

Study on Halal Food Consumption, Integrity, Traceability, and Recommendations: Insights from Predominantly Islamized Groups in the Province of Cotabato, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

The study focused on the perspectives on Halal food products of the three predominantly Islamized groups residing in the Cotabato Province, Philippines: Maguindanaon, Tausug, and Maranao. Three hundred heads of households served as the sample of the study. Data was gathered using a self-made survey questionnaire duly validated by Muslim scholars. The research revealed the participants' strong preference for Halal-Certified products, ensuring adherence to Shari'ah Law. However, the participants' concerns emerged regarding the lack of standardization and clear responsibility for Halal integrity. Transparency and traceability were identified as essential in the Halal food market, with the participants seeking accurate information and comprehensive traceability systems to prevent cross-contamination. Participants recommend strategic investments in Halal infrastructure, including storage and transportation processes that are crucial in Muslim-dominated regions like the Cotabato Province in the Philippines.

Keywords: *Islamized groups, halal food products perspectives, halal certification, Traceability system, and Halal infrastructures*

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1. Introduction

The global attention on halal food consumption has been driven by the expanding Muslim population and increased awareness of Islamic dietary rules. Halal is a term used to describe food that adheres to Islamic law's halal criteria, as defined in the Holy Quran. Unless otherwise stated as haram or forbidden in religious texts, the majority of food and drinks are considered halal. Allah [subhanahu wa ta'ala (s.w.t.) meaning "the Most Glorified, the Most High" has directed His Messengers, including Muhammed [sallallahu alayhi wasallam (s.a.w.)

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in English means “peace and blessings of Allah be upon him”), to urge people to consume the provisions that are good for them, where He says: “O mankind! Eat of that which is lawful and good on the earth.” [1].

According to previous work [2], halal food and drink are defined as anything that can be consumed and there is no legal justification for their prohibition. They also have ingredients that are free of any prohibited or contaminated substances. Additionally, the topic of Halal slaughtering practices is the core of Halal food practices and activities and it holds significant importance within Islamic dietary guidelines, encompassing both technical and religious considerations. Quranic and Hadith citations give insight into the core practices of Halal slaughtering. The Quran provides explicit guidance on Halal and Haram foods (Surah Al-Maaidah, Ayah 4), outlining permissible and forbidden dietary items. The Hadith, a source of Islamic law second only to the Quran, reinforces the importance of proficiency in slaughtering practices, emphasizing the need for skill and compassion in this sacred act [3].

Several research has looked into various facets of eating halal food. On the study [4], it investigated the consumption of halal cuisine in Japan and found that favorable views, subjective norms, and personal convictions had a big impact on Muslim consumers' decisions to eat halal food in Japan. The study found that favorable views, subjective norms, and personal convictions significantly influenced Muslim consumers' decisions to consume halal food in Japan. This suggests that individuals' attitudes, social norms, and personal beliefs play a crucial role in their choices regarding halal food consumption in specific contexts.

Additionally, there is a study [2] that examined Malaysian consumers' perception, knowledge, and religiosity related to halal food products. The study highlighted a perceived lack of halal food products. The study highlighted a perceived lack of halal knowledge, information, and education provided by national government organizations. This suggests that there may be a need for more accessible and comprehensive information about halal food enhance consumers' understanding and decision –making.

Halal research in the Philippines focuses on various aspects related to halal products and services. One study explores the potential of halal tourism in the country by analyzing halal certification institutions and their impact on the tourism industry. A lack of common standards among halal certifiers in the Philippines has led to the development of fragmented certification schemes without a national or standardized framework, according to the study. The need for a unified halal standard is underscored to attract Muslim tourists and enhance tourism in the Philippines [5].

Another research looks into the practices and challenges faced by halal restaurants in Metro Manila, including the awareness and adherence to Halal certification standards. According to the findings, halal restaurants adhere to 12 standard operating procedures for halal certification. Some challenges they face include lack of awareness of certifying bodies in the Philippines, workforce shortage, limited halal suppliers, inaccessible locations, poor signage visibility, and high equipment maintenance costs. Although halal restaurants follow standard operating procedures, it is recommended that government agencies in the country's halal industry intensify their certification campaign to encourage more restaurants to be certified and improve their operations [6].

Additionally, there is a study that examines the business performance of halal-certified food companies, measuring factors such as innovative performance and market performance [7].

These research efforts reflect the growing importance of halal industry in the Philippines, driven by the country's increasing Muslim population [8].

The global Halal business is a rapidly expanding market, with an estimated value of 2.2 trillion USD annually. It encompasses various sectors, including food, apparel, travel and tourism, media and recreation, pharmaceuticals, and cosmetics. The top ten countries with the highest Muslim spending on Halal products dominate these sectors, highlighting the concentration of demand and potential opportunities. While the market has seen some progress, there is still untapped potential in sectors such as modest fashion, media and recreation, and pharmaceuticals. The study suggests that businesses need to pay more attention to meeting the needs of Muslim consumers and develop strategies to tap into this growing market [9]. Similarly [10], the global halal business is predicted to be valued at roughly USD 2.3 trillion yearly among main halal product countries, according to comparison of the possibilities of halal products in emerging countries, with a focus on Nigeria and Malaysia. The primary drivers of the halal food market's explosive growth are the population and awareness growth of Muslims, as well as the acceptance and rising popularity of halal cuisine among non-Muslims [11].

Additionally [12], carried out a structured literature analysis to examine the connections between halal food and innovation, technology, and sustainability, emphasizing the significance of studying these fields in relation to halal food. Salman and Siddiqui found a dearth of empirically proven data on consumer knowledge and views in this area (2011) and conducted an exploratory study to gauge customers' awareness and perceptions of halal food in Pakistan [13]. In a recent study [14] provided an overview of the factors that influence consumer understanding of halal food and products. They also discussed the associated challenges. Their findings showed that halal certification and consumer awareness positively influenced customer intentions to purchase halal food items.

In the Halal industry's international reach, with a growing global Muslim population expected to reach 2.2 billion by 2030, and a projected rise in the Philippine Muslim population to 7 million, the Halal market represents a vast and lucrative realm (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life) [15]. According to the 2020 census conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the Muslim population in the Philippines is approximately 6.4% of the total population, which translates to around 6,981,710 individuals. This figure is an increase from 6.0% in 2015, indicating a growth in the Muslim community in the country. The National Commission for Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) estimates the Muslim population to be around 10 to 11% of the total population [16]. Furthermore, the global Halal market, valued at 2.3 trillion US dollars in 2013, encompasses sectors such as cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and food, with the latter alone constituting 17 percent of the global food industry, valued at 650 billion US dollars [17]. These promising trends call for concerted efforts and strategic actions to capitalize on the Halal industry's potential, both nationally and internationally.

The accreditation of the Philippine National Halal Laboratory by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation – Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries further elevates the industry's credibility and potential for growth. Collaboration between various agencies, including the Commission on Higher Education, holds the promise of fostering the Halal industry's expansion through research, product and process innovations, and the development of skilled manpower [17].

The Philippine Halal Export Development and Promotion Program, established by Republic Act No. 10817, focuses on consumer protection in the Philippines. This legislation was enacted to promote Halal products by giving consumers with clarity, saving time reading labels, and assuring compliance with Halal requirements and government obligations [18]. The conformity of these activities with international standards emphasizes their importance and potential impact on the global Halal market. As customers seek Halal-certified products for reasons of faith, safety, and preference, the meat business must adhere to stringent and well-defined Halal slaughtering methods. The Halal industry can thrive by upholding the sacred values of the Quran and Hadith and implementing consumer protection measures, satisfying the needs of Muslim customers, and instilling trust and satisfaction in all stakeholders.

Despite the burgeoning global interest in Halal food consumption, there remains a gap in understanding the nuanced perspectives and preferences of the predominantly Islamized groups in the Philippines, particularly the Maguindanaon, Tausug, and Maranao communities. Existing research has explored broader aspects of Halal consumption, market potential, and regulatory frameworks, but there is a dearth of specific insights into the cultural and religious considerations influencing the Halal food practices of these specific communities. This study, with its overarching objectives of comprehending the Halal food practices of the three major Islamized groups in the pursuit of quality, healthy, and spiritual progress, and development. The research focuses on four key dimensions: the consideration for Halal food product consumption, the integrity of Halal food products throughout the supply chain, the traceability of Halal food products from origin to consumption, and strategic recommendations to optimize Halal activity and to inform targeted strategies for businesses and policymakers aiming to navigate and contribute to the evolving landscape of the Halal concerns in the Philippines, specifically in Cotabato Province.

2. Materials and Methods

The survey aims to assess the considerations for the consumption of Halal food, the quality of Halal food, the traceability of Halal food, and recommendations for practicing Halal activities among three major Islamic groups, including (a) traceability standards for Halal products and (b) dedicated assets and practices for food segregation in Halal. Data was gathered using a self-made survey questionnaire duly validated by Muslim scholars. The survey was conducted in Cotabato Province and encompassed the towns of Kabacan, Matalam, and Pikit as well as the city of Kidapawan. The participants in the survey were 300 heads of households belonging to three Islamized groups who had relocated and resided in Cotabato Province. The participants' individual characteristics, including their age, sex, and occupation are shown in Fig. 1. Data was analyzed using the frequency counts, percentages, and weighted mean with corresponding verbal description and presented in graphs.

Age. Out of the 300 participants, finding shows how three ethnic groups—Maguindanaon, Tausug, and Maranao—are distributed demographically over four different age brackets (25–35, 36–46, 47–57, and 58–68). The Tausug ethnic group has the highest representation among participants aged 25–35, with 45 participants, which indicates a relatively younger participants. Similarly, the Maranao group also has a large number of participants (54) in the same age

range, indicating a youthful demographic. The Maguindanaon and Tausug groups both reach their peak in the 36-46 age range, with 46 and 30 participants respectively, indicating a higher proportion of middle-aged participants. As the age ranges increase, the number of participants in all three ethnic groups' decreases, suggesting a declining sample as age increases. It is worth noting that the Maranao community has a smaller number of participants aged 58-68, which may indicate a lower number of elderly people within their group during the conduct of the study.

Sex. Based on the data presented, it is clear that all three ethnic groups have a higher population of males than females. The Maguindanaon group shows the most significant gender imbalance, with males making up 74 of their sample while females account for only 26. Similarly, the Tausug group has 60 males and 40 females, while the Maranao group has 65 males and 35 females. These findings suggest that a higher proportion of males in the sample is a common demographic characteristic in these ethnic communities while the research was being carried out.

Occupation. The data presented further shows the distribution of the participants from the different ethnic groups engaged in various professions: Government Employees, Entrepreneurs, Teaching Arabic, and Farming. Each ethnic group exhibited a distinct preference for certain occupations during the conduct of the study. The Tausug and Maranao communities, with 53 and 50 participants respectively, prominently showcased their inclination towards entrepreneurship, highlighting their propensity for engaging in commercial endeavors and self-employment. Conversely, the Maguindanaon participants, consisting of 45 of participants, demonstrated a higher representation in the government employee category, possibly indicating their active involvement in management and public service responsibilities.

In general, the respondents were mostly 25-46 years old, mostly males, and the majority were entrepreneurs and government employees.

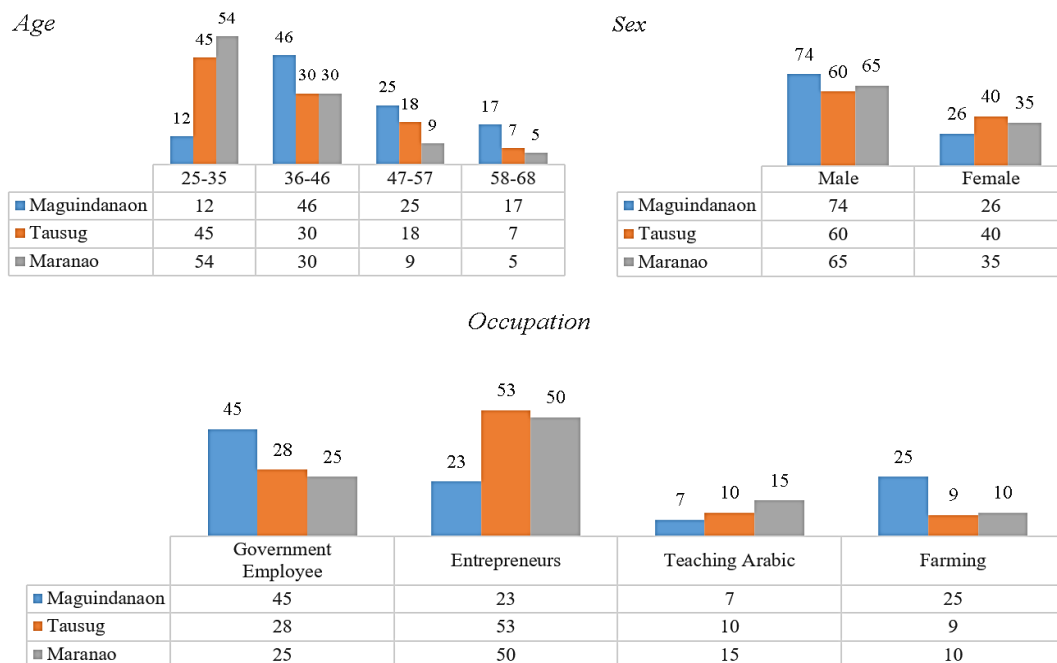


Fig. 1 Demographic Profile of the participants

3. Results and Discussion

Consideration for Consumption of Halal Food Products

The information shown in Fig. 2 offers important understanding into the views of the participants regarding Halal food products. The results revealed the participants' significant preference for consuming Halal-Certified products as shown by their unanimous 'strong agreement' with the statement (weighted means of 3.54 to 3.81) indicating high level of agreement among the participants.

The results of the survey indicate that both the Maranao and Tausug participants had a strong desire to eat out in Halal-certified restaurants (with average ratings of 3.5 to 3.64). This suggests that they were committed in following Halal dietary guidelines when dining out. Although the Maguindanaon participants had a slightly lower average rating of 3.46 on this statement, it still shows a significant level of agreement, although slightly less intense than the other participants.

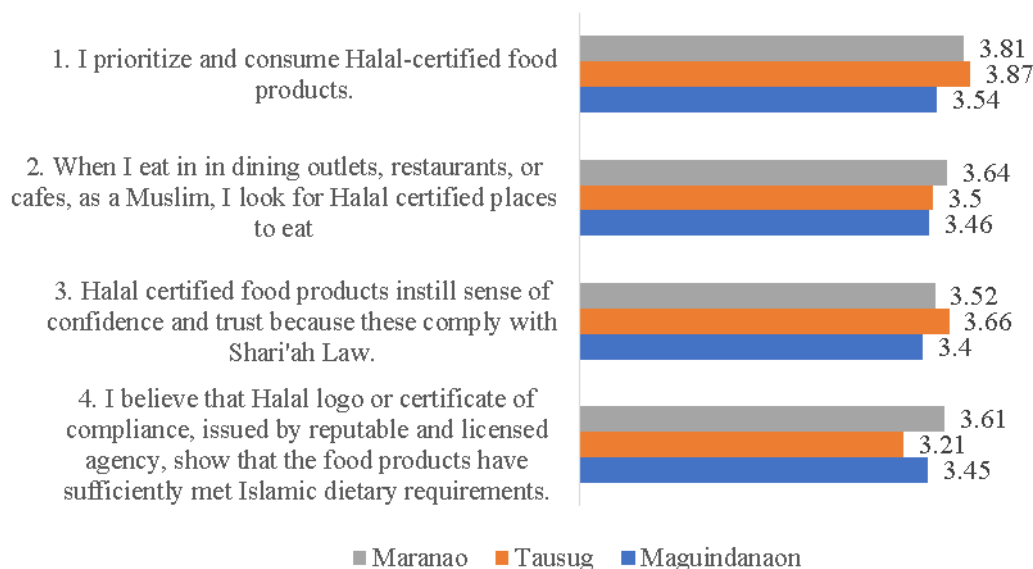


Fig. 2 Consideration for consumption of halal food products

Legend:

(3.50 – 4.00 – Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 – Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 – Disagree; and 1.00 – 1.49 – Strongly Disagree)

According to the study, the Maranao and Tausug participants strongly agreed with the idea that Halal certified food products inspire confidence and trust because they comply with Shari’ah Law. Their mean ratings ranged from 3.52 to 3.66, indicating a high level of agreement. Similarly, the Maguindanaon participants agreed with this statement, although their mean rating was slightly lower at 3.4. This suggests that Halal certification is a significant factor that influences their food choices, not only because of religious reasons but also because they perceive these products as trustworthy.

The data showed that the Maranao group strongly agreed (with a mean rating of 3.61), while the Maguindanaon and Tausug groups agreed (with mean ratings between 3.21 to 3.35) with the statement that a Halal logo or certificate of compliance, issued by a trustworthy and

licensed agency, ensures that food products meet Islamic dietary requirements. This emphasizes the importance of a reliable Halal certification process and the confidence it builds among these communities about the adherence of food items to Islamic dietary laws.

a) *Integrity of Halal Food Products*

In Fig. 3, information is provided about Halal food products and establishments. The data includes three statements regarding the trustworthiness of Halal food products and offers important perspectives from the participants.

All of the participants indicated a disagreement with the idea that they sometimes find it confusing to understand Halal due to variations in definitions. The mean ratings, ranging from 1.58 to 2.24, demonstrated that the participants had a good grasp of the concept of Halal, despite possible differences in its interpretations.

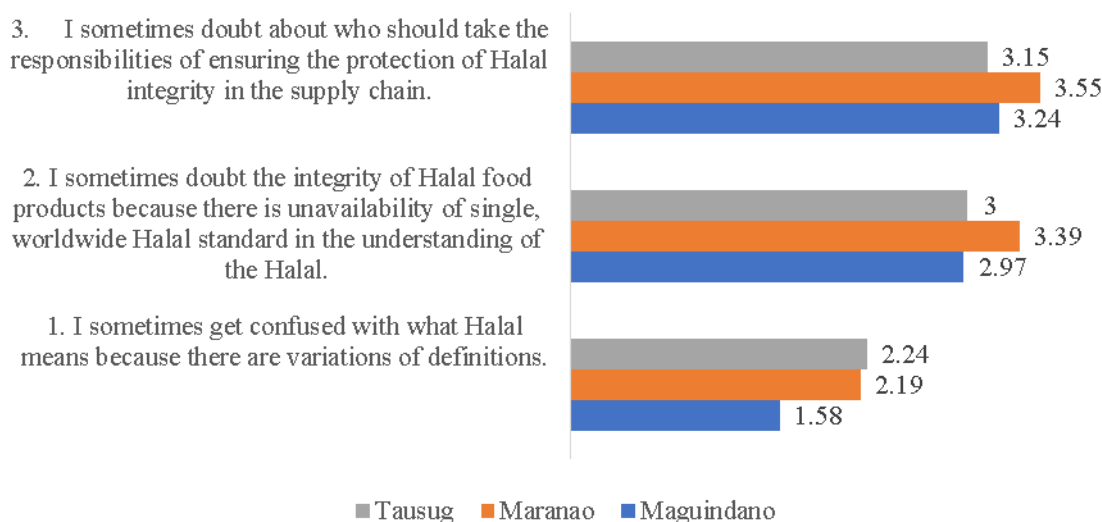


Fig. 3 Integrity of halal food products

Legend:

(3.50 – 4.00 – Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 – Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 – Disagree; and 1.00 – 1.49 – Strongly Disagree)

It is noteworthy that even though those surveyed disputed the ambiguity surrounding the definition of Halal, they all concurred with the second statement. This statement addressed uncertainties regarding the trustworthiness of Halal food items as a result of the absence of a single, internationally recognized Halal standard. The participants, regardless of their tribal affiliation, assigned mean ratings ranging from 2.97 to 3.39, indicating their agreement with the statement. This implies that while those surveyed do not misunderstand the meaning of Halal, they have reservations about the lack of a universally acknowledged standard for Halal. This absence of a standard can create doubts about the authenticity of Halal food products. The most important piece of information from the data is the final statement. It indicates that the Maranao participants strongly agreed with a mean score of 3.55, while the Tausug and Maguindanaon participants agreed with ratings ranging from 3.14 to 3.24. This statement raises concerns about who is responsible for ensuring the protection of Halal integrity in the supply chain. This finding suggests that the respondents share a common uncertainty and lack of clarity about the parties responsible for maintaining the Halal products' integrity throughout the supply chain.

However, Fig. 3 highlighted that the surveyed participants had a good understanding of what Halal means. To enhance consumer trust and promote the growth of the Halal food industry, the participants believed that it is necessary to address these concerns by implementing standardization, transparent certification processes, and clear guidelines.

b) Traceability of Halal Food Products

In Fig. 4 to Fig. 8 result show consideration for Halal food products when it comes to traceability. Fig. 4, in particular, gives us a better understanding of what respondents think about the first statement in the traceability sub-scale. This statement is about their desire for more information about the products they want to buy as consumers of Halal food.

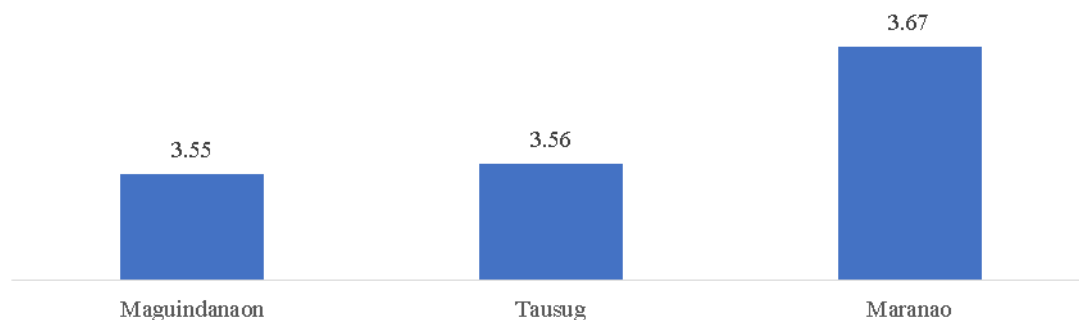


Fig. 4 Statement 1: As a Halal food consumer, I demand more information regarding products that I want to purchase

Legend:

(3.50 – 4.00 – Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 – Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 – Disagree; and 1.00 – 1.49 – Strongly Disagree)

The gathered data shows that there was a firm agreement among the participants. This was evident in their unanimous 'strong agreement' with the statement. The weighted means, which ranged from 3.55 to 3.67, further confirm this finding. This indicates that there was a high level of consensus among the participants from all three communities.

The results shown in Fig. 4 demonstrate that all the participants share a common desire for increased knowledge regarding Halal food products. This underscores the importance of clear and trustworthy labeling and distribution of information within the Halal food market.

The results shown in Fig. 5 highlighted the significance of transparency in providing information within the Halal food industry. The participants agreed with the second statement, which reveals their desire to receive detailed information about the supply chain, food safety and quality assurance, animal welfare practices, and environmental management.

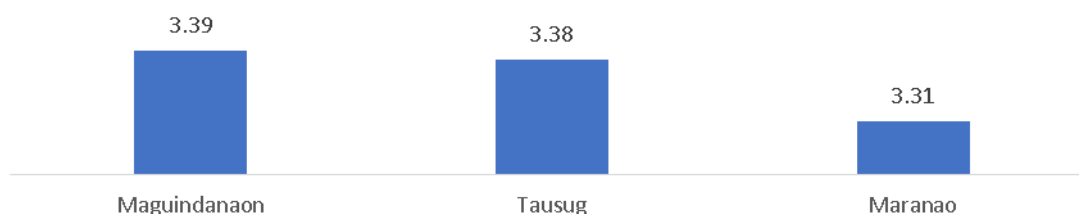


Fig. 5 Statement 2: I am interested to know information such as the activities that happen along the supply chain, assurance of food safety and quality, animal welfare practices and good environment management

Legend:

(3.50 – 4.00 – Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 – Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 – Disagree; and 1.00 – 1.49 – Strongly Disagree)

The results in Fig. 6 emphasize the importance of transparent and traceable information in the Halal food industry. The heads of households in Maranao strongly agreed while the Maguindanaon and Tausug groups agreed with the statement that they are interested in knowing the Halal status of a food product at every stage of the supply chain.

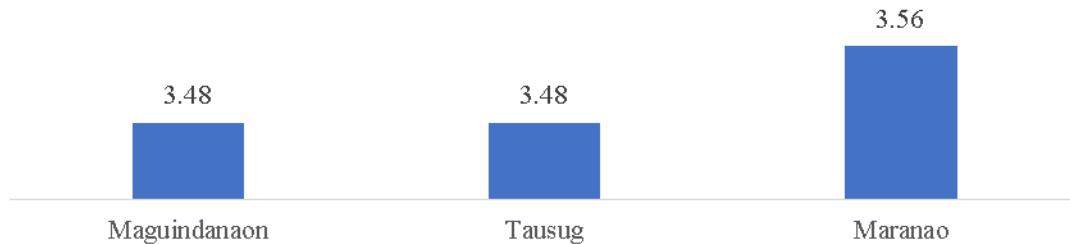


Fig. 6 Statement 3: I am interested to know the Halal status of a particular food product at every of the supply chain

Legend:

(3.50 – 4.00 – Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 – Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 – Disagree; and 1.00 – 1.49 – Strongly Disagree)

In Fig. 7 of the study, all of the participants showed "strong agreement" about their interest in the processes involved in Halal food products. This unanimous agreement, with average ratings ranging from 3.51 to 3.55, indicates that participants' communities share a common desire to know the entire journey of Halal food products. This includes information about the ingredients and animals used in the products, as well as any activities that occur before production.

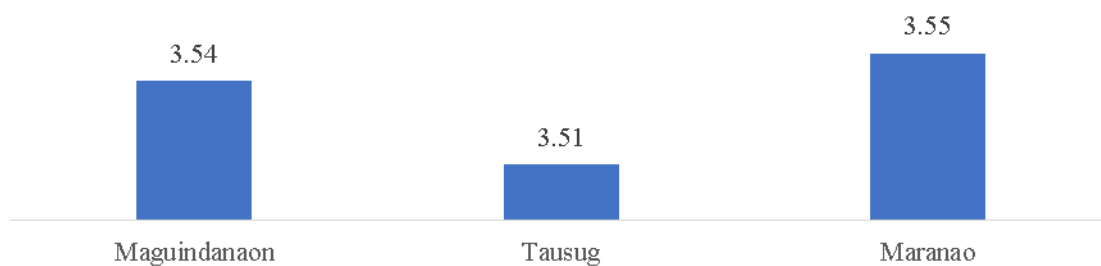


Fig. 7 Statement 4: I am interested about the activities that the Halal food product have went through including activities involved before the production of that particular food product such as origin the ingredients and animals

Legend:

(3.50 – 4.00 – Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 – Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 – Disagree; and 1.00 – 1.49 – Strongly Disagree)

The results regarding the perception of the tools used to trace the Halal status of food products (as shown in Fig. 8) are noteworthy. The participants from the Tausug and Maguindanaon communities "strongly agreed," while those from the Maranao group "agreed" with the statement. The mean ratings of 3.52 to 3.69 for the Tausug and

Maguindanaon groups, and the mean rating for the Maranao group, suggest that there is a shared belief that the current Halal status tracing tools are deficient in several important areas.

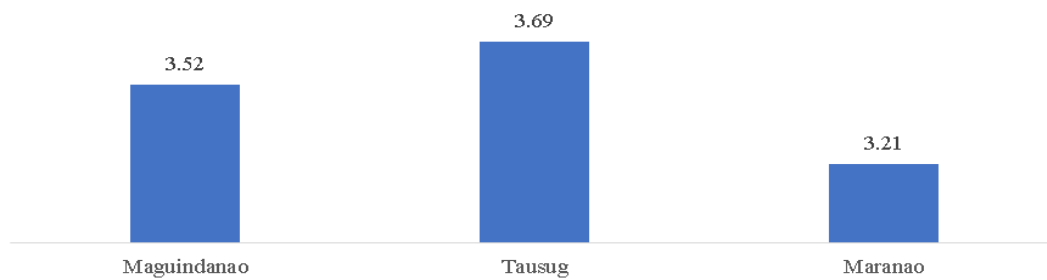


Fig. 8 Statement 5: I think that all existing tools to trace the Halal status are unavailable, lack of security, not real time basis and take longer time to trace

Legend:

(3.50 – 4.00 – Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 – Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 – Disagree; and 1.00 – 1.49 – Strongly Disagree)

The survey findings indicate that traceability plays a crucial role in the purchasing decisions of Muslims based on the responses of the participants. The data reveals that traceability significantly influences the production and consumption of Halal food in these communities. Participants have expressed a strong desire to gain more knowledge about the processes involved in producing Halal food, including the supply chain, animal welfare policies, and environmental management. This highlights their increasing awareness and concern for the ethical and environmental implications of their dietary choices. Many participants seek extensive information regarding Halal principles, indicating a strong dedication to these values beyond mere certification. They desire assurance that their food choices align with their religious beliefs, ethical concerns, and personal values.

Recommendations for Halal Traceability Standards

The information displayed in Fig. 5a to Fig. 5c offers valuable insights into the opinions of the respondents regarding Halal traceability standards. Fig. 5a specifically addresses the first statement, which proposes the need for a comprehensive traceability system in the Halal food chain to increase transparency and integrity. The results show that the Maguindanaon and Tausug respondents 'strongly agreed' (with average ratings of 3.63 and 3.69 respectively), while the Maranao respondents 'agreed' (with an average rating of 3.48) with this proposal.

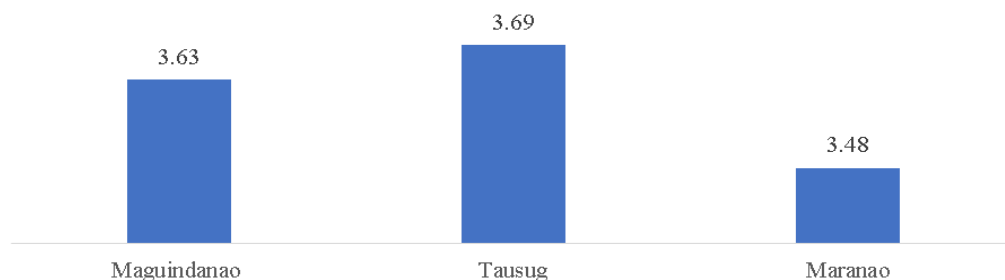


Fig. 9 Statement 1: There must be a separate transportation for the Halal food product to help protect the integrity of the food products as the products are segregated from potential non-Halal elements that might cross contaminate them

Legend:

(3.50 – 4.00 – Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 – Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 – Disagree; and 1.00 – 1.49 – Strongly Disagree)

Based on the data shown in Fig. 10, it is evident that there was a unanimous and strong consensus among the participants. The second statement received a 'strongly agreed' rating (with average scores ranging from 3.60 to 3.63), which highlighted the importance of having a traceability system that includes critical Halal control points. These control points would be closely monitored to detect any potential cross-contamination with non-Halal substances. If cross-contamination is suspected, the traceability system can provide detailed information to pinpoint the specific points of contamination.

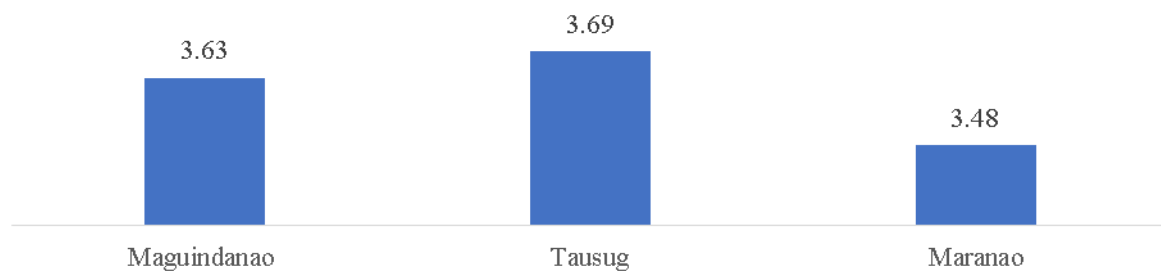


Fig. 10 Statement 2: There must be a traceability system, critical Halal control points which are carefully monitors and if the products are suspected to be cross contaminated with non-Halal elements, detailed information can be retrieved

Legend:

(3.50 – 4.00 – Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 – Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 – Disagree; and 1.00 – 1.49 – Strongly Disagree)

The data shown in Fig. 11 offers important information about how the survey participants view the separation of Halal goods during storage, including in warehouses, transit locations, and transport units. Tausug respondents had a strong agreement with a mean rating of 3.67, while Maguindanaon and Maranao respondents agreed with mean ratings of 3.42 and 3.34, respectively. The statement stressed the importance of completely segregating Halal products in specifically designated storage areas.

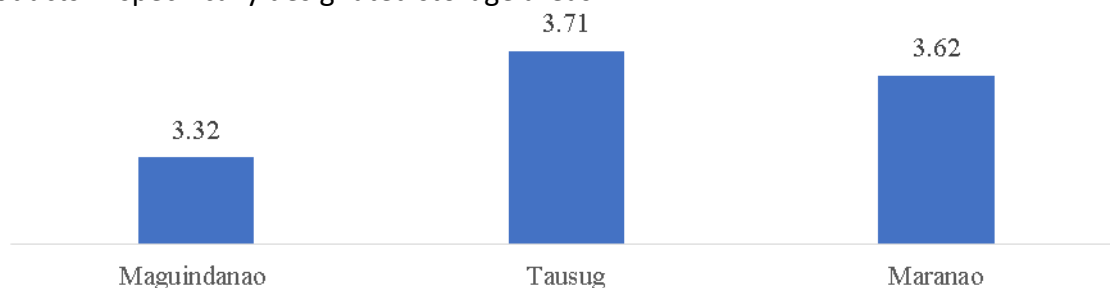


Fig. 11 Statement 3: There must be a total segregation of which the Halal products will be stored in a different storage space whether in the warehouse, transit place or in the transport units

Legend:

(3.50 – 4.00 – Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 – Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 – Disagree; and 1.00 – 1.49 – Strongly Disagree)

Based on the responses received, there are three crucial recommendations to maintain the authenticity and trustworthiness of Halal food items. These suggestions indicate the respondents' dedication to adhering to Halal values and their call for more clarity and responsibility in the Halal food sector.

Halal Dedicated Assets and Practices

Fig. 12 provides insight into the opinions participants on the importance of having proper equipment for handling Halal food and products. According to the data, the Tausug and Maranao participants strongly agreed with this recommendation, with mean ratings of 3.65 and 3.80 respectively. The Maguindanaon participants also agreed, with a mean rating of 3.44.

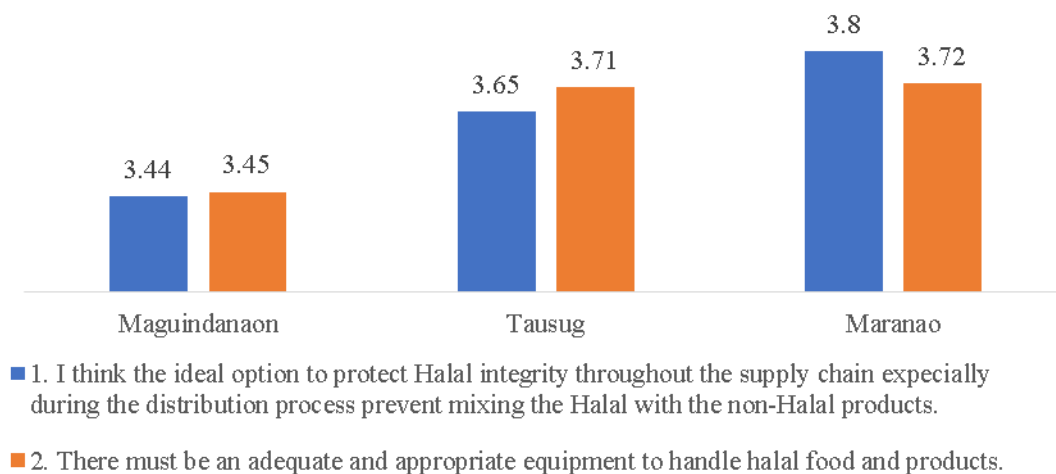


Fig. 12 Recommendations of Halal dedicated assets and practices

Legend:

(3.50 – 4.00 – Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 – Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 – Disagree; and 1.00 – 1.49 – Strongly Disagree)

Halal Dedicated Assets and Practices in terms of Food Segregation

Fig. 13 presents important information regarding the recommended best practices for Halal activities, with a specific focus on Halal dedicated assets and food segregation. The results show that the participants all agree on the importance of proper storage, separate transportation, and complete segregation of Halal products, which can help guide best practices for those involved in Halal activities.

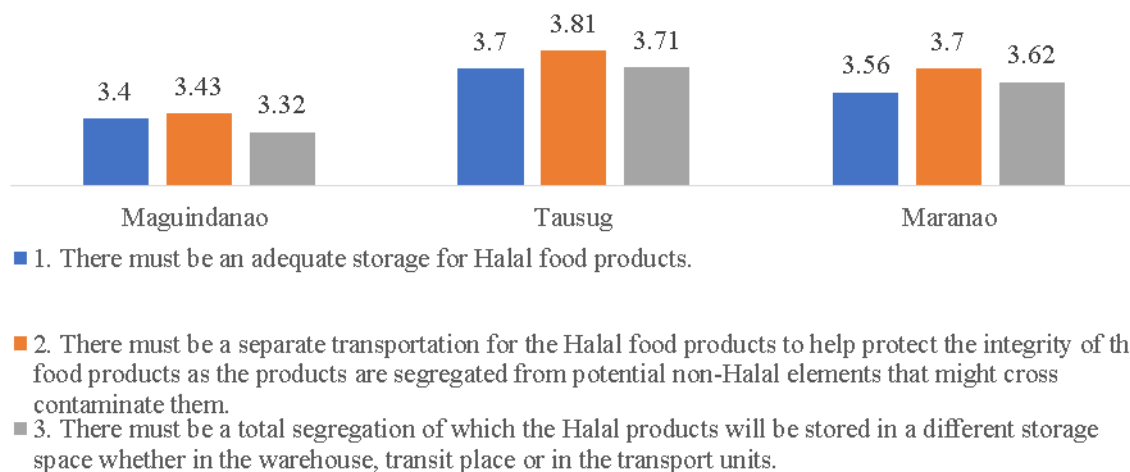


Fig. 13 Halal Dedicated Assets and Practices in terms of Food Segregation

Legend:

(3.50 – 4.00 – Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 – Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 – Disagree; and 1.00 – 1.49 – Strongly Disagree)

4. Conclusion

The research was centered on the views and beliefs of three Islamic groups (Maguindanaon, Tausug, and Maranao) regarding Halal food items and premises. The results showed that all three groups unanimously strongly preferred and consumed Halal-Certified products, indicating a high level of agreement. The findings showed that the participants actively looked for Halal-certified restaurants and felt more confident trusting it due to its compliance with Shari'ah Law. However, the participants had the consensus on the concerns regarding the absence of a standardized definition of Halal, which could lead to questions about the authenticity of Halal food items. Additionally, the participants were unsure about who is responsible for ensuring the protection of Halal integrity in the supply chain. It is evident that the participants perceived that Halal food market should requires transparency and traceability. The participants had a strong desire for more details about Halal products, including their journey in the supply chain and existing tools to track their Halal status. It is essential to have a thorough traceability system in place, as agreed upon by all respondents, the system should have critical Halal control points to avoid cross-contamination, and it is also crucial to emphasize the complete segregation of Halal products during storage and transportation.

The following are the implications for the findings:

Strengthening Consumer Confidence: The findings indicate that all three Islamized groups identified in the study have a strong inclination towards Halal-Certified products and prioritize them in their food choices. This presents an opportunity for businesses to cater to this market segment by offering a wider range of Halal options. By obtaining credible Halal certification and adhering to Islamic dietary guidelines, businesses in the context and communities of the participants, specifically in the Province of Cotabato can instill greater confidence and trust in their products.

Traceability and Transparency: The importance of information transparency and traceability in the Halal food market has been emphasized by a recent study. Consumers are seeking more detailed information about the Halal products they buy and their journey through the supply chain. To increase consumer trust and confidence for the Muslims in the Province of Cotabato, it is recommended to implement a comprehensive traceability system that provides transparent information on the sourcing, handling, and production processes of Halal products. Modern technologies such as blockchain or QR codes can be utilized to achieve this and allow consumers to trace the origins of the products they purchase.

Clarifying Responsibilities: One major concern is that those surveyed participants seemed unsure about who is responsible for ensuring the integrity of the supply chain for Halal products. To maintain Halal integrity, it is essential to establish clear guidelines and standards for all parties involved in the Halal food industry, including producers, suppliers, certification organizations, and regulatory bodies. Effective cooperation and communication between these organizations are vital to ensure the reliability of Halal products.

Enhancing Halal Infrastructure: The unanimous agreement of the participants on the necessity of a traceability system with critical Halal control points highlights the importance of investing in infrastructure to prevent cross-contamination and maintain Halal standards. Businesses need to implement proper storage and transportation practices to ensure the segregation of Halal products. Governments and industry players can collaborate to provide the necessary facilities and equipment for handling Halal products effectively. The study emphasizes the necessity of making strategic investments in Halal infrastructure and Halal Council to be endorsed in the Provincial Government by the Moro Affairs Office as well as for other Muslim-dominated provinces in Mindanao, alongside implementing appropriate storage and transportation practices to proactively mitigate cross-contamination and uphold stringent Halal standards. Tackling these pressing requirements assumes paramount significance in catering to the specific preferences and dietary considerations of Islamized groups in Mindanao and the wider Philippine population.

Market Growth Opportunities: The study emphasizes the potential for growth in the Halal food industry among the Maguindanaon, Tausug, and Maranao communities. Businesses that invest in obtaining Halal certification and adopting transparent practices can tap into this market segment and expand their consumer base. By addressing the concerns raised by the participants, businesses can build stronger relationships with their Halal-conscious customers.

Cultural Sensitivity and Respect: Understanding and respecting the religious and cultural beliefs of these communities are vital for businesses operating in the Halal food market. Demonstrating cultural sensitivity through clear labeling, transparent information, and reliable certification can build trust and loyalty among consumers. Businesses that prioritize cultural awareness and inclusivity are likely to gain a competitive edge in this growing market.

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