

The Moslem Society Perception on The Importance of Korean Food's Halal Status and Its Nutritional Value: A Descriptive Study

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Abstract

Indonesia is a country in which most of its citizens are Muslim. This condition brings both opportunities for halal products and the rise of challenges to ensuring halal status. In line with that, the increasing interest in Korean products also brings a new challenge. Some of their products contain haram ingredients or do not have a halal label. Therefore, consumer awareness of Korean-food halal status is essential to protect themselves from Korean non-halal products. On the other hand, as Korean foods become daily consumption in Muslim society, the concern about their nutritional value and their potential effects on health is also growing.

This study aimed to explore the Muslim society's perception of the importance of Korean-food halal status and nutritional value.

This study is a descriptive mix-methods study that consists of cross-sectional and qualitative studies. The qualitative data were collected using focus group discussion and were validated using source triangulation. The total number of participants in this study was 81. The inclusion criteria were Moslem, aged a minimal 14 years old, live in Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (DIY), and a Korean food consumer.

The results show that most participants are concerned about Korean food's halal status. It also became their priority when purchasing Korean food. More than half of the participants have good halal food knowledge (60,5%) and practices (51,9%). In addition, the majority of subjects were concerned about foods' nutritional value, although only 17,2% of participants were always considerate about the nutrition aspects. They also have perceptions that Korean foods can be considered healthy or not, depending on the food type.

The Korean food halal awareness in the Muslim society in Yogyakarta is quite high, so the stakeholder should support the information availability of Korean halal food items. Education about halal food criteria is also essential, such as what kind of ingredients make a product become haram and how to identify those ingredients.

Keywords

Halal Food, Korean Food, Moslem Halal Perception

1. Introduction

Indonesia, the home of the largest domestic halal economic market in the world, had a 229,6 million Muslim population in 2020. These Muslim consumers are engaged by their core Islamic values, which guide their way of life, including their purchasing behavior. Based on data, this population's domestic spending across halal economy products and services is \$184 billion and will increase to \$281,6 billion in 2025. This data underlines the Indonesian halal economic growth opportunity.¹

On the other hand, the concern about Muslim consumers' protection against non-halal products was also raised. Globalization makes cultural interchange happen rapidly, such as in Korean culture through Korean waves. This phenomenon raises awareness about the product's halal status, especially in food. Some South Korean culinary products do not have a halal certificate² and might contain pork as a non-halal ingredient.³ In addition, Indonesian consumers' halal awareness is still low. Some of them think that all the products available in the market are halal.⁴

In the nutrition aspect, some people believe that Korean food is healthy because of the vegetable composition in their meals.³ However, there is also a concern about its high sodium content in the seasoned soup, stews, and pickled vegetables. Besides, Korean instant foods such as ramen contain very high sodium. Further, Dietary sodium intake is related to ghrelin release, an appetite-stimulating and adipogenic-related hormone that might lead to obesity and hypertension.⁵

Therefore, Korean food consumer's halal and nutrition awareness is essential to prevent them from purchasing non-halal and unhealthy Korean food. Their perception of halal concept affects the purchasing decision. This statement underlined the importance of understanding the Muslim society's perception toward halal status and nutritional value of Korean food. This research aimed to understand the Muslim society's perception toward halal status and nutritional value in their purchasing behavior.

2. Literature Review

Halal food concept

In Arabic the word "halal" literally means "permissible". In the context of halal food, the "permissible" value is based on a certain Islamic principle (*sharia* law).⁶ To determine whether the food products is halal or not, there are two basic points of consideration: the materials used and the processes. The haram materials are the materials that not allowed to be consumed by Muslim, which stated in the Qur'an: pork, blood, and corpse. Furthermore, the animal that was slaughtered without reciting the name of Allah, *khamr* also determined as haram. On the other hand, the food processing and the way to get the material also should be ensured as halal.⁶

In Indonesia, the halal certification requirement is known as HAS23000 which consists of 11 criteria Halal Assurance System: Halal policy; halal team management; training; material; production facilities; products; written procedure of critical activities; traceability; handling of product that do not meet the criteria; internal audit; and management review.⁷

Korean food's Halal Critical Points

Korean food halal issues generally highlighted the use of alcohol in cooking and beverages, *mutanajjis*, fermentation process in cooking ingredients such as sauces, soy sauce and vinegar as well as animal-related nutrition laws concerning *syubhah* or haram based animal feeds.⁸ The gochujang sauce, as a traditional Korean paste, is most commonly and widely used in traditional Korean dishes such as bibimbab, as a condiment for meat, or as a dip sauce.⁹ Some of the gochujang (fermented red pepper paste), is restricted from being consumed by Muslims for its excessive alcohol content.¹⁰

In addition, the well-known instant noodle from South Korea called “Samyang”, produced by Samyang Foods Inc, was found that the noodles contain pork. However, this brand got their halal certificates in 2017. Those cases represent the halal issues of unlabeled halal Korean food that are distributed in Indonesia.

Korean food’s nutritional value

The traditional Korean food, characterized by a table includes dishes or garnitures formed by five colors. This dish is full of vegetables and low in calorie. Koreans also use herbs and fruit as their food for therapeutic effects, such as cooked ginger, cinnamon, adley, and ginseng. The Korean culinary culture preserves its aim of producing healthy food with traditional cooking methods, cooking technology, basic principles, and knowledge.¹¹

Through Korean waves, Korean foods became popular in Indonesia: Kimchi, bibimbap, pajeon, bulgogi, ramyeon, tteokbokki.¹² Some of those type of food considered as vended street food (VSF) which characterized by the food and beverages are prepared and sold outdoors by street merchants. This ready-to-eat food products have a negative reputation of nutritionally imbalanced.¹³

3. Method

This study is a descriptive mix-method study that consists of online cross-sectional and qualitative studies. The data collection was conducted from February to May 2022. The total number of participants in this study was 81. The inclusion criteria were Moslem, aged a minimal 14 years old, live in Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (DIY), and a Korean food consumer.

The qualitative data were collected using focus group discussion and were validated using source triangulation. The data triangulation was collected in different gender and occupation group. The qualitative data was proceed through transcription, data analysis, coding, and dividing data by topic, and comparing the result with the updated reference.¹⁴

4. Results and Discussion

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

The total number of participants in the study was 81. Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the study participants. Most participants were 19 to 40 years old and living in Sleman and Yogyakarta. Most of the participants are undergraduate students.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of study participants

No.	Variables	Frequency n= 81	Percentage
1.	Sex		
	Male	74	91.4%
	Female	7	8.6%
2.	Age		
	14- 19 years	20	24.7 %
	19-40years	59	72.8 %
	>40 years	2	2.5 %
2	Education		
	Senior High School	32	39.5 %
	Diploma I-III	3	3.7 %
	Diploma IV/Bachelor	31	38.3 %
	Postgraduate	15	18.5 %
3	Occupation		
	Housewife	3	3.7 %
	Full time worker	27	33,3 %
	Entrepreneur	4	4.9 %
	Postgraduate student	4	4.9 %

	Undergraduate student	42	51.9 %
	High-school student	1	1,2 %
5	Residential area		
	Yogyakarta	27	33.3 %
	Sleman	27	33.3 %
	Bantul	24	29.6 %
	Kulon Progo	3	3,7 %

Participants Knowledge of Halal Concepts

Table 2 shows that the number of participants who had good knowledge of the halal concept was more than six-tenth, while the question with the lowest score was about the halal status of the product can be determined by consumer checking of its composition (Table 3).

Table 2. Participant's knowledge of halal concepts

Knowledge	Frequency	Percentage
Lack	32	39.5 %
Good	49	60.5 %

Table 3. Participants' Knowledge of Halal Concept: the 5 lowest percentage of true responses

Questions	Frequency	Percentage
1. The halal status of Korean food can be determined by consumers checking its composition, whether there is any non-halal material.	21	25.9%
2. The consumer can choose halal Korean food by buying a non-pork meat and flavour product (Ex: avoiding products with grilled pork flavour).	30	37%
3. The Korean food products with BPOM label are always halal.	38	46.9%
4. The Korean food products in Indonesia are always halal because Indonesia is a Muslim country.	44	54.3%
5. Non-pork products (Ex: kimchi, gochujang) can always be considered halal.	48	59.3%

Participants' practices in purchasing halal products

Table 4 shows that there is a slightly higher score in the appropriate group compared with those who had an inappropriate practices is similar. Further, the lowest score question in this aspect is similar with the knowledge question: I determine the halal status of Korean food only by checking its composition, whether there are any non-halal ingredients. The response to the three lowest score questions is shown in Table 5.

Table 4. Participant's practices in purchasing halal products

Practices	Frequency	Percentage
Inappropriate	39	48.1 %
Appropriate	42	51.9 %

Table 5. Participants' Practices Score: the 3 lowest practices score

Questions	Practices Score (Max:100)
1. I determine the halal status of Korean food only by checking its composition, whether there is any non-halal ingredient	34.3

2. If I am not sure about a product’s halal status, I check its halal status on the LPPOM MUI website	58.3
3. If I am not sure about a product’s halal status, I ask the seller about its halal status.	64.4

This result is strengthened by the qualitative results stated that most of the respondents rely on the raw material or product composition checking to ensure the product’s halal status:
 “..... I checked the halal logo. However, if I the product is noodles such as Samyang, I guess it is halal, although the halal logo is not provided in the package. But if the source (raw material) is from staple food, I think it is halal...”
 (Resp AL, women)

Participants’ Priority in Choosing Korean Products

Based on seven factors influence the buyer in purchasing Korean products, the halal status got the highest score. The type of food product is on the second rank, followed by the product’s taste at the 3rd, and its price. (Table 6)

Table 6. Participants’ Priority in Purchasing Korean Food

Product’s Criteria	Rank
Halal status	1
Type	2
Taste	3
Price	4
Colleague recommendation	5
Packaging appearance	6
Influencer/ advertisements	7

The respondent from the qualitative method in general stated a similar concern that they took halal status as their priority in purchasing Korean food.
 “Because we are Muslim, we check the product whether it is halal or not” (Resp NE, man)
 “The Samyang have a lot of products and some of them were not originally from Indonesia, so I myself always check is there any halal logo in the product first” (Resp RZ, man)

Participants’ Nutrition Value Awareness

We assessed the nutrition value awareness using a Likert scale with five levels of the answer: always (score: 5); often (score:4); sometimes (score:3); rarely (score:2); never (score:1). More than forty percent of participants think they sometimes had a concern in the nutritional value of Korean products they bought, while only 17% that always check the products nutritional value. The result is shown in Figure 1.

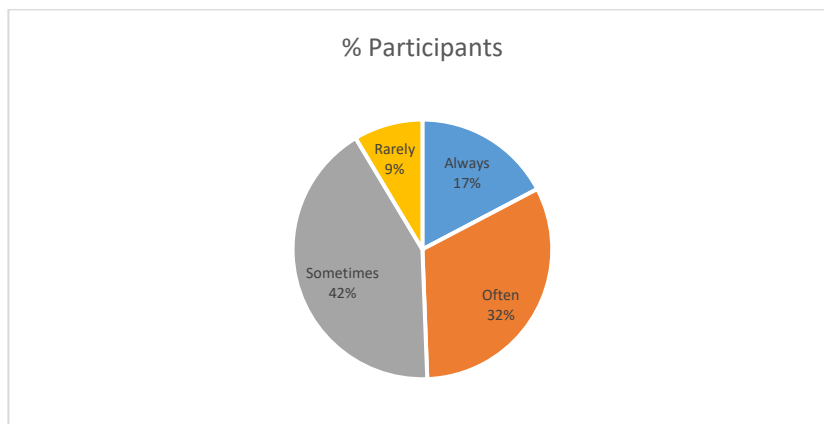


Figure 1. The distribution of participants related to nutrition value awareness

Discussion

The food product or process is declared halal or haram based on the decided fatwa. It is not only considered halal by its raw material but also the food preparation and process, including the slaughtering process.¹⁵ In addition, the production facility should be divided into the halal facility products and non-halal products. The cross-contamination from non-halal ingredients (pork and its derivatives, for example) might change the product status from halal to haram.¹⁶ Indonesia has 11 criteria for its halal guarantee system to determine whether a product is considered halal or haram.⁸

Although the concern about halal food in South Korea has been rising, there is a need to highlight that the Korean product should be certified as halal products by the Korean Muslim Federation (KMF) comprehensive examination. That is because some food producers think halal is only related to alcohol and pork ingredients.¹⁷ In this regard, consumers cannot determine the halal status of the products only from their composition. Consumers should ensure the halal status by checking the halal logo on the package or searching the website of the Assessment Institute for Foods, Drugs, and Cosmetics Indonesian Council of Ulama (*LPPOM MUI*).

Knowledge plays an important role in affecting attitudes toward halal labels.¹⁸ The attitude towards halal-food consumption consistently ranked the highest among all factors.¹⁹ In this study, more than half of the participants had good knowledge and appropriate practices and took halal status as their priority in purchasing Korean food. This result is similar to other research results stating that halal certification /halal logo has a significant positive effect on purchasing products, even for a non-Muslim buyer.²⁰

Korean food has a positive point in its healthiness. Korean people provide dishes with various colors of vegetables that contain complex nutrients. Traditional Korean cuisine has characteristics besides the main dishes, there are three to five side dishes. Those are comprised of vegetables and low-fat foods.²¹ Korean food is useful for improving energy supply, nutrients for healthy skin, constipation prevention, and supporting a healthy gastrointestinal function.³ However, because in Indonesia traditional Korean food is expensive,³ Korean street food is more commonly consumed. The types of Korean street food are *tteokbokki*, *hweori gamja*, *hottang*, *corndog*, and *seafood meatballs*.²² The influence of social environment on a popular food through social media influencer lead to a consumption of high calorie but low nutrition content food, especially in the adolescent group.²³ The consumption of instant noodles, dumplings, and kimchi also contributed to the high sodium intake.²⁴ The high sodium intake might lead to high blood pressure. In addition, the sodium intake might related to preference of sweet taste and its role in stimulating ghrelin, a hormone with appetite-stimulating and adipogenic-properties.⁵

5. Conclusion

The Korean food halal awareness in the Muslim society in Yogyakarta is quite high, so the stakeholder should support the information availability of Korean halal food items. Education about halal and healthy Korean food criteria is also essential, such as what kind of healthy Korean food, its ingredients related to haram material and how to identify those ingredients.

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Biographies

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