

Determinants of Generation Z's Intention to Purchase Halal International Branded Food in Sabah

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ABSTRACT

The halal food industry continues to expand globally, creating significant opportunities for international food brands operating in Muslim-majority markets such as Malaysia. However, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the factors influencing Generation Z's intention to purchase halal international branded food, particularly within the Sabah context. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), this study examines the influence of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control on Generation Z's intention to purchase halal international branded food in Sabah. A cross-sectional survey design was employed using a structured questionnaire administered to Generation Z consumers residing in Sabah, yielding 146 valid responses. Data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS 4. The results revealed that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control positively and significantly influenced purchase intention. The findings support the applicability of the Theory of Planned Behaviour in explaining halal food purchasing intentions among Generation Z consumers in Sabah. Practically, the results suggest that policymakers, halal authorities, and international food brands should strengthen social influence, positive consumer evaluations, and consumers' perceived ability to access halal-certified products in order to enhance purchase intentions within the growing halal food market.

Keywords: Generation Z, Halal International Branded Food, Purchase Intention, Theory of Planned Behaviour, Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioural Control, Sabah

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has established itself as a global leader in the halal industry through its comprehensive halal certification system and strong commitment to developing the halal ecosystem. For eleven consecutive years, Malaysia has maintained its position as the leading country in the Global Islamic Economy Indicator (GIEI), reflecting its strength in halal food, Islamic finance, pharmaceuticals, and other halal-related industries (Bernama, 2023). The Malaysian halal market is projected to reach USD 113.2 billion by 2030, supported by internationally recognised certification standards and increasing global demand for halal products (HDC, 2023; Bernama, 2023).

As the halal industry continues to expand, understanding consumer purchasing behaviour has become increasingly important. In Sabah, where Muslims constitute approximately 69.59% of the population, awareness and demand for halal food continue to increase, particularly among younger consumers (Department of Statistics of Malaysia, 2024). At the same time, Generation Z has emerged as an influential consumer segment due to its strong exposure to international brands, digital platforms, and social media. Their purchasing decisions are often shaped by a combination of personal evaluations, social influence, and perceived ability to access products (Setiawati, 2019; Alwi & Hasan, 2024).

Despite the growing importance of the halal sector, existing studies have primarily focused on consumers in Peninsular Malaysia, leaving limited empirical evidence regarding halal purchasing behaviour among

Generation Z consumers in Sabah. Sabah possesses unique cultural, demographic, and geographical characteristics that distinguish it from other regions in Malaysia (Pugh-Kitingan, 2015). Furthermore, the availability of halal-certified international branded food products varies across locations, creating different purchasing experiences and decision-making processes among consumers (Tey, 2008; Lada et al., 2009). Consequently, findings from previous studies may not adequately explain the behaviour of Generation Z consumers in Sabah, highlighting the need for further empirical investigation within the local context (Lada et al., 2009; Alwi & Hasan, 2024).

Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control on the intention to purchase halal international branded food among Generation Z consumers in Sabah. The findings are expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on halal consumer behaviour and provide practical insights for policymakers, marketers, and international food brands operating in the halal industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), developed by Ajzen (1991), is one of the most widely applied theories for explaining human behaviour and behavioural intentions. The theory proposes that an individual's intention to perform a particular behaviour is determined by three principal factors, namely attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. TPB has been extensively applied across various consumer behaviour contexts, including halal food consumption, sustainable consumption, and purchase intention studies (Khasanah, 2023; Alwi & Hasan, 2024; Ansar et al., 2023; Chekima et al., 2026). Therefore, TPB serves as the underpinning theory for the present study, which examines Generation Z's intention to purchase halal international branded food in Sabah.

Attitude

Attitude refers to an individual's overall positive or negative evaluation of performing a particular behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of halal international branded food, attitude reflects consumers' favourable or unfavourable perceptions regarding the purchase of halal-certified food products offered by international brands. Positive attitudes are generally formed when consumers perceive that the products provide desirable benefits such as quality, safety, religious compliance, and overall satisfaction (Khasanah, 2023).

Previous studies have consistently reported that attitude is a significant predictor of purchase intention. Consumers who possess favourable attitudes towards halal products are more likely to develop stronger purchase intentions (Salman & Siddiqui, 2011; Haryanto et al., 2019). Khasanah (2023) further argued that positive evaluations regarding halal compliance and product quality encourage consumers to engage in halal purchasing behaviour. Therefore, consumers who perceive halal international branded food positively are expected to demonstrate stronger purchase intentions.

H1: Attitude has a positive influence on the intention to purchase halal international branded food among Generation Z in Sabah.

Subjective Norms

Subjective norms refer to the perceived social pressure from significant others that influences an individual's decision to engage in a particular behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). These significant others may include family members, friends, colleagues, and social groups whose opinions are considered important by the individual. Within collectivist societies such as Malaysia, social influence often plays a critical role in shaping consumer behaviour (Taib, 2022; Azizan, 2022).

Generation Z consumers are particularly susceptible to social influence due to their frequent engagement with social media platforms and digital communities. Previous studies have found that subjective norms

significantly influence halal food purchasing intentions, particularly when consumers perceive support and approval from family members and peers (Taib, 2022; Azizan, 2022). Khasanah (2023) further highlighted that social approval and community expectations often reinforce halal purchasing decisions among Muslim consumers. Consequently, stronger subjective norms are expected to increase consumers' intentions to purchase halal international branded food.

H2: Subjective norms have a positive influence on the intention to purchase halal international branded food among Generation Z in Sabah.

Perceived Behavioural Control

Perceived behavioural control (PBC) refers to an individual's perception regarding their ability to perform a particular behaviour, considering the availability of resources, opportunities, and personal capabilities (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of halal food purchasing, PBC reflects consumers' confidence in their ability to access, afford, identify, and purchase halal-certified food products (Karatu & Mat, 2015; Khasanah, 2023).

Previous research has consistently demonstrated that consumers who perceive greater control over purchasing decisions are more likely to develop stronger behavioural intentions (Ajzen, 1991; Taylor & Todd, 1995). In halal food consumption, perceived behavioural control is influenced by factors such as product availability, affordability, accessibility, and consumers' ability to verify halal certification (Karatu & Mat, 2015). Khasanah (2023) further reported that consumers who believe they can easily obtain halal products tend to exhibit stronger purchase intentions. Therefore, higher levels of perceived behavioural control are expected to positively influence Generation Z's intention to purchase halal international branded food.

H3: Perceived behavioural control has a positive influence on the intention to purchase halal international branded food among Generation Z in Sabah.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a positivist, quantitative, non-experimental, correlational design and employed a cross-sectional survey. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to Generation Z consumers residing in Sabah, Malaysia, who had experience purchasing halal food products or intended to purchase halal international branded food. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that respondents met the predetermined selection criteria. This approach is widely used in consumer behaviour research involving specific target populations (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019; Hair et al., 2022).

The final sample comprised 146 valid responses, exceeding the minimum sample size requirement of 119 established using G*Power analysis. Responses were captured using a 5-point Likert scale. The study examined four constructs, namely attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and intention to purchase halal international branded food. Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4. The measurement model was assessed through indicator loadings, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), discriminant validity, and variance inflation factor (VIF). The structural model was evaluated using path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples at a significance level of 0.05 (Hair et al., 2022).

RESULTS

Respondent Profile

The sample comprised 146 valid responses and was slightly female dominated (57.2%). Most respondents were between 21 and 26 years old, generally well-educated, and predominantly Bumiputra Sabah. The majority possessed a Bachelor's Degree qualification and were either full-time students or full-time employees. This profile is consistent with the characteristics of Generation Z consumers in Sabah and reflects an important market segment for halal international branded food.

Measurement Model Assessment

The study reported satisfactory evidence of measurement quality. Indicator loadings ranged from 0.672 to 0.899, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.60. Composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.852 to 0.882, indicating satisfactory internal consistency reliability. Convergent validity was also established, with average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50 for all constructs, specifically 0.653 for attitude, 0.659 for subjective norms, 0.715 for perceived behavioural control, and 0.592 for intention to purchase (see Table 1). Discriminant validity was supported by HTMT, with all values below the recommended threshold of 0.85 (see Table 2). Common method variance was also unlikely to be a serious concern, as all full collinearity VIF values ranged from 1.089 to 1.281 (see Table 3), well below the recommended threshold of 3.3 (Kock, 2015; Henseler et al., 2015; Hair et al., 2022).

Table 1. Measurement Model.

Construct	Item	Loading	CR	AVE
Attitude	ATT1	0.894	0.882	0.653
	ATT2	0.815		
	ATT3	0.740		
	ATT4	0.776		
Intention to purchase	INT1	0.768	0.878	0.592
	INT2	0.785		
	INT3	0.821		
	INT4	0.672		
	INT5	0.792		
Perceived Behavioural Control	PBC1	0.839	0.882	0.715
	PBC2	0.876		
	PBC3	0.820		
Subjective norms	SN1	0.762	0.852	0.659
	SN2	0.899		
	SN3	0.768		

Table 2. Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

	ATT	INT	PBC	SN
ATT				
INT	0.405			
PBC	0.207	0.341		
SN	0.390	0.438	0.188	

Note: ATT = Attitude; INT = Intention to Purchase; PBC = Perceived Behavioural Control; SN = Subjective Norms

Table 3. Full Collinearity Testing

ATT	SN	PBC	INT
1.184	1.192	1.089	1.281

Note: *ATT = Attitude; INT = Intention to Purchase; PBC = Perceived Behavioural Control; SN = Subjective Norms*

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model showed that all three direct hypotheses were supported (see Table 4). H1, which proposed that attitude positively influences intention to purchase halal international branded food, was supported ($\beta = 0.250$, $t = 2.953$, $p = 0.002$). H2, which proposed that subjective norms positively influence intention to purchase halal international branded food, was also supported ($\beta = 0.270$, $t = 3.266$, $p = 0.001$). Similarly, H3, which proposed that perceived behavioural control positively influences intention to purchase halal international branded food, was supported ($\beta = 0.200$, $t = 2.411$, $p = 0.008$). Among the three predictors, subjective norms exhibited the strongest effect, followed by attitude and perceived behavioural control.

The model demonstrated moderate explanatory power. Intention to purchase achieved an R^2 value of 0.250, indicating that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control collectively explained 25.0 percent of the variance in purchase intention. Predictive relevance was also supported, as all Q^2 predict values were positive, ranging from 0.012 to 0.163 (see Table 5). Furthermore, the PLS-SEM model outperformed the linear benchmark model across all indicators, indicating acceptable out-of-sample predictive performance. Effect size analysis revealed that subjective norms ($f^2 = 0.087$), attitude ($f^2 = 0.074$), and perceived behavioural control ($f^2 = 0.051$) exerted small but meaningful effects on purchase intention (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Direct Effects

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std. beta	Std. error	t-value	p-value	BCI LL	BCI UL	f^2	Decision
H1	ATT > INT	0.25	0.085	2.953**	0.002	0.100	0.379	0.074	Supported
H2	SN > INT	0.27	0.083	3.266**	0.001	0.122	0.393	0.087	Supported
H3	PBC > INT	0.20	0.083	2.411**	0.008	0.053	0.324	0.051	Supported

**denotes t-value>1.645 significance at $p<0.05$; ** denotes t-value>2.33 significance at $p<0.01$*

Table 5. PLS Predict

		PLS-SEM		LM		PLS-LM	
	Q^2 predict	RMSE	MAE	RMSE	MAE	RMSE	MAE
INT1	0.148	1.222	1.035	1.229	1.019	-0.007	0.016
INT2	0.113	1.384	1.210	1.428	1.207	-0.044	0.003
INT3	0.163	1.281	1.108	1.315	1.087	-0.034	0.021
INT4	0.012	1.387	1.159	1.447	1.228	-0.060	-0.069
INT5	0.107	1.291	1.095	1.363	1.137	-0.072	-0.042

Note: INT = *Intention to Purchase*

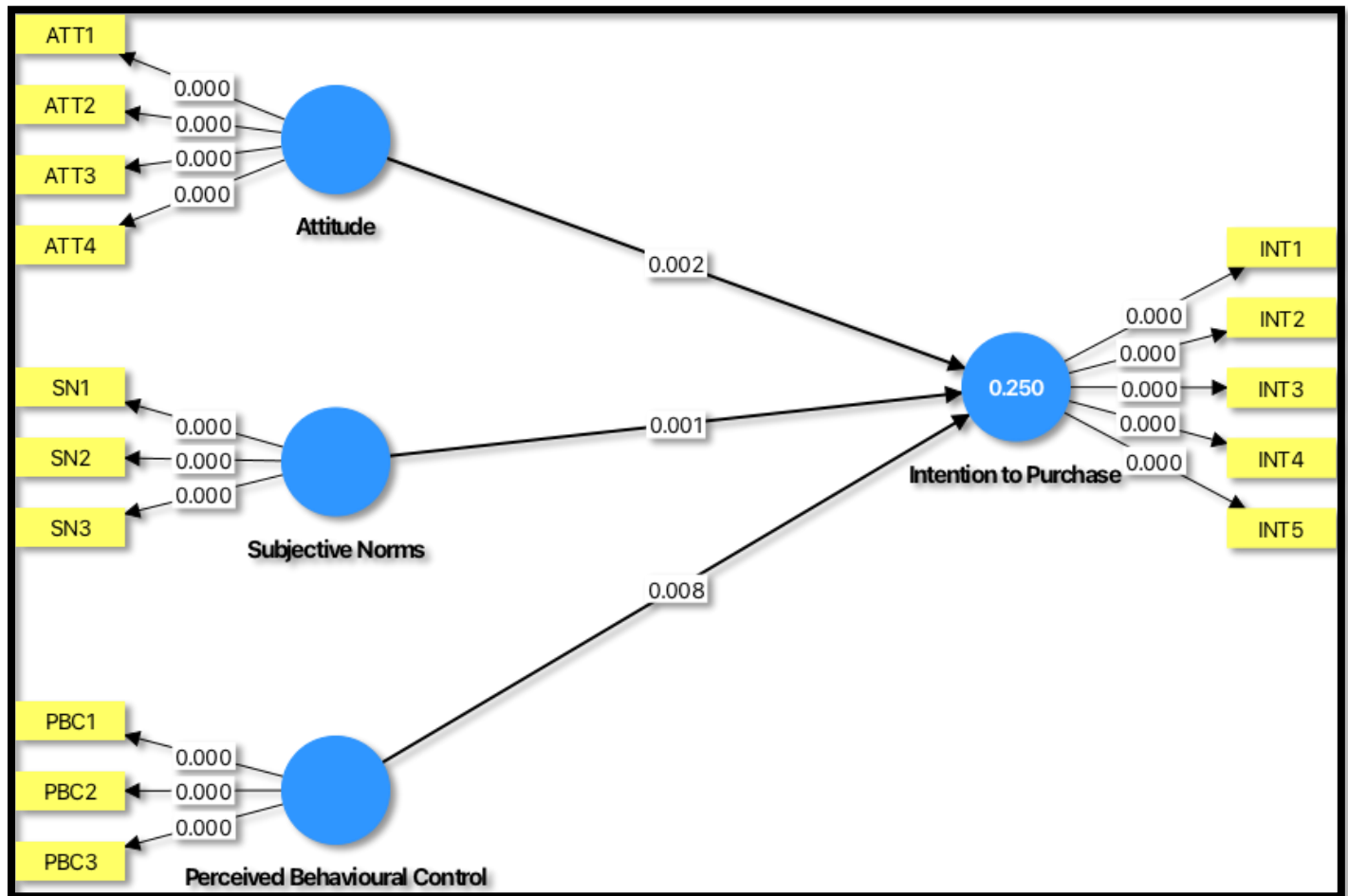


Figure 1: Structural Model

DISCUSSION

The findings provide empirical support for the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) in explaining Generation Z's intention to purchase halal international branded food in Sabah. Attitude was found to positively and significantly influence purchase intention, indicating that consumers who hold favourable evaluations toward halal international branded food are more likely to develop stronger purchasing intentions. This finding is consistent with previous studies which reported that positive perceptions regarding halal compliance, product quality, and overall benefits significantly enhance consumers' willingness to purchase halal products (Salman & Siddiqui, 2011; Khasanah, 2023). The result suggests that favourable personal evaluations remain an important determinant of halal food purchasing decisions among Generation Z consumers.

Among the three TPB constructs, subjective norms emerged as the strongest predictor of purchase intention. This finding indicates that social influence from family members, friends, and significant others plays a critical role in shaping halal food purchasing intentions among Generation Z consumers in Sabah. The result supports previous studies conducted in collectivist societies, where social approval and recommendations significantly influence consumer behaviour (Taib, 2022; Azizan, 2022; Khasanah, 2023). Given the high level of social media engagement among Generation Z, both online and offline social interactions appear to reinforce consumers' intentions to purchase halal international branded food.

Perceived behavioural control was also found to positively and significantly influence purchase intention. This suggests that consumers are more likely to intend to purchase halal international branded food when they perceive such products to be accessible, affordable, and easy to obtain. Consistent with Khasanah (2023),

consumers who possess greater confidence in their ability to identify and purchase halal-certified products tend to exhibit stronger behavioural intentions.

Implications

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing further empirical support for the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) in explaining Generation Z's intention to purchase halal international branded food in Sabah. The findings confirm that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control remain significant predictors of purchase intention within the halal food consumption context. More importantly, the study extends the application of TPB to a relatively underexplored setting, namely Generation Z consumers in Sabah, thereby enriching the literature on halal consumer behaviour and offering additional evidence regarding the applicability of TPB in emerging halal markets.

From a practical perspective, the findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, halal authorities, and international food brands. Since subjective norms emerged as the strongest predictor, stakeholders should leverage social influence through community engagement, peer recommendations, influencer marketing, and social media campaigns that promote halal consumption. At the same time, marketers should strengthen positive consumer attitudes by emphasising halal integrity, product quality, food safety, and brand reputation. These initiatives may enhance consumers' confidence and encourage stronger purchase intentions toward halal international branded food.

The findings also suggest that improving consumers' perceived behavioural control is essential for encouraging halal purchasing intentions. International food brands and retailers should ensure that halal-certified products are easily accessible, affordable, and clearly identifiable through transparent halal certification information. Policymakers and halal authorities may further strengthen consumer confidence by enhancing halal awareness programmes and promoting greater visibility of halal certification standards. Collectively, these efforts can support the continued growth of the halal food industry while meeting the evolving needs and expectations of Generation Z consumers in Sabah.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control on Generation Z's intention to purchase halal international branded food in Sabah. The findings revealed that all three constructs significantly influence purchase intention, with subjective norms emerging as the strongest predictor, followed by attitude and perceived behavioural control. These results provide empirical support for the Theory of Planned Behaviour and demonstrate that social influence, favourable personal evaluations, and perceived purchasing capability collectively shape halal food purchasing intentions among Generation Z consumers. The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on halal consumer behaviour while offering practical insights for policymakers, halal authorities, and international food brands seeking to strengthen consumer engagement and promote halal international branded food within the Sabah market.

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