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THE IMPORTANCE OF HALĀL FOOD AWARENESS; A CASE STUDY IN LINXIA, CHINA

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ABSTRACT

The global food market is concerned with food safety and its hygiene which is considered a worldwide issue. However, the business in China, concerning halāl integrity or halāl food industry, is significantly less. It happens as most people are unaware of the importance and existence of the halāl food industry. If the awareness is low, their attitude will be the same way as people might have less opinion about it or even zero understanding. Interestingly, although the Muslim population in China is very few as it is not a Muslim majority country, Linxia has a Muslim majority population that practices the Islamic teachings. Linxia is well-known as The Little Mecca. Apprehending their situation resided among non-Muslim environments with the higher influence from surroundings, exploring their attitude and behaviour toward the halāl food industry is thought-provoking. Muslims need to have an understanding and knowledge of what halāl is all about when measuring halāl awareness. This paper aims to give an overview of halāl awareness issues in Linxia, so the necessary steps can be taken for the improvement of the halāl industry in Linxia in particular and China in general. The awareness level in this paper is measured by identifying the factors affecting Muslims in Linxia, China, in their intention to purchase halāl products and their buying behaviour. Therefore, this study was constructed to identify the attitude and purchase intention of Muslim Consumers in Linxia toward halāl food products. The theory used to identify the factors is the Theory Plan Behaviour (TPB). The data was collected from 302 Muslim participants, and then it was further analysed using the SPSS software. The result depicted that the participants' attitude is positively correlated with their purchase

intention and buying behaviour of halāl food products, and their purchase intention has a significant and positive impact on buying behaviour of halāl food products.

Keywords: *Halāl industry, Linxia, Halāl Awareness*

Background

Food industries are growing increasingly concerned and sensitive about the production and acquisition of halāl food goods. Halāl food items, on the other hand, are widely acknowledged and recognised as a measure of food safety and quality assurance.¹ Currently, worry about consuming halāl goods is common not just among Muslim customers, but halāl awareness has also expanded to non-Muslim consumers. As a result, awareness of halāl products is growing globally, particularly in non-Muslim nations. Linxia, an affluent Islamic region, is also known as "The Little Mecca." Linxia is made up of Hui, Dongxiang, Baoan, Salar, and other Muslim ethnic groups, accounting for 56.2 percent of the prefecture's total population. As a result, the halāl food business is becoming more concerned in Linxia, and a large number of Muslim customers play a significant part in making the halāl market highly promising.

Halāl food items are widely approved and recognised as food safety and quality assurance standard. Halāl items are not just popular among Muslim customers, but halāl awareness has expanded to non-Muslim consumers as well. The goal of this study is to determine Muslim knowledge and purchasing intentions for halāl food items in Linxia, China.

However, the focus of this research study will be on Muslim customers' intentions and behaviour in Linxia; the researchers have not yet researched Muslim halāl awareness. Furthermore, the purpose of customers to purchase halāl food and the involvement of halāl consumers in consuming halāl food

items has not been studied till now. As a result, because there is no accurate data on consumers' intentions to purchase halāl food items, this topic will be investigated in this study.

Halāl awareness

Halāl awareness refers to a particular interest in or experience with halāl, which may include knowledge of halāl meals, beverages, and goods² (Ambali & Bakar, 2014). However, Randolph (2003) defines "awareness" as "the knowledge or comprehension of a given subject or circumstance." As a result, awareness supplies the raw ingredients necessary for the development of subjective notions about one's encounter with something.³ In other words, awareness is the process of informing or raising awareness among the public about the hazards connected with anything that might harm human life and the actions that individuals can take to mitigate their exposure.

Thus, awareness may be defined in the context of halāl as the process of informing Muslims about what is allowed to eat, drink, and use. To fully grasp this idea, it is necessary to analyse the numerous ways in which humans might be cognizant of something⁴, including religious belief and the halāl logo's function.

Consumer awareness may be a significant component in the purchase decision-making process.⁵ As a result, while assessing halāl awareness, Muslims must have an idea and knowledge of what halāl is all about. As Muhamad Yunus, Wan Rashid, Mohd Ariffin, and Mohd Rashid (2014)⁶ point out, halāl food encompasses not only the product's components, but also its handling, processing equipment, processing aids, packing, storage, transportation, distribution, and retailing (Hasan, 2016). In general, understanding is raised about how humans perceive and respond intellectually to the state of the food, drink, and material they eat.⁷ Awareness is the process by which a product or service is purchased. It often mimics the early stage of

the purchase process when consumers who were previously unfamiliar with the product or service buy it. In other terms, awareness refers to the state of knowledge or familiarity with a specific subject or circumstance.⁸ Prior research has proven that consumer knowledge has a favorable influence on consumer attitudes regarding food purchases.⁹ Furthermore, it has a beneficial influence on customer intent.¹⁰

It is one of the most fascinating sociological issues in China and resolving it has become a need for society's preservation. However, there is a very limited, if not non-existent, business in China that is concerned with the halāl integrity of the halāl food industry. This arises because the majority of people are uninformed of the significance and presence of the halāl food business. When people lack awareness, their views will be similar since they will likely have fewer viewpoints or even no comprehension.

Issues that are arising

People from all over the world have purchased Chinese-made goods, and the country's economy is at the top of the world. However, the halāl food market in China is almost empty since most people are unaware of it and have no opinion about it. Certainly, consumers from other nations lack trust in China's halāl food market, notably in Linxia. Food safety is one of the most pressing public health challenges facing the globe today. It has also become one of the most difficult societal concerns to handle in China. Domestic food safety issues occur more frequently in China than in other countries; there are flaws in all elements of the food chain—from farm to table; and public awareness about food safety is rising.¹¹

The researchers hope to investigate Muslim clients' awareness and halāl knowledge in Linxia through this study. The researcher can link their degree of awareness with the amount of demand for halāl products and services by determining their level of awareness. As awareness expands, so does the demand for halāl products, driving producers to create halāl things. In this

regard, the halāl industry's economics in Linxia is improving, which supports the halāl industry's growth and contributes to the public's trust in halāl items from Linxia in particular and China in general.

Furthermore, only a few studies have attempted to investigate the issues in assessing the elements that track customers' attitudes and intentions in purchasing halāl food goods in nations with a majority non-Muslim population. In China, the level of halāl knowledge is low, and contemporary study has not looked at halāl awareness in the Chinese setting.

Devotion and awareness

There are significant social and cultural differences, and the term "halāl" has many different connotations. As a result, a detailed examination of its definition and scope may offer us some intriguing management insights. It is possible to establish whether a food item, service, or anything else is halāl using the rules provided by the Qurān and hadith. Halāl is commonly misunderstood as a consumption-related ideology that is limited to food consumption alone. Nonetheless, Islam in general, and its sacred text in particular, are concerned with a wide range of other elements of everyday living, not simply halāl eating.¹² Mukhtar and Mohsin Butt (2012) discovered that Muslims are the least perplexed when it comes to issues of permissibility.¹³ However, the preparation and components are always a source of worry.

For Muslims, the cornerstone of all activities must be devotion, which is the act of thanking the Almighty God. "I created the jinn and humans for no other reason than to worship" (adz-Dzariat: 56). According to Shari'ah, eating is also considered a form of worship, with certain restrictions and procedures to observe. Eating should not only be adequate for halāl, but it should also be nourishing, according to the Qurān. There are countless examples of this throughout the Qurān, where halāl terms are employed in diverse circumstances and are always followed by words of justice. Some of the previously mentioned sections are as follows: "O people, eat of the excellent things of the earth, and

do not follow in the footsteps of the devil, because he is a plain adversary to you" (2: 168). "Eat everything you have done well, and fear Allah, for Allah is Forgiving and Merciful." (11: 69.) "Eat all that Allah has supplied you with for comfort and thank God for His bounty if you adore Him." (16:114) "And consume what Allah has supplied you with for comfort, and fear Allah, in whom you have faith" (5: 88).

Every Muslim follows what is contained in the Holy Qurān and Prophet Muhammad's practices (Sunnah). One of them concerns the current state of dietary laws. According to this commandment, Muslims must consume halāl meals while avoiding haram foods.¹⁴ However, Chinese Muslims are expected to remain a minority in their nation, accounting for around 8% of the overall population by mid-century.¹⁵ As a result, efforts are being undertaken to investigate halāl knowledge, particularly among Muslim customers. Customer understanding about halāl influences their decision to purchase halāl food items.¹⁶ It was underlined that halāl awareness has an impact on the intention to purchase halāl items.

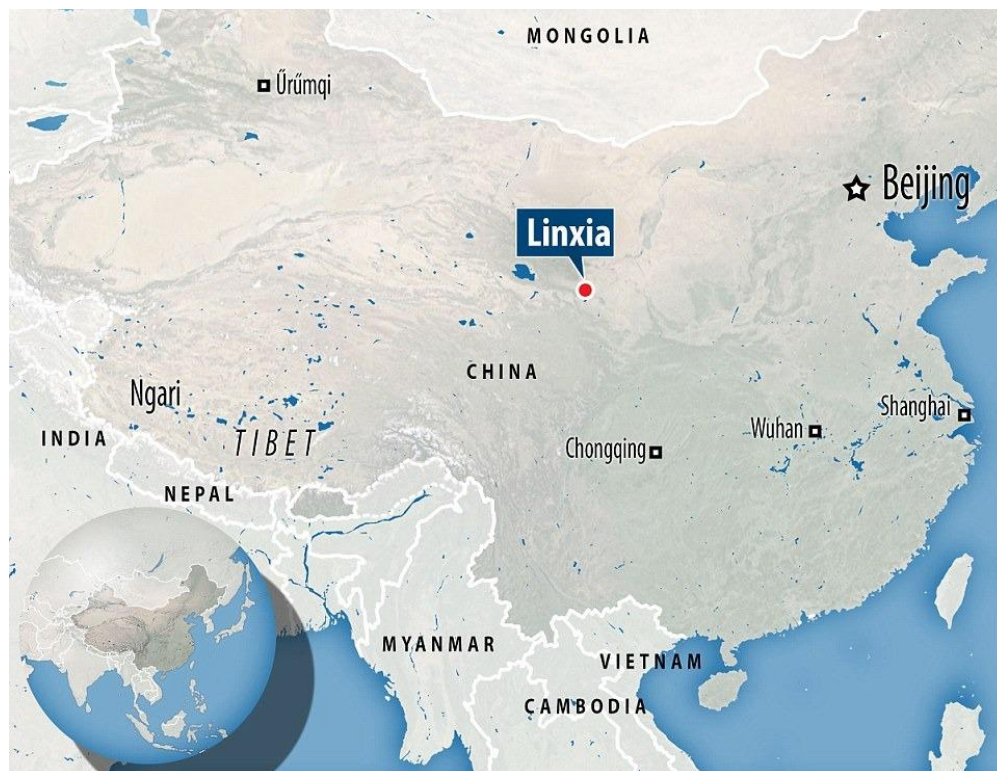
The increased knowledge will have a significant impact on people's purchases of Halāl food, and the economy will develop as a result. Furthermore, their research found that the most relevant element in Muslim customers' decisions to buy halāl food correlates to the amount of awareness about the product. Although numerous researches have been undertaken on the halāl food sector and halāl consumers in Muslim majority countries, only a few studies have attempted to investigate the issues in quantifying the components that trace customers' intentions in non-Muslim majority nations. According to the present literature study, there has been no extensive published research on Muslims' halāl customers' intention in the Linxia environment (Liu & Li, 2016). The goal of this study is to investigate Linxia Muslims' preferences for getting halāl food goods by employing the useful theory of planned behaviour (TPB). Given the rising popularity of halāl-certified products, research into consumer decisions to purchase halāl food items is timely

Significance

Muslims' lives are molded and led by the Qurān and Sunnah in every action and decision they make. Muslims must adhere to religious obedience in their Islamic lifestyle, which encompasses all aspects of life and includes halāl food, medication, and travel. The current study is critical for employees in the Halāl business, stakeholders, educators, and the general public. The next paragraph discusses the implications of the research from a variety of perspectives. To begin, an individual's educational potential and proficiency in the food business or any other form of the food sector in Linxia is determined by their educational potential and proficiency. With this information, the researcher can seek more support to bridge the gap between them. This study will examine the possibility of determining consumers' current degree of intention to purchase halāl food goods.

Second, it is imperative for stakeholders and persons who are directly or indirectly involved in the consumption of food items through visits to restaurants, hotels, university/college/school cafeterias, local food markets, and food and beverage shopping malls. As a result, this study will determine how specific elements influence consumers' purchase intention for halāl food and whether this impact is both influential and motivating.

This research may serve as a reference for academics and halāl scholars conducting more research in Halāl Consumerism. Additionally, it may contribute to the prosperity of the Halāl Industry in Linxia, as Muslim Producers will be more aware and informed about Consumer demand and their reasons for



choosing halāl products, which encourages Muslim Producers to produce halāl products; thus, it contributes positively to the Halāl Industry's development in Linxia.

Figure 1: Maps of Linxia

Source: <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.dailymail.co.uk/news/china/article-5957615/amp/Muslims-Chinas-Little-Mecca-fear-eradication-Islam.html>

The study's purpose

The primary objective of this study is to ascertain Muslim consumers' knowledge of and intention to purchase halāl food items in Linxia, as well as to

ascertain the most relevant elements influencing customers' intention in this respect.

The halāl food concept

Millions of Muslims worldwide are inspired by the concept of halāl when it comes to food consumption. However, the general classification and understanding of halāl items vary by region, and the concept of halāl is more than a marketing tool. Halāl cuisine, according to Wilson and Fan (2010), "reflects a larger belief framework and ethical way of life."¹⁷ According to the World Bank, the worldwide market for Islamic-compliant commodities generates \$632 billion in yearly income for the food industry alone.¹⁸

There are several social and cultural variations, and the term halāl has numerous meanings. As a result, a detailed examination of its definition and scope may yield some surprising management insights. It is possible to ascertain the halāl status of a food item, service, or other object using the Qurān and hadith. Halāl is sometimes misinterpreted as a consumption-related ideology that is limited to food consumption alone. Nonetheless, Islam in general, and its sacred book in particular, are concerned with a variety of other elements of everyday living, not simply halāl eating.¹⁹ Mukhtar and Mohsin Butt (2012) noted that Muslims are the least perplexed by permissibility instances.²⁰ The preparation and ingredients, on the other hand, might always be a source of concern. Through scientific and technical innovation, it is possible to blend halāl and haram substances purposely or accidentally during the production of things. As a result, establishing whether a product is halāl and pure involves multidisciplinary competence in fields such as food, chemistry, biochemistry, manufacturing, engineering, biology, and pharmacy, as well as a working knowledge of Shari'ah. Additionally, Riyaz and Khadry (2004) stated that to make halāl things, they must comply with the three zero concepts, which implies that they must be free of limitations, flaws, and risks.²¹

Contaminants should not contaminate the raw materials used to create halāl goods, products, or primary and secondary materials at any level of the production process. Given the enormous dangers that any manufacturing or distribution business confronts if allegations of prohibited materials are made. While remedial action would be done, no haram (flawless) items should be marketed. If these production methods are followed, a business will be risk-free. Halāl certification and logos are used by food makers to inform customers that their goods are Shariah-compliant.²² Historically, the majority of Muslims were ignorant that their meals violated the required diet. On the other side, Muslim customers are increasingly asking for halāl-certified food products, and more food manufacturers are willing to comply.²³

When clients see the halāl certification and insignia, they may feel secure in picking a halāl-certified food product or restaurant. Halāl certification benefits marketers as well since it serves as third-party verification of product quality. As a result, halāl products are more recognised globally, customer confidence grows, and products are protected from criticism by Islamic-inspired businesses.²⁴ Numerous businesses worldwide are pursuing halāl certification to boost their market presence and consumer satisfaction with their products. As a result of this, businesses will get access to promotional skills they previously lacked.²⁵ By connecting with their target customers, marketers may use the benefits of Halāl certification, which will eventually become an inherent advantage for the consumer. Coincidentally, clients who opt to consume halāl and high-quality food items benefit from a variety of benefits.

The halāl market in china

Muslims have resided in China since the time of the Prophet Mohammad. Few people, however, are aware of China's sizable Muslim community or the complicated history of survival faced by Muslims living amid races and cultures famed for their propensity to transmit and assimilate foreigners, such as the Chinese. The Muslim community in China has developed from a small colony

of Persian and Arab traders along the country's southeast coast to a vast and diverse population distributed throughout the country as a consequence of centuries of expansion. Chinese Muslims are today the country's biggest geographically dispersed minority population, as well as the most developed and interwoven into all facets of everyday life.²⁶ In 2011, there were around 1.8 billion people, with Islam constituting 24% of the world's population.²⁷

According to Pew Research Center forecasts, the Chinese Muslim population will reach 95 million by 2050, making it the world's biggest Muslim population (2015). Nonetheless, Chinese Muslims are expected to remain a minority in their nation, accounting for around 18% of the overall population by the mid-century period.²⁸ The value of food as a product or commodity is determined by society. Within a culture, social institutions such as religion have a major impact on our perception of the worth of food goods.²⁹ Thus, it is not surprising that halāl products as food items get their worth from religion and culture. Millions of Muslims in China, which is particularly remarkable, have a considerable demand for halāl items. China is home to the world's ninth-largest Muslim population, and its halāl marketplaces are among the most active in the business. China's halāl market is projected to be worth US\$2.1 billion, growing at a 10% annual rate.³⁰ While China's halāl sector and certification system are growing, they are still in their infancy in comparison to those in Muslim-majority nations.

While China has a significant number of halāl certification bodies, they do not coordinate and do not follow a centralized halāl standard and certification system.³¹ A similar issue arises about Chinese halāl manufacturers, who lack common awareness of and compliance with halāl manufacturing rules and norms. Apart from a lack of confidence in its supply chain operations, China's halāl business also lacks the necessary technology and people competence, not to mention international legitimacy. As a result, non-halāl components are frequently replaced in the fabrication of halāl items in China; one extreme example being the selling of pig labelled "halāl beef" in one region.³² Concerns

over product adulteration have prompted Chinese Muslims to seek authentic halāl items manufactured using only halāl materials and processes. There is a great desire in China for a true halāl sector, which presently does not exist. The Chinese government is well aware of the obstacles inherent in the sale of halāl products. It recently sought foreign aid in organizing and updating its halāl certification program, as well as collaborating with the halāl business. The chance for halāl merchants to offer their products to this quickly developing and potentially vast market is extremely beneficial.

However, understanding Chinese Muslims' halāl consuming patterns is minimal. This research will provide fresh light on Chinese Muslims' utilization of halāl items, which is currently understudied. The study contributes significantly to our understanding of Chinese Muslims' overall consumption. Additionally, it is concerned with elucidating the requirements and variables that impact Chinese Muslims' use of halāl everyday items, as well as their purchase intents while purchasing halāl goods.

Awareness of halāl in the chinese muslim community

Halāl food consumption is strongly intertwined with Islamic practice. However, unlike Muslims in Muslim-majority countries, it is implausible to suppose that Islamic teachings alone drive the consumption behaviour of Chinese Muslims. Their consumption patterns have also been shaped by their distinct living environment, which is markedly different from that of the rest of humanity. They are born into a Muslim society but grow up in one that is Confucian. While they live in a culture where religion is not a central notion, they are nonetheless regarded as an ethnic minority within a large population. As a result, they consume meals that are opposed to those consumed by the majority of Han people. The Cultural Revolution, which spanned 10 years from 1960 to 1970, had a profound effect on religious engagement in a variety of ways. Ambali and Bakar (2013) define awareness of food and products as a subjective experience that encompasses how a person feels and their perception of what they ingested

throughout the experiment. knowledge halāl They established that the level of ³³ held by Muslim and non-Muslim customers is significantly related to and dependent on a range of characteristics, including religious belief, healthy eating habits, and other factors such as education and training. This research provides an overview of halāl knowledge in general, without focusing exclusively on the Linxia community.

In China, the term halāl is used quite loosely. Surprisingly, 98% of Muslims felt that halāl meant praying before or during the slaughter of a permissible animal. Due to the low prevalence of halāl items in the nation and the scarcity of halāl products in the study's studied Muslim groups (urban and rural), the majority of Chinese Muslims believe that halāl refers primarily to prayer offerings made before and during animal slaughter. This confusing notion was expressed by Muslim respondents, revealing their lack of comprehension of the fundamental interpretation of halāl requirements.

Halāl is also concerned with the products' safety, sanitation, and cleanliness throughout manufacture, rather than with the Muslim faith. Consumers concerned with food safety and maintaining a healthy lifestyle are more inclined to purchase halāl products due to the sustainability concept of cleanliness, sanitation, and safety.³⁴ Additionally, this is critical for the marketability of halāl products, as manufacturers must not only focus on Islamic handling but also on an entire continuous improvement process that complies with food safety regulations to remain competitive. Food safety is concerned with both the customer's knowledge of the ingredients and the product's quality, as well as the safety of the goods' contents. Thus, purchasers must be familiar with the contents of a product since the likelihood of being accepted or rejected happens throughout the purchase decision process.

Linxia Muslim food consumption has a variety of traits. To begin, Chinese Muslims' economics are fundamentally ethnic in nature. These qualities are evident in manufacturing processes, housing, food, marriage, religion, and manner of life. Second, it is geographically limited. Muslims live

near the mosque, have intermarried with indigenous ethnic groups, and speak languages distinct to their community. Muslims often settle on the land where their forefathers did. Thirdly, it is a religiously motivated eating habit in which individuals consume only halāl food offered by religious leaders, family members, or other trustworthy friends and relatives.³⁵

Shaharudin, Pani, Mansor, and Elias (2010) collected and analysed data and discovered that religiosity is positively related to consumers' purchase intentions, as measured by standardized and customized questionnaires issued in 2010.³⁶ Additionally, Mathras, Mandel, and Mick (2016) demonstrated that Muslims' intention to purchase halāl meals was significantly impacted by their level of halāl understanding and the ingredients in the items under consideration.³⁷ Swimberghe, Sharma, and Flurry (2009) all take a similar stance on this issue.³⁸ They got the same result during their investigation: religious affiliation is associated with consumption. Finally, Ahmed, Najmi, Faizan, and Ahmed (2018) revealed that religious affiliation had a significant effect on customers' willingness to pay for halāl foods in a recent research.³⁹

Methods and framework of paper

The data and information gathered in this study are compiled using a quantitative manner. The data collection approach will be quantitative, and the analysis will be based on the replies to a questionnaire survey. Additionally, secondary data will be gathered by a study of the literature.

The public now views research as a source of information. As a result, the findings and conclusions of a research study may be a vital source of knowledge for both academics and business experts. While research is not utilized to make decisions or resolve problems, it does give significant information that assists in effectively filling knowledge gaps while also assisting in decision-making and management practice.⁴⁰

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between psychosocial factors that influence consumer intention to purchase halāl food

and the author's modified Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). It is based on an established theory and focuses on more particular variables inside the Linxia problem rather than on more broad aspects. As a result, choosing the most effective research methodology is vital to the study's success.

Design of research

Despite the presence of contemporary retail facilities in this location, this study focuses exclusively on halāl food consumption in Linxia, China. The data for this study were gathered through primary research. The basic data were gathered by a convenience sampling technique. The survey lasted three months. The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that elicited their choice to consume halāl food as well as their intention to purchase halāl food. This study will employ a sample size of 302 Muslims from Linxia. A research design is a comprehensive strategy that describes the steps necessary to complete the research study in its entirety. To guarantee that the data collected enables us to answer the study questions, it is critical to prepare ahead. Due to the diversity of research issues, numerous sorts of important data are gathered to address them. As a result, the framework for research is required.

The three most often employed types of research are exploratory, descriptive, and causal. Because numerical data are necessary to analyze the research topics in this study, they were addressed using a descriptive research strategy. The data gathered in descriptive studies serve to summarise the status of the phenomena and to explain what is known about the variables in natural settings. The study design typically consists of the following components: data source, sample, research instrument, data collection methodology, and data analysis method, all of which are explored in this paper.

Collection of data

The data gathering process entails compiling data from all relevant sources to solve the research problem, test the hypothesis, and assess the findings. In other terms, data collecting methods are the procedures used to compile data. Data gathering techniques may be split into two categories: primary data collection and secondary data collection.

Major data collection was chosen as the primary mode of data collection in this study. Most data were acquired using one of two primary data collecting methods: quantitative or qualitative data gathering. As a result, this research will focus only on the quantitative element of primary data gathering. There are two types of data sources available: primary and secondary. Primary data is material that was obtained directly by researchers with the express intention of doing a study on the subject at hand. Primary data collection techniques include interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, and observation. Secondary data, on the other hand, is information that has been obtained and extracted from existing sources by others. Secondary data sources include corporate records, government publications, and industry evaluations (Sekaran, 2003). When performing exploratory inquiries or when secondary data is the sole source of historical knowledge accessible, researchers may profit from it. Since secondary data was gathered for the advantage of others, it may have flaws such as irrelevance, inaccuracy, and out-of-date information.

Due to the study's focus on the current state of customer intention to purchase halāl food in Linxia, China, primary data collection is important to acquire the most up-to-date information available.

Finding

The findings indicate that participants' opinions are positively connected with their desire to purchase and purchasing behaviour when it comes to halāl food goods. Their mindset also influences their proclivity to purchase halāl food

products. Additionally, their buying intent has a significant and beneficial effect on halāl food product purchasing behaviour. As a consequence, Muslims in Linxia have a favourable attitude toward halāl food items and a favourable purchasing behaviour toward halāl food goods, as their attitude matches their behaviour.

Conclusion

Although China has a tiny Muslim population because it is not a majority Muslim country, Linxia has a Muslim majority population that follows Islamic teachings. Linxia is sometimes referred to as The Small Mecca. Given their problem of living in a non-Muslim environment with a stronger impact from their surroundings, it is instructive to examine their attitudes and behaviours regarding the halāl food industry. As a result, this main study sought to ascertain Chinese Muslims' opinions and purchase intentions toward halāl food products in Linxia. This research offers an overview of Muslims in China in general and contextualizes why Muslim customers in Linxia were chosen as the subject of the study.

Additionally, it studies emerging concerns that require attention to be rectified. The purpose of this study is also specified to ensure that it proceeds in the proper direction. This study is designed to serve as a resource for academicians in conducting halāl research, as well as for the expansion of the halāl industry in Linxia, which will benefit both Muslim customers and producers. With that, Muslims may help each other in gaining the pleasure of Allah SWT.

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