

Consumer trust in local meat supply chains and its impact on willingness to pay: advancing sustainable food systems in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Trust plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior within food systems, particularly in the context of local meat supply chains where concerns over food safety, authenticity, and sustainability are growing. This study investigates the relationship between consumer trust and willingness to pay (WTP) for locally produced meat in Malaysia, aiming to assess how trust in locality, quality, safety, labeling, certificate and packaging for local meat influences consumer purchasing decisions and willingness to pay. Using a Contingent Valuation Method (CVM), a Double Bounded Dichotomous Choice (DBDC) model was used to analyse an econometric model and survey data among 292 respondents. The analysis explores demographic and technical determinants of trust and WTP while considering price sensitivity factors unique to the Malaysian context. Certificate and packaging are statistically significant with WTP, and it reveal that consumers' WTP at RM28.88. By advancing understanding of consumer behavior in emerging markets, this study contributes to the development of resilient and sustainable food systems aligned with Malaysia's broader food security and environmental goals. These insights contribute to the development of resilient and sustainable food systems in Malaysia, encouraging trust-based purchasing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The demand and supply of food has been a key factor in the survival of human civilisations for thousands of years. Global food demand tends to outpace supply. Global food demand continues to rise due to a combination of factors, including increasing rates of hunger and malnutrition, rapid population growth, and the compounding effects of natural resource overexploitation, climate change, food waste, and biodiversity loss. Most of the producers focused on production and consumption as a whole and neglected the consequences for the environment. It is challenging to meet the production of our needs without exploiting natural resources and being able to sustain the food. Expanding and accelerating the transition to sustainable food and agriculture is essential for ensuring global food security, creating economic and social opportunities, and safeguarding the ecosystem services that agriculture relies upon (FAO).

Increasing emphasis on food security, public health, and environmental sustainability has intensified global interest in strengthening local food systems. Consumer trust plays a

pivotal role in determining purchasing behaviour, especially for perishable and ethically sensitive commodities, such as meat. Trust is often shaped by factors such as transparency, certification, hygiene practices and the perceived integrity of producers and suppliers (Chamhuri & Batt, 2015). Isahak et al. (2024) found the most prioritised factors when deciding to buy meat are freshness, halal and cleanliness. Consumers place greater trust in beef purchased from local butchers, as these butchers often conduct the slaughtering process themselves, thereby ensuring the meat's halal integrity and freshness. As among European consumers, they also demonstrated a significant preference for domestically produced food. The willingness to pay in this country is influenced by food safety certificates (Meixner et al., 2024).

Many Malaysian consumers remain cautious about the handling, origin, and management of local meat products despite the increasing awareness of sustainable consumption. These concerns can negatively affect consumer propensity to spend on local meat, which in turn hinders the development of sustainable food systems. Although consumer trust is widely known as a determinant of food purchasing behaviour, there

is a lack of research on how customers' trust in local meat supply chains affects their willingness to pay, especially in Malaysia. In the absence of this knowledge, policies and business plans aimed at enhancing sustainable food systems may fail to address the needs and motivations of consumers.

Despite growing global awareness of food safety and sustainability, research in emerging markets like Malaysia remains limited in capturing how consumer trust factors, such as certification, food safety, and packaging influence willingness to pay (WTP) within local meat supply chains. Localized empirical data linking these consumer behaviors to sustainable food system outcomes remains scarce.

This study investigates how consumer trust in the local meat supply influences their willingness to pay in Malaysia. In particular, this research will identify factors that affect consumer trust in local meat and examine how trust influences consumers' willingness to pay for local meat. Thus, this study is important because it will offer practical insights for policymakers, producers, and supply chain players to improve communication, transparency, and quality assurance measures that reinforce public confidence in local meat products, besides supporting National Agrofood Policy (NAP 2.0), which emphasises the need for resilient, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable food systems.

The following sections of the paper are organised as outlined below. Section 2.0 outlines the framework for the literature review. Section 3.0 discusses sampling and data collection, followed by data analysis. Section 4.0 presents the results and discussion. Section 5.0 presents the author's conclusions and recommendations.

1.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour and Trust Theory

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is a psychological framework developed by Icek Ajzen, guided by three kinds of considerations: beliefs about the likely outcomes of the behavior, beliefs about the normative expectations of others, and beliefs about the presence of factors that may facilitate or impede performance of the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In a study on applied TPB to traditional local meat products in Trentino, Italy, Visintin et al. (2012) found that subjective norms, attitudes and perceived control were significant indicators to consume locally produced meat. Research on TPB and consumer trust in local meat or food supply chains is limited in Malaysia despite its The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is a psychological framework developed by Icek Ajzen, guided by three kinds of considerations: beliefs about the likely outcomes of the behavior, beliefs about the normative expectations of others,

and beliefs about the presence of factors that may facilitate or impede performance of the behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

In a study on applying TPB to traditional local meat products in Trentino, Italy, Visintin et al. (2012) found that subjective norms, attitudes and perceived control were significant indicators of consuming locally produced meat. Research on TPB and consumer trust in local meat or food supply chains is limited in Malaysia despite its expanding scope. Empirical studies have shown subjective norms and attitudes were found to be strong indicators of food choices and behavioural intentions in a larger study that used TPB to evaluate consumer behaviour in Malaysia (Madahi & Sukati, 2016). Research by Zaman et al. (2022) also shows that subjective norms, attitudes, health perceptions, environmental concerns, and trust greatly affect purchase intention.

Trust Theory also contributes in understanding consumer behavior and cooperation within local meat supply chains. Research by Paterson et al., (2008) identify trust gaps in reliability, information sharing, customization, and timeliness. These gaps undermine effective cooperation and consumer confidence, demonstrating the importance of actively building and managing supply chain trust. While empirical finding from research by Szűcs & Koncz, (2020) indicates that consumers prefer to buy local products when they trust the origin, production methods, and ethical standards. Trust acts as both a marketing instrument and a stabilizer for a small producer. A methodology proposed by Chua & Al-Hakim (2005) combines trust theory, stakeholder theory, and diffusion of innovation to explain how trust from stakeholders affects the use of technology in the meat supply chain. The approach emphasizes the significance of stakeholders' perceptions of trust in the adoption of new technologies, such as traceability and transparency tools, which are essential for local and ethical meat systems.

Trust-related criteria, including certification, halal assurance, and freshness, regularly serve as significant predictors of consumer behaviour, while their influence varies by context. Research from Europe and Africa underscores certification as a potent premium indicator, with consumers demonstrating a willingness to pay much higher prices for certified or animal-friendly products (Nocella et al., 2010; Amfo & Ali, 2020). From the standpoint of Trust Theory, certification functions as a credibility mechanism that mitigates perceived risk and indicates ethical quality. In Malaysia, halal purity and freshness are typically perceived as fundamental expectations rather than distinguishing characteristics. Research indicates that Malaysian consumers have confidence in meat procured from local butchers mostly due to the transparency of the halal procedure and its integration into cultural norms, rendering it a basic requirement rather than a luxury feature (Kamisah et

al., 2018; Isahak et al., 2024). This distinction indicates that although certification is globally applicable, its role differs: in certain markets, it distinguishes items, but in Malaysia, it bolsters fundamental validity. Connecting this to the Theory of Planned Behaviour, halal compliance corresponds with subjective norms, although may not substantially influence the willingness to pay beyond fundamental expectations. This study addresses this gap by empirically examining how certification and halal assurance interact with other trust criteria in influencing willingness to pay in Malaysia.

1.2 Consumer Trust in Meat Supply Chains

Studies by Brusset et al., (2024) explain that consumer trust and willingness to pay (WTP) are the key concepts in understanding consumer behaviour, particularly as markets transition towards quality, sustainability, and ethical activities. Consumer trust in local meat supply chains significantly influences consumers' willingness to pay a premium price for meat products. Various aspects such as price, location, food safety, product quality, certification, labelling, and packaging, can affect trust (Musa & Kadir, 2025). According to Tieman et al., (2013), and Nawi et al., (2023), trust in halal certification is the main WTP in Malaysia, which most of the consumers are willing to pay for meat logistics with halal segregation, food safety and certification from authorities. Price remains a significant attribute to WTP, and it is negatively correlated McKay et al., (2019); consumers will reject higher prices unless by strong trust factors like locality and verified labels, and some consumers prioritise price when strong quality is present (Spers et al., 2022). Locality strongly influences WTP, as it relates to freshness, community support, and ethical production practices (Mehrerjedi & Woods, 2022). Consumers in the Northern Great Plains demonstrated specific preferences for beef selected as locally sourced (Chang et al., 2013).

Some studies used the Contingent Valuation Method (CVM) to assess consumer trust in local meat supply in various countries. In a European study, trust in supply chain operators significantly raised consumers' WTP for certified animal-friendly products (Nocella et al., 2010). In Ghana, the level of trust that consumers have in certification agencies significantly influenced their willingness to pay for enhanced meat attributes. The study demonstrated that certain individuals, particularly those with higher education and income levels, are willing to pay up to 59% more (Amfo & Ali, 2020). A study conducted in Klang Valley, Malaysia, revealed that 57.7% of consumers expressed a willingness to pay a premium for traceable meat. Factors related to trust, such as transparency, halal certification, and food safety, were significant. Consumers exhibiting trust in the traceability system demonstrated a greater propensity to pay elevated

prices for meat perceived as safer and more transparently sourced (Nawi et al., 2023).

The willingness to pay (WTP) for local meat does not sufficiently explore consumer trust, particularly regarding safety, traceability, and certification (Sun et al., 2017). Most of the studies focus on general traceability preferences; however, trust mechanisms such as certification credibility and transparency are often inconsistently implemented (Nawi et al., 2023; Tieman et al., 2013). The study from Narayan et al., 2024, stressed food safety and environmental standards to meet willingness to pay (WTP) in a meat and food context, but only a few studies measure consumer knowledge of certification and trust. Research on consumer trust in local meat supply chains has been ongoing for an extended period. In Malaysia, this area remains underdeveloped, despite the potential for studies to enhance consumers' willingness to pay significantly. This research is timely for establishing sustainable food systems and enhancing the country's food security.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Data collection

A descriptive quantitative research design allowed researchers to measure variables and describe relationships between variables. A set of questionnaires was developed to investigate a consumer trust in local meat supply chains and its impact on willingness to pay. The survey was distributed using an online platform to the respondents, which focusing to Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) staff across Malaysia. The data was collected in June 2024. By using a sample table from Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a total number of 400 samples will be counted for this study. However, due to time constraint, a total of 350 respondents responded to the survey, and after filtering and data cleaning, including checks for completeness, only 292 can be used for the data analysis. The inclusion criteria required participants to be UiTM staff (academic and non-academic staff). Exclusion criteria eliminated respondents who did not complete the survey or provide inconsistent responses. Approval for ethics was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), designated by the code REC/05/2024(ST/MR/98). Consent was secured from each participant prior to the commencement of the questionnaire.

2.2 Data analysis

This study combined a few analysis in order to identify consumer trust in local meat supply chains. This study employed the descriptive analysis to illustrate the socio-demographic traits of the consumers and a Double-Bounded Dichotomous Choice Contingent Valuation Method (DBDC-

CVM) (Model 1 and 2) to regress the consumer trust impact on willingness to pay. Besides, a model by Cameron (1988) is used to estimate mean WTP value (Model 3). The initial price for local meat is RM35, according to the market price of local meat, and the price increased to higher bid if the respondent answers yes for the initial price. There is four possible responses combined, which are Yes-Yes, Yes-No, No-Yes and No-No.

$$WTP_i = X_i\beta + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

Where X_i is an explanatory variable for respondents (socio-demographic and consumer trust), β is a coefficient estimated, and ε_i is an error term. The regression equation used for this study:

$$WTP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Age} + \beta_2 \text{Income} + \beta_3 \text{Gender} + \beta_4 \text{Education} + \beta_5 \text{Price of meat} + \beta_6 \text{Quality of meat} + \beta_7 \text{Certificate} + \beta_8 \text{Packaging} + \beta_9 \text{Locality} + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

$$\text{Mean WTP} = \frac{\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \dots + \beta_n X_n}{-\beta_{\text{BID}}} \quad (3)$$

The data was analyzed using Statistical software STATA. The variables chosen were divided into two, socio-demographic variables and consumer trust variables. The details of the variables as in Table 1.

Table 1: List of variables used in this paper (Dependent and Independent Variables)

Dependent Variable:	Willingness to pay for local meat
Independent Variables:	
Socio-Demographic Variables	Age, income, gender, education
Consumer Trust	Price of meat, quality of meat, certificate, packaging, locality

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics

The study consisted of 292 respondents, 72.26% female and 27.74 male. Most of the respondents are married (82.88%) and consist of Malay (95.21%). The age distribution indicated that a significant majority of respondents (89.38%) is from 25–54 years age group, signifying a mature, working-age demographic, and often responsible for grocery shopping. Income levels were reasonable, with 56.85% of respondents earning between RM4,850 and RM10,959, 38.70% earning below RM4,849, and merely 5.15% earning above RM10,960. The respondents had a high educational profile, with 46.15% possessing a Master's degree and 16.92% holding a PhD, indicating a knowledgeable cohort likely to be more aware of food safety, quality, and ethical sourcing.

Table 2: Socio-demographic characteristics

Sample (n=292)		
Demographic		Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	72.26
	Male	27.74
Marital Status	Single	15.41
	Married	82.88
	Divorce	1.72
Race	Malay	95.21
	Chinese	0.34
	Indian	0.68
	Other	3.77
Age	15 – 24 years	1.03
	25 – 54 years	89.38
	55 – 64 years	9.59
Income	Below RM4,849	38.70
	RM4,850 – RM10,959	56.85
	RM10,960 and above	5.15
Education Level	Secondary School	10.77
	Diploma	4.62
	Degree	21.54
	Master	46.15
	PhD	16.92

3.2 Consumer Trust on Local Meat

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 3 indicate that halal certification significantly influences consumer preferences for local beef, with 83.73% of respondents strongly agreeing. This finding aligns with existing literature that identifies halal assurance as an essential requirement for Muslim consumers in Malaysia and comparable settings (Karpova et al., 2025). Furthermore, freshness (70.49%) and food safety (61.81%) were identified as primary concerns, indicating a growing consumer emphasis on hygiene, shelf life, and health risks associated with food. This aligns with the findings of Mustapa et al. (2025), which highlighted that safety and freshness are significant factors influencing the selection of local or sustainable meat products.

Price remains significant, with 47.22% of respondents strongly agree and 34.37% agree that price is important variable for trust. However, its lower ranking compared to halal and freshness indicates a shift towards value-driven consumer behaviour, rather than a sole focus on cost. This trend aligns with findings by Lecegui et al. (2023), which demonstrate that consumers are willing to pay higher prices for environmentally responsible and locally sourced meat. Furthermore, locality (46.18%) and perceived quality (57.98%) received high ratings, reflecting a significant preference for traceable and trusted sources. This aligns with the findings of Angón et al. (2021), who highlighted that consumers prioritise beef produced through transparent and certified systems.

Table 3: Consumer Trust on Local Meat

Variable	Percentage (%)				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Halal	2.43	1.04	2.74	10.06	83.73
Price	2.1	3.47	12.84	34.37	47.22
Locality	6.6	3.82	5.55	37.85	46.18
Quality	1.39	2.09	5.55	32.98	57.98
Food safety	1.72	1.74	4.17	30.56	61.81
Promotion	4.88	11.8	31.25	27.77	24.3
Labelling	3.48	6.94	31.95	32.98	24.65
Taste	5.55	3.48	13.89	29.51	47.57
Packaging	31.97	10.74	2.43	32.64	22.22
Freshness	1.73	1.74	2.43	23.61	70.49
Nutrient	2.08	2.78	14.24	31.59	49.31
Certification	1.81	3.48	13.81	29.51	51.39

Furthermore, certification (51.39%) received substantial support, highlighting the significance of formal assurance mechanisms in consumer decision-making, particularly concerning safety and authenticity. In contrast, only a few respondents strongly agreed that promotion (24.3%) and packaging (22.22%) as a main concern in consumer trust. It is less significant relative to intrinsic product values such as safety, origin, and religious compliance. This pattern indicates that Malaysian consumers prioritise ethical, safe, and high-quality meat attributes rather than superficial branding, reflecting a wider global trend towards conscious, value-based food consumption.

3.3 Double Bounded Dichotomous Choice Analysis

Double Bounded Dichotomous Choice modelling was used to estimate the value of willingness to pay among respondents towards local meat, affecting by consumer trust. Statistical software STATA was used to analyse the model.

Table 4: Regression of Double Bounded Dichotomous Choice Analysis

Variable	Coeff.	Std. error
Constant	-0.0898	0.147
Age	0.0264	0.379
Income	-0.1971	0.235
Gender	0.4107	0.268
Education	0.0111	0.115
Price of Meat	-0.0342	0.158
Quality of Meat	0.0421	0.215
Certificate	0.3222**	0.163
Packaging	-0.2373*	0.134
Locality	-0.1035	0.184
Number of respondents	292	

***, **, and * denote levels of significance at 1%, 5%, and 10% respectively.

Table 4 shows the result regressed by a logit regression of double bounded dichotomous choice. The results show the determinants affecting respondents'

willingness to pay (WTP) for local meat products within a double-bounded contingent valuation framework. Based on the result, only certificate and packaging are significant with dependent variable, willingness to pay, respectively significant at 5% and 1%. This finding indicates that consumers attribute significant importance to product certification, likely owing to its function in ensuring quality, safety, and adherence to religious or health standards. The findings of Ortega et al. (2011) indicate that consumers demonstrate a willingness to pay a premium for certified and traceable food products, particularly when such certification conveys credibility and mitigates perceived risk.

Despite variables like halal compliance, freshness, and price achieving substantial consensus in the descriptive statistics, they were not statistically significant predictors in the regression model. This result can be elucidated by two factors. Initially, factors such as halal compliance and freshness are regarded as fundamental demands among Malaysian customers rather than distinguishing characteristics. Although price is a significant factor in purchase decisions, its impact is frequently moderated by trust-related indicators such as certification; consumers may be willing to pay a premium only when there is clear evidence of safety and authenticity. Conversely, in the absence of certification or trust procedures, price sensitivity diminishes in significance, as customers devalue the product's overall worth. This elucidates why price and halal were descriptively significant yet not statistically relevant in forecasting willingness to pay, while certification emerged as the pivotal element in establishing trust.

Furthermore, based on Table 4, packaging is significant at 10%, with a negative relationship with consumer's willingness to pay for local meat. This suggests consumer concerns about over-packaging, environmental sustainability, or a mismatch between packaging and perceived product quality. Research by Van Wezemael et al. (2011) supports this conclusion, suggesting that packaging can diminish trust in meat quality if perceived as excessive or misleading. Producers and marketers should adopt careful packaging strategies to maintain consumer confidence.

In contrast, the majority of demographic and perception-related variables, including age, income, gender, education, price sensitivity, quality perception, and local origin preference, did not serve as statistically significant predictors of willingness to pay (WTP). The results aligned with literature, demographic characteristics sometimes do not have a strong or consistent effect, as it is not really represent people's choice (Bateman et al., 2002). Skuras & Vakrou (2002) found that origin-labeled, education and demographic predicted WTP better than price of origin, due to correlated attributes and respondent attitude. These results may be the consequence

of the relatively homogeneous characteristics of the sample, cultural norms, or preference heterogeneity. Respondents who share comparable socio-economic backgrounds may demonstrate substantial variability in their attitudes towards local meat, which ultimately reduces the predictive power of demographic variables. Even though price, quality of meat, and locality are statistically insignificant, it is vital for interpreting regression outputs and designing future models or marketing strategies.

The analysis emphasizes the importance of certification visibility and trust-based cues in influencing consumer propensity to pay, surpassing the influence of standard socio-economic factors or general product perception. The results suggest that public policy and marketing strategies should prioritize the improvement of packaging transparency and consumer awareness of certification schemes, as these initiatives may more effectively stimulate demand for local livestock products than simple demographic targeting.

Based on the estimation results, the mean WTP can be calculated manually using the estimation model by Cameron (1988). However, for this study, it is estimated using the STATA software. Mean WTP was presented in Malaysian Ringgit (MYR). The calculated mean WTP is RM28.88, which lower than range of bidding price (minimum bidding price RM35.00 and maximum bidding price at RM40.00). Respondents likely selected a lower willingness to pay (WTP) as a result of factors such as price sensitivity, perceived product value, and available market alternatives. The survey suggested a minimum bid of RM35.00; however, the average respondent valued the product at RM28.88, likely to indicate their personal assessment of the local meat's worth. This is due to the trust and awareness among respondents, if meat is not clearly associated with visible certification, branding, or food safety assurances, consumers may discount its value and be unwilling to risk paying a higher amount. Trust significantly influences willingness to pay, particularly concerning food products. In the absence of visible certifications, traceability, or branding, consumers frequently assess product value as diminished. Research indicates that confidence in food safety and certification notably enhances willingness to pay for meat products (Ebata, Espinoza & Ton, 2025; Mishu et al., 2024; Mai et al., 2023).

4. CONCLUSION

This study establishes that consumer trust, especially in certification schemes, significantly influences the willingness to pay (WTP) for local beef in Malaysia. Certification emerged as the sole statistically significant positive factor of willingness to pay, underscoring its function

in indicating food safety, halal adherence, and quality assurance. In contrast, extensive or ambiguous packaging was observed to adversely impact willingness to pay, potentially due to environmental apprehension or perceived insincerity. Demographic indicators, including age, income, and education, had no significant predictive capacity, indicating that trust-related cues are more impactful than consumer background traits. These observations highlight the necessity for focused measures that improve certification visibility and mitigate consumer trust deficiencies to promote sustainable meat consumption and strengthen local food systems.

This study will help policymakers and industry players understand consumer behaviour in general. Integrate consumer trust with policy alignment, especially regarding national food security goals that ensure food security strategies are implemented effectively. This also aligns with Malaysia's National Agrofood Policy (NAP 2.0), which emphasises sustainability and local supply chains. Industry stakeholders should prioritise accurate communication regarding certification, implement sustainable and minimal packaging, and utilise traceability technology to enhance customer trust. By matching product presentation with ethical, safety, and environmental principles, producers and retailers can enhance demand for local beef at affordable prices. Joint initiatives among regulators and industry partners to bolster certification credibility, refine labelling methods, and guarantee environmental responsibility in packaging can promote consumer confidence and foster resilient, sustainable food systems in Malaysia.

However, this study is subject to several limitations. First, the sample is confined to academic staff from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), which may limit the generalisability of the findings to the broader Malaysian population. The high education level and income homogeneity of respondents may not reflect the diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of Malaysian meat consumers. Second, the research is exclusively based on self-reported survey data, which might be influenced by social desirability bias and does not capture actual purchasing behaviour or consumer trust. Third, only a few variables for consumer trust were selected for this research.

Thus, a few suggestions are reported for next consideration. First, by expanding the number of samplings and diverse demographics across regions and socio-economic groups in Malaysia to enhance representativeness, which not only UiTM staff, but to meat consumers around Malaysia. Next is by using mixed-method approaches that incorporate observational or experimental purchasing data could provide deeper insights into actual consumer behaviour.

Future research may also explore the impact of digital traceability tools, halal blockchain certification, and sustainability labelling in shaping trust and willingness to pay among different consumer segments. Finally, comparison analyses among various meat varieties or other perishable goods could reveal if the trust characteristics discovered in this research are consistently applicable across food categories. Such extensions would furnish more substantial empirical evidence to assist both policymakers and industry players in formulating consumer-centric policies for resilient and sustainable food systems.

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