

Perspectives of Maranao People at Zamboanga del Sur about Halal Food

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ABSTRACT

This study provides insights into the broader context of religiosity and cultural and societal aspects of Halal consumption from the viewpoints of Maranaos in Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines. It highlights the growing interest in Halal food markets around the world and its particular significance to the Maranaoan community, which is primarily Muslim living in a multicultural environment. It emphasises how strategic it is to comprehend how people think about Halal cuisine to promote inclusion and Filipino economic development within the Halal food industry. The study conducted in-depth interviews with Five Maranaoan respondents using a qualitative technique. The results were interpreted using thematic analysis, with an emphasis on the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours as well as the socio-cultural and religious elements impacting their views on Halal food. The findings highlight the value of cultural identity, community cohesion, and religious observance while revealing a deep regard for Halal culinary customs. However, they also point to difficulties, including the lack of awareness among non-Muslims in the area and the accessibility of Halal-certified goods and labelling. The participants conveyed their wish for Halal practices to be more widely acknowledged and respected in the community and the local food business. This study has numerous implications. Understanding the Maranaoan perspective on Halal food can help stakeholders and policymakers create

inclusive policies and marketing strategies that address the ethical, cultural, and religious aspects of the Halal food sector. Furthermore, increasing the availability and understanding of Halal food can foster economic opportunities and social cohesiveness inside and outside the Maranaoan community. This study adds to the body of knowledge regarding cultural identity, religious eating customs, and the dynamics of Halal food consumption in multicultural environments.

Keywords: Custom; Halal Food; Inclusiveness

INTRODUCTION

The demand for Halal food has increased dramatically in recent years, mostly due to the growing demand from Muslim populations and the growing awareness among non-Muslims of the ethical and health benefits of Halal food(1–5). This increase in demand highlights the significance of Halal cuisine as an important cultural and economic phenomenon in addition to being a necessity for Muslims according to their religion (6,7). In this scenario, Muslim communities' viewpoints on Halal food become extremely important to comprehend the dynamics of Halal food consumption and its wider consequences, especially in areas where they cohabit with diverse cultural groups. One such group is the Maranaoan people of Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines, whose opinions on halal food capture the meeting point of modernity, culture, and religion(8,9).

As one of the biggest Muslim ethnic groups in the Philippines, the Maranaos have managed to preserve both their Islamic faith and rich cultural legacy in the predominantly Christian society. Their cultural customs and religious beliefs are firmly ingrained in their eating habits, particularly concerning Halal food. However, there are advantages and disadvantages to sustaining traditional dietary traditions due to the globalization of food markets and the growing blending of various cultural influences. The purpose of this study is to investigate the Maranaoan people's thoughts on halal food, including how they manage their dietary needs in a multicultural environment and what halal food means to them on a daily basis.

A thorough analysis of the literature indicates a need for more studies on the eating habits of the Maranaoan people, especially when it comes to Halal food. Studies that particularly address the beliefs and practices of Muslim populations in Southeast Asia, such as the Maranaos, are few despite the substantial body of research on the consumption of halal cuisine in Muslim-majority nations and among Muslim communities in the West (10–12). This vacuum in the research highlights the necessity for a targeted study of the perceptions of these populations regarding Halal food, the obstacles they encounter in obtaining it, and the cultural and religious significance these practices hold.

By utilizing a qualitative research approach, this study aims to close this disparity by capturing the complex viewpoints of Maranaos regarding halal cuisine. This study attempts to explore the layers of meaning that Halal food carries for the Maranaoan community in Zamboanga del Sur through in-depth interviews, looking at the interaction of religious responsibilities, cultural identity, and economic factors. This study adds to a deeper understanding of the complex aspects of Halal food consumption and provides insights into the larger conversations on cultural diversity, religious dietary practices, and the globalization of food cultures by concentrating on the

experiences and viewpoints of the Maranaoan people.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past decade, there has been a significant expansion in the literature on Halal food consumption. This reflects this field's increasing interest and importance in both academic and commercial circles(10,11). Research has primarily concentrated on the certification procedures, consumer habits, and market trends in countries with a Muslim majority. These studies provide valuable insights into the processes and difficulties involved in ensuring Halal compliance. The research emphasizes the absence of a standardized global standard and the resulting consequences for international trade (10). In addition, studies on consumer behavior, delve into the reasons behind the consumption of Halal food (11). They identify religious obligation, health concerns, and ethical considerations as significant factors that influence consumer choices.

When examining Southeast Asia, it becomes evident that the literature showcases a diverse range of cultural and religious influences on Halal food practices. They analyze how Muslim communities in this region manage their religious dietary needs in the midst of various cultural practices (13,14). These studies highlight the significance of considering local cultural contexts when examining Halal food practices and how these communities navigate the delicate balance between tradition and modernity. It is worth noting that there is a lack of research on particular ethnic groups in these regions, like the Maranaoan people of the Philippines. Their distinct perspectives and experiences with Halal food have not been thoroughly examined.

One significant theme that emerges in the literature is the role of globalization in transforming Halal food consumption patterns. The impact of global trade and the internationalization of food markets on Halal

certification processes and consumer trust (15,16). This research highlights the growing intricacy of Halal food supply chains and the difficulties that Muslim consumers encounter when trying to confirm the Halal status of food products in a global market. Scholars have started to take notice of the rise of digital platforms and social media in the realm of Halal food. These tools have become instrumental in spreading information and fostering consumer activism. This development opens up exciting possibilities for further research and community involvement.

In order to further enhance our understanding of Halal food consumption, it is crucial to conduct research that specifically examines the experiences of Muslim communities residing in multicultural and minority settings. Based on the literature review, it appears that there is a dearth of research on the dietary practices of communities like the Maranaoan people in the Philippines. Specifically, there is a need to explore how these communities manage the availability and certification of Halal food, as well as their perceptions of the cultural and religious importance of Halal food in their day-to-day lives. It is crucial to address this gap in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Halal food consumption in various cultural and geographical settings. This understanding will help shape policies and practices that cater to the needs and preferences of Muslim communities globally.

MATERIALS & METHODS

In order to gain insights into the views of the Maranaoan community in Zamboanga del Sur on Halal food, a qualitative research approach was utilized. We selected this approach because it is highly effective in capturing the depth and complexity of participants' experiences, beliefs, and practices. The study entailed conducting semi-structured interviews with five informants from the Maranaoan community. The informants were carefully chosen using purposive sampling to ensure a wide range of

participants in terms of age, gender, socioeconomic status, and level of religious observance. The selection criteria were designed to collect a wide range of insights and experiences regarding Halal food consumption in this particular cultural and religious context.

The interviews were conducted in a range of convenient settings for the informants, including their homes, community centers, or places of business. The duration of each interview ranged from 60 to 90 minutes, and a carefully crafted interview protocol was used to gather comprehensive information about the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to Halal food. The discussion covered various important aspects, such as their knowledge of Halal requirements, the difficulties they face in obtaining Halal-certified products, the importance of Halal food in their everyday routines, and their views on the wider food industry in Zamboanga del Sur. The interviews were recorded with the informants' permission, and detailed notes were made to capture both verbal and non-verbal cues, as well as contextual details.

The data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, which consisted of multiple stages. To ensure accuracy, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Afterwards, the transcripts underwent open coding to identify initial themes and patterns. After that, we conducted axial coding to further refine and establish connections between these themes. Then, we proceeded with selective coding to identify the core themes that most accurately reflected the perspectives of the informants. The data was analyzed using NVivo software to help with the organization and retrieval of coded segments. During the analysis, the researchers employed reflexive practices, such as writing memos and engaging in peer debriefing, to strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Through careful analysis, a deep understanding of the Maranaoan people's perspectives on Halal food was revealed. This analysis shed light on the cultural importance of Halal food to

the community, as well as the practical obstacles they encounter in upholding their dietary traditions.

RESULT

The study findings indicate a notable level of awareness and comprehension regarding Halal food among the Maranaoan people in Zamboanga del Sur. The informants displayed a strong understanding of Halal requirements, highlighting the significance of religious adherence in their dietary practices. They expressed a strong link between Halal food and their Islamic faith, considering the observance of Halal guidelines as a crucial part of their religious identity and everyday routine. The understanding encompassed more than just the fundamental concepts of Halal (permissible) and Haram (forbidden). It also included a deep knowledge of the Halal certification procedures and the importance of verifying the authenticity of Halal labels. In spite of being well-informed, the informants mentioned encountering various difficulties when trying to find Halal-certified products in their area. There have been concerns raised regarding the limited availability of Halal food options, especially in mainstream markets and establishments that are not owned by Muslims. Obtaining Halal products often required traveling to specific Halal-certified stores or relying on community networks due to their scarcity. In addition, there was a widespread doubt regarding the credibility of certain Halal certifications. Informants expressed a lack of confidence in specific certification bodies and emphasized the importance of stricter and more transparent certification procedures.

The study also emphasized the significance of cultural and community practices in strengthening awareness and consumption of Halal food. Informants shared insights on how family traditions, community gatherings, and religious education played significant roles in transmitting knowledge about Halal food. The social structures not only offered practical guidance on Halal

compliance, but also emphasized the cultural importance of Halal food as a symbol of Maranaoan identity. The community's dedication to upholding Halal dietary practices is evident through their organization of Halal food fairs, educational campaigns, and religious events.

It is worth noting that the results also revealed an increasing awareness and curiosity about Halal food among non-Muslim residents in Zamboanga del Sur. It has been observed that when engaging with non-Muslim friends, colleagues, and neighbors, conversations about Halal food frequently arise. Interestingly, some non-Muslims have shown curiosity about Halal products due to their perceived health and ethical advantages. The cross-cultural exchange, although currently limited, indicated possibilities for wider acceptance and integration of Halal food into the local food market. It is important to emphasize the importance of making Halal food more accessible and well-known. This can be achieved through educational programs that promote a better understanding and appreciation for Halal dietary practices among the general public.

The cultural aspects of Halal food practices among the Maranaoan people of Zamboanga del Sur extend beyond mere dietary observance and are closely linked to their identity, traditions, and community existence. The informants stressed that Halal eating is not alone a religious duty but also a significant component of their cultural legacy. The cultural significance of food is seen in its preparation, sharing, and consumption. These practices are considered significant measures that enhance community bonds and safeguard cultural customs.

An important cultural element is the safeguarding of Maranaoan cultural identity through their traditional cuisine, which is intrinsically Halal. Informants exhibited immense enthusiasm when discussing traditional foods such as "piaparan" and "rendang," which serve as both delectable culinary masterpieces and important

representations of their cultural legacy. These foods are frequently savored during significant cultural and religious events, such as weddings, "hariraya" (Eid festivities), and other communal gatherings. They function as a significant link to their ancestry and collective history.

Furthermore, the act of making Halal food is enhanced by cultural ceremonies that reinforce communal principles and foster social harmony. For instance, the practice of communal animal killing at "Eid al-Adha" (the Festival of Sacrifice) functions as a religious ritual and a cultural gathering that promotes community cohesion. This procedure promotes inclusivity, involving everyone in tasks such as selecting the animal and sharing the meat, fostering a sense of unity and reciprocal support. The act of congregating to prepare and partake in meals emphasizes the notable impact that Halal cuisine has in promoting social bonds and enhancing communal solidarity.

An intriguing cultural facet to contemplate is the intergenerational transmission of Halal dietary practices. Elders play a crucial role in imparting knowledge to younger family members regarding the significance of Halal food and the proper techniques for its preparation. The intergenerational transfer of cultural and religious knowledge plays a crucial role in safeguarding and perpetuating cultural identity and continuity. The importance of education within the family and community emphasizes the critical function of Halal food in maintaining cultural customs and fostering a feeling of identity among the Maranaoan community.

The Maranaoan people exhibit a wide range of cultural elements in their Halal eating traditions, which encompass traditional culinary practices, communal ceremonies, and intergenerational transmission of knowledge. These practices have various functions, such as satisfying religious duties, expressing cultural heritage, building community solidarity, and developing social integration. To truly comprehend the significance of Halal food within the Maranaoan community, it is essential to

possess a profound comprehension of these cultural components. It also aids in developing comprehensive policies and procedures that respect and accommodate their cultural and religious needs.

DISCUSSION

The arguments around the beliefs of the Maranaoan people on Halal food and their expectations emphasize the complex interplay between religious adherence, cultural legacy, and the challenges of coexisting in a multicultural society. The Maranaoan community's steadfast dedication to Halal as a key tenet of their Islamic faith significantly shapes their daily lives, impacting their food choices and religious practices. This belief system places great emphasis on adhering to religious commandments and fostering a deep dedication to spiritual purity and ethical conduct(15,16). The presence of a repeating motif in this context is clearly apparent, indicating a consistent emphasis on the expectation of receiving respect and assistance in following Halal rules. This theme reflects a broader aspiration for acknowledgment and accommodation of religious and cultural views.

A crucial aspect to contemplate in the discourse is the Maranaoan community's aspiration for more robust and reliable Halal certification procedure(15)s. There is an increasing demand for stricter standards and enforcement to tackle the existing problems related to the identification of genuinely Halal products. The difficulties stem from discrepancies and a dearth of openness in the certification process. The community's confidence in these certification processes is intricately linked to their faith in the purity of Halal food. Ensuring the legitimacy of Halal labeling is crucial to fulfill religious duties without compromising. Governmental and institutional assistance is expected to achieve global recognition and adherence to Halal certification criteria, while ensuring consistency.

Furthermore, the conversations provided insights into the cultural norms and values of

the Maranaoan community about the preservation and promotion of their culinary heritage. Their strong dedication to preserving the authenticity of their traditional Halal recipes and cooking techniques is clearly apparent, as these are considered integral components of their cultural legacy. Anticipated is the celebration and incorporation of these customs within the wider gastronomic scene of Zamboanga del Sur and other areas. The community is eager to investigate several strategies to promote their cuisine, including the organization of culinary festivals, markets, and educational initiatives. These programs seek to promote international understanding and encourage a deeper appreciation for varied culinary cultures.

The discussions among the Maranaoan people about Halal food are imbued with broader aspirations for social recognition, inclusiveness, and support. The individuals articulate their preference for their nutritional requirements to be catered to in public areas, educational institutions, medical facilities, and professional environments. This signifies their desire for acknowledgment and inclusion within the diverse fabric of Zamboanga del Sur. Non-Muslims should strive to gain a thorough comprehension of Halal principles and the cultural importance of Halal dietary practices. This can promote greater inclusivity and develop more courteous interactions.

The Maranaoan people's perspectives on Halal food ultimately demonstrate a profound dedication to their religious beliefs, a robust sense of cultural heritage, and a need for societal inclusion. In order to fulfill these expectations, it is crucial for various stakeholders, including government entities, certification agencies, and the broader community, to collaborate and establish an all-encompassing atmosphere. This will enable the Maranaoan people to freely participate in their food and cultural customs without encountering any hindrances.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, this study provides valuable insights into the complex connection between the beliefs and practices of the Maranaoan people when it comes to Halal food, and how it relates to their wider cultural and religious identity. The study's findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, certification bodies, and the broader community, emphasizing the importance of these dietary laws in their daily lives. Nevertheless, the difficulties they encounter in obtaining trustworthy Halal-certified products and the necessity for more robust and transparent certification procedures underscore significant areas that demand attention and enhancement. In addition, the cultural significance of traditional Halal cuisine and the communal customs related to food preparation and consumption highlight the importance of Halal food in preserving cultural heritage and promoting community unity.

The Maranaoan people have expectations that go beyond just following dietary rules. They hope for wider societal acknowledgement and assistance in preserving their religious and cultural traditions. It is important to consider the implementation of stronger Halal certification standards, improved availability of Halal products, and a wider societal acceptance and accommodation of their dietary needs. It is crucial to address these needs in order to promote inclusivity and respect for cultural diversity in Zamboanga del Sur. By recognizing and endorsing the Halal practices of the Maranaoan community, stakeholders can contribute to the preservation and growth of these traditions, which in turn enhances the diverse cultural landscape of the region. The study's findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, certification bodies, and the broader community, emphasizing the significance of creating an environment that respects and supports religious and cultural practices.

Declaration by Authors

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