

## MUSLIM CONSUMERS' PERCEPTIONS OF RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS AS AN INDICATOR OF PURCHASING DECISION IN RESTAURANT PRODUCTS: A STUDY IN EAST BARITO REGENCY, CENTRAL KALIMANTAN

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### Abstract

The problem addressed in this study is the existence of non-Muslim restaurants displaying Islamic symbols, such as calligraphy, portraits of religious leaders (tuan guru), and other Islamic imagery. This creates the potential for Muslims to unknowingly dine at non-Muslim establishments due to the presence of such symbols. The research employed a qualitative method. The subjects of this study were the owners of restaurants located along the Trans-Kalimantan road in Barito Timur Regency. Data collection methods included observation, interviews, and documentation, while data validation was carried out using source and method triangulation techniques. The findings reveal that residents who intend to dine at these restaurants consider carefully other indicators, such as whether the servers wear cross necklaces or have tattoos, and whether dogs or pigs are present around the premises. The Ministry of Religious Affairs has been unable to take significant action to address this issue due to the absence of technical guidelines, the vast geographical area of Barito Timur Regency, challenges in monitoring, and the lack of funding to provide public awareness initiatives.

**Keywords:** Consumers' Perceptions, Religious Symbols, Restaurant

## INTRODUCTION

The holy scripture revealed to the Prophet Muhammad SAW. is the Qur'an, which serves as a comprehensive guide for Muslims (Komala and Ridwan 2022). Islam, as a universal religion, regulates human life in various dimensions, encompassing both spiritual and material aspects. Its teachings extend beyond matters of faith to include political systems, culture, and economic practices, all aimed at promoting the welfare of humanity as a whole. In adhering to and practicing its teachings, Islam requires its followers to implement its principles in a *kaffah* (comprehensive) manner across all aspects of life, including consumption practices. In recent years, issues related to halal food products have gained increasing attention among the public (Affendi, Yaakob, and Halim 2022). Islam emphasizes not only the fulfillment of physical needs but also non-physical needs, such as avoiding *israf* (excessiveness) and *tabzir* (wastefulness), as well as ensuring the permissibility (halal status) of consumed products.

As Muslims, it is obligatory to consume halal food. In Surah Al-Baqarah (2:168), Allah states: "O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth that is lawful and good, and do not follow the footsteps of Satan; indeed, he is to you a clear enemy." Therefore, the consumption of halal food and beverages is of paramount importance, particularly those that have been certified as halal, as indicated by the presence of a halal logo on the packaging (Subianto, 2019). This requirement is regulated under Government Regulation No. 69 of 1999 concerning Food Labels and Advertisements. Article 2 stipulates that "every person who produces or imports packaged food into the territory of Indonesia for trade is obligated to include a label on the food packaging".

The presence of a halal label on food packaging is essential to ensure that Muslim consumers can identify that the products they consume are in accordance with Islamic law. Furthermore, product handling management must be conducted properly, ensuring a clear separation between halal and non-halal products throughout the production and distribution processes (Subianto, 2019).

Central Kalimantan Province is characterized by a highly pluralistic religious composition. According to the 2024 Statistical Data of Central Kalimantan Province, the religious distribution of its population is as follows: Islam (73.99%), Christianity (19.82%), Protestantism (16.66%), Catholicism (3.16%), Kaharingan/Buddhism (6.03%), Confucianism (0.08%), and others (0.04%) (BPPS, 2024).

Based on these data, it can be inferred that owners of restaurants, cafés, food stalls, and eateries also come from diverse religious backgrounds. Some food establishments are owned by Muslims, while others are owned by non-Muslims. In certain non-Muslim-owned establishments, non-halal menu items may be offered. In some cases, such information is clearly disclosed, while in others it is not explicitly communicated.

Furthermore, based on the research team's observations, there are instances of unethical practices in some food stalls, such as mixing halal and non-halal ingredients. For example, meatballs labeled as beef products may be adulterated with pork.

During field interviews conducted by the research team with a consumer in a restaurant in Ampah, East Barito Regency, the respondent explained that one way to identify whether an eatery is Muslim-owned is by observing visual indicators, such as the presence of images of Guru Sekumpul (K.H. Zaini bin Abdul Ghani) or Islamic calligraphy.

If such elements are present, the establishment is generally assumed to be Muslim-owned and to serve halal food.

On the other hand, Maisyarah a citizen, noted that another common indicator used by consumers is the attire of the seller; for instance, female vendors wearing the hijab are often perceived as Muslim. However, she cautioned that such assumptions may be misleading, as there are cases where the vendor wears a hijab but the establishment is actually owned by a non-Muslim.

Moreover, data collected by the research team indicate that some non-Muslim-owned restaurants display photographs of Islamic scholars, such as Guru Ijai and other religious figures. This suggests that consumers must exercise greater caution before making purchasing decisions. Wahidin further explained that additional indicators sometimes considered include whether the owner keeps dogs or pigs, as well as visible religious symbols such as wearing a cross necklace. Based on these issues, the research team is motivated to conduct a more in-depth and comprehensive study.

Previous studies relevant to this topic include “Halal Food from an Islamic Perspective and the Importance of Labeling” by Asiah Shafie. The study highlights the importance of halal food consumption as a key driver in maintaining the Halal Value Chain (HVC), and emphasizes the need for strengthened international economic cooperation to establish global standards for halal products and certification (Shafie, Nazri, and Hussin 2019).

Another study by Sri Mulyati, titled “Halal and Tayyib Food in the Perspective of the Qur’an,” finds that halal refers to what is permissible, lawful, and free from sin, while tayyib denotes what is good, pure, nutritious, proportional, and safe. Thus, tayyib food is that which is beneficial to the body, balanced, and safe for consumption (Mulyati, dkk. 2023).

From these studies, it can be concluded that the present research differs from previous works. This study offers a novel contribution, particularly in examining the contemporary phenomenon in which some non-Muslim-owned food establishments display Islamic calligraphy and images of religious scholars, potentially influencing consumer perceptions regarding the halal status of the food served.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### a. Perception

Each individual possesses a unique perception shaped by what they think, see, and feel. This implies that perception plays a crucial role in determining how a person acts to fulfill various interests, whether personal, familial, or social, within their environment. It is this perception that differentiates one individual from another. Perception arises from the concretization of thought, which subsequently generates diverse concepts or ideas, even when individuals observe the same object. Broadly speaking, perception can be categorized into two types: perception of objects and perception of humans or socially related phenomena (Romadani and Kurniati, 2023).

Etymologically, the term perception is derived from the Latin *perceptio*, from *percipere*, which means “to receive” or “to take in.” Perception refers to an individual’s experience of objects, events, or relationships, obtained through the process of drawing

inferences from information and interpreting messages. In this sense, perception involves assigning meaning to sensory stimuli.

In essence, perception is formed through the process of receiving stimuli via the sensory organs, which are then processed by the human brain into meaningful information. The formation of perception is influenced by an individual's experiences, cultural background, and level of education (Jamaludin, 2022). Thus, perception can be understood as a process of interpreting or assigning meaning to information derived from sensory input related to objects, events, or relationships, which is subsequently processed cognitively.

The term perception is commonly used to describe an individual's experience of an object or event. It is defined as a process that integrates and organizes sensory data in such a way that individuals become aware of their surroundings, including self-awareness. Perception occurs when a person receives stimuli from the external environment through sensory organs, which are then transmitted to the brain, where cognitive processing takes place and ultimately results in understanding.

According to Dede Mulyana, as cited in Jamaludin (2022), perception is the experience of objects, events, or relationships obtained by synthesizing information and interpreting the messages contained within them. Perception is an internal process that enables individuals to select, organize, and interpret stimuli from their environment, thereby influencing their behavior. It constitutes the core of communication, while interpretation represents the essence of perception, analogous to decoding in the communication process (Jamaludin, 2022).

Based on the aforementioned definitions, it can be concluded that perception is a cognitive evaluative process that occurs after an individual receives stimuli through the senses. These stimuli develop into thoughts that ultimately shape an individual's viewpoint regarding a particular issue or event.

#### **b. Religious Symbols**

Islam is a religious system conveyed to its adherents through symbols that are relatively permanent in nature. In terms of its dissemination, Islam is normatively characterized as elitist, in the sense that the authority and competence to convey its teachings are not possessed by all individuals, but rather by those who meet specific qualifications and criteria. In the contemporary marketing context, religious symbols are frequently utilized as strategic elements in branding practices. Such symbols include halal labels, Arabic calligraphy, and images of religious scholars (Mastory, et al. 2025).

The use of religious symbols in marketing strategies not only reflects brand adaptation to particular market segments but also signifies a transformation in the meaning of these symbols within the public sphere (Mastory et al. 2025). The commodification of Islam has undeniably occurred in Indonesia and has become a common marketing strategy among business actors. From the author's perspective, this phenomenon is not inherently problematic; however, the promotion of products should remain grounded in the principles of sharia marketing (Yustati 2017).

Understanding this factor for traders is essential to develop effective business strategies while simultaneously maintaining respect for consumers' beliefs (Deni, 2023). Terminologically, the concept of "symbol" often gives rise to varying interpretations. According to Collins Cobuild, a symbol is defined as: (1) "*a shape or design that is used to*

*represent something such as an idea,” and (2) “something that seems to represent society or aspects of life, because it is very typical of it” (Deni, 2023).*

In broader use, symbols have long been employed to convey meaning, ranging from simple signs to more complex representations in narratives and even to articulate philosophical arguments. Symbols and information systems on product packaging constitute important elements that should be understood by the general public (Homan, 2011).

Within the sociology of religion, religion is not merely positioned as a transcendental doctrinal-ideological system, but is also understood as a social fact that encompasses the material dimensions of human life. These material aspects are often reflected in individuals' ways of thinking, behaving, and making decisions. Consequently, in social theory, religion is also interpreted as a set of religious practices carried out by its adherents (Zailani and Ulinuha, 2023).

### **c. Purchase Decision**

According to Schiffman and Kanuk, a decision is defined as the selection of an action from two or more alternative choices. A consumer who intends to make a choice must therefore have available alternatives (Fauzi, 2021). A purchase decision represents a stage within the consumer decision-making process in which the consumer actually proceeds with the purchase (Putri, 2019).

The essence of consumer decision-making lies in an integrative process that combines knowledge to evaluate two or more alternative behaviors and subsequently select one of them. Similarly, Kotler defines a purchase decision as the preference formed by consumers among the available brands within a set of choices. Consumers may also develop an intention to purchase the brand they most prefer (Fauzi, 2021).

Purchase intention refers to consumer behavior indicating a desire to buy or select a product based on preferences, usage, consumption, and the experiences they seek (Putri, 2019). According to Pramono, as cited in Putri, the indicators of purchase intention include: (1) referential interest, (2) transactional interest, (3) preferential interest, and (4) exploratory interest (Putri, 2019). After making a purchase decision, consumers engage in post-purchase evaluation, which generates feedback. Through this evaluation process, consumers learn from their experiences, which may influence their decision to repurchase the same brand in the future (Anwar, 2015).

Purchase intention behavior is the outcome of the evaluation process of a brand and represents the final stage in complex decision-making. This process includes purchasing the desired brand, evaluating it during consumption, and storing the information for future use (Nurhayati and Nurhalimah, 2019).

Customer satisfaction is defined as the level of a person's feelings resulting from comparing perceived performance or outcomes with prior expectations (Nurhayati and Nurhalimah 2019). Satisfied consumers are more likely to become loyal customers and engage in repeat purchases. However, in the context of East Barito Regency, Muslim consumers who intend to dine at local restaurants should exercise caution, as some establishments display Islamic calligraphy despite the owners are not Muslims.

### **d. Halal Products**

Advancements in food technology have made it increasingly difficult to distinguish between halal and non-halal products. Some processed food products in circulation do not

display halal certification labels. In fact, halal compliance is not limited to the raw materials alone; it must also encompass the processes of production, packaging, distribution, and presentation. Therefore, adequate knowledge regarding the halal status of products is essential.

The term halal linguistically means “permissible” or “lawful,” implying something free from worldly and spiritual harm. In legal terminology, halal refers to anything that is allowed under Islamic law, and thus safe for consumption. More broadly, it encompasses all matters permitted by religion.

Etymologically, halal denotes something that is permissible, while food refers to anything consumed orally, known in Arabic as *al-tha’am*. The concept of halal food, therefore, refers to food that is permissible for consumption according to the Qur’an and the Sunnah. In conclusion, halal food is that which is suitable for consumption based on Islamic teachings, in accordance with the Qur’an and Hadith. The indicators of halal labeling include four aspects: (1) symbols or images, (2) the word “halal,” (3) placement on packaging, and (4) a combination of images and text (Putri, 2019).

The availability of halal food exceeds that of non-halal food. This is affirmed in the Qur’an, Surah Al-Baqarah (2:29), which states that Allah has created everything on earth for humankind. The Qur’an frequently addresses matters of consumption and food, mentioning food 48 times, the act of eating 109 times, and commands to eat 27 times.

In Surah Al-Ma’idah (5:88), Allah commands humans to consume what is halal and *tayyib* (wholesome). The term *tayyib*, following halal, implies that food must not only be lawful but also beneficial and safe for the human body. Thus, humans are prohibited from consuming harmful substances. According to Nurdin, *tayyib* signifies goodness or blessedness, while Yusuf Qardhawi interprets it as food that is proper, appealing, and not harmful to those who consume it.

Regulations regarding prohibited foods are outlined in the Qur’an, Surah Al-Baqarah (2:173), which includes carrion, blood, pork, and animals slaughtered without invoking the name of Allah. Additionally, predatory animals with fangs, such as lions, tigers, eagles, and domesticated donkeys, are also considered prohibited.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method. The subjects of this research are restaurant owners located along the Trans-Kalimantan Highway in East Barito Regency. In addition, the study involves drivers, passengers, and community members traveling from South Kalimantan to Palangka Raya, most of whom take rest stops in Ampah, a town in North Barito Regency. The data collection methods used in this study include observation, interviews, and documentation. Subsequently, data analysis is conducted through four stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and data verification. Meanwhile, data validation is carried out using source and method triangulation techniques.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

East Barito Regency is one of the transit areas commonly used as a rest stop by travelers undertaking long-distance journeys, for example, those traveling from Hulu Sungai Utara Regency to Palangka Raya or vice versa, as well as those traveling from Muara Teweh to Palangka Raya or the reverse route.

In East Barito Regency, a significant portion of the population adheres to non-Muslim religions, and some of them operate restaurants. Therefore, individuals who intend to dine in this region—whether in restaurants or small food stalls—are advised to exercise caution. In this context, recognizing religious symbols displayed in eating establishments becomes crucial to avoid unintentionally consuming non-halal food prepared by non-Muslim-owned restaurants.

Based on the findings of the research team, the community in East Barito Regency generally pays close attention to religious symbols when deciding whether to purchase food from a particular restaurant. According to Mr. Sarjono, many residents in this area are non-Muslims, and pork is openly sold, often by the roadside. Consequently, consumers must be cautious when purchasing meat, as beef may sometimes be mixed with pork. He further emphasized that individuals seeking restaurants in this area need to be particularly vigilant, given the considerable number of non-Muslim-owned establishments.

The religious symbols identified by informants as indicators to avoid mistakenly choosing a restaurant in East Barito Regency include the following:

1. The presence of images of Tuan Guru or Islamic calligraphy displayed on the walls;
2. The absence of dogs roaming around the restaurant, as their presence is perceived to indicate that the establishment is owned by non-Muslims, since Muslims are generally understood not to keep dogs or pigs;
3. The presence of staff wearing Islamic attire, such as women wearing hijab, along with the absence of cross symbols or tattoos, and the display of Islamic calligraphy or images of Tuan Guru.

Other participants expressed similar views, leading to the conclusion that the characteristics or religious symbols of restaurants owned by Muslims include:

1. Staff wearing Islamic attire, such as men wearing caps (peci) and women wearing hijab;
2. The absence of staff wearing cross symbols, whether in the form of necklaces or earrings;
3. The presence of Islamic calligraphy or images of Tuan Guru displayed on the walls
4. The absence of dogs or pigs roaming around the restaurant;
5. The use of Islamic-oriented names for the restaurant, such as Al-Mukmin, Al-Firdaus, or Rumah Makan Berkah. In contrast, non-Muslim-owned establishments tend to use different naming conventions.

Furthermore, the study reveals that educational efforts provided by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Islamic religious leaders in East Barito Regency regarding the importance of understanding religious symbols in restaurants remain relatively limited. This finding is based on interviews with several key informants. Mr. Abdinor, Head of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) in Patangkep Tutui District, stated that the primary challenges include limited human resources and the absence of sufficient funding to educate the public on the importance of religious symbols in dining establishments.

In line with this, Supiannor, an Islamic religious counselor in the Tamiyang Layang area, added that the vast geographical area of East Barito Regency poses difficulties in reaching remote communities, thereby hindering efforts to raise awareness about the importance of religious symbols in ensuring food halalness. Additionally, Mr. Suhaimi noted that the absence of technical guidelines has resulted in a lack of standardized approaches among religious counselors, making educational efforts largely dependent on individual

initiative. These findings highlight the need for greater attention from relevant stakeholders to strengthen structured and systematic educational strategies at the local level.

## CONCLUSION

Restaurant owners in East Barito Regency include both Muslims and non-Muslims. However, some non-Muslim restaurant owners display Islamic calligraphy and images of Tuan Guru on the walls of their establishments. Therefore, individuals who intend to dine at such places should exercise caution by considering additional indicators, such as whether the staff do not wear cross necklaces and do not have tattoos, and whether there are no dogs or pigs roaming around the premises. The Ministry of Religious Affairs has not yet been able to effectively address this issue due to the absence of technical guidelines. Moreover, the extensive geographical area of East Barito Regency poses challenges for monitoring, compounded by the lack of funding to provide adequate public education and awareness.

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