

A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK OF THE HALAL CERTIFICATION ROLE IN PURCHASE INTENTION OF MUSLIM CONSUMERS ON THE FOOD PRODUCTS FROM MUSLIM MAJORITY COUNTRIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

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Abstract: *The objective of this paper is to uncover the role of Halal certification in the purchase intention of Muslim consumers on food products from Muslim majority countries in the Middle East and North Africa. There is a certain belief that all the food products from the mentioned region are assumed Halal (Kullu Halal) as the majority of the population is Muslim. The fact that most these countries also import products from non-Muslim countries and the presence of the non-Halal food products in the country make the researcher believes that it is important to investigate the Halal status of the products and the consumer demand towards Halal certification when it comes to their purchase decision. A Halal certification is a form of safety for the Muslim consumers as the presence of it will ensure that the food products are safe for their consumption.*

The paper will propose a framework with Theory of Planned Behaviour as a basic theory. The issues encountered in the Halal certification demand are mostly related to Health, Animal Welfare, Religiosity and Food Safety (Halal Certification Motives). Those motives will be the factors that trigger the demand for Halal certification while Food Types and Foreign Ingredients will be the moderating factors between the Halal Certification Motives and Attitude. The researcher believes that it is imperative to study about Halal certification towards Food Products from Muslim Majority countries in the Middle East and North Africa as the

studies about the Halal certification in the certain region are almost non-existent and there are actually some issues need discussion and to be solved.

The study is limited to the conceptual framework of the consumer purchase decision towards the food products without Halal certification imported from the Muslim Majority countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Empirical research and non-empirical research must be performed to uncover the issues regarding the demand for Halal certification and the reasons why it is important to attach Halal certification in the Food Products. The comparison studies in the Muslim Majority countries, Multi-cultural countries, and Non-Muslim Majority countries must also be conducted to test the level of demand and awareness of the consumers living there. The results of the study are expected to provide some guidelines to the Muslim majority countries in the Middle East and North Africa region and help them strategize in increasing the sales of their food products.

Keywords: *Halal certification, Islamic marketing, Muslim consumers, consumer behaviour, Middle East, North Africa, food products*

Introduction

According to Pew Research Center (2017), the global Muslim population is estimated to be around 1.8 billion and it is equal to 24 percent of the world's population. By 2025, it is predicted that the Muslim population will reach 30 percent of the worldwide population (Roberts, 2010). The Halal market is deemed very lucrative and it is one of the biggest industries in the world, however, the industry itself is hugely untouched (Abdul-Talib & Abd-Razak, 2013; PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC), 2013; Wilson & Liu, 2010). According to Reuters (2016), the global industry for Halal food division was valued to be around \$1.17 trillion worth and the revenues generated from food and beverage products with Halal certification were valued to be around \$415 billion in 2015. Halal industry shows a high level of growth and it showcases strength in both business and trade. It no longer only attached to the religious values as it is also deemed as a global symbol for quality assurance and a lifestyle choice (Lada, Tanakinjal, & Amin, 2010).

In the Middle East, there is no jurisdiction nor a country that forces the presence of the Halal certification or Halal label to all food products in the market (Neiburg, 2013). Many of the ingredients used in the food products are imported without the presence of the Halal certification and this issue makes it even harder to ensure that the products have proper Halal status. The reason being is the products are often presented with inadequate paperwork to make a proper review (Batu & Regenstein, 2014). Before 1970s', most Muslim majority countries in the Middle Eastern and North African region were able to provide the food demand for themselves. However, in the late 1970s', Muslim majority countries started to import food products quite extensively from non-Muslim countries in the Asian, European and American region. The food products imported may contain animal derivatives and due to this matter, the consumers cannot be sure if the additives were derived from the Halal animals. Therefore, the Halal status of the products will be regarded as being doubtful (Latif, Mohamed, Sharifuddin, & Mahir, 2016).

When the Halal certification is not attached to the food products, no one is responsible to guarantee the Halal status of the products as the obligation of the manufacturers is only to list

the ingredients used during the production of the food products (Hussaini, 2010). In most cases, manufacturers of the products list many trivial names of ingredients that the consumers are not familiar with (Adams, 2007). Without any Halal certification, Muslim consumers are supposed to check the ingredients to ensure that Haram substances are not present in the food products. This may lead to confusion and it may turn into a cancellation of the purchase. The cancellation of the purchase eventually causes a big loss to the manufacturers of the food products. The objective of this paper is to propose a framework with Theory of Planned Behavior as a basic theory as well as the addition of Halal Motives (Animal Welfare, Health, Food Safety, and Religiosity) as a determining factor to predict the purchase intention. It is important to understand how strong the constructs will explain the final purchase intention as the research desires to help the food industry players in the Middle East and North Africa to grow their Halal food business. Food Ingredients and Food Types will serve as a moderator of the Halal Motives on Attitude path. It is imperative to perform an empirical testing towards the model and the result will be the guidance of the food industry players from the Muslim majority countries in the Middle East and North Africa in improving their marketing strategy and being the key players of the Halal food industry.

Literature Review

Cases in Middle Eastern and North African Region

Sheikh Shamseddin Bouroubi issued a fatwa that consuming Indian meat is forbidden as he believed that the animals were most likely not slaughtered according to Islamic rulings (Belamri, 2010). In Morocco, McDonald's was put in a hot seat as the consumers were worried about the Halal status of the meat used in their menu. McDonald's eventually clarified that their meat comes from Spain (certified by Instituto Halal) and Argentina (Halal Catering Argentina, under the supervision of the Islamic Center of Argentina [CIRA]). However, the consumers felt a bit uncomfortable and were exposed to some level of doubts as it took three months before eventually McDonald's was able to reply such question (Morrocan Times, 2014). In 2014, there was a case in Morocco where a butcher from Switzerland was accused of selling pork, disguised as veal. It was eventually disclosed that the butcher actually had sold around 3.1 tons of pork to Moroccan society. Not only the butchery made a false claim, he also made a ton of profits as pork is relatively cheaper than veal (Morocco World News, 2014). In October 2011, during Eid-Al- Adha celebration, Islamic non-profit food group found out that the sacrificed animals for the Eid-Al-Adha feast were exposed to genetically-modified animal feed. Despite the process was approved by Turkish regulators, the meat could not be considered halal anymore (Official Gazette of the Republic of Turkey, 2011).

Mufti Abdullah Nana (2013) personally claimed that 90% of meat in Saudi Arabia was not Halal as he verified that machine slaughtered chicken, meat not slaughtered by a Muslim, and doubtful meat were imported into Saudi Arabia. 90% of fast food industries in Saudi Arabia (McDonald's, KFC and many more), including Al-Baik, use imported meat as their ingredients. Imported meat might come from countries like Brazil, Netherlands, France and many other countries whose Halal certification processes are highly questionable. Before Islamic revolution was declared, Iran was popular for its ability to produce high quality wine and it seems that tradition does not want to be away from the country sometime soon. Alijani (2015) stated in his article that there are some venues in Iran that actually supply and serve both pork and wine. Reservation to these restaurants are required and they operate in a very secretive manner. Lebanon is a country where it is populated by numerous different religions and the country

consists of 54% of Muslims (27% Sunni and 27% Shia). The awareness level of Lebanese citizens towards the Halal certification is quite low and as in other Middle Eastern countries, there is an assumption that everything in Lebanon, including the meat, is Halal (unless stated otherwise). At large slaughterhouses and butcheries, the animals are slaughtered according to Shariah law. But the same thing cannot be said about the smaller butcheries as they may also have more than just meat and chicken. A food specialist from American University of Beirut, Reem Hamzah, also stated despite there is an assumption that food is 'kullu halal' (all halal), people in certain areas of Lebanon consume pork on daily basis and it is very crucial to understand whether a cross contamination actually occurs during the process (Cochrane, 2016).

Jalel Aossef (2009), the director of Midamar, a US-based international food supplier, and foodservice equipment, claimed that the Halal status of around ninety-five percent of American food items available in supermarket shelves in Middle Eastern countries is highly questionable. The reason why the issue arose was the low level of the integrity of Halal certifiers as they start to become more money oriented and more interested in increasing business profits than respecting Halal integrity. Apart from that, the limitation of the information and knowledge about Halal concept among the manufacturers or the producers is also one of the biggest issues challenging Halal integrity in US (Saleem, 2008). A research by Ireland and Rajabszadeh (2011) resulted in 86.5 percent of respondents are worried about at least one food category, at supermarkets across UAE, for being not Halal. Some products may have everything written in Arabic and customers who are not familiar with the Arabic language may eventually assume that the products are Halal as Arabic language and Islam are highly related. However, we cannot be fully certain about that. The researcher has investigated Arab shops in Malaysia and discovered some products with Arabic writings were produced in Vietnam, Thailand, China, India, Netherlands, and Spain. Those six mentioned countries are not Islamic countries and cross contamination may easily occur during the production process. Also, they have no obligation to ensure their products are Halal as they are not attached to the Islamic regulation or Halal certification bodies.

Halal Certification Benefits

Halal is an Arabic word which means lawful or permissible. *Haram*, on the other hand, is the opposite of Halal as it means unlawful and prohibited. It has been proved that Halal certification provides positive aspects in increasing profits, especially in the Islamic countries or countries that are populated by numerous number of Muslims (Muslim majority countries). A study by Perdana and Altunışık (2017) showcased that there was a high demand towards the issuance of Halal certification in Turkish food products. The research resulted that 82.2 percent of respondents felt high or extreme importance towards the presence of Halal certification in at least one food type. On average, respondents felt high or extreme importance in about 4.98 out of 9 food categories studied. Upon the attachment of Halal certification, McDonald's, Taco Bell, KFC and Burger King have enjoyed around 20% increase in the number of their new customers (Sabri, 2006). In Malaysia, a frozen food company experienced an increase by 100%, in regards to the improvement of their target markets, upon the attachment of Halal certification in its products (Liow, 2012). The same researcher also performed some studies regarding European companies showcasing a success in strengthening their markets to Asian market due to their effort to apply for Halal certification in their food products.

The Halal industry also proves that it does not only attract Muslim majority countries only. After registering for the Halal certification, Singaporean McDonald's increased the number of

their customers by eight million only in one single year (Lada et al., 2010). Another Singaporean success story includes the success of food export of Singapore to the United Arab Emirates as it increased significantly (67%) since Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) decided to have the institution recognized by United Arab Emirates (UAE). The story was claimed by International Enterprise Singapore website. Nestle, a food giant from Switzerland, has continuously showcased their high interest in improving its Halal market. The Halal versions of their brands have been available in countries France, Germany, and the UK to answer the demand of the Halal consumers in the countries since 2004. Apart from that, 85 of 456 Nestle factories around the world have also been Halal certified (Gulf Marketing Review, 2009).

Ahmed (2009) claimed that suppliers, producers, and investors have taken the Halal industry in a serious manner. The countries that comply with their Halal integrity, produce high-quality products, improve Halal standards and Halal marketing will eventually be the countries that earn a huge success in taking control of the Halal market. The Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA) stated, “when a product is Halal certified, the consumer can purchase the product with the assurance it does not contain anything that is haram or doubtful.” The statement means that the presence of the Halal certification is a form of safety to the Muslim consumers. According to National University of Singapore (2001), Halal food showcases a huge potential as the countries importing Halal food have these four qualities: one of the highest per capita incomes in the world, fastest-growing middle class in the world, importing significant proportion of their food needs, and highest rates of population growth in the world (National University of Singapore, 2001).

Research Framework

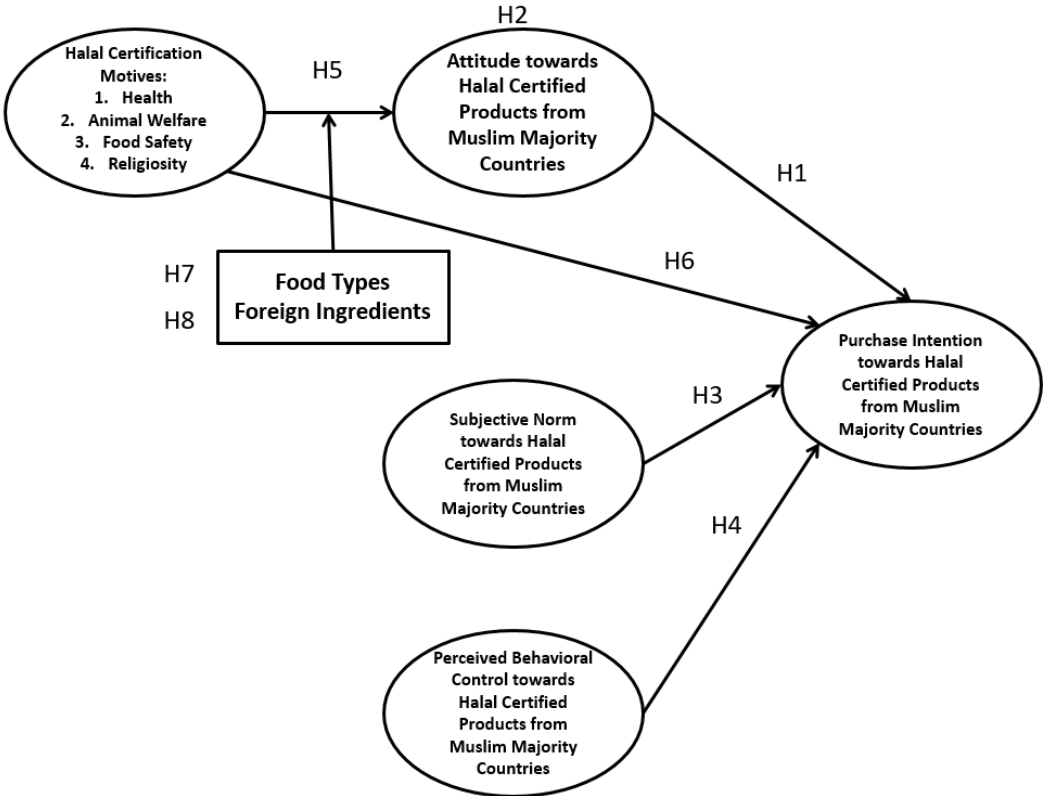


Figure 1: A Research Framework of the Role of Halal Certification in Purchase Intention of Muslim Consumers on the Food Products from Muslim Majority Countries in the Middle East and North Africa

The paper develops a framework (see Figure 1) with Theory of Planned Behavior as a basic theory. The issues encountered in the Halal certification demand are believed to be related to Health, Animal Welfare, Religiosity and Food Safety (Halal Certification Motives). Those motives will be the factors that trigger the demand for Halal certification. Food Types and Food Concerns are proposed to be the moderating factors between the Halal Certification Motives and Attitude.

Theory of Planned Behavior

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) has been widely used to solve Halal-related problems and successfully given answers to numerous research regarding Halal issues. Malaysia is known for its attempt to become a Halal hub in the Islamic world and TPB was employed to one of the studies investigating the manufacturer's perspective (Rahman, Rezai, Mohamed, & Nasir, 2015). A TPB framework with an addition of Halal attributes was developed by Mohayidin and Kamarulzaman (2015). Shirazi and Azam (2014) developed a thesis that examined the Chains of Trust of Halal Certification in the United States. Widodo (2013) performed a research that resulted in the high influence of food safety, religiosity, and health in attitude toward Halal food products. TPB also successfully measured consumers awareness and perceptions towards Halal food in Pakistan (Faryal Salman, 2011) and a thesis developed by Tifaoui (2011) disclosed the results regarding the perception of Muslim immigrants' attitude towards the presence of Halal meat in Spain. Halal meat issue is apparently crucial and a study in Belgium attempted to analyze the impact of the religion towards the meat consumption decision making (Bonne & Verbeke, 2009).

TPB has also been well known for its ability to predict the Purchase Intention of Halal products. A study by Mohd Suki and Abang Salleh (2016) scrutinized the effects of the Halal image in strengthening the intention to patronize Halal stores in Malaysia. Azmawani et al. (2015) conducted a research to investigate the purchase intention towards Halal cosmetics and products. An attempt by Yener (2015) developed a TPB framework that investigated the effects of perceived risk, involvement and religiosity towards attitudes about halal food. A study about determinants of Halal purchase intention of Perlis citizens (Afendi et al. 2014) also employed TPB in determining the purchase intention. Not only about Muslims alone, there was a study dedicated to analyzing the behavior of Non-Muslim consumers towards the presence of Halal certification (Aziz & Chok, 2013). An extended version of TPB with the addition of safety, religiosity, health, and exclusivity (Widodo, 2013) and consumer confidence (Omar et al. 2012) were also performed. Alam and Sayuti (2011) managed to complete a study that proved the ability of the basic TPB to predict the purchase intention towards Halal food. In contrary with the studies previously mentioned, a study from Indonesian researcher Salehudin and Luthfi (2011) claimed that the TPB model is not fully applicable to explain the behavioral intention of Muslim consumers to seek information regarding Halal label and the negative effect of perceived behavioral control. Similar theory to TPB, Theory of Reasoning Action (TRA) was applied to investigate the intention to choose Halal foods (Lada et al. 2010). Therefore, three hypotheses below are proposed:

H1: Attitude will positively affect Intention to Purchase Halal-certified Food Products from the Muslim Majority Countries

H2: Attitude will positively mediate the effect of Halal certification motives on Intention to Purchase Halal-certified Food Products from the Muslim Majority Countries

H3: Subjective norm will positively affect Intention to Purchase Halal-certified Food Products from the Muslim Majority Countries

H4: Perceived behavioral control will positively affect Intention to Purchase Halal-certified Food Products from the Muslim Majority Countries

Halal Certification Motives

Food motives have been studied by so many researchers since a long time ago. Pieniaka et al. (2009) conducted a research that was expected to identify food motives in Belgium, France, Italy, Norway, Poland and Spain and it was found that importance attached to convenience and health acted as direct barriers to traditional food consumption. A study in Australia attempted to investigate the food motives of Australian adults and social marketing perspective was the focus of the particular study. Health, price and sensory appeal were some of the food motives evaluated by the researchers (Piggford, Raciti, Harker, & Harker, 2008). A Taiwanese researcher, Chen (2007), investigated a study that incorporated both food motives and Theory of Planned Behavior. Food choice motives investigated include health, mood, convenience, sensory appeal, natural content, price, religion, environmental protection, and animal welfare. Food choice motives proved to be the main positive contributors to the consumers' positive attitude to organic food. Honkanen et al. (2006) investigated the relations between ethical food choice motives, attitudes and intention to consume organic food and a structural equation model was also developed. The study showcased that people who had high interest in animal rights issues had more positive attitudes towards organic food. A comparative study was also performed to identify the food motives attracting people in Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia and New Zealand. Health, Natural Content, Weight Control and Convenience happened to be the concerns of Malaysian respondents (Prescott, Young, O'Neill, Yau, & Stevens, 2002).

The presence of both mad cows and avian flu have also increased the importance of food safety concerns when food purchase is conducted (Kolkman, 2014). Khalid and Hyde (2013) performed a study that was designed to investigate purchase intention of New Zealand Muslim consumers. The religious commitment was identified as the most influential factor in influencing the purchase of Halal food in New Zealand. Ambali and Bakar (2013) developed a study regarding awareness and policy implications of Halal food and products in Malaysia. Religious belief and health reasons are two of four determinants of Muslims' awareness about Halal consumptions. Food safety, religiosity, and health have a strong influence on attitude toward Halal Food Product, as suggested by a study about the intention to purchase Halal products at retail stores (Widodo, 2013). A Pakistani study by Salman and Siddiqui (2011) also showcased that attitude towards halal food is closely akin to the notion of beliefs (religiosity). A Taiwanese paper developed by Chen (2007) identified that religion and animal welfare were two out of six food choice motive to have positive impacts on consumers' attitude to organic food. Magnusson et al. (2001) developed a study about organic food in Sweden and health was one of the two most important concerns that dictate the intention to purchase organic foods.

In relation to TPB development, food motives like health, religiosity, animal welfare and food safety have been known to be linked to Halal research. And therefore, the four of them are proposed to be the Halal motives to be investigated in this research. The hypotheses below are also proposed:

H5: Halal certification motives will positively affect Attitude

H6: Halal certification motives will positively affect Intention to Purchase Halal-certified Food Products from the Muslim Majority Countries

Foreign Ingredients

Foreign ingredients are the substances that may cause some confusion to the consumers who are not aware or familiar of them. Food industry is getting more advanced nowadays as the additives and the processing aids are heavily used in the process (Al-mazeedi, Regenstein, & Riaz, 2013). The presence of the Halal certification serves as a platform to ensure a sense of confidence the consumers (IFANCA, 2003). The Muslim consumers level of awareness towards the Halal status of their food may vary as well as some of them only define Halal food as a food that does not contain alcohol or pork. There are so many things apart from pork and alcohol that may break the Halal integrity of a food product. Alcoholic content and pork derived ingredients may be present in a food product and listed as unfamiliar names that the consumers do not really understand.

The absence of the Halal certification will require the consumers to check the Halal status of each ingredient and sometimes, the manufacturers also do not list certain ingredients on the package. Apart from that, some manufacturers are also known for hiding the dangerous ingredients behind innocent-sounding names. It is as well not required for them to list the names of chemical contaminants, heavy metals, bisphenol-A, PCBs (Poly Chlorinated Biphenyl), perchlorate or other toxic substances found in the food (Adams, 2007). Genetically Modified Food is very popular nowadays and it is imperative for the Muslims to ensure that the process does not require the presence of non-Halal substances. (Costa-Font, Gil, & Traill, 2008; Grunert, Bech-Larsen, Lähteenmäki, Ueland, & Åström, 2004; Spreng, 2014). The more the consumers are aware of the food ingredients, it is expected that the attitude towards the Halal food products will also increase as the more they understand the more positive they are towards the presence of the products. Upon review, the researcher identified that food ingredients awareness will be a good moderator in relation to attitude and therefore it was decided to develop a hypothesis below:

H7: Foreign ingredients will positively moderate the effect of Halal Certification Motives on Attitude

Types of Food

The confectionaries (chocolates, ice creams, jellies, marshmallows, and candies) are some of the food types that require gelatin in their production process. Gelatin is a form of protein that is generated from collagen in animal bones, skin and connective tissues (usually cow or pig). Both porcine and bovine (mammalians) gelatins are the most utilized gelatin these days (Karim & Bhat, 2009). Gelatin Manufacturers of Europe (GME) reported that the edible gelatins extracted from pigskin are forecasted to be around 80%, while the ones extracted from cattle hide split are expected to be 15%. The other 5% involve the presence of pig and cattle bones, poultry, and fish (GME, 2011).

The gelatins that are sourced from cow or other permissible animals are only good for Muslim consumption if the animals are slaughtered according to Sharia Law. Most gelatins are produced in non-Muslim countries and it is hard to tell whether they are actually safe to be consumed.

And the fact that Muslim majority countries rely heavily food supply from non-Muslim countries will put Muslim consumers in a hard situation (Hanzaee & Ramezani, 2011). However, the usage of fish gelatins is a great alternative for Halal industry and the studies about the development and usage of fish gelatin have been extensively conducted by the researchers (Garcia-Rodríguez & De La Cruz-Aguero, 2011; Irwandi et al., 2009; Karim & Bhat, 2009).

Cheese is very popular in both Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cooking. Feta, Labneh, Ackawi, Nabulsi, Jibneh Arabieh, Testouri, Halloumi and Shanklish are some of the most intensively used cheeses in the Middle Eastern and North African region. It is important to note that the production of the cheese requires assistance of enzymes (De Maria, Vind, Oxenbøll, Svendsen, & Patkar, 2007; Farkye, 2004; Frans van Waarden & Robin van Dalen, 2010; Kilcawley, Wilkinson, & Fox, 1998). The utilization of animal enzymes is possible to make the Halal status of the cheese questionable. The usage of pork-based enzymes will definitely make the cheese haram and so does the usage of enzymes from Halal animals that are not slaughtered according to Islamic rulings (Al-mazeedi et al., 2013; Sazelin Arif, 2011).

Most Muslim consumers might believe that bread would be a Halal-friendly product but it is important to notice that bread may contain L-cysteine. L-cysteine is a flavor and improving agent in a form of amino acid that is utilized to extend shelf-life in commercial, factory-made bread, and it is most often synthesized from human hair as well as duck feathers, cow horns and pig bristles (Kimball, 2004; Morgan, 2014). The Halal integrity of the fresh fruits and vegetables may also be questionable when a certain process is required. Some of the fresh fruits and vegetables are coated, packaged or dried and this is where Halal certification may be deemed crucial. Some fruits and vegetables in the market are coated with a spray that may contain animal products and some of them even are lard based (Batu & Regenstein, 2014). Some seafood products (dried seafood and canned seafood for instance) may contain chicken stock as an effort to remove the fishy taste (Clarke, 2004). And if the chicken is not slaughtered according to Islamic rulings, the whole product will no longer be considered Halal.

The more the consumers are aware of the food types, it is expected that the attitude towards the Halal food products will also be more positive as the more they understand the more important for them to have the products around them. Types of food is definitely a major concern in Halal industry and it is imperative for this study to test the hypothesis below:

H8: Types of Food will positively moderate the effect of Halal Certification Motives on Attitude

Discussion and Conclusion

There is a certain belief that all the food products from the Middle Eastern and North African region are assumed Halal (Kullu Halal) as the majority of the population is Muslim. The fact that most of these countries also import products from non-Muslim countries and the presence of the non-Halal food products in the country make the researcher believes that it is important to investigate the Halal status of the products and the consumer demand towards Halal certification when it comes to their purchase decision. The Halal certification benefits are also presented in this paper to encourage the food industry players in the Middle East and North Africa to apply for the Halal certification and eventually improve the sales turnover. Halal certified food has been gaining interests from the Non-Muslim players and it is also important to introduce this concept to the Muslim food industry players.

Therefore, a research framework on the role of Halal certification in the purchase intention of Muslim consumers on food products from Muslim majority countries in the Middle East and North Africa is proposed. The framework applies the theory of planned behavior as a basic theory and Halal certification motives (health, animal welfare, food safety and religiosity) as a factor that impacts the demand for the Halal certification. Food types and food ingredients play a role as moderating factors between Halal certification motives and attitude.

A non-empirical study and empirical study must be conducted in the future in order to identify which factors attract the consumers the most. The results will eventually help the food industry players in the Middle Eastern and North African region in improving their marketing approach on how to interest their consumers. Food Types study will give an insight into the types of food that need prioritization in the certification process. Halal certification process may take time and it is crucial for the food industry players to understand which food types that the consumers believe they need to be certified first. Food Ingredients study will help the industry understand the consumer awareness towards the food ingredients and how a confusion may eventually cause a cancelation in the purchase.

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