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Case Study: *Muallafs'* Lifestyle Transition Towards Halal Food Consumption in Brunei Darussalam

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ABSTRACT

One of the factors to the rising number of Muslim populations is due to the growing number of people converting to Islam. This paper will be focusing on the converts' sustainable lifestyle changes towards halal food consumption. Food and beverages are the most fundamental need for humans, this is supported by Maslow's hierarchy of needs which categories food as the first and most important stage of human necessity in life. The purpose of this qualitative study is to analyse the *Muallafs'* halal food practices, their challenges, their adaptation to halal food consumption as well as to analyse ways to sustain their new lifestyle. The research showed that there are still gaps in the halal food consumption education amongst *Muallaf* with social challenges from their close social circle's lack of support and awareness. Challenges also includes difficulties in obtaining halal food while travelling abroad, challenges on halal food issues and that they have vague understanding of Islamic teachings. Thus, it can be concluded that the challenges with halal food consumption amongst *Muallaf* in Brunei Darussalam mostly occurs during social eating.

Keywords: *Muallaf*; new converts; Halal food consumption; Halal food practices; Halal food challenges; Halal food adaptability; Sustainable development goals; Lifestyle; Food; Beverages

1 Introduction

Corresponding to the increasing number of apostasies among the *Muallaf* due to their difficulties in transitioning to become a better Muslim [1], it indicates the importance of assisting them as a new Muslim. One of the challenges faced by the *Muallaf* is to revamp their dietary habits. As a human, food and beverages are the most fundamental need for human beings in their daily lifestyle [2]. This is supported by Maslow's hierarchy of needs which categorises food as the first and most important stage of human necessity in life [3].

As a consequence of an individual converting to Islam (*Muallaf*), they are expected to revamp their whole life, including their basic necessities such as their daily consumption [4]. Besides, *Muallaf* needs to be prepared to embrace being a Muslim [5], which includes changing an important part of their life, in this case, their halal food consumption. There has been little research about the *Muallafs'* behaviour towards halal food consumption, and even if there has been, it has been conducted outside of Brunei Darussalam such as the study done by Awang, Ismail and Mahmud [4]. Furthermore, most studies in Brunei Darussalam focus solely on customers' attitudes towards purchasing halal food. For that reason,



this study aims to analyse the *Muallafs'* halal food practices, their challenges as well as their adaptation to halal food consumption in Brunei Darussalam.

2 Methods

The qualitative research approach has been employed in this study as it is believed to be the best method of research when there is a lack of information about a particular topic [6]. Since the population of *Muallaf* in Brunei Darussalam is small and specific, this research implemented the non-probability sampling which is the purposive sampling. In total, there are five *Muallafs* who were recruited for this study. The researcher gathers the respondents through contacting the Brunei's Islamic Da'wah Centre to obtain the name list of *Muallaf* in Brunei Darussalam. As for the data analysis, the researcher has used thematic analysis.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Muallafs' Halal Food Practices

Table 1: List of Respondents' Halal Food Practices

Respondent/ Questions	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5
They practice prior to converting to ensure they are consuming halal food	✓	✓		✓	✓
Respondent is knowledgeable about the definition of halal food	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Consuming halal food is their personal choice	✓	✓	✓	✓	
The respondent ensures the product is halal before purchasing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
It is important for them to consume halal food	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The respondent would feel secure to consume food without halal logo given by another Muslim	✓		✓		✓

Table 1 presents the respondents' practices with respect to halal food. For most part, a majority of the respondents are practicing halal food consumption which may be influenced from the country's strong national principles of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (Malay Islamic Monarchy) as well as the country's image of a '*negara zikir*' [7]. Albeit consuming halal food is a religious prescription [8], however, they personally still find it crucial to consume halal food consumption. This is a result of the *Muallaf* having basic knowledge and understanding about halal food consumption and its benefits. Additionally, they would ensure that the products that they purchase are halal prior to purchasing the product [9].

3.2 Muallafs' Challenges and Adaptation in Implementing Halal Food Consumption

Table 2 reports the respondents' challenges to halal food consumption.

Table 2: List of Respondents' Challenges to Halal Food Consumption

Respondent/ Questions	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5
Challenges from social circle	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Difficulty of obtaining halal food abroad			✓	✓	
Halal food issues	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vague understanding and lack of resources in Islamic teachings	✓		✓	✓	✓

3.2.1 Challenges from Social Circle

This research has found that the challenges caused by family members can be classified into two categories; firstly, family member's deceitful behaviour which the respondents overcame this challenge by acting normal and stating that they would eat the food later so that the issue won't be prolonged and secondly, the family member's lack of awareness towards the practice of halal food. In this case, families who are supportive and open-minded, helps in easing the respondents in implementing the halal dietary.

Furthermore, the *Muallaf* would face the challenge of friends pressuring them into consuming non-halal food. The respondents overcame the challenge by having a mindset of attending the gathering for the sake of maintaining the relationship with their family and friend.

3.2.2 Difficulty of Obtaining Halal Food Abroad

Compared to obtaining halal food in Brunei Darussalam, most of the respondents stated that they only have difficulties in searching and obtaining halal food while travelling abroad. Also, it has been stated that if there were halal food, the respondents would still be doubtful of the sources of the ingredients used. Therefore, the respondents solved this issue by packing some extra food and snacks for them to eat while travelling or to just consume what is halal by default such as seafood, vegetables and fruits [10-11].

3.2.3 Halal Food Issues

As a result of only having the basic knowledge on halal food, some of the *Muallaf* would not know if a product had a genuine halal logo or not. Certainly, in this situation, the *Muallaf* encountered issues such as consuming food which has been alleged to be non-halal. Furthermore, the *Muallaf* claimed that the ingredients which are written in scientific terms causes confusion to them. The techniques which they have employed for this situation are by asking a more knowledgeable person or by referring to the press release from the government and they would stop purchasing that product.

3.2.4 Vague Understanding and Lack of Resources in Islamic Teachings

Lastly, this study has found that some of the respondents have a vague understanding and lack of resources in Islamic teachings. Namely, the usage of the term '*murtad*', their perspective that all products sold in Brunei Darussalam are halal as well as their lack of knowledge regarding food contamination.

4 Conclusions

Despite the fact that previous research has identified the obstacles faced by the *Muallaf*, the majority of it does not focus on the issue of the *Muallaf*'s lifestyle transition toward the implementation of halal food consumption. This study has shown that there is a need to conduct more research on the *Muallaf*'s implementation of halal dietary lifestyle. This is due to the fact that, while they were able to perform fundamental halal food practices, there are still gaps in assisting the *Muallaf* with the in-depth aspects of halal food consumption education.

All of these challenges are manageable for the *Muallaf* provided the people around them are supportive, which validates the hypothesis of the theory of planned behavior [12]. Furthermore, if the *Muallaf* was exposed to halal food consumption practices prior to converting to Islam, it will be easier for them to maintain halal food consumption after converting to Islam. Also, through analysing the results, the religiosity of the respondents also plays a role in the halal food consumption practices. Most of the respondents have overcome the challenges due to their knowledge and understanding about the teachings of Islam.

Future research could concentrate on the issues that *Muallaf* encounters around the world in implementing halal food or on *Muallaf* consumer behavior regarding halal food consumption. There is also a lack of research on the *Muallaf*'s awareness and knowledge of halal food intake that may be done to comprehend their understanding of this subject of study. Finally, the researcher would like to suggest that the authorities involved develop a more detailed syllabus for halal food education, which can be used to provide additional information to the *Muallaf* committee in Brunei Darussalam.

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