TRUSTWORTHINESS, EXPERTISE AND LIKEABILITY TOWARDS HALAL PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR: DOES ATTITUDE MATTER?

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ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: Consumers prefer to review products and services through social media platforms before purchasing them. Consequently, social media influencers have become essential for advertising and reviewing products and services. Credible sources of information using persuasive messages are deemed as influential in the purchasing behaviours of consumers concerning products and services, especially among Gen Z. This paper examines the factors of social media influencers in the purchasing behaviour towards halal food products among Muslim Gen Z in Malaysia. Significantly, the world halal industry is one of the fastest growing markets, especially in the global market, with an estimated value worth around USD 2.3 trillion (excluding Islamic finance) a year.

Methodology: This study used the non-probability sampling method in selecting 226 respondents. Data collected were analysed using SPSS.

Findings: Findings showed that social media influencer trustworthiness, expertise and likeability could affect consumers' attitudes and behaviours towards halal food products. Attitude plays a vital role as a mediator in the relationship of social media influencers' trustworthiness, expertise, and likeability towards purchasing behaviour towards halal food products among Muslim Gen Z in Malaysia.

Contributions: Accordingly, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to marketing theory and the concepts of consumer behaviours, especially among Gen Z, towards halal food products in the context of Malaysia.

Keywords: Social media influencer, purchasing behaviour, halal food products, Muslim, Gen z.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian Third Industrial Master Plan, from 2016 to 2020, indicated Malaysia's aim to become the world's leading halal hub. The halal industry is projected to contribute about 5.8% to Malaysia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In fact, the halal global market is now following Malaysia, and other countries are competing to become a global hub in the halal industry. In addition, this industry is growing at 20% per year, estimating a value of US$560 billion, and the total estimated value of US$2.3 trillion. This value excludes Islamic Finance which is also growing rapidly (Elasrag, 2016). Subsequently, the halal industry is rapidly spreading its wings in the global economy.

In Malaysia, the young generation dominated about 29% of the total population of Malaysia which is about 852 600 people. Ultimately, Millennials are referred to be very concerned with quality assurance, living a healthy lifestyle and are a generation who do not like any limitations in selection.

Essentially, nowadays, social media usage is part of the norms and lifestyle among certain age groups in the society, especially among the Millennial and the younger generations (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). These new sources of information also meant that individuals now encounter thousands of commercials daily, and most of these come from social networking sites. According to Forbes (2016), through the survey done by Linqia Research in 2018, 86% of marketers and advertising agencies utilized social influencer marketing as part of their overall outreach strategy. Market analysts predicted that the influencer marketing industry is worth $15 billion by 2022, big increase from $8 billion in 2019. Notably, TikTok is a fast-growing influencer platform with over 1 billion active users in 2019, followed by Nano-influencers with less than 1,000 followers on Instagram, who have higher engagement rates of 7.2% as compared to mass influencers with more than 100,000 followers.

Apart from social media marketing, the term Word of Mouth (WOM) refers to the interpersonal communication among individuals, which is informal, not commercially motivated, and may take diverse forms including offline and online (Lin et al., 2021; Paley et al., 2019; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). WOM marketing differs from natural spreading information with the references to a company's products and services in how it may come as the result of a promotion, encouragement, or other influence by a company. Therefore, in the current situation, social media has become part of an important media platform. Today's media has been dominated by social media platforms. Accordingly, traditional media such as TV channels, radio and newspapers are no longer the first priorities used by today's consumers to seek information about products and services.

Moreover, Hall (2015) described social media influencers as "micro-endorsers" (as compared to "bigger" celebrity endorsers). In advertisements, the endorsers generally embody the same role that message sources play in the persuasion process. Social media influencers (SMIs) are a new category of a subscriber, similar to celebrity endorsers, who shape customer perceptions on social media platforms (Aziz et al., 2019).

As a result, this study aims to add up to the current research in this field by providing new perspectives and proficiency. Subsequently, various elements such as credibility and honesty, expertise, and likeability might affect Muslim Gen Z consumers' decisions to seek and buy halal food products and services. It is hoped that this paper would assist in providing understanding towards the various elements which could influence consumers' purchases. This would consequently offer valuable feedback to Malaysian Halal product and service providers on how to accelerate and diversify the marketability of their products and make them more aware that they should not just focus on marketing their products and services based on Halal certifications only.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Word of Mouth (WOM) Theory

Word of Mouth (WOM) communication is a type of non-commercial, interpersonal dialogue about products or services that occurs through two-way communication between consumers and people in their circle. WOM is a conventional way of marketing communication that has evolved into Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) with the growth of the internet.

Martensen and Grønholdt (2016) studied how consumer emotion and choice got affected by word-of-mouth with reference to the service industry. Moreover, Rahim et al.

(2016) mentioned that WOM is known as a traditional way of communication in marketing, and as the Internet was introduced, it is now known as Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM). WOM is both the oldest medium for sharing opinions about products or services and the one most likely to influence consumer behaviour, due to the high reliability and credibility transmitted by family and friends. In contrast, few studies have examined the interaction between perceived risk and eWOM source credibility (Hussain et al., 2017).

2.2 Purchasing Behaviour Towards Halal Food

Zeithaml (1988) stated that purchasing behaviour is the perceived quality as the overall or superiority or excellence about any products based on consumers' opinion. It can be said that perceived quality is different from the objective, higher-level perception of a product, a global appraisal and opinion made with consumer suggestions. Meanwhile, the term purchase or buying intention is the decision making to buy the product in future. Purchase intention is normally influenced through the use of social media. The earlier purchaser leaves a bookmark in the form of a review rating to help the forthcoming purchaser. Perceived quality, act as a mediator for purchase intention. Perceived quality evoked by the customer as overall judgment, opinion about superiority, excellence of the product. The customer has the intention to buy the product when the product quality and price are matched (Sulthana & Vasantha, 2021). Marketers must be aware of the many aspects that influence their target audiences' purchasing decisions and adjust their strategies appropriately (Khaniwale, 2015). A person's intentional purpose to make an attempt to acquire a product is known as buy interest. The focus of this essay is on consumer behaviour.

2.2.1 Factors Relating to Muslim Gen Z Purchasing Behaviour Towards Halal Food Products

There are mainly four factors that relate to the Muslim Gen Z purchasing behaviour towards halal products which are trustworthiness, expertise, likeability and attitude.

a) Trustworthiness

The trust paradigm in communication is the receiver's confidence level in believing the message expressed by SMI (Abdul Majid & Wahid, 2012; Nejad et al., 2014; Ohania, 1990). Consumers are more likely to consider a product recommended by SMI if they believe its sense of trustworthiness (Liu et al., 2015). According to Li et al. (2010), customer confidence in

endorsers is an important factor when looking for detailed information online. SMI as opposed to corporations or brands, are considered more reliable (Forbes, 2016), and have become a key source of product knowledge for consumers.

According to Rebelo (2017), the trustworthiness of an influencer is more convincing. When Instagram users view an influencer as dependable, truthful, consistent, genuine, and trustworthy, they are considered trustworthy. According to Zakaria et al. (2017), respondents' interest in halal products is significant to their trustworthiness level on halal products followed by their willingness to spend on halal products. SMI has the potential to develop trustworthy and innovative messages for a brand or product to capture the interest of customers. The purchasing intention of target audiences is higher when SMI are more reliable (Silvera & Austad, 2004) since they have more experience, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Nik Hashim et al., 2019; Mohamad et al., 2020; Omar et al., 2020).

Hypothesis (H1): Trustworthiness of SMI positively relates to Malaysian Muslim Gen Z purchasing behaviour towards halal food products.

b) Expertise

According to Tafesse (2016), since social media marketing is built upon the idea of interacting with brands and peer consumers, listening to genuine reviews and looking at peer users' real experiences, it is strategically relevant to consider how each online persona makes these interactions look "real." Social presence is a positive predictor of consumers' online trust and intention towards online shopping (Beldad et al., 2010). Moreover, Shen (2012) mentioned people feel more comfortable transacting with an online source if they feel that an actual human is present at the other end. Abidin (2016) gave several instances of situations when certain fashion bloggers became celebrities via Instagram platforms, their cultural values are inherent in their social media presence and embedded in all the posts they have shared to show how elegant they were in terms of their current lifestyle, public appearance, visited locations, and others.

Hypothesis (H2): SMI expertise positively relates to Malaysian Muslim Gen Z purchasing behaviour towards halal food products.

c) Likeability

Likeability can be defined as the information receiver's fondness towards the information source's physical looks and personal characteristics (McGuire, 1985; Kiecker & Cowles 2001; Teng et al., 2014). A consumer's perceptions towards a SMI can be said as one of the strongest factors in affecting the consumer's attitude towards a SMI (Li et al., 2014. Therefore, a famous SMI is seen as a more likable person which will bring greater influence on product choices for the consumers (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014; Abidin, 2016; Forbes, 2016). This is because consumers often regard SMIs as role models (Forbes, 2016). According to Wang et al. (2017); Xiao et al. (2018), the notion of likeability of an endorser positively enhances the products' credibility, and highly influences the consumers' attitude and purchase intentions. The self-brand connection is formed when the consumers have extensive knowledge and experiences about the brands and the consumers themselves. Then, the consumers would become active partners in the relationship, which is likely to produce consumer advocacy behaviour. In the context of halal food products, consumers have the tendency to try out the product brands and then would promote the brands to others.

Hypothesis (H3): Likeability to SMI positively relates to Malaysian Muslim Gen Z purchasing behaviour towards halal food products.

d) Attitude

According to Ajzen (1991), attitude is a person's degree of favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the behaviour. A person's attitude can be described as a comprehensive review of a concept. An individual's attitude towards a certain activity reflects how much individuals enjoy or despise doing it (Vizano et al., 2021). The attitude of a Muslim consumer shows his or her overall assessment of his or her likes and dislikes in practising the Islamic faith (Rochmanto & Widiyanto, 2014). Consumers who seem to have a positive attitude toward halal products are more likely to purchase halal food items, which make attitude one of the most important elements affecting halal food product purchase intentions (Elseidi, 2018).

In fact, consumers' attitudes are positively influenced by SMIs with appealing appearances and attributes, which in turn affect buying intent (Lim et al., 2017). Consumers, on the other hand, would not accept and purchase any information or items advocated by SMIs who are unfavourable to them, preferring instead to buy products and information supported and recommended by their favourite SMIs (Li et al., 2014; Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). The SMIs

physical attributes draw attention to the products and encourage customers to buy the recommended items (Erdogan et al., 2017). This is because SMIs are frequently viewed as role models by customers (Forbes, 2016). Hence, the attitude towards halal food leads towards moral assessment in consumption activities (Mainchum et al., 2017). In this study, the attitude variable is defined as the level of respondents' liking for halal food products.

Hypothesis (H4): The attitude of Malaysian Muslim Gen Z positively relates to the purchasing behaviour towards halal food products.

e) Attitude Mediating Effect of Purchasing Behaviour Towards Halal Food Products

In this study, Attitude serves as a mediator between Expertise, Likeability and Trustworthiness. According to Ajeng et al. (2018), their research highlighted Attitude as a mediator based on a study conducted on the knowledge of Muslim consumers towards halal products. In addition, the study also showed that Attitudes have positive influences on the intentions among Muslim consumers towards halal products. Hence, Setiawati et al. (2019) examined the factors in influencing consumers towards halal food. The results showed that Attitude factors play an important role as mediators. The influence of Attitude as a mediator clearly affected Millennial Muslim consumers, especially regarding their efforts to get and purchase halal food.

Moreover, Adiba (2019) stated that Attitude is one of the research factors. Specifically, the study presented consumer behaviour towards the purchase of halal products by making Attitudes as a mediator of the study. The results of this study showed the existence of Attitude factors as a mediator among consumers towards halal products and products. Another study conducted by Vita and Nurwanti (2017) was concerned about the factors which influenced Muslim consumers towards halal products and products. Vita and Nurwanti (2017) explored Attitude factors in the purchase of halal products.

The researcher emphasized the Attitude factor as a mediator which played a very important role in this study, especially on halal products and products. This study used the smart-PLS approach and concluded that Attitude factors are important factors in studying consumer intentions towards halal products, and there are relationships between Attitude as a mediator in influencing factors and intentions towards halal products.

Nevertheless, there is still insufficient studies done on Attitude as a mediator between Trustworthiness, Expertise, Likeability. Therefore, this study aims to fulfil the gap. The above discussions prompted the researchers to forward the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis (H5): Attitude of SMI mediates the association between Trustworthiness and Gen Z Purchasing Behaviour towards halal food products.

Hypothesis (H6): Attitude of SMI mediates the association between Expertise and Gen Z Purchasing Behaviour towards halal food products.

Hypothesis (H7): Attitude of SMI mediates the association between Likeability and Gen Z Purchasing Behaviour towards halal food products.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Framework

In seeking the answers to the hypothesis, this study has forwarded a research framework based on the variables of Trustworthiness, Expertise, Likeability, Attitude and Purchasing Behaviour. Theoretical Framework is presented in Figure 1.
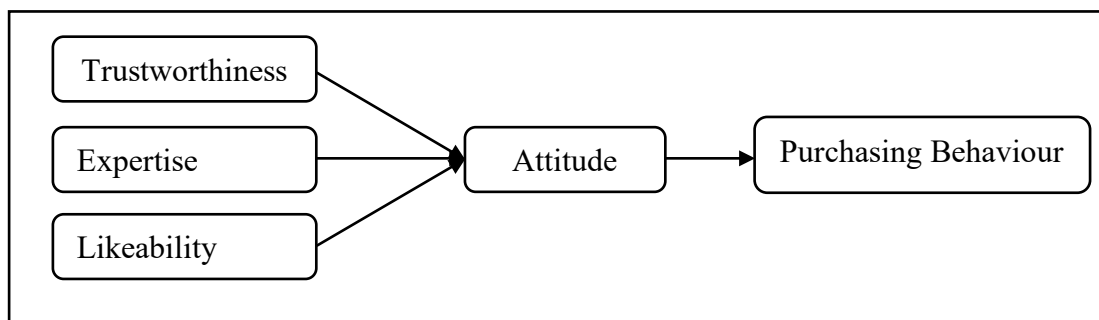

Figure 1: Research framework

3.2 Method

This study is done to investigate the purchasing behaviour of halal food products among Muslim Gen Z in Malaysia. Nonprobability sampling techniques were used in selecting 226 samples in this study due to the lack of Muslim Gen Z sampling frame. Data was collected using both direct and online questionnaires. Variables in this study were constructed based on sources in Table 1.

Table 1: Survey instrument

Variables	No. of Items	Sources
Trustworthiness	2	Zakaria et al. (2017)
Expertise	5	Liu et al. (2015)
Likeability	5	Lim et al. (2017)
		Djafarova & Rushworth (2017)
Attitude	6	Elseidi (2018)
Purchasing behaviour towards halal food	8	Vizano et al. (2021)
		Sulthana &Vasantha (2021).

Data collected were analysed using SPSS. Statistical method used in this study is descriptive analysis, reliability test, simple linear regression, and mediation analysis.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

Based on Table 2, there are 226 Gen Z respondents involved in this study, mostly female (77%). By age, the majority of them are in the range of 23 to 25 years old (44%), 27% are aged between 20 to 22 years old while another 28% are below 20 years old.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics

Demographic profile	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	52	23%
	Female	174	77%
Age group	Below 20	64	28%
	20 - 22	62	27%
	23 -25	100	44%
Total		226	100%

4.2 Reliability Test

All variables are reliable by referring to Cronbach's alpha values which are more than 0.7 (Table 3). The lowest value of Cronbach's alpha is 0.784 for likeability.

On average, respondents have a strong attitude (Mean=4.833) and purchasing behaviour towards halal food products (Mean=4.799). They also agree that the SMIs are trustworthy (Mean=4.093), expert on the products promoted (Mean=4.12) and likeable (Mean=4.059).

Table 3: Variable descriptive statistics and reliability test

Variable	No. of Items	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha
Behaviour	8	4.799	0.255	0.858
Attitude	6	4.833	0.284	0.925
Trustworthiness	2	4.093	0.831	0.934
Expertise	5	4.120	0.756	0.851
Likeability	5	4.059	0.783	0.784

4.3 Path Analysis

Path analysis results toward halal food purchasing behaviour are shown in Table 4. Trustworthiness of SMI is positively related to Muslim Gen Z purchasing behaviour towards halal food products (r=0.277, β=0.085), thus hypothesis 1 is supported.

SMI expertise is positively related to Muslim Gen Z purchasing behaviour towards halal food products (r=0.376, β=0.110), thus hypothesis 2 is supported. This finding is consistent with the study by Wang et al. (2017), which found that information presented by a credible source, for example, the SMIs could affect consumers' beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and behaviours. Likeability to SMI is positively related to Muslim Gen Z purchasing behaviour towards halal food products (r=0.304, β=0.087), thus hypothesis 3 is supported.

The attitude of Muslim Gen Z is positively related to the purchasing behaviour towards halal food products (r=0.617, β=0.553), thus hypothesis 4 is supported. This result is consistent with the study by Bastam et al. (2017), which found that consumer attitude positively affects their behaviour during online shopping.

Table 4: Path coefficients toward purchasing behaviour

Hypotheses	Relationship between variables	r	β	SD	t-value	Result
H1	Trustworthiness > Behaviour	0.277***	0.085***	0.020	4.321	Accepted
H2	Expertise > Behaviour	0.376***	0.110***	0.021	5.157	Accepted
H3	Likeability > Behaviour	0.304***	0.087***	0.021	4.134	Accepted
H4	Attitude > Behaviour	0.617***	0.553***	0.047	11.726	Accepted

*** *Significant at 1%*

* *Significant at 10%*

4.4 Mediation Analysis

Significant relationships of trustworthiness, expertise and likeability towards attitude are confirmed before testing the mediation effect of attitude in the study (Table 5). There is a significant positive relationship of trustworthiness (r=0.350, β=0.120), expertise (r=0.376, β=0.141), and likeability (r=0.304, β=0.110) towards attitude.

Table 5: Path coefficient towards attitude

Relationship between variables	r	β	SD	t-value
Trustworthiness > Attitude	0.350*	0.120***	0.021	5.585
Expertise > Attitude	0.376*	0.141***	0.023	6.071
Likeability > Attitude	0.304*	0.110***	0.023	4.772

* Significant at 1%

*** Significant at 10%

Mediation analysis results are shown in Table 6. Complete mediation occurs when the indirect effect is significant. Still, the direct effect is insignificant, while partial mediation occurs when both direct and indirect effects are significant with a lower direct effect than the total effect. Hypothesis 5 proposes the relationship between trustworthiness and behaviour mediated by attitude. The result shows that attitude fully mediates the relationship between trustworthiness and behaviour (β=0.063, t=4.500) thus supporting hypothesis 5.

Hypothesis H6 proposes the relationship between expertise and behaviour mediated by attitude. The result shows that attitude partially mediates the relationship between expertise and behaviour (β=0.073, t=4.867) thus supporting hypothesis 6.

Hypothesis H7 proposes the relationship between likeability and behaviour mediated by attitude. The result shows that attitude fully mediates the relationship between likeability and behaviour (β=0.058, t=4.833) thus supporting hypothesis 7.

Table 6: Mediator effects of attitude

Hypotheses	Relationship between variables	Effect	β value	Std. Dev.	t-value	Result
H5	Trustworthiness > Attitude > Behaviour	Direct	0.022	0.017	1.256	Accepted (Full mediation)
		Indirect	0.063***	0.014	4.500	
H6	Expertise > Attitude > Behaviour	Direct	0.037*	0.019	1.940	Accepted (Partial mediation)
		Indirect	0.073***	0.015	4.867	
H7	Likeability > Attitude > Behaviour	Direct	0.028	0.018	1.580	Accepted (Full mediation)
		Indirect	0.058***	0.012	4.833	

* Significant at 1%

*** Significant at 10%

5.0 CONCLUSION

This paper aims to contribute to the improvement of the marketing strategy for halal products and services, which focuses on the SMI factors, attitudes and purchasing behavior of halal food products. The finding shows that the purchasing behavior are significantly influenced by the SMI's trustworthiness, expertise, likeability and attitude towards halal products and services. Somehow, attitude towards halal products and services is the dominant factor in predicting the purchasing behavior among Muslim Gen Z.

The attitude towards halal products is a significant mediator and the causal relationship between the SMI trustworthiness, expertise and likeability towards halal products purchasing behavior. Furthermore, the attitude is fully mediating the relationship between trustworthiness and likeability towards purchasing behavior while partially mediating the relationship between expertise towards purchasing behavior. This finding suggests that marketing strategy using SMI should prioritise the expertise factor followed by the trustworthiness and likeability factors because Muslim Gen Z has a strong attitude toward halal products and services, and their purchasing behavior will not be easily influenced solely by the testimony and popularity of the SMI.

Nevertheless, further studies are encouraged to examine other aspects of marketing strategy on halal products and services mediating roles such as consumers' willingness, awareness, and risk tolerance.

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