

Social Media's Role in Shaping Millennials Halal Shopping Trends in Malaysia

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Abstract

Social media influencers (SMIs) have emerged as pivotal figures in advertising and critiquing products and services. They serve as credible sources, disseminating persuasive messages that significantly influence consumer purchasing behavior, particularly among Millennials. This paper investigates the factors pertaining to SMIs that shape the purchasing behavior of Muslim Millennials in Malaysia towards halal food products. Employing a non-probability sampling method, the study surveyed 403 respondents using Structural Equation Modelling-Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS). Data collection utilised a structured closed-ended questionnaire as the survey instrument. Results indicate that SMIs' expertise impacts consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards halal food products, with expertise serving as the sole mediator. Furthermore, SMIs wield significant influence over consumer purchasing behaviour by disseminating product reviews and advertisements to a broad audience. Factors such as trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise among these influencers directly impact the purchasing decisions of millennials. This study makes a significant contribution by enhancing comprehension of the latest digital and social media technologies' relevance and importance.

Keywords: social media influencers, purchase behavior, halal food products, Muslim, Millennials



1.0 Introduction

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim highlighted Malaysia's standing in the global halal economy during the Global Halal Summit (GHaS) 2023 in Kuala Lumpur on September 12 (MIDA, 2023). The concept of Ekonomi Madani symbolises Malaysia's aspiration for economic progress by bolstering trade, particularly in innovative and competitive halal industries. This strategic direction, aligned with the goals of the 12th Malaysia Plan, aims to accelerate industrial growth by nurturing an inclusive, high-impact halal industry. The ascendancy of the halal sector owes not only to the global Muslim population but also to factors like value addition, hygiene, and authenticity, which position Malaysian halal products as the preferred choice for non-Muslim consumers. Malaysia has long been a trailblazer in the halal industry, with the government actively fostering the halal ecosystem, including research and infrastructure development, to bolster the nation's halal sector (MIDA, 2023).

Halal is a Quranic term that means permitted, allowed, lawful or legal. Its opposite is haram (forbidden, unlawful or illegal). According to Shari'ah, all issues concerning Halal or Haram and even all disputes should be referred to Quran and Sunnah (Doi, 2007). Halal and Haram are universal terms that apply to all aspects of human life whether is related to his ibadat or muamalat or mua'sharah. (Marco Tieman, 2011). This research focus on halal food. So, halal food in this research may be defined as any food deemed permissible under Islamic law, as defined in the Quran. The Islamic dietary laws specify that all food and beverages are considered Halal unless explicitly stated as forbidden. These laws guide Muslims around the globe in identifying what foods are Halal, thus fulfilling their dietary requirements in accordance with Islamic teachings.

According to the report "Halal Food Market: Global Industry Trends, Share, Size, Growth, Opportunity and Forecast 2022-2027," global exports of halal food are expected to reach USD3 trillion (RM13.3 trillion) by 2027, up from USD2 trillion in 2021. The prevailing international landscape indicates an imminent surge in demand for halal food, significantly impacting Malaysia's domestic halal food industry. The rising demand in the halal market is driven by the growing Muslim population and increased awareness of halal consumption (Tarmizi et al., 2020). However, the demand for halal products transcends religious adherence (Adekunle and Filson, 2020).



Therefore, individuals are responsible for verifying the status of food, including the sourcing and method of slaughter (Ishak et al., 2018).

Consequently, the halal industry is expanding its influence in the global economy. The burgeoning halal industry in Malaysia has made halal products increasingly popular among both Muslim and non-Muslim consumers due to the diverse range of halal products available, heightened awareness of halal principles, and the perceived benefits of consuming halal food (Zaimah et al., 2018). In Malaysia, Millennials constitute approximately 29% of the total population, which translates to around 852,600 individuals (Lin, 2018). Millennials are characterised by their emphasis on quality assurance, pursuit of a healthy lifestyle, and desire for extensive options (Lokhman Hakim Osman & Riadhus Solehah Aziz, 2018).

Presently, social media usage has become a societal norm and lifestyle element, particularly among Millennials and younger generations (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). These new information channels mean that individuals are exposed to thousands of advertisements daily, many of which originate from social networking sites. Numerous companies now engage in influencer marketing collaborations with Social Media Influencers (SMIs), such as bloggers, to enhance their brand recognition, leveraging the extensive follower base of these influencers across various social media platforms (Tapinfluence, 2017). As per the findings reported by Forbes (2020), a survey conducted by Linqia Research in 2018 uncovered that 86% of marketers and advertising agencies integrate social influencer marketing into their comprehensive outreach strategy.

Analysts in the market anticipate that the influencer marketing sector will achieve a valuation of £15 billion by 2022, marking a substantial rise from £8 billion in 2019. Notably, TikTok has emerged as a swiftly expanding influencer platform, with a user base exceeding 1 billion active users in 2019.

As detailed in a publication by Digital Business Lab (2021), 86 percent of Malaysia's populace engaged with social media as of January 2021, denoting a 24 percent rise from 2016 when only 62 percent of the population utilised social media. Malaysia, identified as a developing nation, is evidently embracing the digital transformation trend, with almost 70 percent of Malaysians (Digital Business Lab, 2021) accessing the internet daily for activities such as news consumption, video streaming, and social networking. This significant surge in both numbers and the proportion of social media usage can



be attributed to the widespread availability of digital technology, resulting in extensive internet accessibility and the affordability of technological devices like smartphones, computers, and tablets.

In an early 2022 data report by Data Reportal, Byte Dance's advertising data disclosed that TikTok had amassed 14.59 million users aged 18 and above in Malaysia (Kemp, 2022). It is also noteworthy that TikTok ranks as the leading mobile application in Malaysia based on download statistics (Digital Business Lab, 2021). This striking data highlights TikTok's popularity among Malaysians, particularly the younger generation or Gen Z. Its rapid rise in popularity among Malaysian youth has established it as the preferred platform for businesses aiming to target this demographic. Termed as the 'new kid on the block' by industry analysts, TikTok has reportedly outpaced the growth rates of established social media giants (Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat). According to Dellato (2021), TikTok proudly announced reaching 1 billion monthly active users, surpassing the milestone achieved by Facebook and Instagram, cementing its status as one of the most widely used and fastest-growing social media platforms.

Furthermore, Nano-influencers, boasting fewer than 1,000 followers on Instagram, exhibit higher engagement rates of 7.2% compared to macro-influencers with over 100,000 followers. However, current statistics from Statista.com for 2021 reveal that the most frequently visited websites and social networking platforms include Facebook (2.74 billion), YouTube (2.291 billion), WhatsApp (2.0 billion), Facebook Messenger (1.3 billion), Instagram (1.221 billion), WeChat (1.213 billion), and TikTok (689 million).

TikTok is acknowledged as one of the fastest-growing social media platforms globally. Nevertheless, concerns have emerged regarding its potential to prompt impulsive purchases among users, particularly among younger demographics. As noted by Ying and Chein (2021), impulse purchases denote unplanned transactions prompted by stimuli and made instantly. An article published in CNBC revealed that 49% of TikTok users admitted to making purchases directly influenced by product advertisements, promotions, or reviews on the platform (Adamczyk, 2021). Furthermore, a survey conducted by Adweek and Morning Consult found that 15% of all adults and 36% of Generation Z members have made purchases as a direct consequence of their TikTok usage (Lundstrom, 2021).



Besides social media marketing, another commonly encountered marketing strategy is Word of Mouth (WOM) marketing. WOM entails informal interpersonal communication among individuals, both offline and online, which is not driven by commercial motives (Lin et al., 2021; Paley et al., 2019; Berger, 2014; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). Unlike the organic dissemination of information about a company's products and services, WOM marketing may be influenced by promotional efforts, encouragement, or other initiatives by the company. Consequently, social media has become an integral platform in the current marketing landscape, displacing traditional media channels such as TV, radio, and newspapers as primary sources of information for today's consumers seeking product and service information.

Lim Radzol, Cheah, and Wong (2017) contend that pervasive networking and the modern Internet have elevated SMIs into influential brand endorsers. Hall (2015) characterised SMIs as "micro-endorsers" in contrast to the "macro" celebrity endorsers. In advertising, endorsers typically serve a similar function to message sources in persuasion. SMIs represent a novel category of endorsers, akin to celebrity endorsers, who shape consumer perceptions on social media platforms (Aziz et al., 2019). Influencer marketing emerges as a more cost-effective and efficient strategy compared to celebrity brand endorsement, with SMIs assuming the role of brand ambassadors by creating catchy content on their social media platforms (Harrison, 2017; Patel, 2016; Talaverna, 2015). Leveraging various social media channels like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (or the "X" application), and YouTube, SMIs disseminate product information and latest offers to their followers (Markethub, 2016), thereby enhancing brand awareness among target consumers (Smart Insights, 2017). SMIs consistently update their followers with the latest information (Lim et al., 2017). According to a survey, 82% of SMIs' followers consider SMIs' reviews trustworthy and appealing, making them more susceptible to their preferred influencers' recommendations (Talaverna, 2015). In contrast to celebrity endorsement strategies, influencer marketing is perceived as more credible, trustworthy, and knowledgeable owing to SMIs' friendly interaction with their followers, particularly for businesses targeting younger demographics.

The present study seeks to enrich existing research in this domain by offering fresh perspectives and insights. Various factors such as trustworthiness, expertise, and likability may influence the



purchasing decisions of Millennial Muslim consumers regarding halal food products and services. In addition, these studies highlight the importance of Attitude as a mediator, particularly concerning halal products. They employed the smart-PLS approach and concluded that Attitude factors are crucial in understanding consumer intentions towards halal products, revealing relationships between Attitude as a mediator and intentions towards halal products. However, there remains a gap in studies focusing on Attitude as a mediator between Trustworthiness, Expertise, and Likeability. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap.

It is anticipated that this paper will contribute to a better understanding of the factors influencing consumer purchases, thereby providing valuable insights to Malaysian halal product and service providers on diversifying and enhancing the marketability of their offerings beyond mere reliance on Halal certifications. This paper is structured into four sections. Section 2 delineates the theoretical framework and reviews the literature on consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards halal food products. Section 3 elucidates the research design and analysis plan, followed by the presentation of results and findings in Section 4, concluding with Section 5.

2.0 Literature Review

a) The Word-of-Mouth (WOM) Theory

Word of mouth (WOM) communication signifies non-commercial, interpersonal exchanges concerning products or services occurring through dialogue between consumers and individuals within their social circles. WOM embodies a conventional form of marketing communication that has evolved into Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) with the advancement of the Internet. Martensen and Gronholdt (2016) explored the influence of WOM on consumer emotions and decision-making within the service industry. Rahim et al. (2016) suggested that WOM, being the oldest medium for sharing opinions on products or services, has transformed into eWOM with the advent of the Internet. eWOM stands as a potent marketing strategy likely to impact consumer behavior due to the high reliability and credibility associated with recommendations from family and friends. Nevertheless, limited research has explored the interplay between perceived risk and eWOM source credibility (Hussain et al., 2017).



Dichter (1966) elucidated the psychological underpinnings of WOM, while Kozinets, Valck, Wojnicki, and Wilner (2010) developed a model elucidating its rationale. Moreover, Kozinets et al. (2010) presented an analysis of WOM in the marketing context. They examined WOM communication, market-based messages, and their reception by the target audience. Their findings highlighted four key factors influencing WOM. Firstly, "character narratives" encompass personal stories or character types that influence communication. Individuals exhibit archetypal patterns in their perspectives, which unfold over time, albeit with variations in narratives. For instance, an influencer identifying herself as a nurturing mother emphasises traits like kindness, helpfulness, and caregiving. Secondly, WOM communication is situated within specific forums such as schools, dinner parties, social networking sites, and blogs. Thirdly, communal norms shape the expression, transmission, and reception of messages and their meanings, varying based on community size, interests, and social class. Fourthly, the promotional attributes of WOM campaigns, including product brand equity and type, influence message content and meaning. These four elements collectively transform WOM messages and associated meanings from commercial promotions into socially valuable information (Kozinets et al., 2010).

b) Purchase Behavior Towards Halal Food

Consumer behavior refers to the inclination of consumers to make decisions influenced by both external and internal factors regarding available products and services in the market (Ahasanul et al., 2018). Internal factors impacting consumer purchase behavior, as noted by Khaniwale (2015), include personality, age, and short-term trust, while external factors encompass family, trends, and social class. Marketers must be cognizant of the diverse influences on their target audience's purchasing decisions and tailor their strategies accordingly (Khaniwale, 2015). Buying interest denotes an individual's deliberate intention to acquire a product. Consumer behavior encompasses the processes of selecting, purchasing, and consuming products and services to fulfil consumer desires. This process involves several stages: firstly, the consumer seeks out goods; secondly, they choose the most suitable goods; thirdly, after selection, they assess their available budget; and finally, they consider the typical prices of the goods before deciding which goods to consume (Victor et al., 2018).



c) Factors Influencing Muslim Millennials' Purchasing Behavior of Halal Food Products

There are primarily four factors influencing millennials' purchasing behavior of halal products, namely trustworthiness, expertise, likeability, and attitude.

i) Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness encompasses credibility, righteousness, and integrity that advocates should possess. Additionally, it entails the impartiality of recipients regarding the source of information (Tahirah et al., 2020). It constitutes a crucial dimension of source credibility, with SMIs needing to establish trustworthiness to persuade their followers (Kim et al., 2018). Consequently, consumers are more inclined to consider products recommended by SMIs (Liu et al., 2015). When advertisers aim to influence consumers' purchase intentions towards products promoted by marketing influencers, understanding perceptions of SMIs' trustworthiness becomes paramount (Rebelo, 2017).

Rebelo (2017) suggested that a trustworthy SMI is more persuasive and influential. Instagram users perceive SMIs as trustworthy when they demonstrate dependability, honesty, reliability, and sincerity. Hence, consumers' purchase intentions are significantly influenced by the trustworthiness of SMIs, making Instagram users a significant source of eWOM (Daniel et al., 2018), attributed to their high credibility and trustworthiness (Grave & Greff, 2018). As corroborated by other researchers, eWOM greatly impacts consumers' purchase decisions based on trust (Kiss & Bichler, 2008; Konstantopoulou et al., 2019). In the halal context, respondents' interest in halal products is significantly associated with their level of trustworthiness in halal products, followed by their willingness to spend on such products (Nor Balkish Zakaria et al., 2017). Hence, this study hypothesises,

Hypothesis (H1): The trustworthiness of SMIs positively correlates with Malaysian Muslim Millennials' purchasing behavior towards halal food products.



ii) Expertise

There is a widespread consensus that expert sources exert greater influence than non-experts (Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 2005). Expertise pertains to the accuracy of statements provided by a representative (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). It encompasses an expert's knowledge and opinion within a specific field, incorporating the advocate's knowledge, experience, and skills (Eren-Erdogmus et al., 2016; Gupta et al., 2017).

Since SMIs are perceived as knowledgeable about the quality of the products they endorse, their followers trust them and recommend others to follow suit (Casalo, Flavian, & Ibanez-Sanchez, 2018). Hence, it can be inferred that the expertise of SMIs positively influences WOM. An advocate who is knowledgeable and expert in a product holds more sway than one lacking expertise (Jamil & Hassan, 2018). Consequently, followers of expert SMIs are inclined to suggest others with similar needs and desires to follow these SMIs (Casalo, Flavian, & Ibanez-Sanchez, 2018). According to Kapitan and Silvera (2016), the match-up hypothesis emphasises the importance of a suitable match between an advocate and the product in influencing consumers.

Influencer marketing is gaining traction as a contemporary form of celebrity endorsement that is also cost-effective (Hall, 2015). Moreover, when brands engage SMIs, who have established themselves in a particular domain, to endorse products related to their area of expertise, consumers may readily believe and accept the opinions expressed by these SMIs. Presently, social media platforms are teeming with individuals possessing diverse experiences, making the use of SMIs for marketing communication an efficient and valuable strategy for brands (De Veirman et al., 2017; Godey et al., 2016). As emphasized by Tafesse (2016), since social media marketing revolves around interacting with brands and fellow consumers, paying heed to genuine reviews and examining peer users' real experiences is strategically pertinent in ensuring these interactions appear authentic. Therefore,

Hypothesis (H2): The expertise of SMIs positively correlates with Malaysian Muslim Millennials' purchasing behavior towards halal food products.



iii) Likeability

Likeability can be defined as the receiver's affinity towards the physical appearance and personal traits of the information source (McGuire, 1985; Kiecker & Cowles, 2001; Teng et al., 2014). Consumers' perceptions of SMIs are considered one of the most influential factors affecting their attitudes towards SMIs (Li et al., 2014). Brickman et al. (1975) suggested that the longer individuals are exposed to someone's ideas, the more likely they are to develop positive inclinations towards that person. Cheung, Xiao, and Liu (2014) argue that when consumers feel a connection with SMIs based on shared personalities, they are motivated to purchase the same products endorsed and shared by the SMIs on their social media platforms for everyday use.

Consequently, esteemed SMIs are perceived as more amiable individuals who wield greater influence over consumers' product choices (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014; Abidin, 2016; Forbes, 2016). This is primarily because consumers often regard SMIs as role models (Forbes, 2016). According to Wang et al. (2017) and Xiao et al. (2018), the perception of an endorser's likeability positively enhances the credibility of products and significantly impacts consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions. Alternatively, influencers are employed for customer acquisition and brand engagement. Therefore, identifying the appropriate influencer who would have the strongest impact on a specific target group by promoting the correct brand message remains a challenge (Wong, 2014). The self-brand connection occurs when consumers possess extensive knowledge and experiences about brands and themselves. Consequently, consumers become active partners in the relationship, potentially engaging in consumer advocacy behavior (Tho et al., 2016). In the context of halal food products, consumers exhibit a tendency to try out product brands and then advocate for those brands to others. Therefore, this study hypothesises that:

Hypothesis (H3): Likeability of SMIs positively correlates with Malaysian Muslim Millennials' purchasing behavior towards halal food products.



iv) Attitude

Thompson and Thompson (1996) emphasized that attitudes towards behavior reflect an individual's level of favourability or unfavourability towards the behavior under consideration. This is determined by multiplying beliefs about the outcome of the behavior by evaluations of those outcomes (Towler & Shepherd, 1991). Kiss and Bichler (2008) emphasized the crucial role of Word of Mouth (WOM) in shaping attitudes, influencing purchase decision-making, and mitigating risks associated with purchasing decisions. 83% of American consumers trust recommendations from their peers over advertising, considering WOM a reliable source of information (McCaskill, 2015), surpassing other marketing forms such as advertising or branded communication (Liu et al., 2015). Many consumers perceive product reviews by other social media users as more trustworthy than business advertisements (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019). Maichum, Parichatnon, and Peng (2017) asserted that attitude towards halal food refers to respondents' favourable or unfavourable evaluations of performing or not performing the behavior. The attitude towards halal food significantly impacts consumer behavior regarding halal food (Maichum et al., 2017). Thus,

Hypothesis (H4): Attitude of Malaysian Muslim Millennials positively correlates with the purchasing behavior towards halal food products.

d) Attitude: The Mediating Effect of Purchase Behavior Towards Halal Food Products

Attitudes towards halal products are crucial precursors to the intention to purchase halal products and act as mediators of subjective norms (Briliana & Mursito, 2017). Moreover, Ajzen (1991) suggested that an individual's attitudes towards halal food derive from their belief in its halal status, potentially leading to positive attitudes, such as the inclination to purchase the product. The concept of Halal Attitude has recently gained considerable attention and is seen as a strong predictor of customer purchase intent, especially within the Halal food industry. Consequently, the attitude towards halal food prompts moral evaluations in consumption behaviors (Maichum et al., 2017).

In this study, Attitude acts as a mediator between Expertise, Likeability, and Trustworthiness. In this study, the attitude variable is defined as the degree of respondents' preference for halal food



products. Ajeng Larasati, Sri Rahayu Hijrah Hati, and Anya Safira (2018) highlighted Attitude as a mediator in their research on Muslim consumers' knowledge of halal products. They found that Attitudes positively influence intentions among Muslim consumers towards halal products. These findings are further supported by Aertsens (2011), who identified Attitude as a strong mediating influence in relationships, particularly on behavior. Similarly, Lilis Mega Setiawati, Chairy, and Jhanghiz Syahrivar (2019) examined factors influencing consumers towards halal food, revealing the significant role of Attitude factors as mediators. The influence of Attitude as a mediator significantly impacted Millennial Muslim consumers, particularly in their efforts to obtain and purchase halal food. Additionally, Elfira Maya Adiba (2019) identified Attitude as one of the research factors, focusing on consumer behavior towards the purchase of halal products by using Attitude as a mediator. Similarly, Vita Briliana and Nurwanti Mursito (2017) explored Attitude factors in the purchase of halal products among Muslim consumers. The preceding discussions lead to the formulation of the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis (H5): Attitude of SMIs mediates the association between Trustworthiness and Millennial Muslims' Purchase Behavior towards halal food products.

Hypothesis (H6): Attitude of SMIs mediates the association between Expertise and Millennial Muslims' Purchase Behavior towards halal food products.

Hypothesis (H7): Attitude of SMIs mediates the association between Likeability and Muslim Millennials' Purchase Behavior towards halal food products.

3.0 Research Framework

To address the hypotheses, this study presents a research framework incorporating the variables of Trustworthiness, Expertise, Likeability, Attitude, and Purchase Behavior. The theoretical framework is illustrated in Figure 1:



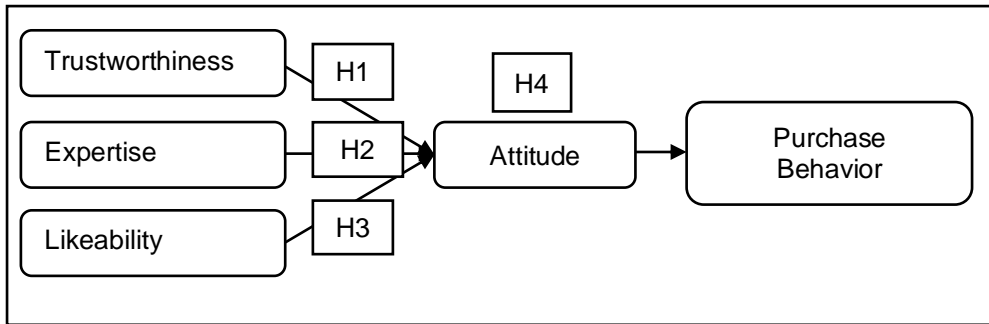


Figure 1 : Research Framework of the Present Study

4.0 Research Methodology

This study examined the factors influencing Muslim Millennials' purchase behavior towards halal food products in Malaysia. The research employed the non-probability sampling method and collected data using Structural Equation Modelling-Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS). This study examines the variables of trustworthiness, expertise, likeability, and attitude in relation to purchase behavior among Millennials.

a) Data Collection and Study Sample Design

The research objectives were achieved through a suitable research design and data collection procedure. A survey-based quantitative design, appropriate for social science research, was employed. The study targeted Malaysian Muslim Millennials who purchase halal food products, using non-probability convenience sampling due to the absence of a sampling frame. According to Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, and Ringle (2019), the sample size in PLS-SEM should be at least ten times the number of study paths. To determine the sample size, Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table was utilised, resulting in the distribution of 450 questionnaires to Millennials aged between 18 and 38 years old. The pandemic restrictions necessitated the use of both online and offline administration methods. Additionally, SMART-PLS software and power analysis were employed to ascertain a minimum sample size of 109 respondents, yet 450 questionnaires were distributed to mitigate potential issues such as incomplete responses or non-returned questionnaires. The Millennial generation was selected due to its significant proportion of the Malaysian



population, estimated at 29%, with an annual growth rate of 0.4% (Lin, 2018).

b) Survey Instrument

A questionnaire comprising six sections was developed. Section A collected demographic information, Section B focused on social media usage, Section C evaluated SMIs' characteristics affecting purchase behavior, Section D assessed Millennials' attitudes towards halal food products, and Section E measured purchase behaviors. All responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale. Table 1 outlines the sources of information and survey instruments utilised in the study.

Table 1 : Survey Instruments

| Variables | No. of Items | Sources |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|--|
| Trustworthiness | 3 | Rahimah Mohamed Yunos, Nor Balkish Zakaria, & Che Faridah Che Mahmood (2017) |
| Expertise | 4 | Lim et al. (2015) |
| Likeability | 5 | Lim, Cheah, & Wong (2017); Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) |
| Attitude | 9 | Elseidi (2018). |
| Purchase behavior towards halal food | 13 | Nico et al. (2020); Sulthana & Vasantha (2020). |

c) Data Analysis Method

Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was utilised for data analysis using Smart-PLS software 3.2.8. PLS-SEM is a multivariate analysis tool suitable for assessing path models containing latent constructs (Hair et al., 2019). This software facilitated the analysis of non-normal and small datasets. Moreover, PLS-SEM offers a causal-predictive approach with robust goodness-of-fit estimation, distinguishing it from covariance-based SEM (Chin, 2010). Data analysis followed a two-step process within PLS-SEM. Initially, measurement was conducted to evaluate reliability and validity levels within the model (Hair et al., 2019). Subsequently, the structural model was estimated, and hypotheses were tested for significance (Chin, 2010). Model estimation, assessed using r^2 , Q^2 , and effect size f^2 ,



determined the outcomes of the routes from exogenous to endogenous constructs (Hair et al., 2019).

5.0 Findings

a) Demographic Characteristics

According to the data presented in Table 2, the majority of respondents were female, accounting for 69.5%, while males constituted 30.5%. Most respondents fell within the age range of 19 to 23 years old, with 82.1% being single and 17.4% married. Regarding ethnicity, the majority were Malays (90.1%), followed by Chinese (6.9%), Indians (1.7%), and other races (1.2%). Additionally, the highest level of education for most respondents was a first-degree qualification, representing 72.70%, followed by those with a Doctoral Degree at 12.65%. In terms of social media usage, 43.42% of respondents used more than five social media platforms, while 21.09% and 13.15% used five and four platforms, respectively. A small percentage of respondents used fewer than three social media platforms.

Furthermore, concerning the time spent accessing social media sites, 48.63% of respondents spent over 180 minutes per day, followed by 14.64% who spent between 120 and 180 minutes daily. Additionally, 11.16% spent between 60 to 120 minutes, 9.43% spent between 30 to 60 minutes, and the remaining respondents spent less than 30 minutes daily on social media sites. This suggests that many Muslim Millennials have a habit of spending several hours browsing various social media platforms daily. The subsequent section discusses the demographic characteristics in detail.

Table 2 : Demographic Characteristics

| Demographic Characteristics | Number (N=403) Frequency | Percentage ((%)) |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| <i>Gender</i> | | |
| Male | 123 | 30.5 |
| Female | 280 | 69.5 |
| <i>Age (years old)</i> | | |
| 19 – 23 | 108 | 26.79 |
| 24 – 28 | 125 | 31.02 |
| 29 – 33 | 73 | 18.11 |
| 34 – 38 | 97 | 24.07 |



| Demographic Characteristics | Number (N=403) Frequency | Percentage ((%)) |
|---|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Race</i> | | |
| Malay | 363 | 90.1 |
| Chinese | 28 | 6.9 |
| Indian | 7 | 1.7 |
| Others | 5 | 1.2 |
| <i>Marital Status</i> | | |
| Single | 120 | 29.77 |
| Married | 267 | 66.25 |
| Widower/Widow | 16 | 3.97 |
| <i>Highest Education Level</i> | | |
| SPM | 62 | 15.38 |
| STPM/Diploma/A Level | 43 | 9.45 |
| Bachelor's Degrees | 140 | 34.74 |
| Master's Degrees | 116 | 28.78 |
| Doctoral Degrees | 42 | 9.23 |
| <i>Number of Social Media Sites Used</i> | | |
| 1 | 20 | 4.96 |
| 2 | 32 | 7.94 |
| 3 | 38 | 9.43 |
| 4 | 53 | 13.15 |
| 5 | 85 | 21.09 |
| 5 and above | 175 | 43.42 |
| <i>Type of Social Media Site Used*</i> | | |
| WhatsApp | 385 | 95.53 |
| Instagram | 286 | 70.96 |
| YouTube | 290 | 71.96 |
| Facebook | 355 | 88.08 |
| Twitter | 108 | 26.80 |
| Others | 86 | 21.34 |
| <i>Time Spent on social media Per Day</i> | | |
| Less than 30 minutes | 25 | 6.20 |
| Between 30-60 minutes | 38 | 9.43 |
| Between 60-120 minutes | 45 | 11.16 |
| Between 120-180 minutes | 59 | 14.64 |
| More than 180 minutes | 196 | 48.63 |



b) Reliability and Validity

Reliability assessment for the latent constructs in the study followed Hair et al. (2019), employing Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR). All constructs demonstrated Cronbach's alpha values well exceeding the threshold of 0.70, with the lowest value recorded at 0.825 (Chin, 2010). The results, as depicted in Table 2, further revealed that the CR values surpassed the 0.70 benchmark, with the minimum CR value standing at 0.873 (Chin, 2010). These findings highlighted the robust reliability of the latent constructs, laying a solid foundation for subsequent analysis. Moreover, to affirm satisfactory convergent validity and uphold the unidimensionality concept for each construct, the average variance extracted (AVE) for all items within each construct should surpass the 0.50 mark (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2 illustrates that each construct attained adequate convergent validity across its items. Additionally, the item loading, as presented in Table 3: Reliability and Validity and Table 4: Discriminant Validity, further confirmed the discriminant validity of the constructs.

Table 3 : Reliability and Validity

| | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Attitude | 0.892 | 0.918 | 0.654 |
| Behavior | 0.87 | 0.898 | 0.504 |
| Expertise | 0.925 | 0.964 | 0.930 |
| Likeability | 0.918 | 0.961 | 0.924 |
| Trustworthiness | 0.855 | 0.933 | 0.874 |

Table 4 : Discriminant Validity

| | Attitude | Behavior | Expertise | Likeability | Trustworthiness |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Attitude | 0.809 | | | | |
| Behavior | 0.869 | 0.71 | | | |
| Expertise | 0.454 | 0.422 | 0.965 | | |
| Likeability | 0.403 | 0.379 | 0.731 | 0.961 | |
| Trustworthiness | 0.433 | 0.411 | 0.81 | 0.663 | 0.935 |

From the data showcased in Table 3, it is evident that all the constructs under study exhibit appropriate discriminant validities. Furthermore, to establish discriminant validity for each construct, the



Fornell-Larcker criterion (1981) was utilised. This criterion involves evaluating the square root of the AVE for each construct, whereby the square root of AVE should exceed the correlations with other constructs (Hair et al., 2019). Tables 4 and 5 provide additional evidence, demonstrating that the study maintains sufficient discriminant validity across all constructs.

Table 5 : Cross-Loading

| | Attitude | Behavior | Expertise | Likeability | Trustworthiness |
|---------|----------|----------|-----------|-------------|-----------------|
| ATT1 | 0.796 | 0.715 | 0.419 | 0.387 | 0.428 |
| ATT2 | 0.695 | 0.586 | 0.382 | 0.346 | 0.346 |
| ATT3 | 0.873 | 0.780 | 0.393 | 0.345 | 0.365 |
| ATT4 | 0.896 | 0.774 | 0.340 | 0.288 | 0.321 |
| ATT5 | 0.699 | 0.578 | 0.343 | 0.318 | 0.300 |
| ATT6 | 0.869 | 0.752 | 0.331 | 0.282 | 0.337 |
| BEHAV1 | 0.460 | 0.658 | 0.280 | 0.199 | 0.247 |
| BEHAV2 | 0.721 | 0.833 | 0.343 | 0.302 | 0.304 |
| BEHAV3 | 0.421 | 0.600 | 0.239 | 0.187 | 0.26 |
| BEHAV4 | 0.685 | 0.738 | 0.229 | 0.226 | 0.273 |
| BEHAV5 | 0.747 | 0.820 | 0.363 | 0.357 | 0.393 |
| BEHAV6 | 0.508 | 0.672 | 0.290 | 0.241 | 0.248 |
| BEHAV7 | 0.799 | 0.841 | 0.383 | 0.305 | 0.352 |
| BEHAV8 | 0.628 | 0.715 | 0.298 | 0.292 | 0.294 |
| BEHAV9 | 0.399 | 0.400 | 0.249 | 0.292 | 0.221 |
| EXPERT2 | 0.44 | 0.407 | 0.965 | 0.713 | 0.791 |
| EXPERT3 | 0.437 | 0.408 | 0.964 | 0.698 | 0.772 |
| LIKE4 | 0.379 | 0.367 | 0.711 | 0.960 | 0.645 |
| LIKE5 | 0.396 | 0.361 | 0.695 | 0.963 | 0.629 |
| TRUST4 | 0.401 | 0.392 | 0.755 | 0.610 | 0.934 |
| TRUST5 | 0.408 | 0.377 | 0.759 | 0.629 | 0.936 |



c) Model Goodness of Fit with the Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)

Following the guidelines outlined by Hair et al. (2019), this study evaluated the Model Goodness of Fit using the SRMR index. A model is deemed fit when the SRMR value falls below 0.08. In this study, the SRMR value is 0.078, indicating a satisfactory model fit.

d) Path Analysis

As depicted in Figure 2, Table 6, and Table 7, the study formulated seven hypotheses, with four being direct hypotheses and three indirect (mediating) hypotheses.

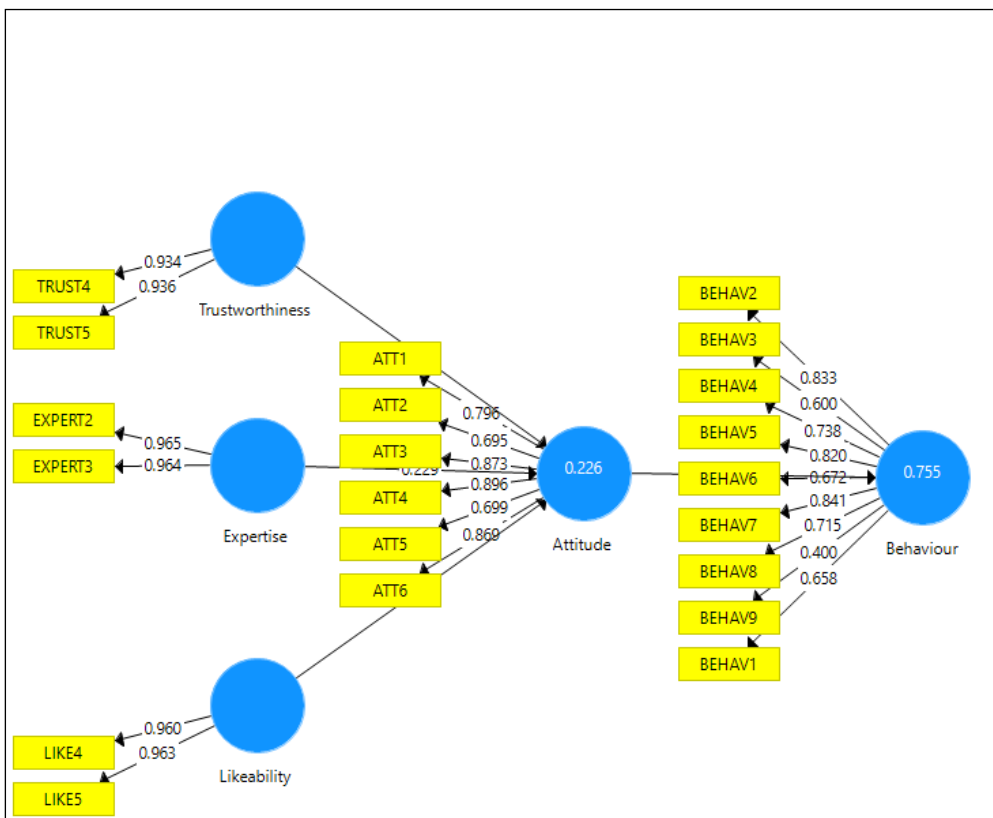


Figure 2 : PLS-SEM Measurement Model

Subsequently, the results indicate acceptable reliabilities and validities of the data from the structural assessment of the study model. The subsequent measurement assessment aimed to examine the



study hypotheses. The standardised path coefficients are presented in Table 5. The path coefficient between Attitude and Behavior ($\beta = 0.869$, Std Dev= 0.021, $t=40.772$, $p=0.000$) signifies a significant and positive relationship between Attitude towards purchasing behavior of halal food products. These findings offer robust statistical support for H1. The study findings align with Hadi, Vahideh, Vahidreza, and Mozhgan's (2017) research, which demonstrated that consumer Attitude positively influences consumer behavior in online shopping.

Additionally, the path value for Expertise and Attitude ($\beta = 0.229$, Std Dev= 0.083, $t=2.757$, $p=0.006$) indicates that SMIs' expertise in promoting Halal food products has a positive and significant impact on respondents' attitude, thereby providing substantial statistical backing for H2. These findings parallel Wang et al.'s (2017) research, which suggested that information presented by credible sources such as SMIs could affect consumers' beliefs, opinions, Attitudes, and behaviors.

Furthermore, the path between Likeability and Attitude ($\beta = 0.129$, Std Dev= 0.063, $t=2.035$, $p=0.042$) demonstrates a positive and significant relationship between SMIs and Muslim Millennials, corroborating H3. However, these findings contrast with the work of Wang et al. (2017) and Xiao et al. (2018), who reported that the Likeability of an endorser positively enhances credibility and consumers' Attitude.

Moreover, the path between Trustworthiness and Attitude ($\beta = 0.162$, Std Dev= 0.070, $t=2.312$, $p=0.021$) indicates a positive and significant relationship between the trustworthiness of SMIs among Muslim Millennials, providing support for H4. Table 6 displays the path coefficients. Nonetheless, the study findings do not align with the results obtained by Berger et al. (2016), who suggested that SMIs' amiability in building rapport with consumers, especially for businesses targeting younger generations, positively influenced their followers.

Table 6 : Path Coefficients

| Hypotheses | Relationship between variables | β value | Std. Dev. | t-value | P-value | Result |
|------------|--------------------------------|---------------|-----------|---------|---------|----------|
| H1 | Attitude --> Behavior | 0.869 | 0.021 | 40.772 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| H2 | Expertise --> Attitude | 0.229 | 0.083 | 2.757 | 0.006 | Accepted |
| H3 | Likeability --> Attitude | 0.129 | 0.063 | 2.035 | 0.042 | Rejected |
| H4 | Trustworthiness --> Attitude | 0.162 | 0.070 | 2.312 | 0.021 | Rejected |

Note: * $p < 0.05$ is significant



e) Mediation Analysis

Hypothesis H5 suggests a link between Trustworthiness and Behavior mediated by Attitude. The results reveal that the attitude of Muslim Millennials mediates the relationship between trustworthiness and behavior ($\beta=0.140$, Std Dev= 0.061, $t=2.293$, $p=.022$), offering no support for Hypothesis H5. This result contradicts the findings by Handriana, Yulianti, Kurniawati, Arina, Aisyah, Ayu Aryani, & Wandira (2021), who suggested that trust is key in running a business. According to their study, with the trust of consumers, the survival of a business can be maintained.

Hypothesis H6 proposes a connection between Likeability and Behavior mediated by Attitude. The findings indicate that the attitude of Muslim Millennials mediates the relationship between likeability and behavior ($\beta=0.112$, Std Dev= 0.055, $t=2.040$, $p=.042$), providing no support for Hypothesis H6. These findings differ from the studies conducted by Bashir (2019) and Aziz, Husin, Hussin and Afaq (2019), which show that consumer attitudes influence their intention to buy products.

Hypothesis H7 postulates a relationship between Expertise and Behavior mediated by Attitude. The results demonstrate that the Attitude of Muslim Millennials mediates the relationship between Likeability and Behavior ($\beta=0.199$, Std Dev= 0.074, $t=2.708$, $p=.007$), supporting Hypothesis H7. The role of attitude enables the mediation between Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), as suggested in the research findings by Lin (2011). Hence, knowledge serves as a guiding light and strengthens the human body against weaknesses (Al-Ghazali, 2015). Understanding tends to influence Attitude and behavior towards good deeds, as mentioned by Mohd Kamal Azman Jusoh (2014:18). The mediation results are outlined in Table 7.

Table 7 : Mediating Effects

| Hypotheses | Relationship between variables | β value | Std. Dev. | t-value | P-value | Result |
|------------|---|---------------|-----------|---------|---------|----------|
| H5 | Trustworthiness -> Attitude -> Behavior | 0.140 | 0.061 | 2.293 | 0.022 | Rejected |
| H6 | Likeability -> Attitude -> Behavior | 0.112 | 0.055 | 2.040 | 0.042 | Rejected |
| H7 | Expertise -> Attitude -> Behavior | 0.199 | 0.074 | 2.708 | 0.007 | Accepted |

Note: * $p<0.05$ is significant



6.0 Discussion

Specifically, only SMIs' Expertise positively correlates with Muslim Millennials in Malaysia in their purchasing behavior towards halal food products (H2). The Attitude factor does not act as a mediator between Trustworthiness and Likeability factors (H5 and H6) but functions as a mediator between social media influencer Expertise and consumers' purchase behavior. Indeed, Expertise is considered a component discussed within source credibility. These findings corroborate the idea that information presented by a credible source (such as SMIs) could influence consumers' beliefs, opinions, Attitudes, and behaviors (Wang et al., 2017).

Additionally, source credibility is frequently used to analyse the effectiveness of endorsements for brands and products (Taghipoorreyneh & de Run, 2016). Notably, SMIs and endorsers perceived as highly trustworthy and expert are likely to lead to consumers' acceptance of the advertising message, resulting in higher acceptance of the message conveyed. SMIs equipped with high expertise are seen as more influential in their followers' behaviors (Lim, Radzol, Cheah & Wong, 2017).

The provided elaboration can be supported by relevant theories such as source credibility theory and social cognitive theory:

Source Credibility Theory: Source credibility theory posits that individuals are more likely to be persuaded by sources perceived as credible and trustworthy. In the context of social media influencers (SMIs), their expertise plays a crucial role in establishing credibility. When SMIs are perceived as experts in the domain of halal food products, Muslim Millennials in Malaysia are more inclined to trust their recommendations and endorsements. This aligns with the finding that only SMIs' expertise positively correlates with Muslim Millennials' purchasing behavior toward halal food products (H2). The idea that expertise is a component of source credibility is supported by this theory. According to Wang et al. (2017), information presented by credible sources, such as SMIs with expertise, can influence consumers' beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors.

Social Cognitive Theory: Social cognitive theory emphasizes the role of observational learning and modeling in shaping individuals' behavior and attitudes. When SMIs exhibit expertise in discussing halal food products, Muslim Millennials in Malaysia may observe and internalize this expertise, leading to changes in their attitudes and behaviors regarding halal food consumption. This supports the finding



that expertise functions as a mediator between SMIs' expertise and consumers' purchase behavior. Additionally, social cognitive theory suggests that individuals are more likely to imitate behaviors modeled by credible and trustworthy sources. Therefore, SMIs perceived as highly trustworthy and expert are likely to lead to consumers' acceptance of the advertising message, as mentioned by Lim, Radzol, Cheah & Wong (2017). This aligns with the idea that source credibility influences consumers' acceptance of endorsements for brands and products, as indicated by Taghipoorreyneh & de Run (2016).

In summary, both source credibility theory and social cognitive theory provide theoretical frameworks that support the idea that SMIs' expertise positively influences Muslim Millennials' purchasing behavior toward halal food products, and that source credibility, particularly expertise, plays a significant role in shaping consumers' attitudes and behaviors.

7.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

To summarise, the findings indicate that SMIs' Expertise can influence consumers' Attitudes and behaviors towards halal food products.

Social media influencers wield considerable influence over Millennials' perceptions and preferences regarding halal food products through several key factors: trustworthiness, expertise, and likeability, all of which contribute to promoting an aspirational lifestyle. Here's how each factor plays a role:

Trustworthiness: Social media influencers often build strong relationships with their followers based on trust. When an influencer consistently demonstrates honesty, transparency, and authenticity, Millennials are more likely to trust their recommendations. By endorsing halal food products and sharing their experiences with them, influencers can leverage this trust to shape positive perceptions of halal food among their followers. When Millennials perceive influencers as trustworthy sources, they are more inclined to view halal food products in a favorable light and consider purchasing them.

Expertise: Many social media influencers specialize in specific niches or industries, positioning themselves as experts in their respective fields. When influencers demonstrate knowledge and expertise in halal food, whether through sharing information about halal certification, discussing the benefits of halal ingredients, or providing cooking tips and recipes, Millennials are more likely to perceive them



as credible sources of information. Influencers' expertise lends credibility to their endorsements of halal food products, reassuring followers that their recommendations are well-informed and reliable. This expertise can influence Millennials' perceptions by highlighting the quality, authenticity, and relevance of halal food products in their lives.

Likeability: Influencers often cultivate a relatable and likable persona that resonates with their followers. When Millennials feel a connection with influencers and enjoy consuming their content, they are more receptive to their recommendations and suggestions. By incorporating halal food into their lifestyle content in an engaging and appealing way, influencers can make halal food products seem desirable and attractive to their followers. Whether through sharing personal experiences, showcasing delicious halal recipes, or participating in halal food-related events and challenges, influencers can enhance the likeability of halal food among Millennials. This likability factor contributes to shaping positive attitudes and preferences towards halal food products, ultimately influencing purchasing decisions.

Overall, social media influencers leverage their trustworthiness, expertise, and likeability to promote halal food products as part of an aspirational lifestyle. By effectively communicating the quality, authenticity, and appeal of halal food through their content, influencers can shape Millennials' perceptions and preferences, driving them to incorporate halal food products into their daily lives and purchasing choices.

Ultimately, an important aspect of expertise is knowledge. Therefore, understanding the latest digital and social media technology is crucial in enhancing the understanding of product owners and Muslim consumers, especially among young generation consumers and halal products. It is hoped that the results of this study could contribute towards better marketing strategy and the development of consumer behavior concepts, particularly among Muslim Millennials towards halal food products.

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