

## A TASTE OF HOSPITALITY: THE HALAL CONCEPT DINING EXPERIENCE

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**Abstract:** This study explores the behavioral intentions of millennial consumers toward Halal concept restaurants in urban Malaysia. Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the research quantitatively examines the predictors of intention based on an extended Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Data was collected from 182 millennial respondents through a structured survey. Findings on demographics profile of the respondents reveal that majority of the respondents are women (64.3%). With regards to age, 30% of respondents are at the age of 30-34 years. Millennials are highly receptive to Halal concept dining, perceiving it as both trendy and enjoyable, which enhances their overall dining experience. The results offer valuable insights for stakeholders in tourism and hospitality management, particularly in developing innovative marketing strategies to engage millennial consumers and stay competitive in a rapidly evolving market landscape.

**Keywords:** halal concept restaurant, millennial, dining experience, intention, tourism and hospitality

### 1. Introduction

In today's globalized hospitality industry, the demand for culturally and religiously appropriate services is on the rise, reflecting a growing awareness of diverse consumer needs. One such area of increasing importance is the provision of halal dining experiences, which cater primarily to Muslim consumers but are also attracting a broader market interested in ethical, hygienic, and inclusive food practices. This paper explores how halal principles are integrated into the contemporary dining sector, emphasizing the intersection between religious observance, customer satisfaction, and hospitality service standards.

In today's evolving culinary landscape, concept restaurants offer more than just food—they provide a comprehensive experience based on a central theme, design aesthetic, and sensory immersion (Walker, 2021). Whether the concept is retro-themed or futuristically styled, every element—from interior layout and ambiance to service delivery—reflects a cohesive vision that distinguishes the establishment from its competitors (Namin et al., 2020). Some concept restaurants go a step further by transforming dining into an interactive event, such as meals

served in repurposed airplanes or caves, or "dining in the sky" experiences that fully engage all senses.

Recent studies (Xiong & Chia, 2024; Kamal, 2020; Yan et al., 2017) have explored the global development of halal tourism, which encompasses the proliferation of halal-certified restaurants, hotels, and prayer facilities in both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim countries. These advancements have led to a more inclusive travel environment, with non-Muslim destinations increasingly recognizing the importance of Muslim-friendly services. The evolution of halal tourism has also emphasized sustainable development and mutual cultural respect, driving further academic interest and industry innovation in this area.

Malaysia is redefining its tourism sector through the expansion of halal concept restaurants, solidifying its position as a global hub for Muslim-friendly travel (Che Mohd Hashim et al., 2024; Mannaa, 2020). The country's abundant halal-certified dining options appeal to tourists from regions such as the Middle East, Indonesia, and Europe, offering them peace of mind and comfort during their culinary experiences. Malaysian halal cuisine also reflects the nation's multicultural heritage, with dishes like *nasi lemak* and *satay* providing both cultural storytelling and gastronomic satisfaction.

The rise of halal food tourism is also driven by millennial travelers who actively document and share their experiences on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Influencer-led halal food tours, cooking workshops, and immersive dining experiences have become key attractions. These efforts are supported by comprehensive travel packages that incorporate halal meals, prayer facilities, and Muslim-friendly lodging. Major events such as the Malaysia International Halal Showcase (MIHAS) and the Halal Festival further reinforce Malaysia's commitment to halal tourism.

Halal dining is no longer a niche market; it has become a strategic pillar of Malaysia's tourism economy, attracting both domestic and international travelers seeking meaningful and faith-aligned culinary experiences. Halal, an Arabic term meaning "permissible" or "lawful," encompasses not only dietary rules derived from Islamic law but also a broader lifestyle framework that values cleanliness, ethical sourcing, and humane treatment of animals. In the context of hospitality, halal dining involves much more than food preparation; it includes aspects such as the sourcing of ingredients, kitchen hygiene, staff training, certification, and the overall ambiance and service environment. As Muslim travelers and consumers become more influential in global markets, understanding and delivering authentic halal dining experiences has become a strategic priority for restaurants, hotels, and food service providers worldwide.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Halal Concept Restaurant in Tourism and Hospitality**

Halal concept restaurants play a significant role in attracting both tourists and hospitality consumers, particularly among millennial Muslim travelers who seek dining experiences that align with their religious beliefs (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Koufie & Kesa, 2020). Research indicates that halal-compliant hospitality establishments positively influence Muslim tourists' intentions to visit by offering halal-certified food, beverages, and accommodations. Key factors influencing urban Muslim millennials' dining choices include spiritual intelligence, spiritual congruence, perceived value, halal food quality, and restaurant facilities. Furthermore, the

motivation for restaurant owners to pursue halal certification often stems from consumer preferences, branding benefits, and safety considerations (Talib, 2017; Marzuki et al., 2012).

Malaysia, as a leading halal tourism destination, has actively adapted its tourism and hospitality infrastructure to meet the needs of Muslim travelers, ensuring a comfortable and spiritually congruent travel experience. The rapid expansion of halal concept restaurants among millennials in Malaysia reflects a dynamic interplay of cultural identity, lifestyle preferences, and digital influence (Rahim et al., 2024; Azam, 2024; Kamarulzaman et al., 2020). This growth is closely tied to Malaysia's socio-cultural and religious landscape, where the halal concept resonates strongly with the values and identity of the urban Muslim millennial population. For many, halal dining extends beyond dietary requirements—it signifies a commitment to spiritual principles and a lifestyle aligned with Islamic teachings. As a result, halal-certified establishments naturally appeal to this demographic seeking authenticity and religious congruence in their everyday choices.

In addition to religious and cultural motivations, digital influence plays a significant role in shaping millennials' dining behaviors. As digital natives, Malaysian millennials rely heavily on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to discover new and trendy dining spots (Rahim et al., 2024). Influencer reviews, viral content, and visually appealing, geotagged posts have transformed halal restaurants into social lifestyle destinations. Since 2018, the concept dining trend has gained momentum, with restaurants increasingly offering immersive experiences rather than merely serving food (Azam, 2024). Contemporary halal dining spaces often feature hipster aesthetics, themed interiors, and photogenic dishes—elements that cater to the millennial appetite for visually shareable and memorable experiences.

Moreover, the rise of halal dining is supported by Malaysia's global reputation as a halal hub and its government-backed initiatives promoting Muslim-friendly tourism and hospitality. Halal food is widely associated with cleanliness, ethical sourcing, and high-quality standards. These attributes resonate with health-conscious and socially aware millennials, further reinforcing the appeal of halal concept restaurants. Ultimately, the success of these establishments lies in their ability to integrate faith, lifestyle, and digital culture—offering a holistic dining experience tailored to the values and preferences of Malaysia's millennial generation.

## **2.2 Halal Concept Restaurant Adoption Intention**

Muslim millennials in Malaysia increasingly seek halal concept restaurants due to an interplay of religious commitment, spiritual consciousness, social influences, and lifestyle preferences (Hassan & Pandey, 2020). A recent study conducted in the Klang Valley highlights the primary factors influencing their intention to visit such establishments, noting that this demographic actively pursues dining experiences congruent with their spiritual and ethical values. Restaurants that reflect Islamic principles not only in their food offerings but also in their ambiance and service delivery are particularly appealing to this group.

Empirical evidence suggests a significant positive relationship between halal awareness and the intention to patronize halal restaurants among both local consumers and tourists (Mohamed, 2021). Al-Nahdi et al. (2009) further emphasize that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control are key determinants of consumers' intentions to frequent halal dining establishments. Moreover, religiosity has been identified as a moderating variable in the

relationship between subjective norms and perceived behavioral control, thereby shaping consumers' patronage behavior.

In addition, Abd Aziz (2021) found that the intention to purchase halal food in restaurants is positively influenced by perceptions of food safety and lifestyle alignment. Structural model analyses confirm that these factors exhibit statistically significant associations with purchase intention, suggesting their relevance for restaurant managers and marketers seeking to formulate effective consumer engagement strategies.

The adoption of hipster-style halal concept restaurants by Muslim millennials represents a compelling intersection of faith, lifestyle, and contemporary identity (Juliana et al., 2021). This cohort is drawn to establishments that provide halal certification while simultaneously offering modern, aesthetically pleasing environments. For many, visiting such restaurants constitutes more than a culinary choice—it serves as an expression of a modern Muslim identity that harmonizes religious observance with creativity, style, and social engagement. Recent studies further identify spiritual intelligence and the congruence between personal beliefs and lifestyle as significant predictors of visit intention. Halal concept restaurants that subtly integrate Islamic values within a modern context are thus especially attractive to this segment of consumers.

For Muslim millennials, the ambiance and thematic elements of a restaurant are as important as the adherence to halal standards (Koufie & Kesa, 2020). This demographic is particularly detail-oriented, often verifying halal certifications before dining at a new venue. Integrating halal compliance into concept restaurants demands more than simply altering the menu—it requires a holistic rebranding that incorporates halal values into all operations (Nor et al., 2025; Haryati et al., 2024). This includes ethical sourcing of ingredients, preparation methods, and customer service protocols.

For instance, a vintage-themed halal restaurant could emphasize traditional halal cooking techniques and highlight the use of locally certified halal ingredients, thereby maintaining authenticity while reinforcing the concept narrative (Rosli et al., 2024). Halal integration not only fosters inclusivity but also offers restaurants an opportunity to differentiate themselves in a competitive market by appealing to ethical and conscientious consumers.

Andrianto (2017) found that in Indonesia, local travelers tend to view halal hospitality as more essential in chain restaurants than in independent local eateries. While chain establishments often prioritize halal certification as part of corporate branding and product differentiation, smaller local restaurants frequently overlook these standards. This disparity is influenced by consumer expectations, where travelers assume local eateries are inherently halal, while expecting formal certification from larger chains. The success of halal-focused restaurants in cities like Bandung is closely tied to their adherence to corporate values and their ability to offer distinctive products.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Framework**

Drawing on relevant literature, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is being expanded to investigate the factors influencing Halal concept restaurants within the tourism and hospitality sector (Battour et al., 2024; Addina et al., 2020; Andrianto, 2019; Adinugraha, 2018). Five causal relationships between the predictors and the intention of visiting the concept

restaurant are: 1) spiritual congruence; 2) spiritual intelligence; 3) perceived price; 4) halal food and beverage; and 5) facilities and physical environment.

## **3.2 Research Methods**

### **3.2.1 Measures**

Recent studies have emphasized the increasing significance of halal concepts within the restaurant and tourism industries. In recent years, halal tourism and hospitality have garnered considerable attention, particularly in Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia (Battour et al., 2024). For Muslim travellers, restaurants offering halal food play a crucial role, as they prioritize aspects like food quality, service excellence, and the physical environment (Addina et al., 2020). The tourism industry is progressively adopting Islamic values through the development of halal tourism villages, which combine halal and thoyyib principles to bolster local economies (Adinugraha, 2018).

Key halal-friendly features—such as the quality of food, service, and ambiance—have a notable influence on tourists’ intentions to revisit (Polas et al., 2022; Addina et al., 2020). Research also shows that tourists’ awareness and understanding of halal food positively affect their decision to dine at halal restaurants (Muharis Mohamed et al., 2021). Moreover, these halal-friendly characteristics contribute to perceived value and build trust in destinations, which ultimately shape travel intentions, especially in non-Muslim countries (Sodawan & Hsu, 2022). To effectively attract Muslim visitors, it is essential to offer halal food both in dining establishments and as local souvenirs, emphasizing symbolic representation, functionality, and sensory appeal (Addina et al., 2020). Additionally, the advancement of halal tourism in Indonesia has led to the standardization of halal certification for restaurants (Andrianto, 2019).

### **3.2.2 Sampling and Data Collection**

This section presents a summary of the research sample profile. The survey was conducted over approximately 12 weeks, beginning in early September and concluding in mid-November 2024. The study focused on a representative group of Muslim urban millennials residing in the targeted area. The urban districts of Kuala Lumpur, Petaling, and Klang were identified based on federal classifications. A total of 182 respondents participated in the survey, all of whom had prior experience visiting a Halal concept restaurant. Due to the absence of a defined sampling frame, probability sampling was not feasible; therefore, a convenience sampling method was employed. To minimize common method bias, the authors followed Kock’s (2021) recommendations, which included diversifying data collection sources such as offline surveys and versions in both Malay and English.

### **3.2.3 Data Analysis**

The study tests its hypotheses using PLS-SEM. PLS-SEM is considered appropriate for analyzing complex models commonly applied in tourism and hospitality research (Abdelhakim, 2023; Abou-Shouk, 2021; Elgarhy, 2022). Construct validity of the scale is evaluated by examining Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, with thresholds below 0.50 indicating insufficient validity (Hair et al., 2021). Reliability is confirmed when estimates meet or exceed a value of 0.7 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

### 4.1 Respondents Profile Discussion

According to Table 1, females constitute 64.3% of the sample, while males account for 35.7%. The largest age group among respondents is those aged 30 to 34, representing 30% of the sample, whereas the smallest group is aged 40 to 44, comprising 18%. Most respondents are married (71.5%), while 28.5% are single. In terms of education, most participants hold a bachelor's degree (63.8%), followed by those with a Master's or PhD (14.6%), diploma holders (14.6%), and those with an SPM qualification (6.2%).

Regarding employment status, 56% of respondents are employed, 26.4% are self-employed or running their own business, and 17.6% are students. In terms of monthly income, the majority earn between RM3,001 and RM5,000 (36.8%), while the smallest group comprises those earning more than RM10,001. Geographically, most respondents reside in the Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur area (39.5%), with 6% living outside the Klang Valley in states such as Penang and Johor.

Table 1: Overall Sample Demographic Profile

Demographic	Description	No. of sample	Percentages
<b>Gender</b>	Male	65	35.7%
	Female	117	64.3%
<b>Age</b>	25 - 29 Years Old	43	24 %
	30 - 34 Years Old	55	30 %
	35 - 39 Years Old	51	28 %
	40 – 44 Years Old	33	18 %
<b>Marial status</b>	Single	52	28.5%
	Married	130	71.5%
<b>Highers education obtained</b>	Diploma	26	14.6%
	Bachelor's Degree	116	63.8%
	Master/PhD	28	15.4%
	SPM	12	6.2%
<b>Employment</b>	Employed	102	56%
	Running own business	48	26.4%
	Student	32	17.6%
<b>Monthly income</b>	Less than RM1,500	14	7.7%
	RM1,501 – RM3,000	32	17.6%
	RM3,001 – RM5,000	67	36.8%
	RM5,001 – RM7,000	46	24.2%
	RM7,001 – RM10,000	14	7.7%
	More RM10,001	11	6%
<b>State of residence</b>	Selangor	34	18.7%
	Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur	72	39.5%

Demographic	Description	No. of sample	Percentages
	Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya	65	35.7%
	Others	11	6%
<b>What make you perceive the concept restaurant to be Halal? (You can tick more than one option)</b>	Halal logo	152	83.5%
	Signage 'No pork No lard'	70	38.5%
	Muslim customers dine in the restaurant	18	9.9%
	Well-known restaurant	19	10.4%
	Reviewed by an influencer on a social media platform	11	6%
	Price	6	3.2%
	Facilities	7	3.5%
	Recommendation by others	54	29.6%
<b>What is the MAIN factor that influences you before dine concept restaurant (You can tick more than one option)</b>	Halal logo	149	81.8%
	Signage 'No pork No lard'	82	45%
	Muslim customers dine in the restaurant	26	14.2%
	Well-known restaurant	16	8.7%
	Reviewed by an influencer on a social media platform	15	8.2%
	Price	52	28.5%
	Facilities	64	35.1%
	Recommendation by others	69	37.9%

Female are found to be more persuaded in trying concept or “viral” restaurants since they are more easily influenced by visually rich content (images, short-form videos, live streams). They are more likely to form parasocial bonds or identification with an influencer or restaurant brand, leading to trust and behavioral intention to visit. Apart from that, sharing and peer-driven online word-of-mouth (especially via social media among female networks) is especially powerful in influencing female dining choices. This is supported by the finding on a survey among Malaysian students highlighted that informative content, live video, images, and short-form video by influencers strongly correlate with female purchase intention in restaurants, with images being especially impactful (Mohammad, N. F. B. et al., 2022).

The survey results highlight the critical role of visible halal indicators in shaping consumer perceptions and dining decisions regarding concept restaurants. The presence of a halal logo emerged as the most influential factor, with 83.5% of respondents identifying it as a key sign of a restaurant’s halal status and 81.8% citing it as the main factor influencing their decision to dine there. The ‘No Pork No Lard’ signage also plays a notable role, selected by 38.5% and 45% of respondents in both questions, respectively. Additionally, recommendations from others and available facilities further contribute to the decision-making process, though to a lesser extent. These findings suggest that halal certification and clear visual cues are essential

in building trust and encouraging Muslim consumers—particularly those seeking themed or concept dining experiences—to engage with a restaurant.

## 4.2 Conclusion

As the hospitality industry evolves in response to global demographic shifts and diverse customer expectations, the halal dining experience emerges as a powerful intersection of religion, culture, and service innovation. This paper has explored how halal principles are currently interpreted and implemented in hospitality settings, revealing both progress and persistent gaps.

Muslim diners seek not only halal-compliant food but also culturally respectful service and ambiance. While many businesses recognize the commercial potential of halal hospitality, inconsistent certification, limited staff awareness, and superficial practices hinder full implementation. Nevertheless, establishments that embrace comprehensive halal practices report improved customer satisfaction, brand reputation, and market growth.

This study recommends that hospitality providers view halal dining not as a niche service, but as a strategic component of inclusive and ethical hospitality. Future research could examine halal hospitality in specific contexts (e.g., luxury hotels, budget chains, non-Muslim majority countries) or compare regional interpretations of halal standards.

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