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Consumer Attitudes in the Tuzla Canton Regarding Halal Nutrition

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ABSTRACT

Consumers today are increasingly aware of the impact of food on health and pursue dietary practices that sustain physical well-being, prevent diseases, and enhance mental health and quality of life. The aim of the research was to determine the attitudes of consumers in the Tuzla Canton regarding the impact of halal diets on reducing health risks associated with obesity and non-communicable diseases. The study employed data analysis on information collected through an anonymous questionnaire administered to respondents in the Tuzla Canton, and compared these findings with secondary data derived from relevant scientific and professional literature on the benefits of halal diets. A high percentage of the most favorable response option on the Likert scale was observed for questions regarding commitment to the consumption of halal products and dishes prepared with halal ingredients (86.3%), awareness of the health benefits of Ramadan fasting (81.6%), and the practice of Ramadan fasting (84.5%).

However, despite these high percentages, particularly concerning commitment to halal diets, the proportion of the most favorable responses for questions related to the nutritional aspects of halal diets was notably low; specifically, responses regarding monitoring nutritional information on halal products (23.3%), consuming a diverse range of halal foods while maintaining nutritional balance (11.0%), and consuming halal food in moderation (28.2%). For all three of these questions, the intermediate response option, namely “occasionally,” was frequently selected, with percentages of 60.2%, 61.0%, and 57.8%, respectively. The response to the seventh question confirmed the potential of halal diets in reducing excessive body weight and obesity, as 48.1% of respondents reported a decrease in body weight after Ramadan fasting. The respondents’ answers indicate a positive impact of halal diets on health.

The high proportion of intermediate responses for questions of a nutritional nature (nutritional balance, diversity, and moderation) indicates a need for consumer education on the nutritional aspects of halal food. Such education would contribute to establishing a stronger scientific foundation for consumers’ attitudes and experiences regarding halal food, potentially resulting in a higher percentage of respondents providing the most favorable responses to these and similar questions.

Keywords: *halal food, halal nutrition, health benefits, consumer*

Introduction

The fast-paced modern lifestyle brings with it a rapid mode of eating, which may contribute to an increase in body weight, heart disease, cancer (particularly colon cancer), and other diet-related illnesses. The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies the leading dietary risk factors as increased body weight (body mass index $> 25 \text{ kg/m}^2$), high consumption of energy-dense foods, saturated fats, trans fats, sugar, and salt. Obesity (body mass index $> 30 \text{ kg/m}^2$) is recognized as a risk factor for numerous diseases and bodily conditions (Flegal et al., 2012; Ogden et al., 2012).

Health is a fundamental component of quality of life (QoL), which is considered the most important goal in societal development (Čanković et al., 2011). Quality of life is defined as the perception of one's position in life within the context of the culture and value system in which an individual lives, relative to his or her own goals, expectations, standards, and interests, while health-related quality of life (HRQoL) represents the subjective evaluation of health and well-being. Due to the undeniable link between diet and health, the concept of food-related quality of life (FRQoL) has been introduced to assess the impact of diet on HRQoL (Čanković et al., 2011; Sitlinger and Zafar, 2018; Oliviera et al., 2021).

In addition to diet, religious practices such as fasting and prayer may also have a positive impact on HRQoL, contributing not only to physical but also to mental health because of the spiritual dimension of religion. This conclusion is supported by 41 out of 64 studies published between 2001 and 2012 (Tan et al., 2013).

The fundamental principle of halal nutrition is to consume halal food frequently, in moderation, and with variety, with its roots in Islam. In accordance with this principle, halal nutrition aligns with the tenets of modern balanced diets as well as with the principles of integrative or holistic medicine. Consequently, halal nutrition is emerging as a new, scientifically grounded health paradigm that is increasingly attracting the

attention of non-Muslims, consumers, and researchers (Zildžić et al., 2023; Latif, 2018).

The aim of this paper is to present the attitudes of consumers in the Tuzla Canton regarding halal nutrition, with a particular emphasis on the perceived impact of this diet on health. The research objectives include analyzing existing knowledge about the relationship between diet and health, determining consumers' attitudes toward halal nutrition, and examining differences in perception among various demographic groups. The research hypothesis posits that although consumers generally exhibit a positive attitude toward halal nutrition, a lack of specific information about its nutritional aspects constitutes an obstacle to fully realizing its potential health benefits.

Halal Nutrition and Health

The word "halal" originates from Arabic and means "permissible." This term is used to denote what is allowed for Muslims according to Islamic regulations. The primary sources of halal guidelines are the Quran, the holy book of Muslims, and the Sunnah, which encompasses everything that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, did, or approved (Jašić et al., 2022). When it comes to food, halal implies that everything is permitted except for what is explicitly forbidden in the Quran, the Sunnah, or by consensus among Islamic scholars. The process of producing and preparing halal food must meet all legal and hygienic standards. This concept ensures the safety of the product, thereby building consumer trust, enhancing the firm's reputation, and ensuring economic sustainability.

Nutrition involves the intake of food to satisfy the body's dietary needs, and halal nutrition can be defined as the selection of health-safe food items with halal status, their preparation in a halal manner, and the moderate consumption of a varied diet along with the intake of an adequate amount of water (Jašić et al., 2022). Halal nutrition is a global phenomenon that transcends religious boundaries and is becoming increasingly interesting to non-Muslim

consumers due to its strong association with food safety, hygiene, and its impact on health.

According to the WHO, health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO, 2020).

Numerous diseases are caused by poor nutrition. An unhealthy diet is associated with a weakened immune system, viral and bacterial infections, as well as deficiency diseases such as scurvy and pellagra (Thompson & Manore, 2018). Diet should be balanced and rich in all essential nutrients; both deficiencies and excesses of certain nutrients can subtly undermine health.

Among the ten most common causes of death in the United States—and globally—four are linked to food and individual dietary habits: heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes. There is also a growing prevalence of insulin resistance, high blood pressure, and similar conditions (Brown, 2017). Obesity is considered the main risk factor for all these diseases (Thompson & Manore, 2018). Over the past four decades, obesity rates among adults and children have dramatically increased (Flegal et al., 2012; Ogden et al., 2012). Data show that mortality rates are highest among adults with excessive body weight relative to their height. BMI ranges are used to classify body mass into categories such as undernutrition, normal weight, overweight, and obesity (Brown, 2017).

Some of the causes of excessive body mass include genetic traits, high intake of added sugars, poverty and low levels of education, lack of sleep, exposure to PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) during pregnancy and early childhood, cessation of smoking, and medications (Brown, 2017).

When considering the onset of diseases such as hypertension, stroke, heart disease, gallbladder disease, type 2 diabetes, osteoarthritis, and certain cancers, common risk factors include excessive body mass or obesity, unhealthy diet, insufficient physical activity, smoking, genetic predispositions, stress, and changes in hormonal status (Brown, 2017).

Halal nutrition encompasses food items that have been scientifically confirmed to be beneficial to human health. Forbidden foods (haram) can be detrimental to health and may cause diseases, as is the case with GMO foods that can have unpredictable consequences on health. In addition to the selection of food items, it is important to pay attention to the quantity consumed and the manner of consumption. Excessive intake—even of halal food—can jeopardize health.

Fasting and Health

Fasting during the month of Ramadan involves complete abstinence from food and drink from dawn until sunset. Numerous studies have confirmed the health benefits of fasting. Many popular dietary regimens are based on this or a similar principle, incorporating long periods without food intake to allow the body to rest and regenerate.

Fasting triggers the process of autophagy, a biological mechanism that occurs within the cells and serves as a means of self-regulation and cleansing. This process involves the breakdown and recycling of damaged or unnecessary cellular components to maintain cellular functionality and homeostasis. Fasting represents a complex therapeutic approach that has a significant impact on cardiometabolic parameters, the immune system, the gut microbiome, and circadian rhythms, thereby affecting the entire organism (Glick et al., 2010). Fasting can have a substantial effect on insulin resistance, weight loss, and the management of obesity.

Recommendations of Halal Nutrition

The Quran and the Sunnah repeatedly emphasize the prohibition of excess in food and drink, and the importance of moderate consumption is clearly underscored by the recommendations of the WHO. The first piece of advice that can be offered by almost all nutritionists and physicians for reducing body weight is: “a lower caloric intake—that is, less food—will lead to weight loss,” which is also the simplest solution

available. Halal nutrition fully aligns with the recommendations of contemporary nutrition and, in many ways, even surpasses them due to its holistic approach to the health and well-being of both the individual and the community. Some of the fundamental principles of halal nutrition include:

- **Do not overindulge in food** - “Eat and drink, but do not be excessive. Indeed, Allah does not like those who commit excess.” (Al-A’raf 31). Every substance a person ingests can serve as both poison and remedy, depending on the amount consumed. It is also well known that the body digests smaller quantities of food more easily and efficiently. Recent research has found that individuals who reduce their caloric intake by 30% tend to live longer and may avoid the development of certain age-related diseases (Saeed, 2022).
- **Always consume food that is pure – tayyib** - “O mankind, eat from that which is on earth [that is] lawful and good...” (Al-Baqarah 168). This primarily means that food should not contain anything that could cause immediate or long-term harm to the body, including any type of contamination (chemical, physical, or biological). Among all these potential impurities, food can be protected by adhering to halal quality standards.
- **Always eat food that is nutritionally rich** - The food recommended in the Quran and the Sunnah is anti-carcinogenic, prevents the onset of diabetes, possesses anti-inflammatory properties, protects the liver, has analgesic effects, and aids in the recovery of the body (Saeed, 2022).
- **Eat a varied diet** - A monotonous diet can lead to various problems, as it may not supply the body with all the necessary nutrients (Ibn Kajjim).
- **Combine foods properly during meals** - It is important that meals consist of foods that complement each other nutritionally (Ibn Kajjim, 2020; Ayad, 2012).
- **Drink water at intervals** - Drinking water in intervals quenches thirst more completely and efficiently, as the water gradually enters

the stomach and helps preserve its warmth against sudden cooling (Ibn Kajjim, 2020).

- **Avoid consuming food you do not like** - If a person dislikes a particular type of food, they should refrain from eating it—even if it is permissible or even healthy. Forcing oneself to eat food one dislikes can have harmful consequences, particularly for mental health (Ibn Kajjim, 2020).
- **Patients should not be forced to eat** - If a patient is compelled to eat or drink, their body will focus on digesting the food, which may interfere with the process of disease elimination. It is advisable to offer the patient nutritionally rich yet light food, such as apple-based beverages, rose water, or aromatic chicken soup, and to do so in limited quantities (Ibn Kajjim, 2020).

Methods

This study employed the analysis of primary data collected through an anonymous questionnaire, as well as secondary data from relevant literature by authors who have investigated similar topics. The research included a total of 206 respondents. The participants were adult individuals of both genders, aged between 30 and 60 years, from the Tuzla Canton area.

Materials

In this paper, a section of a larger questionnaire consisting of 46 questions is presented, with the analyzed and discussed responses pertaining to seven key questions related to consumers' attitudes and preferences regarding halal food. The questionnaire was closed-ended, self-constructed, and designed according to the specific needs of a broader study. The total number of respondents was 206, with a random sample selected from the Tuzla Canton. The respondents were aged between 30 and 60, which enabled the collection of representative data on consumer attitudes. The survey was distributed online, and Microsoft Excel was used for the analysis of the collected data.

Result

Table 1. Comprehensive Overview of Respondents' Answers

1. Do you pay attention to the daily consumption of halal products and meals prepared from halal ingredients?		
1)	No	9,8 %
2)	It doesn't matter to me	3,9 %
3)	Yes	86,3 %
2. How often do you monitor the nutritional information on (halal) products?		
1)	Never	16,5 %
2)	Occasionally	60,2 %
3)	Regularly	23,3 %
3. I consume different types of halal food while ensuring their nutritional balance.		
1)	I do not pay attention	27,7 %
2)	Sometimes	61,2 %
3)	Always	11,2 %
4. When consuming halal food, I make sure not to overeat.		
1)	I do not pay attention	14,1 %
2)	Sometimes	57,8 %
3)	Always	28,2 %
5. How familiar are you with the health benefits of Ramadan fasting?		
1)	Not at all	1,5 %
2)	Partially	17 %
3)	Well	81,6 %
6. Do you fast during the month of Ramadan?		
1)	Never	6 %
2)	Occasionally	8,3 %
3)	Regularly	84,5 %
7. After the month of Ramadan, my body weight has:		
1)	Increased	8,7 %
2)	Remained the same	43,2 %
3)	Decreased	48,1 %

Discussion

A high percentage of the most favorable option among the three offered responses on the Likert scale for seven questions was recorded for questions 1, 5, and 6, which pertain to:

- commitment to the consumption of halal products and meals prepared from halal ingredients (86.3%),
- awareness of the health benefits of Ramadan fasting (81.6%), and
- practicing Ramadan fasting (84.5%).

The reason for the high percentage of respondents who adhere to a halal diet, observe Ramadan fasting, and are familiar with its benefits lies in the demographic composition of the surveyed area, where the majority of the population adheres to the Islamic faith. Additionally, the survey was conducted immediately after the conclusion of Ramadan.

However, despite these high percentages, particularly concerning the commitment to halal nutrition, the relatively low percentage of the most favorable responses related to the nutritional aspects of halal food was somewhat surprising. These include questions regarding:

- monitoring nutritional information on (halal) products (23.3%),
- consuming various types of halal food while ensuring nutritional balance (11.0%), and
- consuming halal food while being mindful of not overeating (28.2%).

For all three of these questions, the intermediate response options, "occasionally" or "sometimes" (often chosen by undecided and uncertain respondents in surveys), were also high and close in percentage: 60.2%, 61.0%, and 57.8%, respectively. The fact that only 23.3% of respondents regularly check nutritional information on (halal) products (16.5% never, 60.2% occasionally) can be attributed to consumer habits, which have been confirmed by numerous studies. These studies indicate that although consumers are aware that nutritional labeling can aid in making healthier food choices, they do not pay much attention to reading nutritional labels in general. Additionally, consumers prefer shorter and more concise information on packaging due to "information overload" and "time pressure" when making purchasing decisions. For example, in France in 2004, out of 870 consumers, only 22% were actively interested in nutritional information, 41% were occasionally interested, 29% had little interest, and 8% were uninterested. In the Una-Sana Canton in 2014, among 300 respondents, 21.7% always and 28.7% mostly read product labels, while the other half rarely (34.3%) or

never (15.3%) did so. In Croatia, 60% of the population never or rarely reads nutritional labels, while only 39% read them regularly, mainly, or only upon the first purchase. Those who read nutritional labels mostly do so out of curiosity (35%) or a desire for a "healthy" diet (30%). Furthermore, 59% of respondents stated that the main reasons for not reading nutritional labels were a lack of interest and a lack of responsibility for food purchases (Muhamedbegović et al., 2018; Temple et al., 2014).

Additionally, considering responses about nutritional balance and moderation in food intake, a certain level of concern arises. As many as 61% of respondents stated that they sometimes pay attention to food balance, while only 11% do so regularly, and 28% do not consider it at all.

Regarding halal food consumption, only 28.2% of respondents consistently ensure they do not overeat, while 14.1% do not pay attention to this aspect, and 57.8% sometimes do.

These responses indicate that only a small number of respondents strictly and confidently adhere to the fundamental principles of halal nutrition: consuming halal food frequently, moderately, and diversely. This is also inconsistent with the principles of modern balanced nutrition.

The response to the question about changes in body weight after Ramadan fasting confirmed the potential of halal nutrition in reducing excessive body weight and obesity (which affects 10% of the 206 respondents). Specifically, 48.1% of respondents reported weight loss after Ramadan fasting. Fasting has multiple beneficial effects on the human body, one of which is providing a break from constant food intake, thereby promoting fat utilization and leading to weight reduction. Fasting is a means of maintaining health and a healthy body weight, especially when combined with prayer. This religious practice can have a positive impact not only on physical health but also on mental well-being due to its spiritual dimension. This was confirmed by

41 out of 64 studies published between 2001 and 2012 (Tan et al., 2013).

Therefore, the aforementioned percentage of responses is highly valuable as further evidence of the positive impact of halal nutrition on health, demonstrating that Ramadan fasting can serve as a strategy for weight management.

An integral part of this strategy should be education on the principles of halal nutrition—consuming halal food frequently, moderately, and diversely—as well as awareness of eating speed. Modern consumers increasingly consume food on the go, and numerous studies have confirmed that slow eating can maximize satiety, reduce energy intake per meal, and serve as a useful preventive measure against obesity and diabetes through weight management (Khan, 2024).

Conclusion

The research results indicate that consumers in the Tuzla Canton generally hold a positive attitude towards the consumption of halal food. This is evidenced by the high percentage of respondents who deliberately choose halal products and meals prepared from halal ingredients, as well as by the high level of awareness regarding the health benefits of Ramadan fasting and regular fasting practices.

At the same time, the results show that regarding nutritional aspects—such as monitoring nutritional information on products, consuming a varied and balanced diet, and controlling food intake—the majority of respondents provide moderate responses. This suggests a lack of information or a less rigorous application of nutritional guidelines. It is also noteworthy that a significant proportion of respondents reported a reduction in body weight following the month of Ramadan, which implies a certain potential of halal food in improving health status, while simultaneously emphasizing the need for further education on nutritional principles.

Therefore, it can be concluded that although consumers generally exhibit a positive attitude towards halal food, there remains room for improvement through targeted education on nutritional aspects. Such an approach would ensure a deeper understanding and more effective application of dietary guidelines, potentially further enhancing health outcomes.

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Stavovi potrošača u Tuzlanskom kantonu o halal prehrani

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SAŽETAK

Potrošači danas sve više shvataju utjecaj hrane na zdravlje i teže prehrani koja ih može održati fizički zdravim, spriječiti bolesti te poboljšati njihovo mentalno stanje i kvalitetu života. Cilj istraživanja bio je utvrditi stavove potrošača na Tuzlanskom kantonu o utjecaju halal prehrane na smanjenje zdravstvenih rizika od gojaznosti i nezaraznih bolesti. U radu je korištena metoda analize podataka prikupljenih putem anonimnog popunjavanja upitnika ispitanika u Tuzlanskom kantonu i komparacija sa sekundarnim podacima iz relevantne naučne i stručne literature autora koji su istraživali prednosti halal prehrane. Visok procenat najpovoljnije opcije od tri ponuđena odgovora po Likertovoj skali zabilježen je za pitanja o posvećenosti konzumaciji halal proizvoda i jela pripremljenih od halal sirovina (86,3%), poznavanju benefita ramazanskog posta za zdravlje (81,6%) te prakticiranju ramazanskog posta (84,5%).

Međutim, s obzirom na ove visoke procenat, posebno za odgovor o posvećenosti halal prehrani, pomalo je iznenađujući nizak procenat najpovoljnijih odgovora dobijen za pitanja vezana za nutritivni aspekt halal prehrane, a to su pitanja o praćenju nutritivnih informacija na halal proizvodima (23,3%), konzumiranju raznovrsne halal hrane vodeći računa o nutritivnoj izbalansiranosti (11,0%) te konzumiranju halal hrane vodeći računa da se ne pretjeruje sa unosom hrane (28,2%). Kod sva tri ova pitanja srednja ponuđena opcija odgovora „povremeno“ odnosno „ponekad“ bila je visoka: 60,2%, 61,0% i 57,8%. Odgovor na sedmo pitanje potvrdio je potencijal halal prehrane na smanjenje prekomjerne tjelesne mase i gojaznosti, jer je 48,1% ispitanika navelo da im se tjelesna masa smanjila nakon ramazanskog posta. Odgovori ispitanika indiciraju pozitivan utjecaj halal prehrane na zdravlje.

Visok procenat srednjih ponuđenih opcijskih odgovora tipa „povremeni“ ili „ponekad“ za pitanja nutricionističkog karaktera (nutritivna izbalansiranost, raznovrsnost i umjerenost) pokazuje potrebu za edukacijom potrošača o nutritivnom aspektu halal hrane. Ova edukacija bi pomogla uspostavljanju jačeg naučnog temelja za njihove stavove i iskustva u vezi sa halal hranom, što može dovesti do većeg procenta ispitanika koji daju najpovoljnije odgovore na ova i slična pitanja.

Ključne riječi: *halal hrana, halal ishrana, zdravstvene koristi, potrošači*
