play a substantial role in shaping behavioral intentions. Among these, the halal logo and product quality emerge as the most influential factors. The study highlights the importance for businesses to prioritize halal certification, enhance product quality, and strengthen brand identity to effectively engage their target customers. Future research is encouraged to explore additional variables that may further influence consumer intentions in this domain.

**Keywords:** Halal food, Signaling theory, Islamic advertising, Behavioral intention, Malaysia

## INTRODUCTION

Advertising functions as a conspicuous and resource-intensive signal employed by businesses to bolster the perceived quality of their offerings among consumers. By serving this purpose, advertising facilitates consumer discernment between superior and inferior product or service providers, thereby mitigating the potential for post-purchase dissatisfaction linked with acquiring products of inferior quality. Consumers view advertising as a firm's way of conveying confidence in its product. Consumers are always searching for information that gives them confidence in their purchase decision-making process. The halal food industry in Malaysia holds profound significance not only from a religious standpoint but also in terms of economic growth, cultural preservation, and global trade. As Islam is the official religion of Malaysia, with a substantial Muslim population, the halal food industry holds a crucial role in catering the dietary needs of Muslim consumers by ensuring that food products comply with Islamic dietary laws. Consuming halal food is not merely a fundamental aspect of Islam but a religious obligation for Muslims, symbolizing adherence to Islamic principles, cleanliness, and purity [1]. Economically, the halal food industry is a major contributor to Malaysia's economy, generating significant revenue through both domestic consumption and exports. Malaysia has established itself as a leading supplier of halal products, making substantial inroads into the international market. This sector encompasses a wide array of products, including food, beverages, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals. It also provides employment opportunities across various sectors, such as manufacturing, wholesale, retail, and halal certification bodies [2]. Culturally, halal food is deeply intertwined with Malaysian identity, reflecting the nation's rich cultural heritage and culinary traditions. Interestingly, halal-certified products are also favored by non-Muslims in Malaysia due to their perceived high quality, cleanliness, and ethical sourcing. This widespread acceptance of halal food fosters unity and inclusivity among Malaysia's

multiethnic population [3]. The halal food industry's impact extends to the hospitality and tourism sectors, bolstering Malaysia's reputation as a halal-friendly destination. Muslim travelers can access a variety of accommodations, dining options, and tourist attractions that hold halal certification. Additionally, international halal events, conferences, and expos draw tourists and potential investors from around the world, enhancing Malaysia's appeal as a prime destination for both leisure and business travel [4]. From a health perspective, products with halal certification are perceived as free from harmful substances, emphasizing cleanliness and hygiene. The rigorous inspections and audits involved in the halal certification process enhance consumer protection and ensure food safety. The prohibition of certain chemicals and additives in halal food further reinforces its reputation as a healthier option [5] since assurance and halal values have an impact on consumer satisfaction and trust [6]. Malaysia's halal food industry is of enormous significance from religious, cultural, economic, touristic, and health perspectives. It embodies the country's rich cultural legacy, economic vitality, and commitment to producing safe, high-quality food products. This study investigates the significance of various signals employed in Islamic advertising for halal food by synthesizing the findings of previous studies that make a theoretical contribution to signaling theory.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Advertising practices in Malaysia are profoundly influenced by its complex multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multireligious population. Most of the Malaysia's population comprises Muslim Malays, alongside substantial ethnic groups including Chinese, Indians, and others. These groups encompass various distinct traditions and languages, yet they share many commonalities. In this context, advertisements must possess a distinctly Asian character while adhering to local sensitivities [7]. Consequently, the Malaysian government has established advertising regulations based on Islamic principles. This approach is crucial not only for maintaining a harmonious multicultural society but also for supporting the increasing business investments in Malaysia.

Islamic advertising is an emerging field that has garnered interest from both academics and practitioners [8] since the recognition of Muslims as a viable and substantial market segment [9]. Islamic advertising principles differ significantly from those of contemporary advertising. Islamic teachings require the full disclosure of all pertinent information about promoted products and prohibit concealment of any facts, including product shortcomings [10]. In contrast, conventional advertising is often viewed with skepticism regarding its honesty [11]. Islamic advertising is grounded in the principle of submission to Allah Almighty, necessitating that advertising is allowed within Islamic guidelines [12]. Islamic advertising is characterized by its ethicality, credibility, non-deceptiveness, simplicity, dignity, and humanity (8).

Advertising strongly and positively influences brand recognition [13]. When target consumers are exposed to halal food advertisements, they seek out brand names with which they have had satisfying experiences or engage in schemata when encountering a new manufacturer's identity. The brand or manufacturer's identity plays a role as an external cue that helps communicate the halal status of particular food item. The stronger the brand name, the higher the chances of gaining consumer trust [14]. Brand plays an important role in forming the confidence level in the consumer on the product's halal status. As consumer trust in the brand grows, it becomes easier for companies to communicate their marketing messages and build favorable impressions in consumer's minds about their brands [15]. Consequently, brand trust positively affects purchase decisions [16].

Halal logo symbolizes both trust and quality for halal food consumers, thus, halal certificate is credible cue for the Muslim consumers [18]. Halal certification or logo significantly influence the purchasing decisions of Muslim patrons, as halal-certified products are mandatory to meet their religious requirements [1]. Halal certificate or logo is prominently displayed on products and featured in all form of advertisements [19]. Reference [20] studied the purchasing behavior of educated millennial Muslim Malaysian females and found that, despite being brand conscious, they exhibited a relatively high concern for the halal certification of cosmetic items. Reference [21] found that halal certifications significantly influenced the purchase intentions of Muslim students and tourists in Spain. Reference [22] examined how advertising, food ingredients, halal awareness, the presence of halal labelling, and purchase interest influenced the buying decisions for Samyang noodles in Indonesia and revealed that halal label had a significant positive effect on both purchase intention and buying decisions.

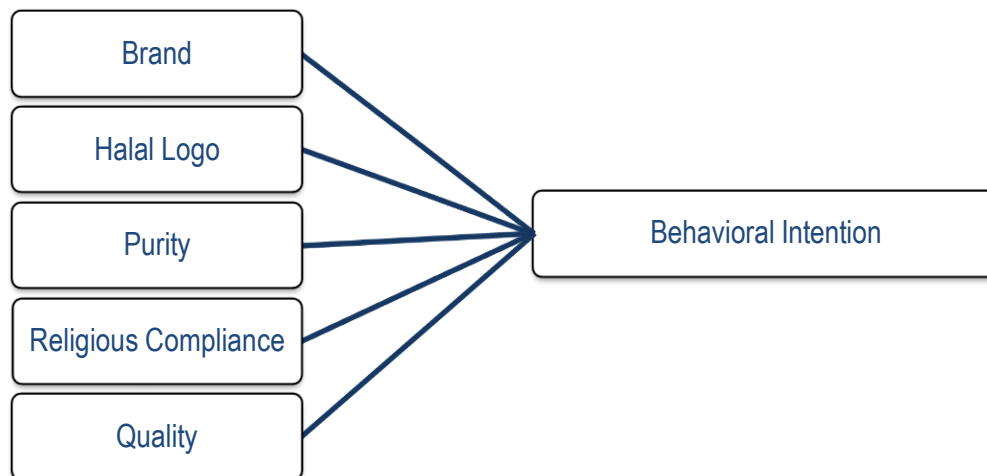


Fig.1 Established Research Framework

A growing concern regarding food safety, hygiene, and quality has led to an increased global interest in halal products [23]. A significant and positive relationship between food ingredients and purchase intention was revealed by [22]. Study emphasized that the use of ingredients and processes that contravene Islamic regulations can render a product impermissible for Muslim patrons. In pursuit of consuming halal food, consumers prioritize intrinsic and extrinsic cues equally related to raw material and ingredient's purity [24].

Food quality is widely recognized as a critical factor in shaping customer's quality perceptions [25]. Halal products are distinguished by their adherence to specific quality standards and processes that differ from those of conventional products in the same category. This distinction contributes to the increasing consumer demand for halal products [26]. As per [27], typically, consumers rely on signals provided by manufacturers to assess product's quality. In halal food context, quality is often presented and guaranteed by means of certification from authorized bodies, which can also function as marketing tool. Halal food is perceived as not only meeting the dietary needs of Muslims but also as representing a healthier and more appealing lifestyle for both Muslims and non-Muslims. The halal attribute is thus viewed as a symbol of quality, rather than merely a religious requirement ([27], [28], [23]). Reference [29] explored non-Muslim Malaysians' purchase intentions for halal products, highlighting that product quality, price, availability, and safety significantly impact their decisions. Among these factors, product quality emerged as the most critical determinant.

Research shows that today Muslim consumers are becoming more mindful of their food choices and expect the halal food supply chain to uphold and strengthen the integrity of halal products. Halal products are often marked with particular signals or symbols to signify their adherence to Islamic principles [30]. Beyond representing religious compliance, halal has come to symbolize integrity, quality, and cleanliness, reflecting higher humanitarian and environmentally conscious production approach [28]. The halal status of a product ensures that all stages, from raw material procurement to processing, manufacturing, shipping, and warehousing, align with Sharia law and Malaysia's halal standards.

## Research Questions

1. How does the brand influence consumers' behavioral intention to purchase a halal food product?
2. What is the impact of the presence of a halal logo on consumers' behavioral intention to purchase halal food products?
3. How significant is the perception of purity in determining the behavioral intention of consumers towards halal food products?
4. What role does religious compliance play in shaping the behavioral intentions of Muslim consumers in the food industry?
5. How does perceived product quality influence consumers' behavioral intention to purchase halal food products?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We conducted a survey among Malaysian customers using a questionnaire that utilized a five-point Likert scale. The survey aimed to gather data on the variables under investigation. We distributed the survey to 450 individuals, and 422 of them responded, yielding a 94% response rate. The respondents' basic demographic profile is as follows. About 56% of the respondents are female, and the majority fall within the age range of 26 to 40 years. The sample distribution by ethnicity is as follows: 70% Malays, 15% Chinese, 12% Indians, and 3% from other ethnic groups.

### Descriptive Analysis

The table below displays the descriptive statistics for the factors examined in this study. The results confirm that we have considered all 422 replies. The study encompasses calculations of the lowest, maximum, mean, and standard deviations. The results indicate that the data adheres to the anticipated criteria.

Table I Descriptive Analysis

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Behavioral Intention	422	1.24	4.24	2.8744	.70956
Brand	422	2.16	3.80	3.0862	.34192
Hala Logo	422	2.33	4.47	3.4498	.63565
Purity	422	1.80	4.10	2.8455	.50594
Religious Compliance	422	1.00	3.14	2.0992	.66605
Quality	422	2.17	4.33	3.2251	.54053
Valid N (listwise)	422				

### Reliability Analysis

The table below presents the reliability test results using Cronbach's alpha. Data that has a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.70 (or 70%) is considered reliable for future statistical studies and policy formulation. The results show that all variables have Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.70, or 70%.

Table II Reliability Analysis

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Brand	0.794	25
Hala Logo	0.872	10
Behavioral Intention	0.914	17
Purity	0.698	10
Religious Compliance	0.850	07
Quality	0.706	6
Overall	0.746	80

### Normality Analysis

Data normality can be examined by two methods: statistical method and graphical method.

#### Graphical Method for Normality:

The results of the Box-Whisker plot confirm that the obtained data does not contain any outliers, indicating that it

follows a normal distribution and is suitable for further analysis.

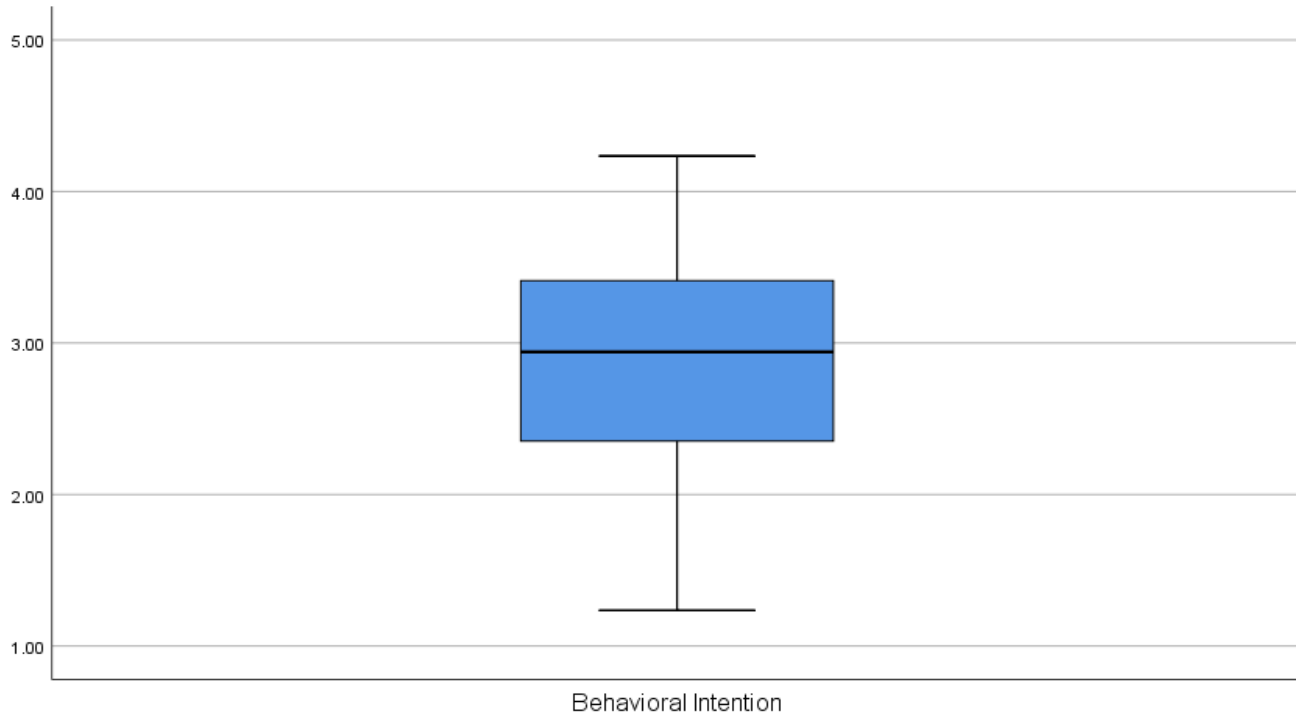


Fig. 2 Graphical Method for Normality Analysis

**Statistical Method for Normality:**

Statistical methods for testing normality include the Z-score test for skewness and kurtosis, as well as the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests for establishing significance values. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is used for samples larger than 50, while the Shapiro-Wilk test is used for samples smaller than 50. If the results of these tests are not statistically significant, the data follows a normal distribution. In this research, The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was utilized because the sample size exceeded 50, and the findings indicate that the data does not follow a normal distribution.

Table III Statistical Normality Analysis

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Behavioral Intention	0.115	422	0.000	0.963	422	0.000
Lilliefors Significance Correction						

**Correlation Analysis**

The correlation between behavioral intention and brand is very low and not significant, indicating little to no relationship. A strong positive correlation exists between halal logo and behavioral intention, significant at the 0.01 level. This suggests that as the presence of a halal logo increases, so does behavioral intention. A moderate positive correlation, significant at the 0.01 level exists between purity and behavioral intention, indicating that perceptions of purity are positively related to behavioral intention. A positive and strong correlation among religious compliance and behavioral intent exists, significant at the 0.01 level, showing that higher religious compliance is associated with higher behavioral intention. Significant at the 0.01 level, a strong negative correlation is found between quality and behavioral intention, suggesting that higher perceived quality is associated with lower behavioral intention. Based on the above results, it can be established that behavioral intention is most strongly positively correlated with the halal logo (0.675).

Table IV Correlation Analysis

	BI	B	HL	P	RC	Q
Behavioral Intention	1					
Brand	0.018	1				
Halal Logo	0.675**	0.059	1			
Purity	0.279**	0.205**	0.367**	1		
Religious Compliance	0.503**	0.305**	0.433**	0.371**	1	
Quality	-.643**	-.093	.572**	-.345**	-.375**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Homogeneity Test**

Based on the presented estimation observations, the Levene statistic value indicated statistical significance. The Levene statistic value being greater than 0.05 suggests that there is homogeneity in the data. Conversely, if the Levene statistic value is less than 0.05, it signifies that the data do not exhibit homogeneity.

Table V Homogeneity Test

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Behavioral Intention	Based on Mean	13.493	32	382	0.000
	Based on Median	6.630	32	382	0.000
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	6.630	32	222.919	0.000
	Based on trimmed mean	12.833	32	382	0.000

**Model Summary Results**

The R2 value of 0.598 indicates that approximately 59.8% of the variance in the dependent variable can be accounted for by the predictor variables within the model. The Durbin-Watson statistic, which is 1.212, considers the presence of autocorrelation in the residuals from the regression analysis. Typically, values between 1 and 3 suggest an absence of autocorrelation. The value observed here is above 1, potentially indicating absence of autocorrelation issue. Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) are metrics utilized to evaluate multicollinearity among predictor variables. Tolerance measures the proportion of variability in a predictor variable that is not explained by other predictors, with higher values (closer to 1) indicating low multicollinearity. VIF quantifies the extent to which the variance of a regression coefficient is inflated due to collinearity, with values exceeding 10 suggesting problematic multicollinearity. In this analysis, all VIF values are below 10, suggesting that multicollinearity is not a significant concern. The F-statistic of 124.002, with a significant level demonstrates that the overall model is statistically significant and a good-fit model.

Brand, halal logo, religious compliance, and quality revealing positive and significant impact on behavioral intention. By increasing one-unit in all these variables, behavioral intention may increase by 0.2-units, 0.414-units, 0.274-units, and 0.476-units respectively. While purity confirm the positive yet insignificant impact on behavioral intention.

Table VI Model Summary Results

R	R <sup>2</sup>	Durbin-Watson		
0.774	0.598	1.212		
F	124.002*			
Variables	Coefficients		Tolerance	VIF
Brand	0.200*		0.832	1.201
Halal Logo	0.414*		0.561	1.784
Purity	0.081		0.774	1.291
Religious Compliance	0.274*		0.673	1.486
Quality	0.476*		0.636	1.573

“ \* ” shows significance at 5%

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on empirical estimation outcomes, we conclude that brand, halal logo, religious compliance, and quality confirm the positive and significant influence on behavioral intention in Malaysian economy. While purity reveals positive but insignificant impact on behavioral intention. The table below summarizes the results in relation to the research questions:

Table VII Results & Conclusion

Research Questions	Results	Conclusion/ Recommendation
How does the brand influences consumers' behavioral intention to purchase a halal food product?	There is positive and significant impact of brand on behavioral intention.	Halal food businesses should develop influential and unique halal food brands.
What is the impact of the presence of a halal logo on consumers' behavioral intention to purchase halal food products?	There is positive and significant impact of halal logo on behavioral intention.	Businesses can utilize branding and advertising tactics to emphasize their halal certification resulting in boosted customer trust.
How significant is the perception of purity in determining the behavioral intention of consumers towards halal food products?	There is positive but insignificant impact of purity on behavioral intention.	Purity is not a major component therefore firms may want to rethink how much importance they give it in their advertising.
What role does religious compliance play in shaping the behavioral intentions of Muslim consumers in the food industry?	There is positive and significant impact of halal logo on behavioral intention.	Businesses can verify their products follow Islamic principles and highlight this attribute to attract customers who place faith in their buying preferences.
How does perceived product quality influence consumers' behavioral intention to purchase halal food products?	There is positive and significant impact of quality on behavioral intention.	Halal food businesses should maintain and publicizing their exceptional goods' value through advertising initiatives.

Based on the findings, following are the proposed recommendations:

1. **Highlight Halal Certification:** Because the halal logo is the most influential driver of behavioral intention, enterprises ought to utilize branding and marketing tactics to showcase their halal certification. This can boost customer trust and encourage a broader demographic, especially where halal compliance is necessary.
2. **Boost Quality Insight:** Quality is the variable that has the most influence on customer behavior. Entrepreneurs need to focus on maintaining and publicizing the outstanding value of their goods through advertising initiatives, feedback from customers, and evaluations of products. Continuous endeavors to boost quality will be acknowledged by customers.
3. **Brand Growth:** Given the crucial role of brands, businesses ought to invest in developing influential, distinctive brands for halal food. This can encompass running customer loyalty initiatives, collaborating with trustworthy groups, and implementing recognition initiatives.
4. **Religious Compliance:** Considering the significance of religious compliance, enterprises can make sure their products follow Islamic principles and emphasize this attribute to draw in customers who prioritize faith in their buying preferences.
5. **Reconsider Purity:** Purity was not a key factor in this model, so enterprises may wish to reconsider how much priority they give it in their advertising strategies. Deeper scrutiny, however, might look into its significance in niche markets or certain demographics.

At  $R^2 = 0.598$ , almost forty percent (40%) of the variation remains unexplainable. Future studies ought to investigate more aspects, such as price sensitivity and cultural impacts, to bolster the model and better comprehend behavioral intention.

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