



HALAL BRAND PERSONALITY AND BRAND LOYALTY AMONG MILLENIALS MODEST FASHION CONSUMERS IN MALAYSIA: A CONCEPTUAL PAPER



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ABSTRACT

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The growing competition in Malaysia modest fashion industry has proven to be the main challenge for the business to stay relevance in the market. Based on this reason, it is vital for the marketers to create a differentiation in their brands to attract more customers. One of the ways to create this differentiation is by establishing brand personality. Brand personality does not only differentiate from one product to another but it is also a common strategy used by the marketers to create competitive advantage for their business. Although, brand personality has been studied on various product brands, but limited research has been done on Muslim products especially modest fashion apparel. Since modest fashion is considered as Muslim products in Malaysia, this paper examines the relationship between Halal brand personality, brand trust and brand loyalty with the aim to provide a better understanding of the Islamic Marketing concept.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature of Halal brand personality (purity, excitement, sophistication, safety and righteousness) by examining its relationship with the concept of brand loyalty. Future researcher is encouraged to test the framework empirically. This proposed research framework will help to improve the modest fashion businesses marketing strategy in Malaysia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, modest fashion has made it way to the mainstream. It is so significant that a lot of prominent fashion designers make efforts to break through this market. Mango, DKNY, Zara, Tommy Hilfinger, Dolce and Gabbana, Oscar De La Renta, Uniqlo and Nike are among the designers that jump into the bandwagon to cater modest fashion consumers. In fact, the industry considers modest fashion as the untapped market and need to be recognized especially among the Millennials because they believe that fashion consumption and religion beliefs should not be

separated instead it should be celebrated. 40 percent out of the reported 1.8 billion Muslim consumer are the young generation under the age of 25. The younger generation is perceived as technology genius, positive, brand conscious and loyal to their brand.

In Malaysia, total spending on modest wear alone is estimated around 230 billion this year and the statistic is expected to reach 327 billion by 2019. Malaysia modest fashion market size is represented by 61 percent of Muslim out of the total population. This show great opportunities for modest fashion designers to market their product in the country. The government has shown their support by identifying retail industry as part of Malaysia's Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) with the aim to strengthening Malaysia position as one of the world's leading shopping destinations.

However, not everything about modest fashion is free from challenges. The growing competition among the modest fashion brands are also on the rise. Since, the discovery of modest fashion industry, many new players opening up their businesses in Malaysia every year. The competition has become so stiff due to the emergence of new local designers and the entry of renowned international designers in the market especially following the easy access of raw materials from China and Vietnam.

Unfortunately, most of the local modest fashion businesses decided to close down only a few months after they started their business. In order to survive this catastrophe and to ensure that the company can survive in a long run, marketers should create brand differentiation to attract new consumers as well as maintaining existing consumers. One of the effective ways to create a brand differentiation is by establishing brand personality (Thomas and Sekar, 2008). It is vital to shape a brand to its target market. Brand personality is not only differentiating one product to another but it is also a common strategy used by the marketers to create competitive advantage for their business.

Since modest fashion in Malaysia mostly caters Muslim consumers, it is important to include the *Halal* concepts into (Aaker, 1997) brand personality concepts because Muslim consumer keep religion and life as dependence on one another and will not disintegrate them (Alserhan, 2010). This statement was supported by Wilson and Liu (2011) as they consider Muslim consumers as "halal-conscious" and "risk-averse". Apart from that, *Halal* brands are established based on Islamic guidelines which are comprehensive including food, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, logistics, clothing, banking and finance (Minkus-McKenna, 2017).

Previously, many studies have been done on the concept of *Halal* such as *Halal* market condition (Alserhan, 2010) *Halal* supply chain management (Tieman, 2011) the perception of non-Muslim on *Halal* concept (Golnaz et al., 2010) *Halal* certification (Shafie and Othman, 2006; Noordin et al., 2009; Aziz and Vui, 2012) *Halal*-Holistic brand (Aoun and Tournois, 2015) but there is very limited research that has been done on *Halal* brand personality. A few research done on *Halal* brand personality has been identified, however, none has focus on the relationship between *Halal* brand personality and brand loyalty. One of the earliest research that incorporated *Halal* into brand personality model was proposed by Borzooei and Asgari (2013). Borzooei and Asgari (2013) investigated the relationship between brand personality and purchase intention with the mediating effect of brand trust and moderating effect of religious commitment. Borzooei and Asgari (2013) once again examined the effect of brand personality and brand personality appeal on purchase intention in the same year. However, both research implemented (Aaker, 1997) "Big Five" brand personality measurement. Ahmad (2015) argued that brand personality model should be revisited to include new dimension of *Halal* brand personality to support the development of Malaysia as a *halal* hub. One of the recommendation for future studies is to identify constructs that are closely related to *Halal* brand personality. Addressing this gap, the researcher will adapt (Ahmad, 2015) *Halal* brand personality model and extend it to the concept of brand loyalty. Previous studies are illustrated in table 1.

Another challenge for modest fashion businesses in Malaysia is understanding Millennials as their consumers. Millennials are defined as those who were born between 1980s to late 1990s (Levenson, 2010).

However, there has been a debate among scholars regarding the start and end date of millennial generation. Three main characteristics of Millennials are; they are receptive towards diversity, independent and positive.

It is vital for marketers to understand the cohort because Millennials are perceived to be loyal to their brand. They love to be included as partners to the brand they love and because they are interactive especially through social media, they prefer two-way communication between them and the brand. Apart from that, Millennials trust the word of mouth and very particular with their own preferences (Wilson and Liu, 2011). In order for a brand to attract their attention and stay survived in the market is by fulfilling their personal needs.

Millennials are technological savvy because they are born in the era of internet and technological advancement (DeMaria, 2013). Majority of Millennials are active users of social media and posted a video of themselves online. Since they spend most of their time online, they influence brand building and can also spread negativity if they are not satisfied with the products or services. According to Fromm and Garton (2013). Millennials are the largest group who purchased gadgets and fashion apparel. Millennials, like the other cohorts, want to fit into the group which consists of their closest friends, social media influencers, classmates and colleagues which may affect their consumption behavior. Wood (2004) mentioned that millennials are very particular with what the brand communicates to them. Brand that can fit into their personality will create differentiation from the competitors by staying authentic to their brand identity. This also proves that Millennials prefer status related products. Economic downturn in Malaysia recently showed that there is no effect on Millennials fashion consumption.

Table-1. Studies on Halal Brand Personality

Authors & Years	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Other Variables	Findings
Borzooei and Asgari (2013)	Brand Personality (Sincerity, Competence, Excitement, Sophistication, Ruggedness)	Purchase Intention	Brand Trust, Religious Commitment	- Proposed conceptual framework so clarify implementation of brand theories on <i>Halal</i>
Borzooei and Asgari (2013)	Brand Personality (Sincerity, Competence, Excitement, Sophistication, Ruggedness) Brand Personality Appeal (Favorability, Originality, Clarity)	Purchase Intention		- Proposed conceptual framework to clarify implementation of brand theories on <i>Halal</i>
Ahmad (2015)	<i>Halal</i> Brand Personality (Purity, Excitement, Safety, Sophistication, Righteousness)			- Found new dimensions of <i>Halal</i> Brand Personality - Religious aspects of brand personality deserve careful consideration

This paper will review and analyze previous academic journals on *Halal* Brand Personality and Brand Loyalty from the year 1991 to 2017 to identify the problem statement and gap. The articles were used to develop the titles, abstracts, keywords, frameworks as well as headings and sub headings. The main criteria for choosing the journals are the relevancy and credentials of the authors. This concept paper will focus on fulfilling the criteria of a good concept paper which consists of detailed literature review, designing new framework, constructing logical arguments, creating a linkage between concepts, expanding the body of knowledge. To further understand the relationship between the variables, the research objectives and research questions driving this study are as follows:

Research Objectives	Research Questions
To examine the influence of <i>Halal</i> brand personality on brand loyalty among Millennials modest fashion consumers in Malaysia.	Does <i>Halal</i> brand personality have a positive relationship with brand loyalty among Millennials modest fashion consumers in Malaysia?

This study provides an idea to industry players and can be used as tools to assist them in pursuing their objectives. It is also expected to provide some recommendations on how to increase the sale performance of modest fashion businesses in Malaysia. Apart from that, it can be used as a strategy to improve brand loyalty among their consumers in the future. Brand loyalty may vary between each modest fashion brand. Hence, it is necessary to produce a conceptual paper on brand loyalty and *Halal* brand personality among Malaysia's modest fashion consumers to attract more thorough research in the future.

Another contribution of this research is it will be a source of information, reference and comparison for future researchers in their study. Furthermore, researchers can gather information and knowledge regarding *Halal* brand personality that influences brand loyalty among modest fashion consumers. Researchers can also use this paper as a reference and utilize it as valuable information to test it empirically. Moreover, the study will add new insights to the body of knowledge in the marketing field. The discovery of new framework using *Halal* brand personality will add uniqueness to the research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty represents a consumer's deep commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred brand in the future (Oliver, 1999). It can also be defined as the degree of consumer's attachment to a specific brand (Jung and Soo, 2012). Fournier (1998) categorized brand loyalty into attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Generally, attitudinal brand loyalty refers to the consumer's commitment on the brand and behavioral brand loyalty refers to consumer's repurchasing behavior (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Brand loyalty has become the main discussion in the marketing field as it is proven to be the basis of longitudinal relationships and the predictor to a successful business. The advantages of brand loyalty to the marketers are lessens consumer's price sensitivity (Birgelen *et al.*, 1997) reduces marketing costs and attracts new customers (Aaker, 1991) and serves as driver for word of mouth promotion (Dick and Basu, 1994).

2.2 Halal Brand Personality

The concept of brand personality is widely accepted, but there is lack of consensus among researchers on the definition of the model (Aaker and Fournier, 1995). The most prominent definition was introduced by Azoulay and Kapferer (2003). They defined brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated with brand." However, the definition has been criticized over time by the other scholars. Likewise, Ferrandi *et al.* (2000) described brand personality as "all personality traits used to characterize the individual and are associated with a brand". Plummer (1985) suggested the definition of brand personality as one of the key elements of brand image and it is purely the result of marketer's communication.

Aaker (1997) introduced five-dimensional models also known as the Big Five factors as the measurement of brand personality (Caprara *et al.*, 2001). The five fundamental dimensions of brand personality consist of 42 traits. Aaker (1997) designed brand personality by measuring it to consumer perceptions. The Big Five factors measurement scale include excitement, sincerity, competence, sophistication and ruggedness as the dimensions. However, throughout the years, Big Five measurement scale has been criticized and the dimension has been reassessed to fit the constant changes of the environment. Many scholars argued that brand personality can be different from one field to another (Lee and Back, 2010; Usakli and Baloglu, 2011; Rojas-Méndez *et al.*, 2013). The studies on Big Five measurement scale was also conducted in different geographical areas by introducing new dimensions (Huang and Lu, 2003; Bosnjak *et al.*, 2007; Romero, 2012). It is proven that brand personality dimensions are flexible based on the environment and market place.

The concept of *Halal* brand personality was first proposed by Ahmad (2015) in his article "Antecedents of *Halal* Brand Personality". Ahmad (2015) identified five dimensions of *Halal* brand personality that consist of three new

dimensions' purity, safety and righteousness and two Aaker (1997) existing dimensions which are excitement and sophistication. The research was conducted by interviewing seven *halal* certification experts from Malaysia Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) to determine the five Likert scale questionnaires of *Halal* Brand Personality. Five dimensions of *Halal* brand personality are explained as below:

2.2.1 Purity

According to Man and Yahya (2014) humans are born in the state of purity. Therefore, going back to their nature (*fitrah*), Muslims are encouraged to choose products that are permissible by Allah s.w.t (*Halal*). It is a must for the producers to ensure the products that they sell is free from the forbidden (*Haram*) resources. Not only that, they also need to make sure that the products produced are clean. Shaari and Arifin (2010) stated that it is important for the producers to ensure the resources and the distribution channels are pure. For example, in the concept of modest wear, the producers need to make sure the cloth is not made out of pig skin. The concept of purity is important because it provides assurance to the Muslim consumers that the products they are using is not questionable (*shubhah*).

2.2.2 Excitement

Sung and Kim (2010) relate excitement with consumer's emotional responses. Thomas and Sekar (2008) argued that excitement is the degree of talkativeness, freedom, happiness and energy that make a brand perceived as more appealing to its targeted consumers. The concept of excitement also refers to the judgments of the quality or excellence of the intangible products and services which will influence consumer's loyalty towards the brand (Al-Harran and Low, 2008).

2.2.3 Safety

Kim and Chung (2011) mentioned that marketers need to understand consumer's true needs and ensure consumer safety in the consumption of the product. Man and Yahya (2014) refer safety as consumer freedom from danger, injury and damage from the consumption of the products from certain brands. The concept of safety must comply with *Shari'ah* law and good judgement (Rajagopal *et al.*, 2011). In modest fashion, the producers need to make sure that the fabric chosen does not contain hazardous chemicals or can cause injury to the consumer. This dimension also determines consumer loyalty intention.

2.2.4 Sophistication

It is vital for the modest fashion companies to discuss the level of sophistication of their products with the consumers so that they get a better understanding in fulfilling the consumer true needs. According to Ahmad (2015) business is responsible to be transparent in providing information for consumers on the services provided. Sophistication refers to a process or change of an outcome from the simple or natural to the well informed or cultured worldliness (Okazaki, 2006). Referring to the modest wear, sophistication provides an agreement between businesses and the consumers in term of the style, choices of colors and design of the apparel as long as it complies to Islamic law (*Shariah*).

2.2.5 Righteousness

Ahmad (2015) defined righteousness as virtue or morality in Islamic perspectives. Righteousness plays an important role in providing comfort to the modest fashion consumers that they have chosen the right brand and product. Thus, it will determine their behavior and loyalty intention on the brands. Halstead (2004) stated that Muslims relate the concept of righteousness to submission, surrender and obedience to Islam.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

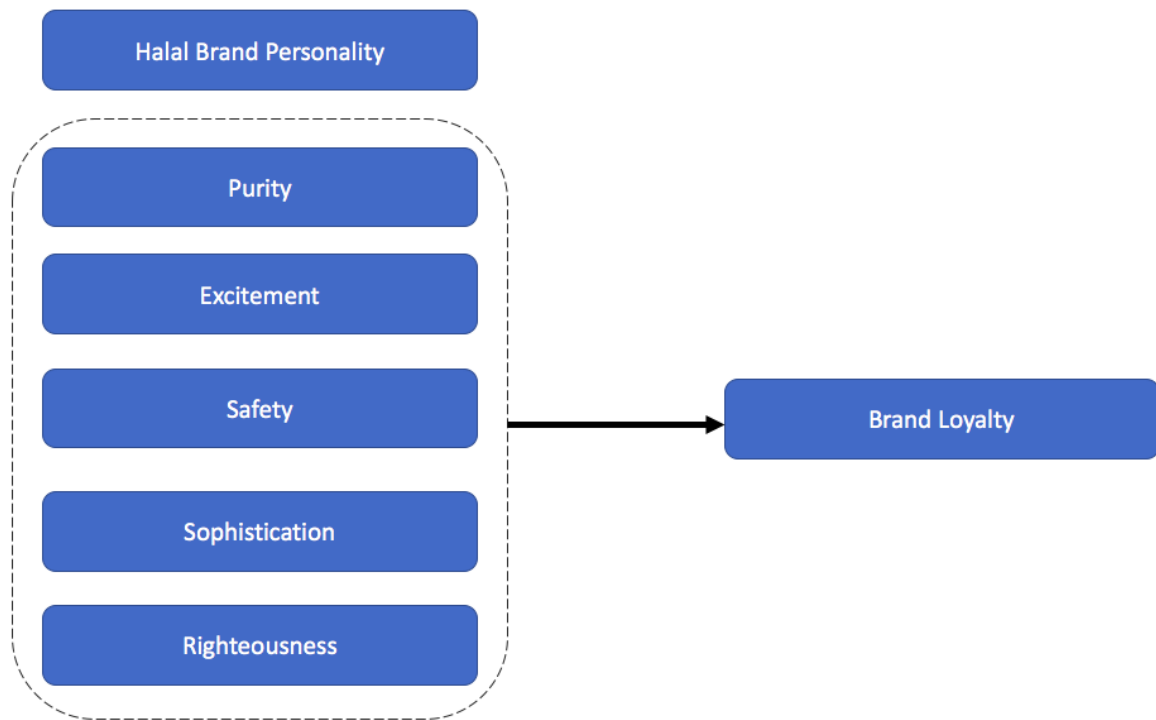


Figure-1. *Halal* brand personality and brand loyalty framework

Previous study proves that there are abundance of research addressing the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty (Zentes *et al.*, 2008). The researchers expect that when the consumer can relate themselves to certain brand there are higher tendency for the consumer to be loyal to the brand (Guo, 2003). Based on previous research, there is a positive relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty (Ekinici and Hosany, 2006; Zentes *et al.*, 2008). However, since *Halal* brand personality is still new, Ahmad (2015) suggested for the constructs to be investigated to explain consumer behavior through *halal* products traits to refine the concepts. Borzooei and Asgari (2013) argued that *Halal* brand were express through beliefs, features, interests and heritage which implies that *Halal* brand contains certain types of personality that appeal to the interest of their consumer. This type of personality also important in consumer's decision making, purchase intention and maintaining strong relationship with a brand (Louis and Lombart, 2010). The integration of religion with brand personality will help to influence the devoted believers to stay loyal to their brand because devout consumer will strongly follow their religious principles and definitely it will impact their behavior in the market, level of confidence on a brand and most importantly their commitment or loyalty towards the brand (Khraim, 2011). In order to gauge a better understanding on the relationship between *Halal* brand personality and brand loyalty, it is necessary to discuss the relationship between each dimension with brand loyalty constructs.

3.1. The Relationship between Halal Brand Personality and Brand Loyalty

The concept of purity in *Halal* brand personality can be defined as the sincerity that the brand provides to their consumers and it rely on the concept of morality (Walker, 1978). According to Bowman and Narayandas (2001) the concept of sincerity usually associated with consumer's loyalty because it is related to the concept of fairness. Sincerity of a brand will be the main elements in building consumer-brand relationship (Aaker *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, sincere brands are considered to have high moral values and will create brand loyalty among consumer (Maehle *et al.*, 2011).

Ahmad (2015) associated safety with the concept of consumer's assurance and dependability of brands to fulfill consumer's needs. If the consumers feel safe with the products they are more likely to create positive purchasing behavior towards the brands (Lau and Lee, 1999) and high value relationship with the brand (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) argued that both; behavioral and attitudinal loyalty among consumers and brands will be created once the consumers feel safe consuming the products.

Maehle *et al.* (2011) mentioned that brands that make their consumers excited will increase consumer's commitment. Ahmad (2015) agreed with Helgeson and Supphellen (2004) that exciting brands will portray the elements of contemporary and up-to-date which eventually have a positive influence on consumer's attitude, thus, potentially creates brand loyalty among consumers. Al-Harran and Low (2008) also argued that excitement contributes to consumer satisfaction and develop brand loyalty among consumers.

Sophistication personality denotes the concept of excellent, fabulous, famous, great, high-class and marvelous (Ahmad, 2015). The dimension expresses a consumer's personality and insinuates an individual's social status as well (Lau and Phau, 2007). Thus, improve brand's perceived quality, which lead attitudes formation towards brand extension (Aaker and Keller, 1990). Lin (2010) argued research on brand personality proved that "sophistication" dimension have positive effect on both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty.

Delener (1994) argued that religion is the central life value that was developed at a young age and play a vital role in consumer's consumption. According to Stark and Glock (1968) the heart of religion is loyalty and righteousness is a multi-dimensional construct that can encourage brand loyalty among consumer. In other word, righteousness might be an indicator to a great relationship between the brand and consumer. Djupe and Gilbert (2002) also characterized righteousness as a form of brand loyalty. Therefore, the research hypothesized as below:

H1: *Halal* brand personality has a positive impact on brand loyalty.

4. CONCLUSION

In this study, an attempt was made to conceptually analyze *Halal* brand personality model. The study proposed a model that describes the relationships between *Halal* brand personality, brand trust and brand loyalty. Brand trust as a significance variables in building a long-term relationship between brand and consumer is vital in determining the success of a modest fashion business. The antecedents of *Halal* brand personality have been used in this research to provide depth to the current body of knowledge. Hopefully, the proposed framework will be useful for scholars, *Halal* manufacturers and marketing practitioners. Finally, it is recommended for the future researchers to do empirical research on the proposed framework.

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