



Halal Awareness through Information-seeking Behaviours among Muslim Consumers towards Halal Food

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ABSTRACT

Halal awareness has become one of the most prominent topics in halal-related literature. While various scholars have conceptualised halal awareness differently, it is clear that these concepts are primarily based on self-assessment. Self-assessment may be open to further criticism, since it does not involve third-party validation. To complement this, other dimensions of consumer halal awareness ought to be studied. Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate information-seeking behaviours among Muslim consumers to provide a new perspective on how consumer halal awareness can be measured. The research employs document analysis as the primary data collection method, focusing on inquiries submitted to the Mufti and the responses issued in the form of fatwas. However, the study is limited to unpublished fatwas produced by the Federal Territories Mufti Office from 2016 to 2024, related to halal foods. The data were analysed using both content and thematic analysis. Findings indicate that the information-seeking behaviour of consumers is evident in the consistent number of inquiries they submit, which receive responses from the Mufti. Additionally, it was discovered that, over the years, consumer inquiries have become increasingly sophisticated and complex. This trend suggests that halal awareness is not only present but also growing. Based on these findings, this study recommends further research on information-seeking behaviours among Muslim consumers regarding other halal products, including their information-seeking behaviours towards JAKIM's local and international halal certification using relevant databases

INTRODUCTION

"Some of us underestimate this issue, while some regard popular restaurants as equal to any Muslim-owned warung at the night market that operates without halal certification. These truly show how irresponsible some of these Muslims, who are not aware of the current situation" (Shaharuddin, 2023)

"It is part of fardu ain (obligatory acts that every Muslim must perform) that must be learned from childhood. The problem is that many parents still lack knowledge about halal food. If a

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certain foodstuff becomes viral, they will all rush (to buy it) without checking if the product's halal logo is genuine.” (Roslan, 2022)

These are some statements posted on the media signalling the ignorance of some Muslims concerning halal food consumption. Amid these, numerous studies have examined halal awareness among Muslim consumers. Contrary to the above, the studies found that halal awareness of Muslim consumers is high (Ambali & Bakar, 2013; Maifiah et al., 2022; Musa & Hashim, 2022; Mashitoh et al., 2013) and has influenced their purchase intention and buying behaviour (Sahat et al., 2023). In addition, similar studies exploring halal awareness, attitudes, and the like have also been conducted across many countries, for example, Muslim consumers in different countries. Some of them are South Africa (Bashir, 2019), Thailand (Shaari et al., 2021), Korea (Mansor et al., 2017), Indonesia (Kurniawati & Savitri, 2020; Rachmawati et al., 2022; Rafiki et al., 2023), Saudi Arabia (Azam, 2016), for instance, Bashir (2019) found that halal awareness of non-Muslims is higher than that of Muslims in South Africa.

Apart from these developments in the research on halal awareness, a loophole prevails. The loophole is that the awareness of halal is self-assessed. One may say that he is aware of halal, whether it is rooted in religiosity, safety and hygiene reasons, halal exposure, or simply because there is a halal logo on the packaging of the product. Nevertheless, considering the advanced halal market in this country, it is not evident that the self-assessed halal awareness measured in the literature adequately reflects the halal awareness or knowledge anticipated from a Muslim consumer. Currently, the halal market witnesses new products, such as foods, cosmetics, medications, or technologies utilised in product manufacturing, that may alter the concept of fundamental halal and haram in Islam. Inevitably, these products will reach consumers and interfere with their daily consumption. While some studies have advanced the concept of halal awareness, for example, making a clear distinction between the consumer's ability to recall halal products and the ability to recognise halal products (Nurhayati & Hendar, 2020), little is known about consumer halal awareness in line with the growing types of products around them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Halal Awareness

Halal awareness has been described as the perception of a customer that they need to get good information about what is happening. In a study, awareness was linked to ‘having a special interest in or experience of something and/or being well informed about what is happening at the present time concerning halal foods, drinks and products. As such, awareness describes human perception and cognitive reaction to a condition regarding what they eat, drink, and use. Subjectively speaking, awareness is a relative concept in which a person may be partially, subconsciously, or acutely aware of an issue or issues relating to the halal aspect of what is permitted by Allah’ (Azam, 2016). Building on this, Hanifasari et al. (2024) further employed four aspects of awareness in their study, namely: 1) awareness of the halalness of the product based on Islamic rulings, 2) halal knowledge that is grounded in religious obligations, 3) halal knowledge grounded in product hygiene and safety, and 4) halal knowledge through information provided in the packaging of halal food products from the manufacturer. Musa and Hashim (2022) described halal awareness as knowledge and attitude towards halal products. In Ambali & Bakar (2013), it was ascribed to ‘having a special interest in or experience of something and/or being well informed about what is happening at present on halal food, drinks, and products.’ According to them, this describes perception and cognitive reaction to what consumers eat, drink, or use. Perhaps the concept of halal awareness is still evolving. This is plausible since the halal exposure that Muslim consumers had in the early 2000s differs from that in the 2020s. Research alone has shown significant growth from 2013 with two Scopus-indexed publications on halal awareness to 10 and 14 in 2023 and 2024, respectively (see Figure 1). Figure 1 also depicts how research on halal awareness has evolved from 2013 to 2024, with a small number of studies focusing on the concept of halal awareness itself.

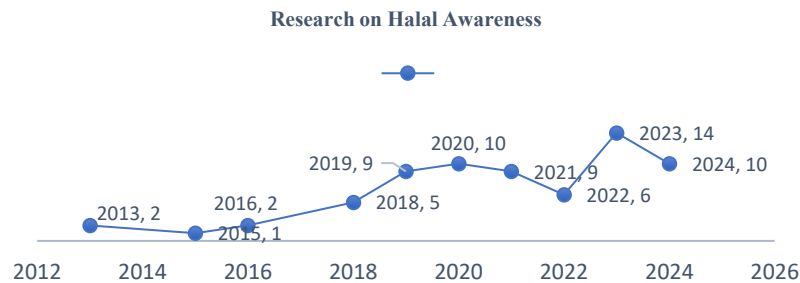


Fig. 1. No. Publication on Halal Awareness. Source: Author (2025)

Information-Seeking Behaviours

While halal awareness is generally measured by knowledge, perception and attitude towards consuming halal products, little attention has been given to the ‘information-seeking behaviour’ of halal as part of that awareness, or knowledge and attitude. Information-seeking behaviour involves actions undertaken by an individual to ‘express his/her information needs, select, evaluate and use the information to fulfil the information requirements. This behaviour has become inherent in the era of advanced technology (Kumar & Kumar, 2021). Seeking information about halal should imply a higher level of awareness among consumers because it is purely intrinsic and forms part of the *tabayyun* practice in Islam. In the literature, awareness and information-seeking behaviour have been studied concurrently since they influence one’s attitude. Shahi et al. (2021) found that students’ attitudes toward the environment were significantly influenced by their awareness and information-seeking behaviour. Surprisingly, a small study at our unit discovered that Muslim consumers display these behaviours when they reach out to learn about the halal status of the products they consume or intend to consume. It was found that the State Mufti Office websites play an essential role (see Table 1). There are 11 channels dedicated to public inquiries for the Federal Territories Mufti Office alone. For each of these channels, numerous inquiries have been posted and responded to, not to mention the high frequency with which the public has visited or read these responses. All of these imply the level of awareness that the public has towards religious issues, including those concerning halal matters.

The Concept of Halal Awareness

Halal awareness has been studied extensively. Ambali and Bakar (2014) have carefully examined and conceptualised halal awareness. They discussed the meanings of awareness and linked them to halal. In their study, they conceptualised halal awareness as 1) having a particular interest or experience in something and/or being well informed about what is happening at present regarding halal foods, drinks, and products, and 2) the informing process of increasing the levels of consciousness towards what is permitted for Muslims to eat, drink and use. In the study, the halal awareness of consumers was measured by four items, i.e., ‘I am highly aware of halal food’, ‘I believe I have enough knowledge about halal food’, ‘I am always concerned with halal issues’, and ‘By consumer right, I always take action when there is something wrong with the food I purchase’. Although the term ‘halal awareness’ was used, the study concentrated on ‘awareness of halal consumption’. This concept has been adopted by a few researchers (Kurniawati & Savitri, 2020). Building on Ambali & Bakar (2014), Kurniawati and Savitri (2020) explored the halal awareness levels of Indonesian consumers. In their study, halal awareness was referred to as ‘having a special interest or experience or being well informed about halal foods, drinks, and products.’ They found that the awareness level index was high. However, it is notable that Kurniawati and Savitri (2020) did not concentrate on awareness of halal consumption; instead, they focused on awareness of certified products. This indicates that, while the instrument was adopted from Ambali and Bakar (2014), the latter discussed a different aspect of halal awareness. In addition to these, Bashir (2019), who surveyed halal awareness among South African consumers, conceptualised halal awareness as the consumers’ understanding of the meaning of halal, their awareness of the processes involved in halal food production, and their familiarity with halal

certification/logo. In a similar vein, Musa & Hashim (2022) described halal awareness in their study as 'understanding of the halal concept, attitudes toward what is halal and haram, and awareness of halal certification of the products they buy, eat, and drink.' This study investigated awareness in three aspects, i.e., knowledge of halal, attitudes towards halal food consumption, and awareness of halal certification. Based on these studies, it was found that there are diverse halal awareness concepts in the literature.

In response, a study has highlighted the importance of distinguishing the awareness of halal from the awareness of halal certification. According to them, most studies investigating halal awareness among consumers have asked the respondents about their knowledge of halal regardless of whether the knowledge is correct or not. While awareness is evidence of knowledge, knowledge is not necessarily evidence of awareness (Usman et al., 2023). However, it was found that halal awareness (HA) has a significant impact on halal-certified awareness (HCA) in the study. Similarly, Aziz and Chok (2013) and Vanany et al. (2020) also treated this awareness of halal and halal certification separately. While these developments, i.e., separating halal awareness and halal-certified awareness, are evident in several pieces of literature, a loophole still prevails. The loophole is that the awareness of halal was self-assessed. One may say that they are aware of halal, whether it is rooted in religiosity, safety and hygiene reasons, halal exposure, or simply because there is a halal logo on the packaging of the product. Nevertheless, considering the advanced halal market in this country, it is not evident that the self-assessed halal awareness measured in the literature may adequately measure halal awareness or knowledge anticipated from a Muslim consumer. Currently, the halal market witnesses new products, such as foods, cosmetics, medications, or technologies used in their production, that may alter the concept of fundamental halal and haram in Islam. Inevitably, these products will reach the consumers and affect their daily consumption. While some studies have advanced the concept of halal awareness, e.g., making a clear distinction between the consumer's ability to recall halal products and the ability to recognise halal products (Nurhayati & Hendar, 2020), little is known about consumer halal awareness in line with the growing types of products around them.

Based on these, this study asserts the need to offer a new dimension of halal awareness among consumers or potential consumers through information-seeking behaviour as part of their awareness of halal. Since this is a new avenue of understanding halal awareness, this study focuses on the behaviours related to halal foods only. According to MS1500:2009, halal food is, 'food and drink and/or their ingredients permitted under the Shariah law' and it fulfils primarily six conditions: 1) it does not contain any parts or products of animals that are non-halal or are not slaughtered according to Shariah law; 2) it does not contain impurity (*najis*); 3) it is safe for consumption; 4) it is not prepared, processed or manufactured using equipment contaminated with *najis*; 5) it does not contain any human parts or derivatives; and 6) during its preparation, processing, handling, packaging, storage and distribution, the food is physically separated from any other food that does not meet the requirements stated in items 1), 2), 3), 4) or 5) or any other substances that have been decreed as *najis* by Shariah law. Halal food may also be in the form of meat, poultry, seafood, dairy products, cereals and grains, oil and fats, as well as confectionery. Halal awareness of halal foods has been frequently addressed in previous studies (Albra et al., 2023; Ambali & Bakar, 2014; Bashir, 2019; Kurniawati & Savitri, 2020; Musa & Hashim, 2022; Nurhayati & Hendar, 2020; Sahat et al., 2023). Thus, extending it through Muslim consumers' information-seeking behaviours is hoped to shed light on consumer halal awareness from a new perspective.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research investigates the information-seeking behaviours of Muslim consumers towards halal foods. It employed document analysis as its data collection method. The data are the information-seeking behaviours represented through the inquiries made by Muslim consumers about halal foods to the Mufti channels. The data collection involves identifying the channels, searching for inquiries on halal, and trimming the inquiries to ensure the data meet the research needs. The selection of the data is based on purposive sampling. Fatwas issued via different channels, i.e., Bayan Linnas, Irsyad Hukum, Irsyad Usul al-Fiqh, al-Kafi, Bayan al-Falak, Irsyad al-Hadith, and four others at the

Mufti of Federal Territories Office's website, that employ the keyword 'halal food' or 'makanan halal', are selected for further analysis.

These channels are publicly accessible at the Mufti of Federal Territories Office's website, for the public to seek information on halal. Initially, this study tried to identify the objectives of establishing each channel. However, little was made known on the website except for short descriptions provided at the top page of each channel. It was identified that, while some of these channels are voluntary statements and discussions issued by the mufti/Mufti's Office, others are responses to individual inquiries posted by anyone, either directly to the office (by email) or via social media (presumably the Office's social media accounts). It was identified that there are 164 issues published by the Mufti from different channels and across different years that contain the keyword 'halal' from 2016 to 2024 (cut-off date April 2024).

Table 1. Details of Mufti of the Federal Territories Office's Channels

Channels	Earliest post (Year)	Current issue (No. of Series)	Scope of deliberation	Source
Bayan Linnas	2015	295	Contemporary fiqh issues/ rulings	Voluntary
Irsyad Hukum (previously Irsyad al-Fatwa)	2014	841	Contemporary fiqh issues/ rulings	Response to enquiries
Al-Kafi li al-Fatawi	2015	1983	Contemporary fiqh issues/ rulings	Response to inquiries in social media
Irsyad al-Hadith	2016	594	Issues relating to Hadith	Response to enquiries
Irsyad Usul al-Fiqh	2016	74	Issues relating to Usul al-fiqh	Response to enquiries
Tahqiq al-Masail	2017	10	No information	Response to enquiries
Al-Afkar	2017	146	Issues relating to Aqidah	Response to enquiries
Bayan li al-Haj	2017	40	Issues relating to al-Haj	Response to enquiries
Tashih al-Mafahim	2018	22	Issues relating to extremism	Response to enquiries
Suara Pemikir	2015	5	No information	Response to enquiries

Source: Author (2025)

The data collected consist of 64 issues of fatwa. After another data screening, the data were reduced to 48 issues that relate directly to halal foods and their consumption. The final analysis using content analysis was confined to these issues. Notably, other Mufti websites offer similar services to the public, where information-seeking behaviour can be examined. Nonetheless, considering this study preliminary, it limits its data to the Federal Territories Mufti website.

This research employs thematic analysis to analyse the data. This involves data coding and themes development. Peer-briefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used to help with the validity of the coding process. Based on the analysis, the data were coded into 57 codes, including 9 codes for the years 2016-2024. The themes were developed by year (i.e., 9 themes) and by the types of halal foods inquired about by the consumers (6 themes). For the thematic analysis, a Sankey diagram and network diagrams were used to produce better visualisations of the findings.

RESULTS

Figure 2 depicts the number of fatwa issues or inquiries by year, i.e., from 2016 to 2024 (April 2024). It shows that the information-seeking behaviour of Muslim consumers is evident, as reflected in the consistent number of inquiries posted to the Mufti's Office over the years. However, a drop is evident from 2021 to 2023 and 2024. The highest number of inquiries, indicating the highest rate of information-seeking behaviour, was in 2020, mainly about meat (see Table 2 and Figure 3). The

highest number of inquiries may have been due to the high use of social media that year, as the people were affected by the first outbreak of COVID-19 and the impact of the Movement Control Order (MCO). For 2017, 2022, and 2024, only one inquiry related to ‘halal foods’, ‘makanan halal’, or ‘halal consumption’ was retrieved. The small number is justified for 2024 since the cut-off date was early April 2024. However, for 2017 and 2022, many inquiries were evident on the website, but they were not related to the study’s keyword.

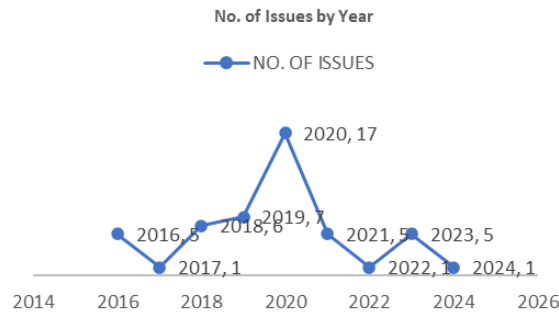


Fig. 1. No. of Issues (Responses by Mufti to Consumer Inquiries on Halal Foods) by Year. Source: Author (2025)

Based on Table 2, six themes of fatwa issues have been identified. There are 48 issues related to halal foods, and these issues were coded into six themes based on the nature of the issues, i.e., inquiries about the halal status of foods that are either egg, meat, seafood, or insect, inquiries regarding the halal status of foods originating from non-halal sources, and others. The ‘others’ theme includes inquiries that do not fit within the previous five themes.

Table 2: Code Co-Occurrence by Year and Issues' Themes

	EGG Gr=3	INSECT Gr=4	MEAT Gr=21	SEAFOOD Gr=7	SOURCES OF FOOD Gr=2	OTHERS Gr=11	SUM
● 2016 Gr=5	0	1	1	1	1	1	5
● 2017 Gr=1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
● 2018 Gr=6	0	0	2	1	1	2	6
● 2019 Gr=7	1	0	2	1	0	3	7
● 2020 Gr=17	1	2	10	1	0	3	17
● 2021 Gr=5	1	0	2	1	0	1	5
● 2022 Gr=1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
● 2023 Gr=5	0	1	2	2	0	0	5
● 2024 Gr=1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	3	4	21	7	2	11	48

Source: Author (2025)

In addition to these, Figures 3 and 4 depict the main themes of the issues by year, and the most coded themes were issues relating to the consumption of ‘meat’ and ‘others,’ which are evident throughout 2016 to 2024 for both themes. In Figure 3, the themes are presented across the years 2016 to 2024 to provide a comparison for those years. The inquiries are almost consistent every year, but

the halal foods inquired about differ. Figure 4 provides the details of inquiries. For instance, seven codes were recorded under the seafood theme, i.e., the halal status of the coconut crab, unwashed fish, catfish that consume pork, turtle, stone crab, fish, sushi, and sashimi. Under the meat theme, there were twenty-one inquiries about meat consumption and whether or not it is halal. These include the meat of peacocks, hyenas, capybaras, beavers (with two inquiries), and even a few types of snails, etc. Three codes were determined for the egg theme and two codes for the sources of food theme, indicating inquiries on the status of the food based on the sources. Finally, there were eleven codes recorded under the ‘others’ theme. The codes under ‘others’ are mostly inquiries about the ingredients, preparation, and processing of the halal foods. These show that Muslim consumers are well aware of the concept of halal foods, which goes beyond the food and its sources, encompassing the preparation and processing involved.

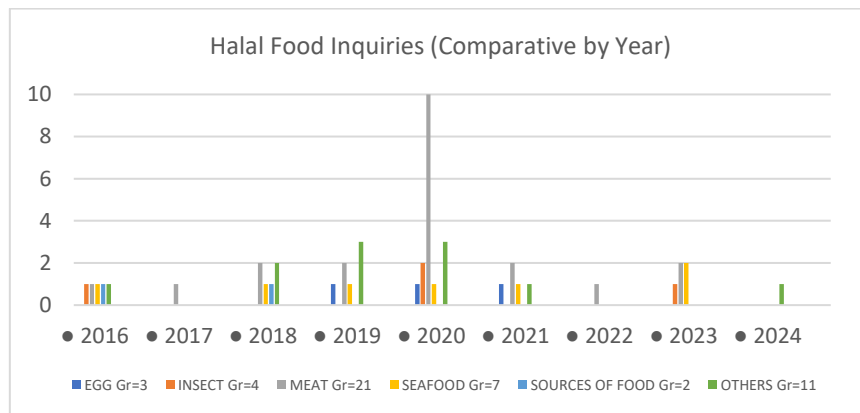


Fig. 2 No. of Issues (Consumer Inquiries on Halal Food) by Year. Source: Author (2025)

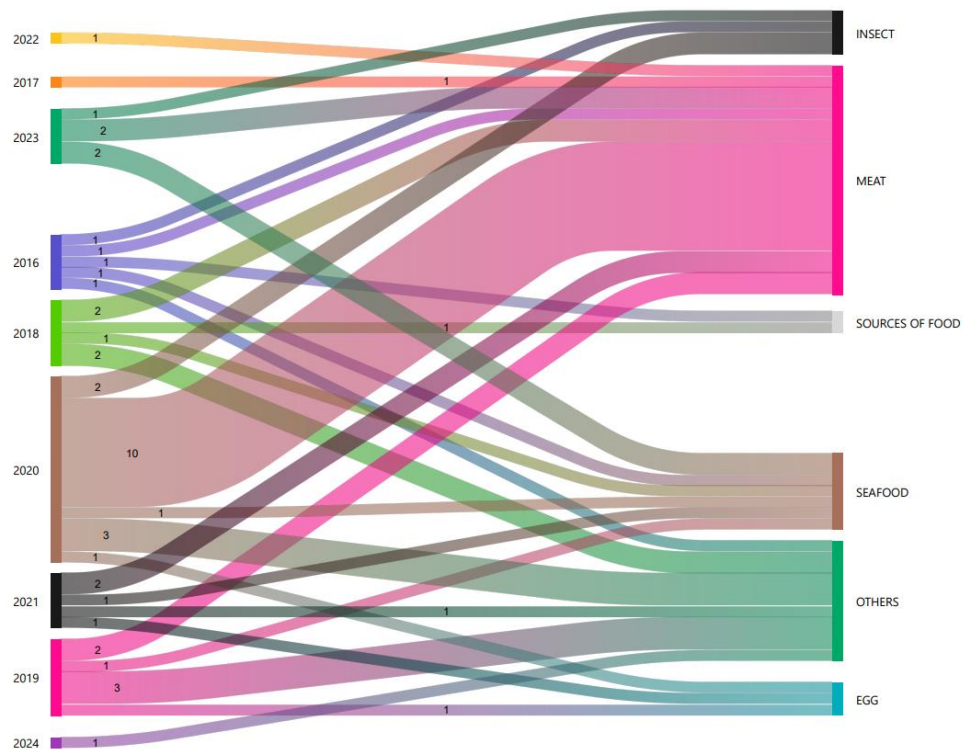


Fig. 4. Sankey Diagram of Year and Issues' Themes. Source: Author (2025)

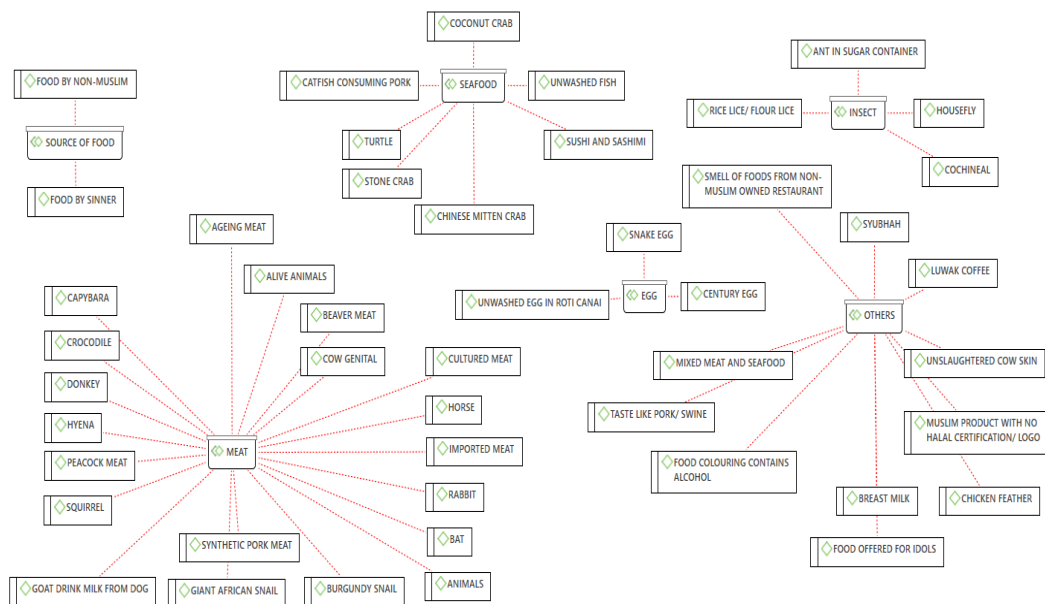


Fig. 3. Network of Themes of Fatwa Issues. Source: Author (2025)

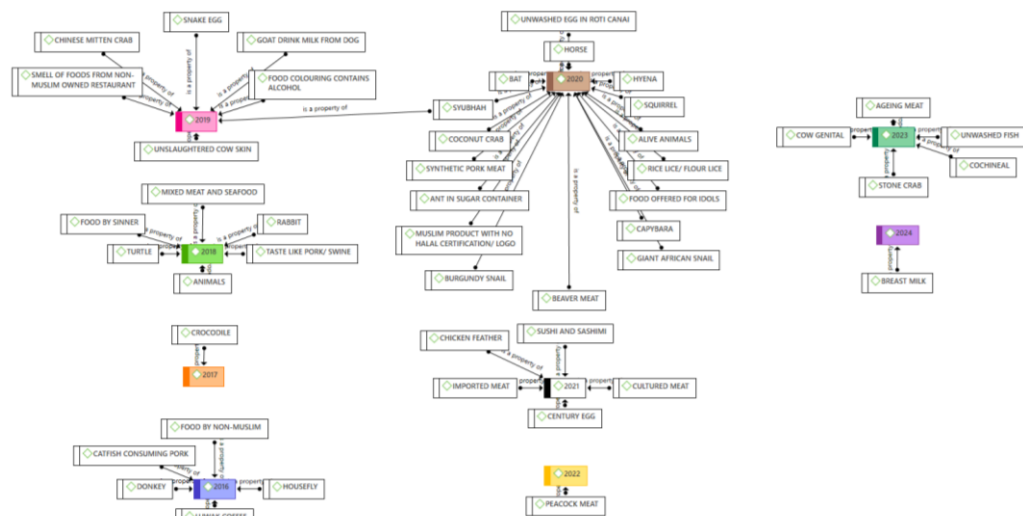


Fig. 4. Network of Themes of Issues by Year. Source: Author (2025)

Figures 5 and 6 provide another insightful finding on the information-seeking behaviour of consumers. An overview of the inquiries shows that very few of these inquiries were related to the basic halal and haram status. In other words, the inquirers appeared well aware of the fundamental halal and haram in Islam, since there were very few inquiries regarding alcohol/liquor or pork. Even in 2016, a complex inquiry relating to *al-hayawān al-jallālah* was posted to the Mufti. In 2018, there was an inquiry on haram animals for Muslims, where the Mufti elaborated on the list in detail. In the same year and subsequent years, the inquiries became more complex, with inquiries on foods that taste like pork/swine, food colouring containing alcohol, and several scientifically engineered foods, e.g., cultured meat, synthetic pork meat, and a few inquiries on uncommon foods, e.g., foods that are alive when consumed or foods originating from cochineal. Other than these, several inquiries were recorded as linked to intricate or cautious attitudes among consumers, e.g., inquiries on the halal status of rice lice, Muslim products that are not halal-certified, and rulings on consuming unwashed eggs and chicken feathers. These findings are intriguing and provide indirect evidence of the halal awareness of Muslim consumers and their attitudes towards halal foods and their consumption.

CONCLUSION

As argued above, these results offer a new dimension of halal awareness among Muslim consumers. In addition to filling the gap in the literature, namely the information-seeking behaviour on halal foods, it was observed that the inquiries posted to the Mufti website evolved from questions on the halal status of common foods or food sources before 2020, to inquiries regarding more uncommon foods or food sources. This implies that Muslim consumers have begun seeking information about the halal status of foods currently available in the market, either because they were perplexed after or before consuming them, or because they were simply anxious and inquisitive. Either way, this demonstrates their awareness not only of the concepts of halal and haram but also of the expanding halal market, which requires them to remain knowledgeable and vigilant. While halal awareness among Muslim consumers is well discussed in the literature, little is known about this particular aspect of halal awareness. Therefore, these findings may serve as a foundation for further studies on the information-seeking behaviours of Muslim consumers. In addition, this study may have implications for the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), which consistently explores and examines halal awareness among Muslim consumers in Malaysia.

Nonetheless, this study is preliminary. It employs limited data, namely issues by the Mufti's Office relating to 'halal foods', which are restricted to the Mufti of the Federal Territories Office's website. Therefore, further studies are required to enhance the understanding of Muslim consumers' halal awareness and information-seeking behaviours. While it is logical to promote halal awareness and information-seeking behaviour to strengthen the practice of halal consumption as part of Islamic teachings and beliefs, such efforts should also be promoted to support the halal industry in this country.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author affirms that this research was conducted in the absence of any personal, commercial, or financial conflicts of interest and declares no conflicting interests with the funders.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The author conducted the research, conceptualised the central research idea, designed the study, wrote the manuscript, reviewed and revised the work, and completed the article submission.

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