EDUCATING CONSUMER AWARENESS ON HALAL ISSUES: A CASE STUDY OF VIRAL PRODUCTS MIXUE AND AI-CHA IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract
This qualitative study explores the rise of viral beverage brands Mixue (China) and Ai-Cha (Indonesia) among Malaysian Muslim consumers, focusing on the implications of their uncertified halal status. Despite Malaysia's comprehensive halal certification system governed by JAKIM, many consumers—especially youth—exhibit limited awareness and verification practices regarding halal compliance. This study aims to assess halal literacy, identify behavioral gaps, and propose educational strategies to address syubhah (doubtful) consumption. Using document-based content analysis of official guidelines (MS1500:2019), Islamic jurisprudence, media discourse, and consumer behavior literature, findings indicate that brand aesthetics, social media influence, and pricing often outweigh religious considerations. The results underscore an attitude-behavior gap, where consumers affirm halal values but do not consistently act on them. The study concludes that enhanced formal and informal halal education is critical to strengthening faith-aligned consumption, particularly among youth. Recommendations include multi-platform public outreach and curriculum integration to foster informed, ethical, and faith-conscious consumer behavior.

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Educating Consumer Awareness on Halal Issues: A Case Study of Viral Products Mixue and Ai-Cha in Malaysia

Introduction

In Malaysia, halal certification is a religious mandate and a national agenda, governed by comprehensive standards such as MS1500:2019 and enforced by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM). The halal industry has become a crucial driver of Malaysia's economy, positioning the country as a global halal hub through efforts by the Halal Development Corporation (HDC, 2022). Halal certification ensures that products comply with Islamic law and meet high standards of cleanliness, safety, and integrity (JAKIM, 2023). However, the growth of globalized trade, social media marketing, and the popularity of imported products has introduced new challenges in maintaining halal compliance—particularly among younger, trend-driven consumers.

One such challenge is the rise of viral imported products, such as Mixue (originating from China) and Ai-Cha (from Indonesia), which have gained immense popularity in Malaysia but lack official halal certification from JAKIM. Despite this, these products are widely consumed, especially by youth, due to their affordability, branding, and visibility on digital platforms. This raises important questions about how consumers perceive and interpret halal assurance, especially when confronted with foreign logos or the absence of certification.

Islamic jurisprudence places great importance on avoiding syubhah—consumption of doubtful or questionable products. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) warned, "Leave that which makes you doubt for that which does not make you doubt" (Sahih al-Tirmidhi, no. 2518). However, recent consumer behavior patterns suggest these religious values are not consistently applied. Many Muslim consumers assume products are halal simply because they are widely available or aesthetically appealing, without verifying certification status through official tools like the Halal Malaysia Directory or mobile apps.

Although there is growing research on halal certification processes (Kamarulzaman & Syed Khalid, 2019), halal supply chains (Shafie & Othman, 2006; Hashim et al., 2024), and Muslim consumer behavior (Norazah, 2017; Fadhlina & Nor, 2024), few studies have examined the impact of viral, uncertified imported products on halal awareness and decision-making among Malaysian youth. Even fewer address how educational interventions can bridge the knowledge-behavior gap (Stibe, Krüger & Behne, 2022). This represents a critical research gap, especially as Malaysia aspires to lead globally in halal governance while also safeguarding its Muslim-majority population's religious compliance.

Another concern is that existing halal education efforts—whether through religious classes, university courses, or public outreach—are often fragmented and reactive rather than proactive (Risza, 2024). As globalization intensifies and consumer choices become increasingly influenced by digital culture, there is a need to strengthen halal literacy through formal education, digital platforms, and community engagement. Equipping youth with the ability to assess product compliance critically and ethically is now more urgent than ever.

This study examines how Malaysian Muslim consumers, particularly youth, perceive and respond to the halal status of viral imported products like Mixue and Ai-

Cha. It also seeks to identify the gaps in halal literacy and propose educational strategies to promote ethical, informed, and faith-conscious consumption behavior. By adopting a qualitative, document-based analysis, this research highlights the regulatory and theological implications of syubhah and the need for a more holistic, educationally integrated approach to halal awareness in Malaysia and beyond.

Role and Challenges of Halal Certification for Imports

Halal certification in Malaysia, governed by JAKIM and based on MS1500:2019 standards, is vital in ensuring that consumer products comply with Islamic dietary laws (JAKIM, 2023). Muslim consumers trust the halal logo to symbolize religious integrity and product safety. However, the rise of imported viral products such as Mixue and Ai-Cha, lacking official certification from JAKIM, highlights regulatory weaknesses. Many Malaysian consumers, especially youth, assume these products are halal due to their popularity and branding, despite the absence of proper verification (Ahmad, Rahman, & Ariffin, 2021).

A significant challenge is the absence of a globally unified halal standard. While some countries have their halal certification bodies, not all are recognized by JAKIM, resulting in foreign products carrying logos that are unfamiliar or misleading to Malaysian consumers (Riaz & Chaudry, 2004). Additionally, imported goods often enter the country through informal retail or online marketplaces, bypassing customs checks and halal verification processes (Kamarulzaman & Syed Khalid, 2019). These gaps allow syubhah (doubtful) products to reach consumers without proper oversight.

Ultimately, this places the responsibility of verification on consumers—many of whom lack adequate halal literacy. This highlights the importance of integrating education with regulation. Through public awareness campaigns, school programs, and mobile verification tools, strengthening halal education can empower consumers to make informed and ethical choices (Halal Development Corporation, 2022; Talib & Johan, 2012). While certification systems remain essential, they must be supported by accessible and consistent halal literacy efforts to ensure long-term compliance and trust.

Research Gaps and Synthesis

While existing studies have explored halal certification processes (Kamarulzaman & Syed Khalid, 2019), consumer behavior (Shafie & Othman, 2006; Norazah, 2017), and youth awareness (Hanafiah et al., 2021), there is a noticeable gap in research that directly addresses the impact of viral imported products lacking halal certification, such as Mixue and Ai-Cha, within the Malaysian context. Most prior research has examined halal literacy or consumer trust in general terms. However, little has been done to analyze how fast-trending foreign brands penetrate Muslim-majority markets despite religious uncertainty. Moreover, there is insufficient integration of Islamic legal principles, media influence, and educational strategies in a single framework to assess how youth and general consumers respond to syubhah risks. This study fills that gap by offering a multidisciplinary perspective combining

halal jurisprudence, regulatory policy, and consumer education to understand better halal awareness's behavioral and institutional challenges in a digital, globalized market.

Research Method

This study adopted a qualitative research design using document-based content analysis to explore the halal compliance of viral imported beverage brands and assess consumer awareness and educational implications. This approach is well-suited for analyzing religious principles, regulatory frameworks, and behavioral trends using secondary data, particularly in contexts involving ethical and socio-cultural dimensions (Creswell, 2014; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The data collection employed purposive sampling of 15 documents selected based on their relevance to four main themes: (1) halal certification and compliance standards, (2) Islamic jurisprudence on syubhah consumption, (3) consumer behavior among Muslim youth, and (4) challenges in the regulation of imported food products. The documents included government-issued materials such as the Manual Prosedur Pensijilan Halal Malaysia (JAKIM, 2023), standards under MS1500:2019, and halal assurance guidelines from the Halal Development Corporation (HDC, 2022). Religious references such as Sahih al-Bukhari (2001), Sahih Muslim (2006), Tafsir Ibn Kathir (2000), and Tafsir al-Jalalayn (2007) were examined to contextualize the Islamic principles of consumption. Media sources from Bernama, Harian Metro, and The Star were also analyzed to reflect current discourse and public perception regarding Mixue and Ai-Cha.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach: (1) familiarizing with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. This method was selected for its flexibility and suitability in interpreting patterns in qualitative data across diverse textual sources. Thematic coding was conducted manually to preserve the religious and cultural sensitivity embedded in the documents and references.

From the analysis, four primary themes emerged: (1) Halal compliance and the certification status of viral beverage products, (2) Islamic perspectives on syubhah and ethical consumption, (3) Regulatory and policy challenges related to imported halal products, and (4) The state of halal literacy among youth consumers.

Data triangulation was used by cross-referencing themes across religious texts, policy documents, academic publications, and public media to ensure credibility and trustworthiness. Islamic interpretations were verified with classical commentaries to maintain scholarly accuracy where necessary.

This study was based exclusively on publicly available secondary sources, so no ethical clearance was required. Nonetheless, the research adhered to ethical standards through proper attribution, source reliability, and academic integrity.

This methodological framework supports the broader goals of Malaysia's Dasar Pemakanan Kebangsaan 2.0 (DPKM 2.0), as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being, and SDG 12: Responsible Consumption

and Production), particularly in promoting halal literacy, consumer protection, and sustainable food ethics in a globalized halal economy.

Table 1: Summary of Themes Identified Through Thematic Analysis

No	Main Theme	Subtheme(s)	Supporting Description
1	Halal Certification and Compliance	Lack of JAKIM approval; confusion over foreign logos	Viral brands like Mixue and Ai-Cha are widely available but uncertified by JAKIM, raising concerns about product legitimacy and consumer trust.
2	Islamic Perspective on *Syubhah*	Ethical consumption; avoidance of doubtful products	Islamic teachings urge Muslims to avoid *syubhah* (doubtful) products. The absence of halal certification places these brands in a religious grey area.
3	Regulatory Challenges for Imports	Weak border control; limited international coordination	Imported products often enter via informal or e-commerce channels, bypassing Malaysia's strict halal certification system.
4	Consumer Awareness and Halal Literacy	Youth preferences; social media influence	Young consumers are more influenced by peer trends and viral marketing than by halal status, indicating a gap in religious literacy and informed behavior.

Note. Themes were developed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. Sources include JAKIM guidelines, Islamic texts, media coverage, and peer-reviewed literature.

Result

Four key themes emerged regarding consumer behavior, halal awareness, and the regulation of viral imported products in Malaysia based on document-based thematic analysis of 15 sources—including halal regulatory guidelines, Islamic jurisprudence texts, scholarly articles, and media reports.

Theme 1: Consumer Perception of Halal Certification

Many consumers, especially youth, were unaware or confused about official halal certification. Products like Mixue and Ai-Cha were frequently assumed to be halal based on their widespread availability and appealing branding, despite not being certified by JAKIM. This suggests a superficial understanding of halal standards and limited recognition of the importance of institutional verification.

Theme 2: Influence of Social Media and Popular Trends

The virality of Mixue and Ai-Cha in Malaysia was primarily driven by social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Young consumers were influenced by influencers, trends, and peer recommendations, often without cross-checking product halal status. Marketing content emphasizing taste, price, and aesthetics overshadowed religious or ethical concerns.

Theme 3: Public Understanding of Syubhah

Documents analyzed revealed a general lack of understanding of syubhah (doubtful matters) among the public. While Islamic teachings warn against consuming products of unclear halal status, this principle was not widely translated into

purchasing behavior. Religious texts such as hadith from Sahih Muslim and al-Bukhari emphasize avoiding doubtful consumption, which was rarely reflected in consumer choices for viral products.

Theme 4: Halal Literacy and the Need for Consumer Education

Educational gaps were evident in the consumer base's ability to distinguish between officially certified and foreign or misleading halal logos. Although digital tools such as the Halal Malaysia app are available, their usage remains limited. There is a clear need for structured halal literacy initiatives—both digital and community-based—to help consumers make informed decisions.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight a significant attitude-behavior gap among Muslim consumers in Malaysia, particularly when it comes to verifying halal status before consumption. While consumers generally prefer halal products, their actual purchasing behavior—especially for trendy or viral items—often contradicts that stance. This supports previous findings by Shafie and Othman (2006) and Norazah (2017), who noted that consumer trust in branding or peer influence can override religious caution.

The role of social media emerged as a critical factor influencing youth purchasing behavior. Aligned with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), subjective norms—such as peer influence and digital trends—can powerfully shape intentions and actions, sometimes more than personal or religious attitudes. Therefore, halal education strategies must consider knowledge dissemination, social environment, and peer-led influence.

The principle of avoiding syubhah is well-documented in Islamic jurisprudence, with classical scholars like Al-Nawawi (1996) and Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi (1994) emphasizing its moral and spiritual importance. However, this study finds that contemporary consumer behavior does not reflect this guidance. This underscores the need to re-contextualize religious teachings in everyday settings, particularly among younger generations.

Moreover, despite Malaysia's sophisticated halal certification system, gaps remain in regulating imports and rapidly spreading franchises. Like Kamarulzaman and Syed Khalid's (2019) findings, this study reinforces that systemic enforcement and consumer awareness must work to maintain halal integrity. Halal Development Corporation (2022) also emphasizes integrating halal topics into formal education to foster long-term behavioral change.

Finally, the findings point toward the necessity of a multi-level educational approach that includes formal curricula, digital awareness campaigns, religious institutions, and youth influencers. Such efforts should be designed to increase knowledge and shape attitudes, values, and daily decision-making. Without this shift from awareness to action, halal integrity in the face of globalization and viral consumerism will remain at risk.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that although Malaysia possesses a robust halal certification system and a strong Islamic legal framework, consumer behavior—particularly among youth—remains heavily influenced by branding, social media trends, and peer recommendations. The popularity of viral products like Mixue and Ai-Cha, despite lacking JAKIM halal certification, reflects a critical gap between halal awareness and actual consumer practice. Thematic analysis of regulatory documents, religious texts, and public discourse identified four key issues: misunderstanding or ignorance of halal certification, the influence of social media on purchasing decisions, lack of clarity regarding syubhah, and low halal literacy levels among the public.

These findings emphasize the importance of a multidimensional strategy to address halal compliance challenges. Educational interventions must go beyond factual knowledge to promote critical thinking, religious literacy, and ethical consumption habits aligned with Islamic teachings. Moreover, regulatory efforts must adapt to globalized markets and digital consumption realities, including strengthening inter-agency collaboration and improving consumer access to reliable halal information tools. As Malaysia continues to position itself as a global halal hub, ensuring public compliance and understanding through education and institutional support will be crucial in upholding the integrity of the halal ecosystem.

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