

Ethical Abstention and Halal Brand Preference among Muslim Consumers: The Mediating Role of Trust

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of ethical abstention on halal brand preference and the mediating role of halal trust among Muslim consumers. Extending previous phenomenological findings on ethical abstention, this research positions moral avoidance of products without halal labels as a measurable consumer behavior construct. A quantitative explanatory design was employed using survey data collected from 200 Muslim consumers in Makassar and analyzed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results show that ethical abstention positively influences halal brand preference, while halal trust partially mediates this relationship. These findings suggest that moral restraint functions not only as avoidance behavior but also as a pathway through which trust and preference toward halal brands are formed.

INTRODUCTION

The halal market has become one of the most rapidly expanding sectors in contemporary consumer economies, reflecting not only demographic growth among Muslim populations but also the increasing importance of trust, transparency, and ethical assurance in product consumption. For Muslim consumers, halal labels are no longer interpreted solely as indicators of religious permissibility, but also as institutional signals that reduce uncertainty in increasingly complex market environments. In product categories where consumers cannot directly verify ingredients, production processes, or supply chain compliance, halal certification functions as a trust mechanism that helps consumers make morally secure purchasing decisions (Aziz & Chok, 2013; Rasul & Gani, 2020). This is particularly relevant because halal products belong to the category of credence goods, in which product legitimacy depends heavily on symbolic verification rather than direct consumer evaluation (Ashraf, 2019; Kaya & Ekmekci, 2022).

In Indonesia, halal consumption has become increasingly central to everyday marketplace behavior as public awareness of halal issues continues to grow. However, despite stronger halal regulation and broader public discussion regarding halal certification, many products remain widely circulated without formal halal labels, especially in small retail channels, imported food products, local packaged goods, and digital marketplaces. Consumers frequently encounter products that are socially familiar, commonly consumed, and trusted through everyday experience, yet institutionally ambiguous in halal status (Ariyanti, Rahman, & Siregar, 2021; Sukesti & Budiman, 2014). This condition creates a recurring moral dilemma in which Muslim consumers must decide whether familiarity and social acceptance are sufficient grounds for consumption when formal halal assurance is absent.

The complexity of this situation becomes more visible in urban consumption environments, where product variety, convenience, and promotional intensity often challenge religious caution. Muslim consumers increasingly face consumption choices in supermarkets, cafés, convenience stores, and online marketplaces where information is abundant but not always reliable. Under such circumstances, halal decision-making often shifts from legal certainty toward moral interpretation. Consumers are required to make rapid judgments based on incomplete information, balancing religious obligation, practical convenience, and trust in product presentation. Previous studies show that many consumers still purchase products without halal certification because they rely on packaging cues, product familiarity, or informal assumptions regarding safety and cleanliness rather than formal halal verification (Hidayati & Sunaryo, 2023; Wibowo, 2023). This suggests that halal consumption cannot be fully explained by certification presence alone, because moral judgment and personal interpretation continue to play important roles in actual purchasing situations.

Existing halal marketing literature has largely focused on halal purchase **intention** as the main outcome of Muslim consumer behavior. Numerous studies demonstrate that religiosity, halal awareness, certification perception, and

attitude toward halal products positively influence consumers' willingness to purchase halal-certified goods (Aziz & Chok, 2013; Yener, 2015). Other studies also confirm that halal certification strengthens trust toward producers and increases positive attitudes toward halal brands (Kaya & Ekmekci, 2022; Millatina et al., 2022). While these contributions are important, they generally begin from the assumption that consumers enter the market with positive purchase orientation. In reality, however, many consumption decisions begin not with willingness to buy, but with hesitation and restraint when halal certainty is absent. This earlier moral stage remains insufficiently examined in dominant halal consumer behavior models.

A significant contribution to understanding this earlier stage was provided by Ridha and Fitriani (2025), who explored the lived experiences of Muslim consumers in Makassar who consciously avoided commonly consumed products without halal labels. Their phenomenological study introduced the concept of ethical abstention, defined as deliberate non-consumption driven by moral accountability and spiritual awareness rather than fear of social judgment. The study identified four interconnected experiential dimensions: awareness of uncertainty, moral and emotional negotiation, faith-based reasoning, and spiritual fulfillment (Ridha & Fitriani, 2025). These findings show that abstaining from uncertified products is not merely passive avoidance but a reflective ethical act through which Muslim consumers exercise *taqwa* in daily marketplace encounters.

The findings of Ridha and Fitriani (2025) indicate that Muslim consumers often begin their consumption decisions from uncertainty rather than from immediate preference. When halal labels are absent, consumers may first experience hesitation, internal dialogue, and moral negotiation before deciding whether to consume or abstain. This suggests that non-consumption itself may represent an important stage in halal decision-making. However, while the phenomenological evidence explains how ethical abstention is experienced, it does not yet clarify how such restraint influences subsequent brand-related behavior. In particular, it remains unclear whether repeated avoidance of uncertified products strengthens trust toward halal-certified brands and eventually shapes brand preference.

This unresolved issue represents an important theoretical gap because trust is widely recognized as one of the strongest determinants of brand preference in markets characterized by uncertainty. In situations where product attributes cannot be fully verified, consumers rely on trusted symbols, institutional credibility, and consistent brand communication when making choices (Ashraf, 2019; Kaya & Ekmekci, 2022). Halal labels serve this role by reducing moral ambiguity and signaling product legitimacy. Therefore, consumers who frequently abstain from uncertified products may gradually develop stronger trust toward brands that visibly communicate halal commitment. Yet empirical studies explaining this transition remain limited.

The urgency of examining this relationship has increased under current market conditions in which Muslim consumers are exposed to growing product diversity and digital purchasing environments. Online shopping platforms often

present products with incomplete halal information, while digital promotion accelerates purchase decisions without always providing clear certification visibility. Under such conditions, ethical abstention may become a protective consumer strategy that encourages stronger reliance on trusted halal brands. What begins as moral avoidance may gradually develop into stable brand preference through trust formation.

From a marketing perspective, understanding this pathway is important because it expands halal consumer theory beyond conventional purchase intention models. Ethical abstention introduces a new antecedent that begins from moral restraint but may contribute positively to halal brand preference. Rather than viewing avoidance as purely defensive behavior, this study considers it a meaningful stage in consumer trust formation. Consumers who repeatedly avoid uncertified products may assign greater value to brands that consistently present halal assurance, thereby creating stronger preference and long-term loyalty.

This study therefore contributes to knowledge enrichment in three ways. First, it extends the concept of ethical abstention developed by Ridha and Fitriani (2025) into a measurable consumer behavior construct. Second, it positions halal trust as a mediating mechanism linking moral restraint to halal brand preference. Third, it enriches halal marketing literature by showing that avoidance behavior may actively shape positive market orientation among Muslim consumers. Building on previous phenomenological findings, this study aims to examine whether ethical abstention influences halal brand preference through halal trust and to explain how moral avoidance becomes part of contemporary Muslim consumer decision-making.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Ethical Abstention in Muslim Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior theory explains that purchasing decisions are not always expressed through active selection, but may also appear in the form of deliberate refusal when products are perceived as inconsistent with personal values, beliefs, or expected standards. According to Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015), consumers evaluate products not only based on functional benefits but also through internal psychological processes involving values, motivations, and perceived risk. In many cases, consumers choose not to purchase when available alternatives generate uncertainty or conflict with personal norms. Similarly, Consumer Behavior emphasize that non-purchase behavior represents an active decision because consumers often reject products that fail to satisfy internal standards of acceptability.

Within Islamic consumption, non-purchase behavior acquires stronger ethical significance because consumption is regulated not only by preference but also by religious accountability. Muslim consumers are encouraged to consume lawful (halal) products and to avoid doubtful (syubhah) matters when certainty cannot be established. This ethical orientation positions abstention as a form of moral self-regulation in which consumers consciously refrain from consumption to preserve religious integrity. Previous halal consumer studies have mostly focused on halal awareness, religiosity, and certification as antecedents of

purchase intention (Aziz & Chok, 2013; Sukesti & Budiman, 2014), while limited attention has been given to deliberate avoidance behavior when halal certainty is absent.

A major conceptual contribution to this area was introduced by Ridha and Fitriani (2025), who defined ethical abstention as deliberate avoidance of commonly consumed products without halal labels among Muslim consumers in Makassar. Their phenomenological findings revealed that abstention develops through awareness of uncertainty, moral and emotional negotiation, faith-based reasoning, and spiritual fulfillment. Consumers described abstention as an intentional ethical act rooted in taqwa and moral consistency rather than social pressure. This finding suggests that ethical abstention is not merely avoidance behavior, but an early stage of market decision-making through which consumers filter available products before forming positive preferences.

From the perspective of Theory of Planned Behavior, ethical abstention can also be interpreted as behavioral intention shaped by negative attitudes toward uncertainty and strong subjective religious norms. When uncertified products are perceived as morally doubtful, consumers are more likely to avoid them even when such products remain socially familiar and commercially accessible.

Halal Brand Preference

Brand preference refers to the tendency of consumers to prioritize one brand over competing alternatives because the brand is perceived as more desirable, trustworthy, and aligned with personal expectations. According to Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015), brand preference develops through repeated positive evaluation in which consumers assign greater value to brands that provide psychological assurance and reduce uncertainty.

In halal markets, brand preference carries an additional moral dimension because consumers evaluate brands not only through quality and price, but also through religious credibility. Halal-certified brands are often preferred because they provide visible assurance that products comply with Islamic requirements. Millatina et al. (2022) demonstrate that halal labels significantly influence consumers' product choices because they reduce doubt and strengthen confidence in product legitimacy. Similarly, Wibowo (2023) explains that halal-oriented consumers increasingly associate halal brands with identity consistency and moral security.

For consumers who frequently encounter uncertified products, preference toward halal brands may emerge as a practical solution to recurring uncertainty. Ethical abstention can therefore become an antecedent of brand preference because consumers who repeatedly avoid doubtful products may eventually prioritize brands that consistently communicate halal assurance.

Based on this reasoning, ethical abstention is expected to positively influence halal brand preference because avoidance behavior directs consumers toward brands perceived as morally safer.

H1 : Ethical abstention positively affects halal brand preference.

Halal Trust as Mediating Mechanism

Trust is a central construct in consumer decision-making because it reduces perceived risk and enables consumers to choose products under uncertainty. According to Kramer and Tyler (1996), trust allows individuals to simplify decisions when direct verification is impossible by relying on confidence in institutional reliability and expected consistency.

Halal products are highly dependent on trust because consumers cannot directly inspect ingredient origins, production methods, or compliance processes. Kaya and Ekmekci (2022) explain that halal certification strengthens trust because it functions as institutional verification of religious legitimacy. Rasul and Gani (2020) also show that halal labels serve as visible signals that reduce moral hesitation and support product credibility.

Trust becomes especially relevant when linked to ethical abstention. Consumers who repeatedly avoid uncertified products are likely to develop stronger trust toward halal-certified brands because these brands represent stable moral certainty. In this process, trust explains how avoidance behavior is transformed into positive brand preference. Without trust, abstention may remain a defensive response; with trust, abstention becomes a pathway toward stable brand choice.

Ashraf (2019) further argues that trust in halal markets extends beyond certification itself and becomes attached to brands that consistently communicate halal identity. Therefore, halal trust is expected to mediate the influence of ethical abstention on halal brand preference.

H2: Halal trust mediates the relationship between ethical abstention and halal brand preference.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Based on the theoretical arguments developed in the previous section, this study proposes a conceptual framework that explains how ethical restraint in halal-related consumption behavior may shape positive brand orientation among Muslim consumers. The framework assumes that ethical abstention functions as an antecedent variable because Muslim consumers who deliberately avoid products without halal certification are likely to develop stronger preference toward brands that provide clearer halal assurance. In this context, avoidance behavior is not interpreted merely as refusal, but as an active cognitive and moral filtering process that directs consumers toward brands perceived as safer and more aligned with religious values.

The framework also positions halal trust as a mediating mechanism that explains how ethical abstention influences halal brand preference. Consumers who repeatedly abstain from uncertified products tend to seek greater certainty in their consumption choices, and this need for certainty encourages stronger trust toward brands that visibly communicate halal legitimacy. Trust becomes important because halal products belong to credence goods, where consumers cannot directly verify ingredients or production processes and therefore depend on symbolic assurance such as certification, reputation, and perceived consistency.

Within this model, halal brand preference represents the final behavioral orientation that emerges after consumers evaluate products through moral caution and trust formation. Halal brands are expected to become preferred because they offer psychological comfort, reduce religious uncertainty, and provide a stable solution for consumers who prioritize halal integrity in everyday consumption. Thus, the proposed framework explains both the direct relationship between ethical abstention and halal brand preference and the indirect relationship through halal trust as an intervening variable. The conceptual relationship proposed in this study is presented in Figure 1.

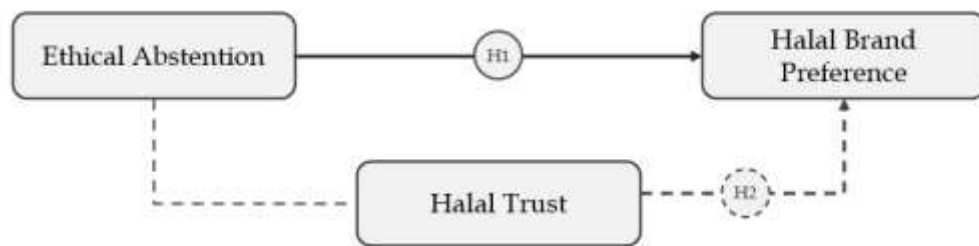


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative explanatory research design to examine the direct effect of ethical abstention on halal brand preference and the mediating role of halal trust. A quantitative approach was selected because the proposed conceptual framework aims to test causal relationships among latent constructs derived from previous theoretical and phenomenological findings. The explanatory design is appropriate for verifying whether ethical abstention, previously identified as a lived moral experience among Muslim consumers, functions as a measurable determinant of halal-oriented brand preference.

Population and Sample

The study was conducted in Makassar, where Muslim consumers regularly encounter products with different levels of halal certification in both traditional and modern retail environments. The population consisted of Muslim consumers who independently make purchasing decisions regarding food, beverages, and daily consumer products.

Purposive sampling was used because the study specifically targeted respondents who met three criteria: Muslim consumers, individuals who actively purchase consumer products, and individuals who have encountered products without halal labels. Based on the recommendation for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling, a minimum sample size of 200 respondents was considered sufficient.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The

questionnaire consisted of statements designed to measure ethical abstention, halal trust, and halal brand preference.

Before distribution, the questionnaire was reviewed to ensure wording clarity and conceptual consistency. Data collection was conducted both offline and online to increase accessibility and respondent diversity.

Variable Measurement

The construct of ethical abstention was adapted from the phenomenological dimensions identified by Ridha and Fitriani (2025), including hesitation toward uncertified products, deliberate avoidance, moral caution, and preference for halal certainty.

Halal trust was measured through indicators related to confidence in halal labels, trust in brand compliance, and perceived reliability of halal-certified products, adapted from Kaya and Ekmekci (2022) and Rasul and Gani (2020).

Halal brand preference was measured through respondents' tendency to prioritize halal-certified brands, choose halal brands over alternatives, and maintain preference toward brands perceived as consistently halal, following Millatina et al. (2022) and Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015).

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). This method was selected because it is suitable for predictive models involving latent constructs, mediation analysis, and relatively new theoretical variables such as ethical abstention.

The analysis consisted of two stages. First, the measurement model was evaluated through convergent validity, discriminant validity, composite reliability, and factor loadings. Second, the structural model was tested using path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, coefficient of determination (R^2), and bootstrapping procedures to examine mediation effects.

The mediating role of halal trust was assessed by testing the indirect effect of ethical abstention on halal brand preference through bootstrapping.

RESULTS

Respondent Profile

This study involved 200 Muslim consumers in Makassar who met the predetermined sampling criteria. The respondents were selected because they actively make purchasing decisions regarding food, beverages, and daily consumer products and have experience encountering products without halal labels. Demographic characteristics were analyzed to provide an overview of respondent distribution and to ensure that the sample adequately represented urban Muslim consumers.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Male	88	44%
Female	112	56%

18-25 years	76	38%
26-35 years	84	42%
>35 years	40	20%

The data indicate that female respondents slightly dominated the sample, accounting for 56% of total respondents, while male respondents represented 44%. Based on age distribution, most respondents were in the productive consumer age category, particularly between 26 and 35 years. This profile suggests that the sample is appropriate for examining halal-related purchasing behavior because the respondents belong to active consumption groups that frequently engage with modern product markets.

Measurement Model Evaluation

Before testing the structural relationships among variables, the measurement model was evaluated to ensure that all indicators met validity and reliability requirements. The evaluation included factor loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 2. Measurement Model Results

Variable	Loading Range	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach Alpha
Ethical Abstention	0.742 - 0.861	0.648	0.902	0.864
Halal Trust	0.756 - 0.884	0.671	0.913	0.878
Halal Brand Preference	0.733 - 0.869	0.659	0.907	0.871

The results show that all indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong indicator reliability. The AVE values for all constructs were above 0.50, confirming convergent validity. Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values also exceeded 0.70, demonstrating satisfactory internal consistency. These findings indicate that all latent constructs are statistically reliable and suitable for structural model analysis.

Structural Model Evaluation

After confirming measurement quality, the structural model was assessed to determine how much variance in endogenous variables could be explained by the proposed relationships. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to evaluate predictive power.

Table 3. Coefficient of Determination

Endogenous Variable	R^2
Halal Trust	0.462
Halal Brand Preference	0.587

The R^2 value of 0.462 indicates that ethical abstention explains 46.2% of the variance in halal trust. Meanwhile, the R^2 value of 0.587 shows that ethical abstention and halal trust jointly explain 58.7% of the variance in halal brand

preference. These values suggest that the proposed model has moderate explanatory power and that the included constructs meaningfully contribute to understanding halal-oriented brand preference among Muslim consumers.

Hypothesis Testing

The structural relationships proposed in the conceptual framework were tested using path coefficient analysis and bootstrapping procedures. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Path Coefficients

H	Path	Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Ethical Abstention → Halal Brand Preference	0.412	5.873	0.000	Supported
H2	Ethical Abstention → Halal Trust → Halal Brand Preference	0.276	4.921	0.000	Supported

The first hypothesis tested the direct effect of ethical abstention on halal brand preference. The path coefficient of 0.412 with a t-value of 5.873 indicates a positive and statistically significant relationship. This result means that consumers who demonstrate stronger ethical abstention tend to show stronger preference toward halal brands.

The second hypothesis examined the mediating role of halal trust. The indirect effect coefficient of 0.276 with a significant p-value indicates that halal trust successfully mediates the relationship between ethical abstention and halal brand preference.

Mediation Analysis

To confirm mediation, the indirect effect was examined separately using bootstrapping.

Table 5. Indirect Effect

Indirect Path	Coefficient	t-value	p-value
Ethical Abstention → Halal Trust → Halal Brand Preference	0.276	4.921	0.000

The indirect effect is statistically significant, indicating that halal trust functions as a meaningful explanatory mechanism in the relationship between ethical abstention and halal brand preference. Because both the direct and indirect effects are significant, the mediation is classified as partial mediation. This suggests that ethical abstention influences halal brand preference both directly and indirectly through halal trust.

DISCUSSION

The Direct Effect of Ethical Abstention on Halal Brand Preference

The findings of this study demonstrate that ethical abstention has a positive and significant effect on halal brand preference among Muslim consumers. This result indicates that consumers who consciously avoid products without halal labels tend to develop stronger preference toward brands that visibly communicate halal assurance. Ethical abstention therefore cannot be understood merely as refusal to consume uncertain products, but must also be interpreted as an active behavioral orientation that guides consumers toward brands perceived as morally safer and religiously reliable.

This finding confirms that avoidance behavior in halal consumption contexts has constructive market consequences. In many consumer behavior discussions, non-purchase decisions are often treated as passive outcomes or temporary hesitation. However, in halal-oriented decision-making, abstention appears to function as a deliberate evaluative process in which consumers compare available alternatives before assigning preference. Muslim consumers who repeatedly encounter uncertified products appear to internalize moral caution as part of their routine consumption logic, and this caution gradually directs them toward halal-certified brands.

The result strongly extends the phenomenological findings of Ridha and Fitriani (2025), who identified ethical abstention as a lived moral experience among Muslim consumers in Makassar. Their study revealed that consumers often experience internal tension, hesitation, and spiritual reflection before deciding to avoid products without halal labels. The present quantitative evidence demonstrates that this internal process does not remain limited to moral hesitation, but evolves into stable marketplace preference. In other words, what begins as ethical restraint eventually becomes a determinant of positive brand selection.

This extension is theoretically important because it transforms ethical abstention from an experiential concept into an explanatory behavioral construct. Previous halal consumer studies have generally emphasized halal awareness, religiosity, and certification as drivers of purchase intention (Aziz & Chok, 2013; Sukesti & Budiman, 2014). Those studies largely assume that consumers begin decision-making from the desire to purchase halal products. The present study shows that consumers may begin from the opposite direction: avoiding uncertain products first, and then developing preference toward halal brands afterward.

From the perspective of Consumer Behavior, preference develops when consumers repeatedly assign higher value to brands that reduce psychological discomfort and perceived risk. In halal markets, uncertified products often create cognitive tension because consumers cannot easily verify ingredient sources, production methods, or certification legitimacy. This moral uncertainty encourages consumers to assign greater value to brands that visibly reduce doubt.

Similarly, Consumer Behavior explain that consumers often simplify decisions by rejecting alternatives that conflict with personal standards before choosing acceptable options. This theoretical explanation aligns closely with the

current finding. Ethical abstention represents the rejection stage, while halal brand preference emerges as the acceptance stage.

The positive effect also supports recent halal market findings suggesting that halal-certified brands increasingly serve as symbols of moral consistency rather than merely legal compliance. Millatina et al. (2022) found that halal labels significantly strengthen consumers' preference because labels reduce ambiguity and increase confidence in product legitimacy. Wibowo (2023) similarly argues that halal brand preference is increasingly linked to identity expression among Muslim consumers, particularly in modern urban markets where product choices are abundant but not equally trusted.

An important implication of this finding is that halal brand preference may emerge even before detailed brand evaluation occurs. Consumers practicing ethical abstention may already favor halal brands at the screening stage, before comparing price, taste, packaging, or promotional attractiveness. This means that moral filtering can precede conventional brand evaluation.

In contemporary consumption settings, especially in supermarkets, convenience stores, and digital marketplaces, Muslim consumers are exposed to numerous products that appear familiar yet remain uncertain in halal status. Under such conditions, ethical abstention becomes a practical decision shortcut. Consumers who repeatedly rely on abstention are likely to assign stronger preference to halal brands because these brands consistently resolve uncertainty without requiring repeated moral negotiation.

Therefore, ethical abstention should be viewed not as market withdrawal but as an active moral pathway through which consumers construct brand preference.

The Mediating Role of Halal Trust

The second major finding of this study confirms that halal trust significantly mediates the relationship between ethical abstention and halal brand preference. This result indicates that ethical abstention influences brand preference not only directly, but also indirectly through trust formation. Consumers who repeatedly avoid uncertified products gradually develop stronger confidence toward halal-certified brands because these brands represent stable moral certainty in everyday purchasing situations.

This mediation finding reveals that trust is the psychological mechanism through which ethical restraint becomes positive market preference. Ethical abstention alone reflects moral caution, but trust allows that caution to be translated into stable brand orientation. Without trust, avoidance may remain situational and temporary; with trust, consumers develop repeated preference toward brands perceived as reliable.

This finding supports Kaya and Ekmekci (2022), who explain that halal trust emerges because halal certification functions as institutional assurance in markets where direct verification is difficult. Consumers cannot inspect raw ingredients, processing procedures, or production chains directly, so they depend on visible trust signals such as halal labels and brand credibility.

Rasul and Gani (2020) also argue that halal trust reduces religious risk by offering symbolic product legitimacy. This becomes especially relevant in markets where uncertified products remain socially accepted and commercially widespread. Under such circumstances, trust helps consumers resolve internal uncertainty efficiently.

The present study extends previous trust literature by showing that halal trust is not only formed through direct exposure to certified products, but also through repeated avoidance of uncertain alternatives. Consumers who often abstain from uncertified products appear to assign greater psychological importance to halal trust because trust becomes the answer to recurring moral uncertainty.

This is consistent with Kramer and Tyler (1996), which explains that trust functions as a mechanism for simplifying decision-making when complete information is unavailable. In halal markets, trust reduces complexity by allowing consumers to rely on institutional symbols and brand consistency instead of repeatedly evaluating every product independently.

The partial mediation result found in this study is particularly meaningful. Because ethical abstention remains significant even after halal trust is introduced, it indicates that trust strengthens but does not replace the direct moral influence of abstention. Moral restraint itself already carries motivational force strong enough to shape brand preference, while trust stabilizes that process into stronger brand commitment.

This means that Muslim consumers may directly prefer halal brands because halal brands symbolically resolve uncertainty, while trust deepens this preference through repeated confidence and emotional assurance.

Another important implication is that halal trust should not be understood only as confidence in certification logos. Trust also includes confidence that brands consistently uphold halal integrity across product communication, reputation, and perceived ethical seriousness. Consumers increasingly interpret halal trust through the broader moral credibility of brands.

In digital marketplaces where halal information is sometimes incomplete or inconsistently displayed, trust becomes even more important. Consumers who practice ethical abstention may rely heavily on trusted brands because trusted brands reduce the cognitive burden of evaluating every product individually. Thus, halal trust functions as the bridge connecting moral caution and positive market preference in contemporary halal consumption.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that ethical abstention plays an important role in shaping halal-oriented consumer behavior among Muslim consumers. The findings demonstrate that consumers who deliberately avoid products without halal labels tend to develop stronger preference toward halal-certified brands. Ethical abstention therefore functions not only as avoidance behavior, but also as an active moral mechanism through which consumers filter market alternatives and direct their choices toward brands perceived as religiously safer and ethically

more reliable. This finding confirms that moral restraint in halal consumption has constructive implications for brand preference formation.

The study also confirms that halal trust significantly mediates the relationship between ethical abstention and halal brand preference. Consumers who repeatedly avoid uncertified products gradually develop stronger trust toward halal-certified brands because these brands provide greater certainty under conditions of product ambiguity. Trust therefore functions as the psychological mechanism that transforms ethical caution into stable brand preference. The mediation result indicates that halal trust strengthens the effect of ethical abstention while ethical abstention itself remains a direct determinant of halal-oriented brand preference.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to halal marketing literature by extending the concept of ethical abstention from a phenomenological insight into a measurable explanatory construct. Previous halal consumer studies have largely focused on halal awareness, religiosity, and purchase intention, whereas this study demonstrates that non-consumption behavior itself can become an important antecedent of positive market orientation. The study also enriches halal consumer behavior theory by showing that trust bridges moral restraint and brand preference in contemporary halal consumption settings.

From a practical perspective, the findings imply that halal branding strategies should not rely solely on certification symbols but also emphasize trust-building communication. Producers and marketers need to present halal assurance consistently through packaging clarity, transparent product information, and credible halal communication. Brands that successfully communicate ethical reliability are more likely to gain stronger preference among Muslim consumers who practice ethical abstention. In increasingly complex retail and digital markets, trust-oriented halal branding becomes essential for reducing consumer hesitation.

This study is limited to Muslim consumers in Makassar and focuses on halal-related purchasing decisions within general consumer product categories. Future studies are recommended to examine ethical abstention in broader demographic settings, compare different product categories, and incorporate additional variables such as religiosity, perceived risk, or halal knowledge to further explain halal consumer decision-making in diverse market contexts.

FURTHER STUDY

This study is limited to Muslim consumers in Makassar, so the findings may not fully represent consumer behavior in different regions or market contexts. In addition, the study focuses only on general consumer products without distinguishing specific product categories that may involve different levels of halal sensitivity.

Future research is recommended to test ethical abstention in broader demographic settings and across different product categories such as food, cosmetics, or pharmaceutical products. Additional variables such as religiosity, halal knowledge, or perceived risk may also be incorporated to provide a more comprehensive explanation of halal consumer behavior.

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