THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HALAL FACTORS AND PURCHASE INTENTION OF FOOD PRODUCTS AS MODERATED BY WORD-OF-MOUTH COMMUNICATIONS

Muhammad Iskandar Hamzah♣
Universiti Teknologi MARA

Abdul Kadir Othman
Universiti Teknologi MARA

Wan Edura Wan Rashid
Universiti Teknologi MARA

Noor Maisurah Awang Ngah
Universiti Teknologi MARA

ABSTRACT

Due to increasing awareness of Halal food products, customers are becoming more concerned about the food they purchase. Marketers often presume that they will purchase the food products if the Halal indicators are labeled. However, there is no clear standard on what determines the food to be Halal and will be chosen by the customers. Therefore, this study intends to identify the Halal-related factors that contribute to purchase intention. We conducted a survey that involves customers of a Malaysian large retail hypermarket brand. Based on the analysis of 368 usable responses, four factors were found to be essential in influencing customers' purchase intention, namely: religious belief, Halal certificate, marketing concept, and Halal awareness. Contrary to our expectations, word-of-mouth fails to exert any contingent effect on purchase intention. The findings can be utilised by retailers in ensuring that their food products possess these elements in order to attract Muslim customers to purchase them.

Keywords: Purchase intention; Halal marketing concept; Halal awareness; Halal certification; Religious belief; Word-of-mouth communication.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Customers, especially Muslims, are getting more demanding and selective in determining the products they want to consume. The situation becomes contemplative when the purchase decision involves halal food products. Many factors are believed to contribute to this phenomenon. Among others, factors like heightened awareness, higher levels of education, an increase in the availability of products, and increase income levels are believed to influence customers' purchase intention.

♣ Corresponding author: Faculty of Business and Administration, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Puncak Alam, 42300 Bandar Puncak Alam, Selangor. Email: iskandarh@uitm.edu.my

Besides, halal purchase intention studies conducted in Malaysia have utilized Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour and Theory of Reasoned Action models (Husin, Ismail, & Rahman, 2016; Lada, Tanakinjal, & Amin, 2009; Suki & Salleh, 2016). However, these studies did not provide ample coverage on the halal certification, religious beliefs, and word-of-mouth within their models. The lack of studies in this aspect, especially in the country, makes it difficult to ascertain what factors matter most in affecting customers' purchase decision.

The world's halal trade is expanding rapidly, with global halal food spending to reach USD1.93 trillion in 2022 (Thomson Reuters, 2017). In Malaysia's case, halal food manufacturers need to meet strict standards before being awarded halal certification by JAKIM, the country's only halal accreditation authority. These standards cover the food ingredients and their manufacturing processes that include proper hygiene and sanitation procedures. These halal standards also comply with the existing food security standards, such as GMP and HACCP (Ab Talib, 2017). Because of this, halal certification is becoming widely accepted as a valid food safety certification. Hence, halal-certified food products have their own appeal even towards non-Muslims who are concerned about hygiene and safety, especially in Malaysia (Mathew, Abdullah, & Ismail, 2014; Rezai, Mohamed, & Shamsudin, 2012).

However, studies that group together consumers' attitudes towards halal certification, religious beliefs, and word of mouth as factors in predicting halal purchase intention are scarce within the extant literature. Since the conceptualization of behavioural intention is developed from the western world perspective, a comprehensive behavioural intention construct that incorporates Islamic values and Sharia principles is required to capture responses within the Muslim consumers context accurately. It has been argued that the predictive power TPB is limited when it comes to specific religiously-sanctioned behaviour, in this case, halal purchase intention (Bonne, Vermeir, Bergeaud-Blackler, & Verbeke, 2007). Against this backdrop, halal purchase intention remains a relevant phenomenon for further investigation since Muslims' buying behaviour of food products is not fully explored, including the products produced by non-Muslim manufacturers (Azam, 2016).

Therefore, the present study is meant to identify factors or dimensions of Halal that are perceived to be essential for customers to have purchase intention. The study was undertaken using a survey questionnaire that was distributed to customers of Giant Hypermarkets in Shah Alam. The results of the present study would be able to confirm the factors of Halal that contribute to customers' purchase intention. This paper is organized as follows. The first section will highlight the rationale for conducting this study. The second section will discuss the existing studies on purchase intention, each dimension of Halal purchasing motivation, and the role of word-of-mouth in affecting the intention to purchase food products.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.   *Halal Purchase Intention*

In explaining the human motivation to perform a particular action, Ajzen (1991) clarified that such action begins with the intention of performing the behaviour. In marketing, purchase intention refers to the aim set in mind by the consumer to purchase certain products in the near future. Purchase intention will ultimately lead to purchase decisions. In general, people will have the

intention to buy products if they have money to use, and they want the products to satisfy their physiological, social, safety, self-esteem, and self-actualization needs. At the physiological level, people buy food products to satisfy their hunger and thirst. Concerning social needs, they want their food purchase to appear pleasant to others. In terms of safety needs, they aim to feel safe by buying nutritious products that safeguard their healthy wellbeing. At higher self-esteem levels, people portray a sense of great pride in consuming food products that elevate their sense of accomplishment in life. All these relate to Maslow's hierarchy of needs that is also relevant in explaining customers' purchase intention.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) dictates that a person's behavioural intention can be explained by her attitude towards the behaviour, her beliefs of how other people judge that behaviour, and her readiness and her confidence in taking action in a given situation (Ajzen, 1991). Within the Muslim world context, the theory's assumption that people have the freedom to act without limitations violates the core Islamic values. These values are embedded within the Sharia' principles that are meant to guide Muslims' behaviour. Hence, the proposed model seeks to extend what is currently known about Muslim purchasing intention based on the tenets of TPB. Pertaining to Halal products' purchase intention, few factors are believed to have some weight in this direction. These factors include halal marketing concept, Halal awareness, Halal certificate, and religious belief. Halal marketing concept and Halal awareness are concerned with attitudinal dispositions that reflect a Muslim consumer's approval or disapproval towards a food product.

Meanwhile, halal certification is known to instill confidence and trust among consumers that the food product is processed in accordance with the rigorous standards advocated by the underlying Sharia' principles. Finally, religious belief explicates what kind of actions are benevolent deeds and what kind of behaviours are wrong and sinful. These beliefs are unconsciously institutionalized as norms in a Muslim's everyday conduct regardless of any given situation (work, personal, or leisure).

2.2.   *Halal Marketing Concept and Halal Purchase Intention*

Halal marketing concept is defined as the perception of the consumer on how the marketers or retailers introduce the halal products to the market. It involves four conventional marketing mixes that include product, price, place, and promotion. In establishing halal marketing concept, all of these four aspects must incorporate and adhere to the Halal concept (Shaari & Arifin, 2009). When the halal marketing concept appeals to their belief, customers are willing to purchase the products. In a study conducted by Ali, Xiaoling, Sherwani, and Ali (2017), positive personal attitude towards the consumption of Halal meat predicted the intention to purchase of Halal meat among international Muslim students in China. Besides, the promotion of halal products and branding was considered as the determinant of consumers purchase intention of halal products (Aziz & Chok, 2013).

Halal awareness relates to the understanding or familiarity of customers on the products they want to purchase. A Muslim consumer who possesses a high degree of halal awareness is always mindful of the product to be consumed, on whether it is permissible (halal), forbidden (haram), or somewhere between the lines (Eliasi & Dwyer, 2002). To create awareness, marketers, and retailers need to educate their customers by informing them of the contents or ingredients of the products, the processes involved to produce or prepare the products and the processes involved in distributing

the products or product handling. Some brands fell short of meeting up with customers' expectations when it comes to proper halal accreditation. The presence of animal-based substances used in food processing is a concern for consumers (Sahilah, Laila Liyana, Aravindran, Aminah, & Mohd Khan, 2016). There is also an increasing scepticism on the halal status of non-Muslims producers. Fake news on the authenticity of halal-certified food products circulated through social media worsens this situation. Customers are only willing to purchase the products if they are aware of the products' Halal status (Aziz & Chok, 2013).

To ascertain whether a food product is either Halal or Haram (forbidden), Muslim customers tend to scrutinize its Halal status. The easiest way to confirm the products' Halal status is through Halal certification. In Malaysia, JAKIM is responsible for awarding Halal status to companies or products that fulfill specific criteria set by the body. The Halal logo produced by JAKIM is the only verified logo that can be trusted by customers. However, nowadays, due to lack of enforcement, there are forged Halal logos produced by food manufacturing companies and importers. This situation occurs due to some barriers to obtaining halal certification. These include complexity and ambiguity on the halal concept (Ngah, Zainuddin, & Thurasamy, 2015), and costs implications associated with obtaining the halal certification (Talib, Rubin, & Khor, 2013). Regardless of these reasons, the abuse and misuse of the halal logo might affect public trust in the Halal certification authenticity. Malaysian Muslims, for example, found it hard to distinguish the original Halal logo from the fake or non-authoritative counterparts, and they demanded the use of a single and unified logo (Shafiq, Haque, & Omar, 2015). This situation indicates that halal-conscious Muslims are highly sensitive to the halal status of the food products that they consume. In recognizing the deep sense of obligation Muslims have towards halal consumption, it is common to see large household brands (such as Nestle, Unilever, and Fonterra) to have their products halal-certified in Muslim majority populated countries such as Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and Indonesia. Nevertheless, to ease the discussion, it is hypothesized that confidence towards Halal certification will influence customers' purchase intention.

Religious belief is defined as the levels of conviction a person has in practicing his religious principles. Religious beliefs will influence the attitudes and behaviours of individuals. Muslims are primarily guided by the Quran and Sunnah in establishing whether a particular act is considered as either right (good deeds) or wrong (sins). Those who have higher levels of religious belief are believed to be vigilant in choosing the right products as they believe that the food they consume will affect their ability to perform good deeds and avoid wrongful sins. In fact, Sharia-abiding Muslims are concerned about 'halalness' of the fabrics that they wear, perfume, cosmetics and lotions that they apply, and even toothpaste or mouth rinse that they use. People with religious beliefs regard morality as a set of objective truths (Shariff, 2015). They believe that their good deeds will not be rewarded or they will accumulate sin if their negligence led them to the use or consumption of forbidden or 'haram' products. According to Essoo and Dibb (2004), who studied Muslim, Christian, and Hindu consumers, there are significant differences in shopping behaviour between consumers who are 'devout religious' and 'casually religious'. Devout Muslims are more sceptical and doubtful of food products that are deemed to be suspicious in terms of its halal status. They also tend to exercise utmost caution on the halal status of the food products that they plan to consume as compared to their 'less devout' counterparts. Consumers scepticism, or also known as cynical behaviour may serve as a defensive psychological mechanism toward purchase intentions of any particular products (Chylinski & Chu, 2010). Therefore, it is expected that religious belief will determine Muslim customers' purchase intention.

2.3.   *Moderating roles of Word-of-Mouth Communication*

Word-of-mouth communication is considered as oral and unwritten advice either in the form of endorsement or disapproval by a customer to other prospective customers when receiving a product or service. In the present study, word-of-mouth is treated as a moderating variable. Studies have shown the ability of Word-of-mouth communication in influencing consumers' intention to purchase. In a study involving family takaful (Islamic insurance) consumers, word-of-mouth was found to influence purchase intention indirectly via subjective norm (Husin et al., 2016). This finding is supported by another detailed examination of the impact of word-of-mouth on tourists' travel intention by Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, and Manzari (2012) that proved to be significant. Muslim communities are considered to be close to each other, and they have a strong sense of collectivism (Ahmad, 2003). Hence the word of mouths on halal food status can travel very quickly across the communities (Ahmed, 2008). Those who receive higher word-of-mouth recommendations will be more influenced by Halal marketing concept, Halal awareness, Halal certificate, and religious belief, and subsequently affect their purchase intention. It is because people tend to trust the information they receive from their friends, family members, and their significant others. This sense of trust is expected to influence them to have higher levels of purchase intention.

Building on these discussions, the following set of hypotheses are generated:

H1a: Halal marketing concept significantly influences halal purchase intention towards food products.
H1b: Halal awareness significantly influences halal purchase intention towards food products.
H1c: Religious beliefs significantly influences halal purchase intention towards food products.
H1d: Halal certification significantly influences halal purchase intention towards food products.

H2a: Word-of-Mouth significantly moderates the relationships between halal factors (halal marketing concept, halal awareness, religious beliefs and halal certification) and halal purchase intention towards food products.
H2b: Word-of-Mouth significantly moderates the relationships between halal awareness and halal purchase intention towards food products.
H2c: Word-of-Mouth significantly moderates the relationships between religious beliefs and halal purchase intention towards food products.
H2d: Word-of-Mouth significantly moderates the relationships between halal certification and halal purchase intention towards food products.

The framework of this research is illustrated in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Framework of the research
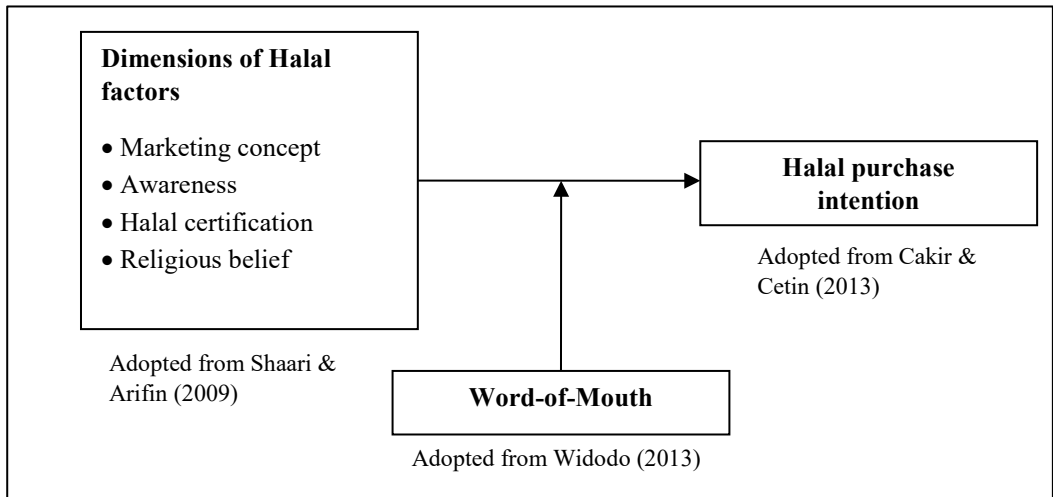
3. METHODOLOGY

This study used a correlational research design as it is meant to examine the relationship between Halal dimensions and customers' purchase intention. The unit of analysis for this study is individual. The convenience sampling technique that is one of the non-probability sampling methods was used to select the respondents since there is no sampling frame available for the use of probability sampling techniques. This technique is popular among marketing studies since the main objective of the study is to obtain the data from any of the customers patronising the premise.

The sample size for this study is 373, which is sufficient for generalization of the findings. There retail locations were chosen as the venue for data collection, a prominent hypermarket with branches in Section 17, Section 13, and Section 33, Shah Alam. The locations are selected based on the following justifications; (1) Shah Alam city has a high concentration of Muslim population that makes up two-thirds of its 600,000 estimated population (2) it is also the capital city of the wealthiest state in Malaysia, (3) the hypermarket is one of the major three hypermarket operators in Malaysia, and it is headquartered in one of the specified locations, and (4) majority of the food products in these retail stores are halal certified. Data collection was conducted from March to June 2018 using purposive sampling that involved Muslim consumers who checked-out food products (or who have completed point-of-sale transactions) from those retail premises.

The data for this study were collected using a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire consists of four parts. Part A contains questions asking about the customers' demographic information comprising gender, age, marital status, education, employment, and monthly income. Part B consists of statements about Halal dimensions that were adapted from Shaari and Arifin (2009).

These questions were intended to measure four dimensions of Halal, which are religious belief (9 items), Halal certification (9 items), marketing concept (9 items) and Halal awareness (9 items). The sampled items for these factors are, "As a Muslim, every product that I purchased is supposedly Halal", "Halal logo is important in choosing product", "When purchasing a product, brand is vital", and "Before purchasing meat product, I will make sure it is slaughtered".

Part C contains five statements reflecting halal purchase intention, which were adapted from Widodo (2013). The sampled item for this part is, "I intend to purchase Halal food products from this retail store". Part D contains eight statements on word-of-mouth communication, which were adapted from Cakir and Cetin (2013). The sampled item for this aspect is "word-of-mouth communication is important for my buying decision".

All items were gauged using a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree. The data were initially analysed using SPSS version 23 for descriptive analysis, construct validity (via exploratory factor analysis), reliability analysis, correlation analysis. The first set of hypotheses (H1a until H1d) was tested using multiple regression analysis. As for the second set of hypotheses (H2a until H2d), moderated regression analysis was conducted whereby four interaction indicators (each indicator is a multiplication of the independent variable and the moderator variable) were regressed against the dependent variable simultaneously. The results of these analyses are provided in the following section.

4.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A total of 373 customers participated in the study. However, five respondents were removed at the later stage analysis because they were outliers. They were asked some personal information comprising gender, age, marital status, education, occupation, and monthly income. For gender, the data show that 218 respondents (58.4%) are female, while 155 respondents (41.6%) are male. Regarding respondents' age, most of them were between 21 and 30 years old (42.6%) represented by 159 respondents. 76 respondents aged between 31 and 40 years old (20.4%). It is followed by 74 respondents (19.8%) who aged between 41 and 50 years old and 51-60 years old with 38 respondents (10.2%). Besides, 15 respondents aged below 20 years old (4.0%) and 11 respondents aged more than 61 years old (2.9%).

For education level, the majority of respondents were bachelor degree holders with 171 respondents (45.8%), followed by those who had a diploma, represented by 70 respondents (18.8%). Forty-four respondents had SPM qualification. Masters and STPM recorded the same number of respondents with 40 respondents (10.7%), respectively. Besides, only eight respondents (2.1%) respondents had a PhD. Furthermore, for occupation, most of the respondents worked in the private sector, which are 143 respondents (38.3%). Then, it is followed by the students, which are 80 respondents (21.4%).   Next, 79 respondents (21.2%) respondents came from other occupation categories that include businessmen, housewives, and pensioners. Sixty-one respondents (16.4%) worked as government servants, and only 10 respondents were unemployed.

Table 1: Respondents' Profile

Variables	Description	Frequencies	Percentage
Gender	Male	153	41.6
	Female	215	58.4
Age	Below 20 years old	15	4.1
	21-30 years old	155	42.1
	31-40 years old	76	20.7
	41-50 years old	73	19.8
	51-60 years old	38	10.3
	61 years old and above	11	3.0
Marital Status	Single	146	39.7
	Married	212	57.6
	Others	10	2.7
Education	PhD	8	2.2
	Masters	39	10.6
	Degree	168	45.7
	Diploma with Matric	69	18.8
	STPM	40	10.9
	SPM	44	12.0
Occupation	Government	61	16.6
	Private Sector	141	38.3
	Student	77	20.9
	Unemployed	10	2.7
	Others	79	21.5
Monthly Income	Below RM1000	30	8.2
	RM1001-RM3000	145	39.4
	RM3001-RM5000	109	29.6
	Above RM5000	16	4.4
	No monthly income	68	18.5

Regarding monthly income, the majority of respondents had between RM1001 and RM3000, with 146 respondents (39.1%). It is followed by those received between RM3001 and RM5000, with 110 respondents (29.5%). Besides, 71 respondents (19.0%) had no stable monthly income. A total of 30 customers (8%) had a salary below RM1000, while 15 respondents (4.0%) obtained between RM5001 and RM7000 as their monthly income. There is only 1 respondent (0.3%) who received more than RM7000 monthly.

A principal component factor analysis was performed to analyze the dimensionality of items measuring the independent variables. The KMO value of 0.735 indicates the suitability of factor analysis to be conducted, and the Bartlett's test of sphericity shows significant value that indicates a sufficient correlation matrix of items to proceed with factor analysis. The MSA values that range from 0.629 to 0.856 indicate sampling adequacy for each item. Altogether, there were 36 items with nine items that were adapted to measure each dimension of Halal. However, after factor analysis, only 16 items remain forming four dimensions of Halal as originally conceptualized. All four factors explain 55.98% of the variance in the model. The first factor reflects religious belief

with four items measuring the concept. The loadings for the factors range from 0.689 to 0.775. This factor explains 17.07% of the variance in the model.

Table 2: Results of Factor Analysis for Independent Variables

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Religious Belief				
Matters pertaining to Halal are important to me	0.775			
I stay away from products that are non-Halal to Muslims	0.741			
I am well informed that every product that I purchase are supposedly Halal	0.732			
I do not consume products which contain non-Halal ingredients	0.689			
Halal Certification				
I know certain Halal products received Halal certification from other country		0.723		
I know that forged Halal logo exists		0.711		
I will purchase product that displays Halal logo from other country		0.694		
I will always be careful when choosing products with Halal logo		0.596		
I know how to differentiate between genuine and non-genuine Halal logo		0.510		
Marketing Concept				
Purchasing Halal brand is vital			0.823	
I make purchase based on the brand			0.791	
I ensure the quality of the product			0.555	
I choose to purchase the product even it is quite expensive			0.551	
Awareness				
Cleanliness and protection of the product are equally important				0.766
I will not purchase halal product if the distributor is not practicing cleanliness (R)				0.745
I will not purchase the product if it is arranged next to non-halal products (R)				0.565
% of variance explained (55.98%)	17.068	14.265	13.225	11.418

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.735
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1617.681
	df	120
	Sig.	0.000
MSA		0.629–0.856

Notes: 1. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. 2. 'R' indicates reverse-coded items.

The second factor consists of five items measuring Halal certificate with loadings in the range of 0.510 and 0.723. This factor explains 14.23% of the variance in the model. The third factor comprises four items specifically meant to measure marketing concept. The factor loadings are from 0.551 to 0.823, and his factor explains 13.23% of the variance in the model. The fourth factor is about Halal awareness, and for this factor, only three items hold together to form the intended factor. The loadings range from 0.565 to 0.766. This factor explains 11.42% of the variance in the model All items for each factor were averaged out to create its mean value and this value was used when conducting subsequent analyses.

Table 3: Results of Factor Analysis for Moderating Variable

		Component 1
For my food product choices, my friends' advice is important for me.		0.735
For my food product choices, I take advice from those whom I trust.		0.733
The advice of consumers, who have bought the same food product before, is important for me.		0.691
I ask for advice from the people around me before choosing a product.		0.685
I choose the food products that my family advises.		0.671
Word-of-mouth communication is important for my buying decision.		0.607
I choose the food product that I get more advice about.		0.583
% of variance explained		45.471%
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.796
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	702.749
	df	21
	Sig.	0.000
MSA		0.757 – 0.830

Notes: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

A principal component with varimax rotation was also performed on eight items measuring word-of-mouth communication. The KMO value of 0.769 indicates the suitability of factor analysis to be conducted and the Bartlett's test of sphericity shows significant value that indicates a sufficient correlation matrix of items to proceed with factor analysis. The MSA values that range from 0.757 to 0.830 indicate sampling adequacy for each item. However, the results of factor analysis indicate that seven items remain to form one factor explaining 45.47% of the variance in the model. The seven-item factor has loadings ranged from 0.583 to 0.735. The mean value for this factor was computed and used in the subsequent analyses.

A principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation was also performed on five items measuring the dependent variable that is purchase intention. The KMO value of .802 indicates the suitability of factor analysis to be conducted, and the Bartlett's test of sphericity shows a significant value that indicates a sufficient correlation matrix of items to proceed with factor analysis. The MSA values that range from 0.779 to 0.810 show the adequacy of sampling for each item. All five items form a single factor explaining 58.41% of the variance. The item loadings range from 0.701 to 0.806. The items were later computed to create a mean value that was later used in the subsequent analysis.

Table 4: Results of Factor Analysis for Dependent Variable

	Component 1
Next time, I will keep on buying halal food products from this retail store.	0.806
I would consider buying halal food products from this retail store.	0.796
I would recommend to my Muslim friends to buy halal food products from this retail store.	0.757
The probability that I would consider buying halal food products from this retail store is high.	0.757
I intend to buy halal food products from this retail store.	0.701
% of variance explained	58.408%
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	0.802
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity — Approx. Chi-Square	619.972
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity — Df	10
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity — Sig.	0.000
MSA	0.779 – 0.810

Notes: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 5: Results of Correlation and Reliability Analysis

No	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Marketing concept	4.10	0.55	(0.685)					
2	Awareness	4.39	0.48	0.262**	(0.624)				
3	Halal certificate	4.13	0.49	0.405**	0.285**	(0.697)			
4	Religious belief	4.84	0.28	0.077	0.200**	0.126**	(0.759)		
5	Word-of-mouth	4.32	0.41	0.223**	0.293**	0.316**	0.269**	(0.794)	
6	Purchase intention	4.60	0.40	0.259**	0.290**	0.258**	0.396**	0.414**	(0.818)

Notes: **Correlation is significant at the $p < 0.01$ level (n=368); Diagonals in the parentheses indicate the Cronbach's Alphas (α).

The results of reliability analysis are shown in the parentheses in Table 5. All items measuring each variable are moderate and highly reliable, with the highest Cronbach's alpha values in the range of 0.818 and 0.624. These values indicate that all items measure the constructs they are supposed to measure. Nunally and Bernstein's (1994) Cronbach's alpha threshold value of 0.6 were referred and considered for Marketing Concept and Awareness dimensions due to the following limitations; (1) the items were newly tested and adapted from the original scales (Shaari & Arifin, 2009), and (2) only a few items (three to five) were used for the scales. As such, the researcher proceeded to utilize the instruments for the primary data collection.

Concerning the correlations between the independent variables, the values show from low to moderate correlations. The moderate correlation is between marketing concept and Halal certificate (r=0.405, p<0.01), and the low correlation is between religious belief and Halal certificate (r=0.126, p<0.01). These values indicate acceptable discriminant validity of the dimensions of Halal factors.

Next, we examine the correlation between independent variables and the moderating variable. It is found that all independent variables are significantly correlated with word-of-mouth with correlation values ranging from low to moderate. The lowest correlation is between marketing concept and word-of-mouth ($r=0.223$, $p<0.01$), and the highest correlation is between Halal certificate and word-of-mouth ($r=0.316$, $p<0.01$). These values indicate the potential moderating effect of word-of-mouth in affecting the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

Pertaining to the correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable, all variables are significantly correlated with the values ranging from low to moderate correlations. The lowest correlation is found between Halal certificate and purchase intention ($r=0.258$, $p<0.01$) and the highest correlation is observed between religious belief and purchase intention ($r=0.396$, $p<0.01$). Besides, word-of-mouth is significantly correlated with purchase intention ($r=0.414$, $p<0.01$). The results denote the concurrent validity of the constructs.

Table 6: Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

Variables	Standardized Beta value		
Independent variables	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
Marketing concept	0.148**	0.128**	0.859
Awareness	0.151**	0.106*	0.484
Halal certificate	0.113*	0.059	-0.237
Religious belief	0.341**	0.289**	0.118
Moderator			
Word-of-mouth		0.258**	0.578
Interaction Terms			
MCxWOM			-0.985
AWxWOM			-0.578
HCxWOM			0.448
RBxWOM			0.366
R	0.496	0.548	0.552
R^2	0.246	0.300	0.305
R^2 change	0.246	0.054	0.005
F change	29.657	27.981	0.618
Sig F change	0.000	0.000	0.650
Durbin Watson			1.746

Notes: **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$. MC=Marketing concept, AW=Awareness, HC=Halal concept, RB=Religious belief, WOM=Word-of-mouth.

Multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the factors of Halal that influence purchase intention. This analysis can be observed from the Model 1 of the regression analysis. The R^2 of 0.246 indicates that 24.6% of the variance in the model is explained by the four independent variables. The model is significant with F value of 29.657. Regarding the influence of the independent variables on purchase intention, all Halal dimensions were found to be significant

predictors; marketing concept (β=0.148, p<0.01), awareness (β=0.151, p<0.01), Halal certificate (β=0.113, p<0.05), and religious belief (β=0.341, p<0.01). Hence, H1a, H1b, H1c and H1d are supported.

Model 2 of the regression analysis signifies the inclusion of the moderating variable in the regression model. When word-of-mouth was included in the second step of the regression analysis, the R^2 increases to 0.30. This increment indicates that the inclusion of the moderating variable increases the variance explained in purchase intention to 30%. The F value increases by 27.981, and the change is significant. Furthermore, word-of-mouth is a significant predictor of purchase intention (β=0.258, p<0.01), and its presence reduce the beta values of the independent variables.

Model 3 is where the interaction terms between independent variables and the moderating variable are included in the regression model. However, the inclusion of the interaction terms does not significantly change the variance explained in the regression model. Therefore, it can be concluded that word-of-mouth does not act as a significant moderating variable to affect the relationship between the dimensions of Halal and purchase intention. Therefore, H2a, H2b, H2c, and H2d are not supported.

5.   DISCUSSION

Based on the results, customer purchase intention is proven to be influenced by four dimensions of Halal; marketing concept, Halal awareness, Halal certificate, and religious belief. Customers will buy Halal products if the marketers or retailers are obliged to Halal marketing concept. In fact, rice noodles manufactured by non-Muslims that depict a Halal-friendly image (for instance, the logo of a mosque) in its packaging receive high demand from Muslim customers in the country. Therefore, a robust Halal marketing concept is vital to influence purchase intention among Muslim customers. The finding is in tandem with Awan, Siddiquei, and Haider (2015), who found that halal marketing has a significant influence on halal purchase intention.

The second factor that is a significant predictor of purchase intention is Halal awareness. The significance of halal awareness in predicting purchase intention corroborates with the findings by Aziz and Chok (2013), while contradicts with the shreds of evidence put forward by Awan et al. (2015). Customers will buy the products if they are aware of the ingredients used to make the products. If they are not sure about the products' ingredients, they might not buy them because the food they consume will determine their state of physical and mental vigour towards practicing the Islamic teachings. This sense of obligation is the common practice of almost all devout Muslims.

The third factor that leads to purchase intention is Halal certificate. This finding is consistent with previous works in this field (Awan et al., 2015; Aziz & Chok, 2013; Suki & Salleh, 2016). This study also produces a result that supports the idea that halal certification itself is a useful communication tool that food marketers should use to attract Muslim consumers (Rajagopal, Ramanan, Visvanathan, & Satapathy, 2011). When the products have been certified as Halal, Muslim customers are confident to buy and consume the products without any doubt. This certification acts as a symbol showing that the products are safe, clean, handled according to the Islamic principles. Customers are more receptive to a food product when they see the Halal symbol attached to the product packaging. Even nowadays, non-Muslims and vegetarians are also looking

for Halal certified products because they recognize the benefits brought by the certification (Rajagopal et al., 2011).

The fourth factor that contributes to purchase intention is religious belief. This finding is in tandem with (Bhatti, Zafarullah, Awan, & Bukhari, 2011). Customers' religious beliefs will influence them to purchase Halal products, especially food products. Likewise, those who are religious will not buy doubtful products. This linkage is a significant finding as this knowledge can be used by retailers and marketers in ensuring that their products are free from doubtful elements that may adversely affect their Halal status (such as the source of the food products, the manufacturing process of the products, and the logistics and food handling aspects). All these uncertainty elements must be made clear to the customers so that they are willing to buy the products.

Contrary to earlier expectations, this study found that word-of-mouth (WoM) does not act as a significant moderator. The magnitude of effects brought by all of the four halal factors (marketing concept, awareness, halal certificate, and religious belief) was neither amplified nor weakened when WoM was present. However, this does not mean that WoM is unrelated to consumers' decision to purchase food products since the results also indicated the significance of WoM in influencing purchase intention. There may be a few reasons why the hypothesized moderating effect fell short from being materialized.

First, there may be possibilities that the food products are sought mostly by occasional consumers. It is a known fact that many food brands in supermarkets provide value-based offerings for different brands at different times. Price-conscious consumers often make impromptu purchases based on the discount offerings available at that point of time, regardless of the brands as long as the products are perceived to have near-similar levels of quality and pricing. It has been suggested that occasional consumers may reveal less about their favourite brand in face-to-face conversations rather than brand loyalists (Eelen, Özturan, & Verlegh, 2017). Although WoM does takes place, the unclear connection between the consumer and the brand may cause the halal factors to show no signs of becoming more or less influential than it currently is towards purchase intention among consumers.

Second, dealing with Halal products is a serious matter. Someone cannot rely on others' words or recommendation to buy the products. The information must be directly obtained by the individual buyer herself. This trait is part of individualistic behaviour. Despite the fact that Asians are known to be collectivists in general, in recent trends, Malaysians somehow appeared to show higher levels of individualism compared to their western Australian counterparts based on research conducted (Nair, Mukhtar, Jobson, Hashim, & Ruziana Masiran, 2016; Noordin & Jusoff, 2010). Perhaps Malaysians are becoming more liberal on their preferences and personal choices over what seems to be unreliable peer pressures driven by the of uprising of fake news circulated via social media.

Horizontal individualism behaviour might arise based on cynicism over social circles' claims about halal status that are perceived as either baseless or exaggerated. Even in European countries where Muslims are the minority, individualistic Muslims are seen to disengage themselves from normative peer pressures and considered halal as personal convictions (Bonne et al., 2007). Based on this expectation, Jamal and Sharifuddin (2015) contended that horizontal individualism among British Muslims should negatively affect their intention in terms of purchasing halal products and patronizing halal stores. However, there was no link found between their individualistic behaviour

and halal purchase intention. The researchers suggested that it was hard for halal marketers to target increasingly horizontally individualistic consumers. This phenomenon can be attributed to the assimilation of Muslims into the mainstream consumer culture who paid less attention about halal-labelled products (Jamal & Sharifuddin, 2015).

The factors involving lack of brand connection and individualism are the most plausible reasons for the non-significant moderating effect of word-of-mouth on the relationship between Halal factors and purchase intention. Nevertheless, this does not mean that WoM is not an influential predictor of purchase intention. As indicated in Table 6, the direct influence of word-of-mouth on purchase intention is significant in the second model of regression analysis. Furthermore, with the presence of WoM in the second step of the hierarchical model, the significant positive effect of halal certification diminishes. Hence, the inter-relationships between halal certification and WoM can be considered in future studies.

6. CONCLUSION

This study is intended to investigate Halal dimensions that contribute to purchase decisions among customers of Giant Hypermarkets in Shah Alam. Based on 368 data collected using convenience sampling technique, the results of multiple regression analysis revealed that all four Halal dimensions; Marketing concept, Halal certification, Halal awareness and Religious belief are significant in contributing to purchase intention of Halal food products among the customers. However, word-of-mouth communication does not significantly moderate the relationships between the Halal dimensions and customers' intention to purchase.

These findings lead to several implications for marketers and retailers. First, customers will purchase food products based on the brand that they trust. Therefore, marketers and retailers must develop a trusting brand by inculcating the elements of *Halalan toyiban* in the food products, from the beginning of the production process until the products reach the shelf in the hypermarket. This brand can be used in promotional activities for food products. Second, customers must be made aware of the product's valuable information, such as the production process, the ingredients, and the logistics aspects of the products. Awareness leads to trust, and trust leads to consumption.

Third, Halal certificate is an essential factor that leads to purchase intention. This endorsement (by JAKIM) is the only legitimate indicator of the Halal status among food products in the country. Retailers will risk losing Muslim customers if they do not obtain the Halal certification from the right channels. Lastly, religious belief is also significant in influencing customers' purchase intention. Marketers and retailers can use this aspect in their marketing activities by emphasizing on the importance of choosing the food products that are permissible by religion. In doing so, marketers and retailers must be knowledgeable of religious (or Shari'a) requirements so that they can use this knowledge in marketing the products.

For research implications, future researchers can validate the findings using greater samples not only on Giant Hypermarket customers but also customers of other hypermarkets in Malaysia. Customers of Giant Hypermarkets are believed to have specific characteristics such as young to middle-aged customers, mostly with bachelor's degree education, having low to average monthly income. Customers with different characteristics are believed to have a different opinion on the

factors that contribute to their purchase intention. In terms of statistical analysis, future studies on halal purchase intention and WoM may incorporate other mediators through the use of structural equation modelling. Lastly, the five predictors (including WoM) contribute only 30% of the variance explained in the regression model in this study. Therefore, it is suggested that future researches should include other factors such as safety and security, product appearance and packaging, price, and image as potential predictors of customers' purchase intention.

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