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Building halal industry in Indonesia: the role of electronic word of mouth to strengthen the halal brand image

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Abstract

Purpose – This present study aims to investigate the effect of electronic word of mouth (e-WoM) behavior in Muslim social media on building a halal brand image (HBI) and its influence on purchase intention (PI). Also, Muslims' altruism (ALT) and moral obligation (MO) were hypothesized as motivators to engage in e-WoM behavior.

Design/methodology/approach – A survey involving 320 members of a Muslim halal forum was conducted. Further, structural equation modeling was used to assess the proposed hypotheses.

Findings – It is found that ALT and MO positively influence e-WoM behavior. Furthermore, E-WoM also significantly affects HBI and PI. Meanwhile, HBI has a positive effect on PI.

Practical implications – Indonesian halal marketers face difficulties developing a halal image as a critical differentiator, mainly due to the upsurging number of halal certifications and the consumer's perception that all products available in the market are halal. This present study offers an alternative strategy for Indonesian marketers to strengthen the HBI through Muslim social media amidst the cluttering halal brands in the market.

Social implications – The development of HBI combined with social media interactions will accelerate the halal brand awareness and usage among society, especially in Indonesia, a Major Muslim country.

Originality/value – This present study provides empirical evidence that social media e-WoM, despite its lack of physical interaction and opportunity to scrutinize the halal features, effectively creates HBI and influences PI among Muslims.

Keywords Halal brand image, Altruism, Moral obligation, e-WoM, Online forum, Social media

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Marketers must build effective communication with their target consumers. To communicate is to be human. Likewise, people get information from outside by interacting with their environment. Society itself is a sum of relationships formed by communication (Lee *et al.*, 2011). Nonetheless, the internet development has changed the scope of society which is no longer related to physical interaction to a virtual society connected through cyberspace. Internet emerged as a place for exchanging information, where people tend to virtually trust other people on the other end of the screen without any physical interaction. The interactions through social media are considered to substitute for the poor quality of the social relationship, mainly due to its ability to create new relationships in no time (Lee *et al.*, 2011) and maintain relationships that might otherwise fade (Kearns and Whitley, 2019).

Despite the advantage of internet-based social media, there has been debate on the adverse effects of social media. For instance, Kearns and Whitley (2019) asserted that the internet provides the opportunity for massive interactions but produces lower social interactions. Online friendships were likely to be more limited than those supported by physical proximity (Lee *et al.*, 2011). Online friends were not embedded in the same day-to-day environment and were likely unable to fully comprehend the context of the conversation, making it difficult to understand the discussion within social media (Clark, 1996). Weak interpersonal relationships in online communication also hinder communication and impact message ineffectiveness (Kraut *et al.*, 2002). Thus, discussing products features and convincing people to use them through social media is likely less effective than those involving physical interactions.

Meanwhile, Zhu and Chen (2015) highlighted the incongruence purpose between marketers and people engaged in social media, accentuating that marketers go to social media expecting that the connection between people could enhance product sales. In contrast, people go to social media to connect with others. Hence, the results of social media activities on product performance are often less than satisfactory. People tend to rely on trustworthy sources through their interactions, including choosing halal products. In the context of halal marketing, this issue becomes more critical as "halal" comprises religious beliefs and complex knowledge of the ingredients contained in the final product. Halal is an everyday manifestation of obedience to Islamic teachings; it requires regular interaction with the religious community or trustworthy people (Rahman *et al.*, 2020). It is critical as Muslims to evaluate the product features thoroughly to obtain a truly halal product. Thus, the poor quality of relationships in social media might cause the inability to precisely assess the product's features and hamper the objective assessment of halal compliance.

To cope with the dilemma, marketers could incorporate a brand image strategy that emphasizes the perceptions of the brand inside the consumers' minds rather than the complex product feature, which is difficult to be assessed through social media interaction. Brand image is defined as perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand association held in the consumer's memory (Keller, 1993). The brand image describes the consumer's thoughts and feelings toward the brand (Roy and Banerjee, 2007). A brand image builds a connection with the target audience by conveying how the brand could fit into the consumer's self-concept and personal value (Sajtos *et al.*, 2015). Halal marketers may incorporate the communication approach to building a solid halal brand image (HBI), encouraging Muslim consumers to choose their brands rather than competitors. The idea stemmed from the principle that people make decisions, not on functional and financial criteria alone, but it is felt "fit" between the brand personality, their lifestyle and their identity (Wilson and Grant, 2013). Therefore, "Halal dogma" should position consumers as primary stakeholders rather than beholden to the businesses (Wilson and Liu, 2010).

Despite the critical role of brand image for marketers to aim for a specific segment, scarce studies investigate HBI creation and its effect on Muslim consumers. Prior studies on conventional brand image building generally revealed a positive relationship between social media electronic word of mouth (e-WoM) behavior on consumers' purchase intention (PI) (Haro *et al.*, 2020; Evgeniy *et al.*, 2019; Sulthana and Vasantha, 2019; Kala and Chaubey, 2018; Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012a). However, it may not be the case for halal brands, as marketers face difficulties convincing consumers that their products are genuinely halal (Jan and Wan, 2018). Although in the Indonesian context, prior studies found no significant difference in consumer perceptions between a leading halal-positioned brand and its competitor that used a neutral positioning (Larasati *et al.*, 2018; Wijaya and Dharmayanti, 2014). The lack of halal differentiation might stem from the nature of Indonesian Muslims, who believe that all available products in the market are halal even without halal labels (Soesilawati and Yuliana, 2013). Also, there has been a significant growth of Indonesian producers who applied for halal certification since the enactment of government regulation Number 31 of 2019 on Halal Products Guarantee, which obliges consumer goods producers to obtain halal certificates (Ma'rifat and Sari, 2017). Hence, the upsurging number of halal-labeled brands in the market provides additional obstacles for marketers to use "halal" as a comparative advantage.

Given the current development of social media usage, especially among Indonesian consumers, which exceeds other usages such as emailing and news browsing (Rahmadini and Halim, 2018), this present study investigates the effect of e-WoM behavior to strengthen HBI and its relationship with PI. Farzin and Fattahi (2018) found that e-WoM is a critical factor in shaping consumer behavioral and attitudinal characteristics. Also, Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) argued that social media channels could reach a broader yet targeted audience. Thus, halal branding by incorporating social media could be an effective differentiation strategy for the large Indonesian Muslim segment. Further, responding to the suggestions from Hussain *et al.* (2020) to examine factors that are critical in motivating people to engage in e-WoM, this present study involves altruism (ALT) and moral obligation (MO) as antecedents. These two factors are regarded as the critical Muslim motivational factors for helping or providing benefits to others (Bowles and Gintis, 2011; Halstead, 2007). Although ALT and MO are generally discussed in the physical interaction context (Bennet and Einolf, 2017; Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2005; Mustafa *et al.*, 2016; Gheorghe *et al.*, 2018), they may also contribute to developing a trusted relationship as they emphasize Muslim's attitudes to make a positive contribution to society (Halstead, 2007), including that of online society.

Therefore, this present study addresses these questions:

Q1. Do ALT and MO significantly influence e-WoM behavior?

Q2. Does e-WoM behavior significantly influence HBI and PI?

Q3. Does HBI significantly influence PI?

Theoretically, this present study provides empirical evidence on the effect of social media on halal image creation. Also, this study offers practical strategies for halal marketers to incorporate the religious motivation of Muslim groups within social media to strengthen their halal business. Especially for the Indonesian Government and other major Muslim population countries, this present study provides insights for further developing the halal industry by incorporating Muslim communities and their social media. The later parts of this paper were organized as follows: relevant theories were described along with the developed hypotheses in the following section. Subsequently, the research methodology was

described, covering the measurement, data collection and analysis steps. The following section is the results and discussions. The last sections were conclusions, theoretical and practical implications, limitations and directions for further studies.

Theories and hypotheses development

Altruism

ALT is defined as an act for or in a way to benefit others without anticipating compensation (Van Emmerik et al., 2005). Whereas prosocial behavior refers to general actions that benefit others, ALT is a more specific term that refers to self-intention to act pro-socially (Simpson and Willer, 2015). It is an enduring tendency to think about welfare and act in a way that benefits others (Van Emmerik et al., 2005). ALT arises from a consciousness that our interactions affect the whole community positively or negatively and that ALT could enhance positive relationships (Morrison and Severino, 2007).

Religion contributes to altruistic behaviors by encouraging genuine and selfless behaviors for its adherents (Etter, 2019). In addition, religion influences people's internal norms and values, resulting in an internal motivation to help others (Bennet and Einolf, 2017). Saroglou (2013) explained two dimensions of religion affecting ALT, namely, the "coalition dimension" and "spiritual dimension". While the "coalition dimension" views ALT as merely confined to people who belong to the same community, the "spiritual dimension" connects altruistic behavior to divinity. Thus, it goes beyond the religion's boundaries. These two dimensions encapsulate ALT in the context of halal consumption. Muslims should have individual awareness to help the community and be responsible for helping other members to fulfill Islamic teachings. Similarly, Islamic value encourages adherence to have a good character and improving relationships with fellow human beings (El-Menouar, 2014). To help other members in halal consumption means improving relationships within the networks. Therefore, the ALT heightens the motivation for Muslims to engage in social networks and may encourage reciprocal behaviors from others.

Moral obligation

The concept of MO is closely related to providing benefits to society. MO is concerned with the extent to which an individual feels a sense of responsibility to act (or not) morally (or immorally) when faced with an ethical situation (Beck and Ajzen, 1991; Leonard et al., 2004). In a broader aspect, the principle of morality in Islam has encouraged an economic system that regulates production, distribution and consumption that favors individuals and the community (Mustafa et al., 2016). The duty to one's fellow human beings can create collective motivations, which motivate contribution for the benefit of a group rather than for a personal return. MO is a derivation of religious value, described by a sense of duty or obligation to help other peers based on shared membership (Gheorghe et al., 2018). Islamic religious duty can encourage MO, which involves principles that motivate other individuals by sharing knowledge (Halstead, 2007). The morality aspect of the Islamic economic system focuses on socio-economic justice by reducing the gap between the haves and the have-nots (Al-Qaradawi, 2000).

Drawing on the previous literature, Muslim's MO emphasized promoting benefit for the whole society, justice and collective responsibility. Muslim's MO in everyday life is mainly carried out in relationships between individuals to build justice in social life. In the context of activities in social media, therefore, MO is reflected in the desire to share experiences and provide suggestions for other members in terms of experiences using brands or products. As asserted by (Beck and Ajzen, 1991), MO serves as an ethical consideration and responsibility

to provide genuine feedback on a particular halal brand. These sharing activities, in turn, provide a valid differentiation between the truly halal brands and those that are not.

Electronic word of mouth

The changing landscape of competition has driven the paradigm from "producers controlled" into "consumers controlled" marketing activities, giving consumers more empowerment to influence the marketing outcomes (Herna and Kahleb, 2013). It represents the fundamental change in the relationship between marketing and consumers and could further develop a substantial change in the marketing practice (Kahle *et al.*, 2003). Consumers form a more positive attitude toward a product when recommended by other consumers than the experts or companies (Zhang *et al.*, 2010). Duhan *et al.* (1997) added that a personal connection to someone we know makes recommendations more authentic and trustworthy than other forms of influence, such as advertising and promotions. Hence, marketers should involve consumers in their marketing tasks and identify what factors drive consumers to recommend the products to others.

The development of the internet has driven this kind of communication to become even more critical and created the term "e-WoM". Although e-WoM is similar to the traditional form of WoM, it has several unique characteristics. First, it often occurs between consumers with have little or no prior relationships and could be anonymous (Sen and Lerman, 2007). This anonymity allows consumers to share their opinions and evaluations comfortably without revealing their identities. Second, the natural e-WoM has been preferred rather than paid influencers as this form of communication have potentially negative consequences such as credibility loss (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016; Sen and Lerman, 2007). Third, the unique feature of e-WoM encourages consumers to share their experiences with others, thus, increasing the volume of e-WoM. Given the empirical evidence that e-WoM involves genuine recommendations among members, it is pertinent to examine the e-WoM relationship with halal image building. As it often involves credence attributes, Halal consumption requires reliable and authentic recommendations from people with the same beliefs. Hence, convincing people that the brand is genuinely halal.

Halal brand image

The concept of halal products has become a worldwide benchmark for safety, hygiene and quality. Halal is a purely religious issue (Bonne *et al.*, 2007). Muslims believe that the products should not only fulfill their beliefs but also serve as a part of divine worship (Wilson *et al.*, 2013). On the other hand, nonMuslims consider halal as an assurance of hygiene, quality and safety (Ambali and Bakar, 2014). Nonetheless, halal consumption is often dilemmatic for Muslim consumers as often the products involve credence attributes, which are hardly assessed even after the consumption (Bonne and Verbeke, 2008). Muslim consumers must be convinced that they are being served by marketers who share the same ideals and values, are authentic, and openly stand alongside their communications and offerings (Wilson *et al.*, 2013).

Through building image, identity, personality and slogan creation, branding aims to produce attractive and memorable meaning (Wilson, 2020). It is critical to attract Muslim consumers to purchase products that fit their halal lifestyle. Abdullah and Ireland (2012) asserted that Muslim consumers are concerned about some factors that may burden the product "halalness". Some primary reasons are the ingredients derived from pork; the animals were badly slaughtered, the use of alcohol, impurities and the use of foreign substances or animal gelatin, which came from pork. The complexity of these halal provisions makes it difficult for consumers to scrutinize the products. Therefore, As coined

by Ali *et al.* (2018), HBI is a set of brand perceptions in a customer's mind linked to the Muslim faith, halal concerns and halal commitments; it is critical to developing a positive image, accentuating that the brands already fulfill those thorough halal assessments. It is expected that the HBI differentiates the brands and creates an emotional link with Muslim consumers.

Purchase intention

Ghamisi and Benediktsson (2015) defined *consumer behavior* as human's specific behaviors that directly participate in the acquisition and use of goods. It includes various decision-making processes that start from marketing stimulus entering consumers' consciousness and going through the psychological process to guide the actual buying behavior. It is considered that intention could be used for predicting behavior. Specifically, consumers' PI was used to predict buying or usage behavior in practice (Gazley *et al.*, 2015). The term "intention" is defined as the antecedents that occur before purchasing action. It stimulates consumers' behavior to purchase respective products and services (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2010). Meanwhile, Halder *et al.* (2016) regarded PI as a measure of the possibility of a consumer buying certain products (i.e. the consumer's inclination for a product). The more consumers intend to purchase, the more likely they will buy the particular products.

Altruism and electronic word of mouth

ALT could bring people into social networks in which people are more likely to be asked to help others. These networks contain norms that make people feel that they are expected to comply with the request within society (Bennet and Einolf, 2017). ALT is related positively to organizational citizenship behavior, which encourages people to behave following the organization or community values (Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2005). Similarly, this present study examines an online forum, which may serve as a community where each citizen must follow the established values. As each Muslim is bound to help others, they are likely to share their experiences within their community. This altruistic motive, combined with religious values, motivates Muslims to be involved in e-WoM activities and help each other decide which halal brands to buy:

> *H1.* Muslims' ALT positively influences e-WoM behavior.

Moral obligation and electronic word of mouth

In the context of halal products, the MO derived from the Sharia principle encourages Muslim consumers to share their knowledge and experience on particular products with other community members. Thus, they fulfill their MO toward God and other fellow human beings (Halstad, 2007). Farzin and Fattahi (2018) also found that MO positively affects e-WoM behavior, reflecting the commitment to help other fellow members within the social network. Conversely, Cheung and Lee (2012) found that MO does not significantly correlate with consumers' e-WoM intention. The commitment to a specific brand does not necessarily convey a sense of duty or obligation to help others based on shared membership. The effect of MO was also shown to be less relevant in social interaction ties and reciprocity, as Chiu *et al.* (2006) found that it only increases the quantity of knowledge sharing, but not the quality. However, Indonesian Muslims tend to make their religious life visible on social media. Being religious online always means presenting one's piety to audiences (Husein and Slama, 2018). This piety-presenting behavior through social media, combined with the

religious obligation toward halal food, will likely drive them to share quality information regardless of the brand and the formality degree of their online community. Therefore, MO may become a significant predictor for e-WoM behavior:

H2. Muslim's MO positively influences e-WoM behavior.

Electronic word of mouth and halal brand image
Ali *et al.* (2018) emphasized the importance of building HBI, which significantly influences consumers' PI. Molinillo *et al.* (2017) argued that responsible brands are preferred to build brand trust; in this context, the responsibility to fulfill the halal requirements. Kardes *et al.* (2004) argued that consumers face imperfect and asymmetric information. Therefore, they rely on other consumers' trust and regard them as a signal about the quality of products or brands. The role of this trust becomes critical in halal consumption. Moreover, consumers' generated e-WoM is more effective in strengthening the image and attracting online users (Rahman *et al.*, 2020; Racherla and Friske, 2012; Zhang *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, e-WoM behavior among Muslims serves to strengthen HBI:

H3. Muslims' e-WoM behavior influences HBI.

Electronic-word of mouth and purchase intention
Empirical studies of e-WoM generally found a positive relationship with PI toward products or services. For example, e-WoM is proven to significantly affect consumers' intention to buy cars (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012a) and electronic products such as smartphones and laptops (Aerts *et al.*, 2017; Chen *et al.*, 2016). Although in the services sector, e-WoM significantly influences tourism destination choice (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012b) and intention to book hotels (Agag and El-Masry, 2016). In the case of positive e-WoM, this motivation enables consumers to share their same positive experience. In contrast, e-WoM may save others from mis-purchases (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016). The same phenomenon could be expected in Muslim social media through information exchange. Thus, members can purchase the desired halal brand through others' recommendations and avoid mis-purchase:

H4. Muslims' e-WoM behavior influences PI.

Halal brand image and purchase intention
Lopez and Sicilia (2014) argued that perceived source credibility is critical in consumer trust toward e-WoM. If the online community perceived the source as not credible, the consumer might not trust the recommendation, which does not significantly affect the brand image. Zhang *et al.* (2010) also argued that a less reputable editor review has a less significant effect on brand image and PI than trustworthy consumer-generated WoM. When producers aim to deliver halal products only, they strive to build HBI to enhance the PI (Ali *et al.*, 2018). This study predicted that the HBI encourages Muslim consumers' PI due to its fitness to their lifestyle and identity (Wilson and Grant, 2013):

H5. HBI positively influences PI.

Based on the aforementioned literature review and the developed hypotheses, this present study proposed a structural model depicting the relationship between constructs, as shown in Figure 1.

Methodology

Approach and sample

This present study used a cross-sectional approach as it is an appropriate method to investigate people's attitudes at any point in time (Kesmodel, 2018). The sampling method was purposive as it better matches the study objectives and improves the rigor and trustworthiness of the results (Campbell *et al.*, 2020). An online halal forum located in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, was selected as the sample community. This halal forum engaged in online activities to promote the halal lifestyle. The forum administers its own social media, dedicated to promoting or reviewing any halal brands. Thus, the members can share their experiences or views.

Instrument and preliminary test

This present study used a survey method using a questionnaire to collect the data. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section contained demographic details such as gender, age, education, occupation and monthly income. The second section contained information regarding the respondents' activities in the online forum, such as duration of joining the forum, frequency of opening a conversation and commenting on others' posts or recommendations. The third section contained five scale Likert measures where 1 means "strongly disagrees" and 5 means "strongly agree" concerning the given statements. The statements were adapted from validated scales from previous studies and modified according to the context of this present study. First, the scales were translated to Bahasa Indonesia and then translated back to verify their linguistic equivalence. The scales in Bahasa Indonesia were pretested on 30 Muslim respondents to check the readability of the questions. The respondents were also asked to provide suggestions to improve the overall questionnaire. Finally, the scales that were not easily comprehended were dropped. The final indicators consisted of four questions for ALT, four questions for MO, five questions for e-WoM, four questions for HBI and five questions for PI. Table 1 displays the indicators for each construct.

Data collection

The respondents were selected primarily by their involvement in the halal forum activities as recommended by the administrator. Trained surveyors were assigned to conduct the survey during the forum's weekly gathering and monthly events to achieve a high response rate from the members. The respondents were briefly explained about the survey. They were asked to answer the questions based on their experiences in using
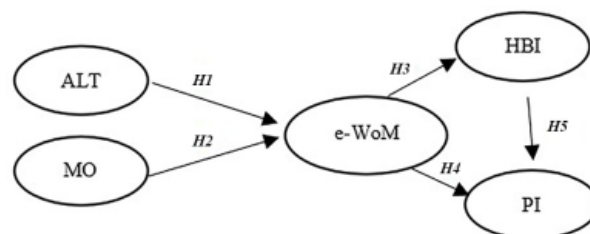

Figure 1.
Proposed structural model

Constructs		Indicators	Sources
Altruism (ALT)	ALT1	People should be willing to help others who are less fortunate	Ricardo *et al.* (2019)
	ALT2	Helping people with their problems is very important to me	
	ALT3	People should be more charitable toward others in society	
	ALT4	People in need should receive support from others	
Moral obligations (MO)	MO1	My conscience calls me to contribute and share in social media	Cheung and Lee (2012)
	MO2	My decisions to share or not in social media is fully in line with moral conviction	
	MO3	I feel morally obliged to share the halal experiences of a brand	Farzin and Fattahi (2018)
	MO4	I feel morally obliged to help people in the online community	
Electronic word of mouth behavior (e-WoM)	e-WoM1	I always provide my experiences in using brands with other members in social media	Cheung and Lee (2012)
	e-WoM2	I always gather information from social media before I buy certain brands	Farzin and Fattahi (2018)
	e-WoM3	To choose the right brands I always consult or read reviews provided by other members in the social media	Farzin and Fattahi (2018)
	e-WoM4	I always discussed the products/services offered with other members in the social media	Goyette *et al.* (2010)
	e-WoM5	I intend to to share my experiences in using brands more frequently in the future	Cheung and Lee (2012)
Halal brand image (HBI)	HBI1	My current halal brands are the best benchmark of halal commitments	Ali et al. (2017)
	HBI2	My current halal brands are the well reputed among other halal brands	
	HBI3	My current halal brands address all my halal concerns	
	HBI4	My current halal brands are trustworthy about halal promises	
Purchase intention (PI)	PI1	I will also buy the current halal brands in the near future	Ali *et al.* (2017)
	PI2	I will buy the current halal brands rather than other halal brands	Shukla (2010)
	PI3	I am likely to buy halal brands that are recommended by members in the social media	Duffet (2015)
	PI4	I would like to buy halal brands that are recommended by members if I had the money	
	PI5	I plan to buy halal brands recommended by members in the social media	

Table 1.
Constructs and
indicators

halal brands recommended by members of the halal forum through its social media. They were also explained that there are no correct or incorrect responses and promptly assisted in comprehending the questions. Souvenirs were provided as a gift for those who agreed to take the survey to increase the response rate. After two months, the surveyors approached 420 members and 376 members agreed to take part. Nonetheless, only 320 questionnaires were completely filled and could be further processed, resulting in a 76.2% response rate.

Data analysis

Covariance based structural equation modeling (CBSEM) technique was used using AMOS 24.0 because this technique fits the purpose of confirming a theoretically assumed relationship (Fan *et al.*, 2016). Hypothetical constructs were estimated as common factors assumed to cause their indicators (i.e. observed or manifest variables) (Zhang *et al.*, 2010). First, the common-method bias (CMB) was examined using Harman's single factor test to avoid the systematic error of measurement, leading to a spurious correlation between constructs (Cote and Buckley, 1987). The multivariate kurtosis value (Mardia's) coefficient was also calculated to assess the data normality. It ensures that the maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) can be applied (Stevens, 2009).

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used as the scales were adapted from previous studies conducted in different countries and contexts. Hence, it could be assured that the scales were comparable to the original ones (Spector *et al.*, 2015). Also, this step aims to ensure that the latent and observed variables' structure follows the hypothesized constructs (Weiss and Adams, 2010). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was then used to test the measurement model's validity and reliability (Hair *et al.*, 1998). Subsequently, MLE regression was applied to test the relationship between constructs. The goodness-of-fit (GoF) indicators were assessed based on the recommendation of Kline (2011). The following cut-off was used: $\chi^2/df < 3$, comparative fit index (CFI) > 0.90, Tucker-Lewis's index (TLI) > 0.9, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) < 0.08 and root means square error of approximation (RMSEA) < 0.06. Finally, the hypotheses were concluded and interpreted.

Results

Respondents' demographic profiles and activities on the social media

Table 2 displays the respondents' demographic profiles and their activities in the social media administered by the forum. Respondents were mostly female (54.1%), within 41–50 years old (44.7%), have a bachelor's degree (49.1%) and have a monthly income between IDR 5m and IDR 10m (59.1%). They mostly have joined the forum for six months to one year (41.3%), followed by 1–2 years (40.6%). Also, most respondents post recommendations 1–3 times a month (61.6%).

Based on the membership periods, which were dominated by "6 month-1 year" and "1–2 years", the respondents will have likely developed engagement with the online forum and be exposed adequately to the e-WoM from other members. Besides, the respondents were considerably active in the forum, as indicated by their frequencies of posting recommendations (1–3 times a month). Therefore, the respondents could provide valid responses in accordance with the objectives of this present study.

Common method bias and assessment of normality

Following the recommendation from Podsakoff *et al.* (2003), Harman's one-factor test was used to examine whether CMB issues arise, which can detriment the validity and the reliability of the data (Jordan and Troth, 2020). The calculation indicated that the first component with the largest eigenvalue explains 26.13% of the variance. Therefore, it did not exceed the recommended cut-off value of 50% of all variance (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). It indicated that CMB was not an issue. Subsequently, the data were introduced to the assessment of normality and showed that the multivariate kurtosis value (Mardia's coefficient) was 1.56 ($p = 0.05$), which was within the critical interval of $+1.96$ and -1.96 (Stevens, 2009). Therefore, the multivariate normality was assured and allowed MLE techniques (Stevens, 2009).

	Frequency	(%)
Sex		
Male	147	45.9
Female	173	54.1
Age		
18–30	35	10.9
31–40	79	24.7
41–50	143	44.7
51–60	54	16.9
>60	9	2.8
Education		
Diploma	45	14.1
Bachelor	157	49.1
Master	78	24.4
Doctor	20	6.3
Others	20	6.3
Monthly income		
Less than IDR 5m	45	14.1
IDR 5–10 m	189	59.1
IDR 10–15m	65	20.3
More than 15 million	21	6.6
Duration of joining the halal forum		
Less than six months	34	10.6
6 months–1 years	132	41.3
1–2 years	130	40.6
more than 2 years	24	7.5
How often do you post recommendations?		
Never, I only read the posts or comments	87	27.2
1–3 times a month	197	61.6
more than 3 times a month	36	11.3

Table 2.
Respondents' demographic profiles and their activities in the halal forum

Exploratory factor analysis

Varimax rotation principal component analysis was used to extract important factors that represent the constructs. It showed that all the items' EFA loading factors and communalities are above the recommended cut-off value of 0.5 and 0.4, respectively (Karetepe *et al.*, 2005). Thus, no items need to be deleted. Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy value was 0.823, which exceeded the minimum value of 0.6. At the same time, each item's KMO exceeds the recommended value of 0.5 (Field, 2000). Bartlett's test of sphericity showed a significant value ($p = 0.000$). Therefore, the sampling was adequate (Field, 2000). Table 3 displays the EFA loading factor, communalities and KMO for each item.

Confirmatory factor analysis

Examination of the standardized loadings, Cronbach-α (CA), composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) was performed to test the reliability and validity of the constructs. All items' standardized loadings were above the cut-off value of 0.5; thus, they correlate adequately to their respective constructs (Hair *et al.*, 1998). Both CA and CR values of all constructs were above the minimum cut-off value of 0.6. The internal consistency for each construct was assured. Thus, each set of items measures the intended construct

Constructs	Items	EFA Loading Factor	Communalities	KMO
ALT	ALT1	0.665	0.813	0.588
	ALT2	0.738	0.786	0.79
	ALT3	0.729	0.612	0.64
	ALT4	0.645	0.79	0.54
MO	MO1	0.782	0.855	0.819
	MO2	0.611	0.601	0.721
	MO3	0.579	0.749	0.655
	MO4	0.653	0.809	0.524
e-WoM	e-WoM1	0.777	0.643	0.799
	e-WoM2	0.56	0.799	0.715
	e-WoM3	0.683	0.812	0.822
	e-WoM4	0.51	0.69	0.655
	e-WoM5	0.758	0.718	0.52
HBI	HBI1	0.737	0.555	0.844
	HBI2	0.514	0.716	0.713
	HBI3	0.526	0.523	0.859
	HBI4	0.722	0.545	0.744
PI	PI1	0.658	0.768	0.792
	PI2	0.644	0.909	0.549
	PI3	0.525	0.65	0.82
	PI4	0.787	0.798	0.705
	PI5	0.54	0.825	0.708

Table 3.
Exploratory factor analysis

Source: SPSS 24.0 output collated by the authors

(Hair *et al.*, 1998). Also, the AVE value of all constructs exceeded the cut-off value of 0.5. Convergent validity was assured, and each set of items was strongly related and measured the same construct (Hair *et al.*, 1998). Table 4 displays the CFA.

Subsequently, the discriminant validity test was performed by comparing the square root of AVE with corresponding correlation values with other constructs. Table 5 indicates that the square root of AVE exceeded the correlation value with other constructs. The discriminant validity was assured, and the items related more strongly to their construct than others (Hair *et al.*, 1998). The GoF assessment also showed adequate values with $\chi 2/df = 1.843$, CFI = 0.903, TLI = 0.924, SRMR = 0.042 and RMSEA = 0.051 (Kline, 2011). Table 5 displays the discriminant validity.

Hypotheses testing
Estimation was performed using MLE regression using AMOS 24.0. As seen in Table 6, ALT and MO positively influences e-WoM ($\beta = 0.478$, SE = 0.135, CR = 2.02, $p = 0.014$; $\beta = 0.567$, SE = 0.165; CR = 1.89, $p < 0.001$). E-WoM significantly influences HBI and PI (SE = 0.22, $\beta = 0.315$, CR = 1.78, $p = 0.012$; $\beta = 0.431$, SE = 0.38, CR = 2.11, $p < 0.001$). Also, HBI positively influences PI ($\beta = 0.078$, SE = 0.147, CR = 1.74, $p = 0.011$). Therefore, all hypotheses proposed were accepted.

As the antecedents, ALT and MO were proved to significantly encourage Muslims to share experiences in using brands that claim to be halal through the halal forum. Subsequently, e-WoM behavior was proved to significantly influence HBI and Muslim consumers' PI. Despite the claim of being halal, the finding indicated that the halal image of the products themselves could be affected by the content of the member's e-WoM. When a member posts or replies to someone's questions according to his/her experience regarding

Indicators	Items	CFA loading factor	CA	CR	AVE
ALT	ALT1	0.765	0.787	0.85	0.69
	ALT2	0.844			
	ALT3	0.79			
	ALT4	0.815			
MO	MO1	0.906	0.69	0.644	0.702
	MO2	0.74			
	MO3	0.679			
	MO4	0.688			
e-WoM	e-WoM1	0.91	0.72	0.78	0.598
	e-WoM2	0.89			
	e-WoM3	0.544			
	e-WoM4	0.657			
	e-WoM5	0.51			
HBI	HBI1	0.795	0.699	0.639	0.677
	HBI2	0.838			
	HBI3	0.892			
	HBI4	0.53			
PI	PI1	0.649	0.754	0.706	0.621
	PI2	0.617			
	PI3	0.75			
	PI4	0.691			
	PI5	0.525			

Source: AMOS 24.0 output collated by authors

Table 4.
Confirmatory factor
analysis

	ALT	MO	e-WoM	HBI	PI
ALT	*0.754*				
MO	0.381	*0.808*			
e-WoM	0.259	0.413	*0.86*		
HBI	0.478	0.467	0.202	*0.799*	
PI	0.53	0.249	0.483	0.198	*0.875*

Note: The square-root of AVE of own construct is italicized
Source: AMOS 24.0 output collated by the author

Table 5.
Discriminant validity

Paths	β	SE	CR	p	Results
ALT → e-WoM (H1)	0.478	0.135	2.02	0.014*	Supported
MO → e-WoM (H2)	0.567	0.165	1.89	***[a]	Supported
e-WoM → HBI (H3)	0.315	0.22	1.78	0.012**	Supported
e-WoM → PI (H4)	0.431	0.38	2.11	***[b]	Supported
HBI → PI (H5)	0.078	0.147	1.74	0.011*	Supported

Notes: ***[a]Significant at $p < 0.001$ (one-tailed). ***[b]Significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed). **Significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed). *Significant at $p < 0.05$ (one-tailed)
Source: AMOS 24.0 output collated by the author

Table 6.
Regression results

the halal aspect within a brand, it influences the perception of other members in the forum. Hence, the online members could decide whether it has already fulfilled the halal aspects as required by the religious teachings.

The result also indicated that HBI positively influences PI. When a brand possesses a stronger halal image, Muslim consumers are more likely to purchase it rather than other brands with weaker halal images or are more similar to conventional ones. In terms of predictive power, MO has more effect on e-WoM behavior than ALT. It indicates that Muslims involved in this study were motivated more by their MO to engage in e-WoM. As described earlier, the MO construct represents one of the religious variables that emphasize more external motivations concerning caring for others and benefit for the whole society, in this context, their Muslim community members. Therefore, it is proved that motivations related more to religious values play a more substantial influence on behavior to share through e-WoM.

Discussions

This present study aimed to investigate the influence of ALT and MO as antecedents of e-WoM behavior and the subsequent effects on HBI and PI. There were five hypotheses proposed, and all were supported. Of particular interest, the findings showed that ALT and MO, two motivations that stemmed from religious teachings, were significant predictors of Muslims' behavior toward sharing their experiences regarding halal brands on social media. This e-WoM, in turn, strengthens HBI, provides differentiation, gives reason to buy, and most importantly, conveys messages that these brands are truly halal.

The result shows that ALT positively influences e-WoM behavior among Muslim consumers on social media. This finding confirmed those of Reimer and Benkenstein (2006), which argued that altruistic motivation drives people to share experiences in using products. Also, a positive direction between ALT and e-WoM was following the argument by Killian et al. (2016), who revealed that consumers with high ALT tend to share information and opinions without expecting a reward. As indicated by the indicators, this altruistic behavior emphasized doing good toward others (e.g. helping people is essential to me and people should be more charitable toward others in society). The survey involved a dedicated halal forum; thus, there were likely unwritten rules for members to share their consumption experiences. Also, the findings confirmed that the Muslim's moral duty motivates them to engage in e-WoM behavior. Muslims' MO encourages the contribution for the group's benefit rather than for a personal return (Halstead, 2007). Muslim membership in halal forums created sharing behavior based on religious motivation. As Van Emmerik et al. (2005) coined, an appropriate citizenship behavior allows members who feel benefited from others on social media to be morally encouraged to return benefits by sharing his/her own experiences.

Next, e-WoM significantly influences HBI and PI. It confirmed the findings of Rahman et al. (2020) and Racherla and Friske (2012), who argued that e-WoM affects the brand image. Recommendations for others could be beneficial, especially when the products/brands in question were among credence goods where the actual ingredients could not be evaluated even after the consumption. Therefore, the halal image plays a significant role in portraying that the brands are genuinely halal as expressed by the indicators (e.g. the brands are well-reputed among other halal brands, and the brands are trustworthy concerning halal promises). One of the critical factors is that the brands should not only be halal-certified but also promote a halal lifestyle and fit for Muslims. More importantly, it could strengthen the image of being a good Muslim by using/consuming these brands. Conversely, if a Muslim consumer shares his/her negative experience, which causes some

doubt regarding the halal aspects (e.g. the Muslim minority country of origins or the use of dubious substances), the image could be burdened. Thus, the halal claims will likely be less trusted by Muslim consumers.

Nonetheless, this study also revealed that e-WoM directly influences PI. This finding was in line with those of Jalilvand and Samiei (2012a, 2012b), Aerts et al. (2017) and Chen et al. (2016). The respondents did not perceive a halal image as a mandatory factor for making purchase decisions, as indicated by a significant direct path between e-WoM and PI. However, the halal image was not only the reason to purchase the products or services. The respondents could still purchase the brands even if they do not have a solid halal image, perhaps due to quality or familiarity considerations. Another insight from this finding is that e-WoM alone could decrease PI. Thus, marketers could not neglect other quality attributes as it could bring adverse effects when they could not fulfill consumers' halal expectations.

HBI positively influences Muslim consumers' PI. This result supported Yusof and Jusoh's (2014) argument, revealing that brands are closely linked to emotions and perceptions, especially when religious values are involved. Since halal is a purely religious issue (Bonne et al., 2007), a specific brand must portray the halal image first; then, the consumers can decide whether to buy it based on other factors (Ali et al., 2017). Therefore, it is critical for a brand that targets Muslim segments to have this halal image as a first impression before the consumers assess other attributes. When marketers fail to develop the halal impression, it is most likely that Muslim consumers would decline to consider the brands in the first place and subsequently consider other brands within the same product category.

Conclusions and implications

This present study provides empirical evidence on social media e-WoM's role in strengthening HBI. Specifically, the findings provide insights into the influence of ALT and MO as antecedents of e-WoM behavior and the subsequent effects on HBI and PI. Of particular interest, e-WoM significantly strengthens HBI and eventually influences PI among Muslim consumers. Theoretically, it is proved that social media interaction could enhance the HBI and convince Muslim consumers that the brands are truly halal, even though there is no complex scrutinization or physical interactions involved. Practically, this present study offers an alternative strategy for marketers to strengthen the halal image amidst the cluttering halal brands in the market. As described earlier, Indonesian halal marketers anticipated the upsurging number of halal-labeled brands due to government obligations, combined with perception barriers as consumers tend to believe all brands are halal even without a halal label. Therefore, it is suggested that marketers incorporate Muslim social media communication in their marketing practices.

Given a vast Muslim population, the Indonesian Government should support halal brand development; thus, they will be eligible for halal certifications. Also, government could promote halal-certified brands through social media as it is proven to build a halal image effectively. The development of halal brands helped by the Muslim communities could positively impact the whole national industry. This halal brand development also promotes the halal lifestyle to global communities and gradually shifts the consumption patterns toward halal products.

Limitations and direction for further studies

This study has limitations in several areas that future studies might address. First, the respondents were only representatives of one halal forum in one city. Given the large Muslim population in Indonesia, further studies may involve other Muslim communities in other cities to expand the generalizability of the results. Second, this present study only investigated ALT and MO as motivation comes from religious teachings. Further studies

may investigate other factors that motivate people to engage in e-WoM. Third, this study did not distinguish the brands based on consumer involvement (i.e. high vs low involvement products). Future studies might investigate the brands based on those categories and compare the magnitude of the influence between high and low-involvement products.

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