



## Customer Loyalty Dynamics: The Influence of Halal Certification, Trust, and Brand Preference in the Indonesian Fast Food Industry

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### ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered consumer behavior in Indonesia, with a stronger focus on essential needs such as food and beverages. This shift in priorities has been met with a positive response from businesses in the fast-food industry. KFC, one of the most prominent fast-food chains in Indonesia, serves as the context for this study. The research focuses on Indonesian Gen Z consumers who have previously purchased from KFC, with a sample of 180 respondents selected through purposive sampling. The study uses SEM-PLS analysis with Smart-PLS 4.0 software, revealing that Halal Certification, Brand Preference, and Trust have a positive and significant impact on Customer Loyalty. Additionally, Trust and Brand Preference act as mediators in the relationship between Halal Certification and Customer Loyalty, highlighting the importance of these factors in shaping consumer behavior. The findings suggest that halal certification not only influences customer loyalty directly but also strengthens brand preference and trust, which are crucial in fostering long-term loyalty. This is particularly important in the Indonesian market, where ethical and religious considerations are key drivers in consumer decision-making, especially among the younger generation

## INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the COVID-19 virus began spreading in Indonesia, causing a pandemic that led to significant changes in consumer behavior. One of the key shifts was in purchasing patterns, with consumers increasingly focusing on essential and primary products. During the pandemic, fast food became especially popular due to its convenience, and many fast-food restaurants also offered online delivery services. A study by Lidwina (2020) found that from September 9-13, 2020, visits to fast-food restaurants reached 62% of normal levels, the highest percentage compared to other types of restaurants.

This surge in fast-food consumption prompted many fast-food producers to actively work on attracting more consumers to choose their products. One of the key players in the industry is KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken). However, despite its popularity, KFC Indonesia experienced a decline in sales in 2020. This drop was largely due to the temporary closure of several KFC outlets in Indonesia during the pandemic and the decreased purchasing power of consumers. As a result, KFC faced financial losses due to reduced revenues (Wulandhari, 2020).

Table 1. Comparison of Indonesian Fast Food Industry Brand Index

Brand	Index			
	2019	2020	2021	2022
KFC	31.70	33.00	28.50	30.50
McD	28.20	27.50	30.50	30.70
Burger King	9.70	10.80	9.10	9.60
Hokben	-	-	10.10	10.80

Source: Topbrand Award-2022

According to Table 1, derived from the TopBrand Award, both KFC and McDonald's show strong competitiveness in the fast-food industry. In 2019-2020, KFC was the leader with market shares of 31.70% and 33.00%, while McDonald's ranked second with shares of 28.20% and 27.50%. However, between 2021 and 2022, McDonald's managed to surpass KFC, with market shares of 30.50% and 30.70%, while KFC's market share decreased to 28.50% and 30.50%, placing it in second position.

Tabel 2. Revenue Comparison of Fast Food Industry Indonesia (KFC vs McD)

Restaurant	Revenue (Q4 2020)	Revenue Q4 2021
KFC	Rp 4,84 Triliun	Rp 4,81 Triliun
McD	Rp 5,3 Triliun	Rp 6 Triliun

Sumber: Liputan 6.com 2022 & Databoks 2022)

In Table 2, it can be seen the income comparison between the two leading fast-food chains, where in 2021, KFC faced a revenue decline, while McDonald's showed an increase (Dihni, 2022).

In addition to the financial downturn, KFC also faced negative publicity in 2021. Issues arose regarding the halal status of some of its products, including claims that KFC burgers contained very little chicken and added inedible ingredients. Furthermore, the soy sauce and mayonnaise in KFC menus were allegedly made with non-halal oils, causing KFC to be accused of being anti-Islam (Fitria, 2021).

These issues are particularly sensitive in Indonesia, where the majority of the population is Muslim. For Muslims, consuming halal food is non-negotiable, as it is closely linked to religious faith and obedience to Allah (Saifudin et al., 2022). The Quran, in Surah Al-Baqarah:168, clearly states: "O mankind, eat from whatever is on the earth [that is] lawful and good, and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy." This verse underscores the necessity of consuming halal and pure food while avoiding what is prohibited. In response, KFC introduced halal certification for its products, but the question remains whether this action will be enough to regain consumer trust and loyalty, particularly among Indonesian Muslim customers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketing management refers to the process where a company creates value for its customers and establishes strong customer relationships in exchange for gaining value from those customers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). In this context, understanding consumer behavior is crucial, as it involves the processes through which individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy their needs and wants (Solomon, 2020).

This study focuses on Generation Z, individuals born between 1997 and 2012, who make up a significant portion of the Indonesian population, with approximately 74.93 million or 27.94% of the total population (Jayani, 2020). From a business perspective, Generation Z represents a substantial market segment, and understanding their characteristics can assist marketers in optimizing their strategies (Wijoyo et al., 2020). Several studies have also explored the behaviors of Gen Z in Indonesia, highlighting key factors that shape their consumer choices (Hanafiah & Djabbar, 2024; Fortunata & Hanafiah, 2024; Hanafiah et al., 2023).

### A. Halal Certification

Halal certification serves as a guarantee for Muslim consumers to choose products that align with their religious beliefs and standards (Adhari, 2021). It ensures that the product meets certain safety and quality standards during production, which is particularly important for consumers seeking religiously compliant products. The indicators used to measure halal certification in this study are adapted from Basri and Kurniawati (2019) and include:

1. The halal certification on KFC assures me that KFC is halal.
2. I feel safe when purchasing KFC because it is guaranteed halal.
3. I choose KFC because I am confident it is halal.

4. I believe that halal certification increases the popularity of KFC products.

5. The halal certification from KFC motivates me to make repeat purchases.

#### **B. Trust**

Trust is commonly defined as the reliance of customers on the quality and reliability of a service or product (Leuthesser & Kohli, 1995). In this study, trust is measured through indicators adapted from Aziz and Chok (2013), which include:

1. I trust KFC.

2. You can always rely on KFC.

3. KFC is dependable

#### **C. Brand Preference**

Brand preference refers to the tendency of consumers to favor a particular brand over others, based on the information and stimuli they receive from the brand (Chalil, 2021). In this study, brand preference is measured through the following indicators, adapted from Amin and Uddin (2020):

1.KFC is a better fast food brand compared to others.

2.I prefer KFC's menu over other fast food menus.

3.Apart from KFC, I would consider purchasing from other fast food brands.

4.I am not interested in trying other fast food brands besides KFC.

5.KFC is my first choice when I decide to buy fast food.

6.The satisfying experiences I've had with KFC make me choose it over other fast food brands

#### **D. Customer Loyalty**

Customer loyalty refers to the consistent preference and commitment to a brand, often leading to repeat purchases (Han & Ryu, 2009). The indicators for customer loyalty, adapted from Han and Ryu (2009), include:

1.KFC is always my first choice.

2.If KFC is not available, I would rather not purchase from another brand.

3.I consider myself loyal to KFC.

#### **E. Theoretical Basis and Hypothesis Development**

This study uses the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) theory (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) as its theoretical framework. The S-O-R theory has been widely applied in consumer behavior research because it helps explain the relationship between environmental stimuli, customer responses, and actions (Li et al., 2012). In this study, the theory serves as the foundation for the conceptual framework, exploring how halal certification influences customer loyalty, with trust and brand performance acting as mediators.

#### **Hypothesis Development**

To address the sales performance issues faced by the company, the application of marketing strategies, particularly halal certification, can be best understood through the S-O-R theory. As mentioned earlier, the theory suggests that trust and brand performance mediate the relationship between halal certification and customer loyalty. Halal certification is considered an "external stimulus" (Salindal, 2018), while trust and brand performance represent the "organism" (Chang, 2013), and customer loyalty is the "response." Previous studies have confirmed the connections between these variables.

For example, research has shown that halal certification positively influences consumer trust (Novagusda & Deriawan, 2019; Mahliza & Arditantri, 2022). Trust refers to the customer's belief in the reliability and integrity of a relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Halal certification fosters trust among Muslim consumers (Hamdan et al., 2013). Additionally, Quaoquab et al. (2019) found that trust significantly impacts customer loyalty in the Malaysian fast food industry, with trust also acting as a mediator between halal certification and customer loyalty. Similarly, empirical studies have shown that halal certification can positively influence brand preference, which in turn enhances customer loyalty.

For instance, a study by Mollah et al. (2021) found that consumers perceive halal-certified products as more trustworthy, which leads to a stronger preference for these brands. This preference further contributes to increased customer loyalty. The study also highlights that brand preference acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between halal certification and customer loyalty. Thus, halal certification not only directly influences customer behavior but also indirectly strengthens its loyalty through brand preference. Hence, based on above empirical studies, this research proposed several hypotheses:

H1: halal certification positively influence trust

H2: halal certification positively influence brand preference

H3: halal certification positively influence customer loyalty

H4: trust positively influence customer loyalty

H5: brand preference positively influence customer loyalty

H6: trust mediate the relationship between halal certification toward customer loyalty

H7: brand preference mediate the relationship between halal certification toward customer loyalty

Therefore, to address all hypotheses, it can be seen by the following research framework (figure 1). This framework is designed to make it easier to understand the relationship between all variables in this research.

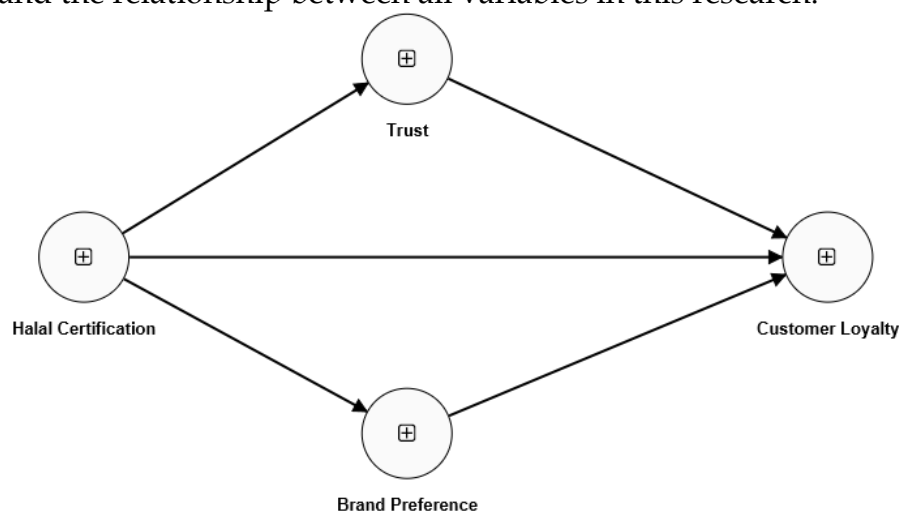


Figure 1. Research Framework

## METHODS

The primary goal of this causal study is to explore the relationships between the variables being examined. A quantitative approach was used,

focusing on data collection and measurement through self-reporting. The questionnaire, designed using a Google Forms-style format (shout.com), was distributed through various online platforms, including WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook. To gather the required number of responses, a snowball sampling method was used. This involved the researcher sending the questionnaire to friends and family members, who then forwarded it to others. In addition, purposive non-probability sampling ensured that respondents were members of Generation Z, and the following screening questions were asked: "Are you Muslim?" and "Are you aged between 10 and 25 years?". A total of 180 questionnaires were distributed, which was determined using G Power 3.1 software to achieve 80% statistical power, based on parameters such as effect size = 0.15, error margin = 5%, and power of  $(1-\beta) = 80\%$ , with three predictors.

In terms of demographics, most respondents were male (53.3%, or 98 respondents). Age-wise, the study was predominantly made up of respondents aged 21-23 years, who accounted for 86.7% (156 respondents). Regarding employment, 53.3% (96 respondents) were students, followed by private employees, who made up 36.7%.

The methodology applied in this research is component or variance-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), specifically using Partial Least Squares (PLS) with the Smart-PLS version 4 software that involved two key stages, in line with the recommended approach in PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2017). The first stage was the evaluation of the measurement model (outer model), which involved assessing the reliability and validity of the constructs through indicators such as loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE). The second stage focused on the structural model (inner model) to test the hypothesized relationships, including path coefficients, t-values, and the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), to determine the strength and significance of the relationships between the constructs.

## RESULTS

SmartPLS 4 is used for the purpose of SEM in this study, and there are two stages of model analysis in the PLS. The first stage is the evaluation of the measurement model or outer model. Then, the second stage is assessing the structural model or inner model analysis to determine the hypotheses decision. For measurement model, in table 3, it can be seen that all indicators for each construct have an outer loading value  $\geq 0.60$ , and Composite Reliability values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency for each construct (Hair et al., 2017). Followed with the average variance extracted (AVE) that are all above 0.5 that meets the convergent validity.

Table 3. Indicator Reliability and Convergent Validity Test Results

(Loadings and AVE)

Variable	Indicator	Loading	CR	AVE
Brand Preference	BP1	0.791	0.922	0.664
	BP2	0.865		
	BP3	0.655		
	BP4	0.807		
	BP5	0.899		
	BP6	0.850		
Customer Loyalty	CL1	0.904	0.852	0.866
	CL2	0.799		
	CL3	0.930		
Halal Certification	HC1	0.836	0.872	0.888
	HC2	0.845		
	HC3	0.860		
	HC4	0.695		
	HC5	0.822		
Trust	TR1	0.844	0.850	0.852
	TR2	0.897		
	TR3	0.891		

Source: Researcher Output (SmartPLS 4)

In table 4, HTMT test is part measurement model to test the discriminant validity. In more recent literature, Franke and Sarstedt (2019) confirm that 1 can be interpreted as an upper boundary of acceptable construct correlations and this condition does not represent a definite violation of discriminant validity. To sum, the measurement model meet the reliability and the validity test. Then we continue to structural model.

Table 4. HTMT Test Results

	BP	CL	HC	TR
BP				
CL	0.931			
HC	0.646	0.529		
TR	0.834	0.798	0.701	

At this the second stage of analysis, the relationship between constructs was assessed. In this regard, coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) and effect size ( $f^2$ ) can be seen in table 5 and 6. Then, the hypothesis testing was conducted by performing the bootstrapping procedure.

Tabel 5. Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ ) Values

Relationship	$R^2$	Predictive Accuracy
HC -> BP	0.340	Substantial
HC -> TR	0.381	Substantial
HC -> CL BP -> CL TR -> CL	0.690	Substantial

In table 5, the effect ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating a higher level of predictive accuracy. As  $R^2$  values refer to the predictive accuracy of the predictor constructs on the respective variables (Hair et al., 2016). The the combination of HC, TR, and BP can predicts 69% of CL and described as substantial predictive accuracy. (Cohen, 1992)

Tabel 6. Effect size ( $f^2$ ) Values

Relationship	$f^2$	Effect Size
HC -> BP	0.514	Substantial
HC -> CL	0.011	Small
HC -> TR	0.615	Substantial
TR -> CL	0.058	Medium
BP -> CL	0.686	Substantial

In table 6, effect size ( $f^2$ ) value signifies the contribution of a construct toward the  $R^2$  value of a target construct in a structural model (Hair et al., 2016). Such contribution or effect size would be based on the value of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, which are interpreted as a small, medium, and large, respectively (Cohen, 1992). As such, it can be seen in table 6 that HC to BP, HC to TR, BP to CL, are having the substantial effect.

Tabel 7. Hypotheses Testing for the Direct and Indirect Relationships

No	Hypotheses	$\beta$ value	t value	P value	BCI LL	BCI UL	Remarks
H1	HC -> TR	0.617	9.703	0.000	0.457	0.716	Accepted
H2	HC -> BP	0.583	12.239	0.000	0.476	0.668	Accepted
H3	HC -> CL	0.465	8.635	0.000	0.343	0.559	Accepted
H4	TR -> CL	0.212	2.451	0.014	0.038	0.375	Accepted
H5	BP -> CL	0.708	9.998	0.000	0.561	0.840	Accepted

H6	HC -> TR -> CL	0.131	2.387	0.017	0.027	0.241	Accepted
H7	HC -> BP -> CL	0.413	7.316	0.000	0.308	0.525	Accepted

**The Direct Effect of Halal Certification on Trust**

The analysis for H1 reveals that Halal Certification (HC) significantly influences Trust (TR), with an original sample value of 0.617, a t-statistics value of 9.703 (> 1.96), and a p-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). This indicates that Halal Certification has a strong and positive effect on Trust, meaning that consumers who recognize halal certification on food products are more likely to trust the brand offering these products. This finding aligns with previous research in halal product markets, where halal certification is considered an indicator of quality, safety, and ethical standards, which in turn enhances consumer trust. Halal-certified products are often seen as meeting religious dietary requirements and maintaining higher safety and quality standards. This result similar to the study of Mollah et al. (2021) that found halal certification significantly boosts consumer trust, especially in food industries where religious considerations play a significant role in consumer decision-making.

**The Direct Effect of Halal Certification on Brand Preference**

The analysis for H2 reveals that Halal Certification (HC) significantly influences Brand Preference (BP), with an original sample value of 0.583, a t-statistics value of 12.239 (> 1.96), and a p-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). This indicates that Halal Certification positively and significantly affects Brand Preference, meaning that consumers are more likely to prefer brands that offer halal-certified products. The halal certification serves as a strong signal of product quality and ethical standards. Similarly to research by Chani et al. (2020) that shown consumers tend to favor halal-certified brands due to the perception of better quality, ethical production processes, and compliance with religious values. Halal certification creates a strong connection between brand identity and consumer preferences, making it a crucial factor in the food industry.

**The Direct Effect of Trust on Customer Loyalty**

The analysis for H4 indicates that Trust (TR) significantly influences Customer Loyalty (CL), with an original sample value of 0.212, a t-statistics value of 2.451, and a p-value of 0.014. This shows that trust plays a critical role in fostering customer loyalty, meaning that consumers who trust a brand are more likely to remain loyal to it. This finding supports Morgan and Hunt's (1994) commitment-trust theory, which emphasizes that trust is a foundational element in building lasting relationships with customers. Moreover, Mollah et al. (2021) have demonstrated that trust is a significant mediator between halal certification and customer loyalty, underlining the pivotal role trust plays in maintaining customer loyalty in the halal food industr

**The Direct Effect of Brand Preference on Customer Loyalty**

The analysis for H5 reveals that Brand Preference (BP) has a strong positive effect on Customer Loyalty (CL), with an original sample value of 0.708, a t-statistics value of 9.998, and a p-value of 0.000. This indicates that brand preference is a critical driver of customer loyalty. Consumers who prefer a brand are more likely to remain loyal to it. This result is consistent with

previous studies, such as the one by Sujana et al. (2020), which found that brand preference directly contributes to customer loyalty. When customers develop a preference for a brand, they are more likely to engage in repeat purchases and exhibit long-term brand loyalty.

**The Indirect Effect of Trust on Halal Certification on Customer Loyalty**

The analysis for H6 shows that Trust (TR) acts as a mediator between Halal Certification (HC) and Customer Loyalty (CL), with an original sample value of 0.131, a t-statistics value of 2.387, and a p-value of 0.017. This indicates that trust partially mediates the relationship between halal certification and customer loyalty. In other words, halal certification enhances customer loyalty through the development of trust. This mediation effect is in line with research by Abdullah et al. (2020), which showed that trust plays a mediating role in the relationship between halal certification and customer loyalty, particularly in sectors where religious beliefs are important to consumers.

**The Indirect Effect of Brand Preference on Halal Certification on Customer Loyalty**

The analysis for H7 indicates that Brand Preference (BP) also acts as a mediator between Halal Certification (HC) and Customer Loyalty (CL), with an original sample value of 0.413, a t-statistics value of 7.316, and a p-value of 0.000. This suggests that halal certification influences customer loyalty through its effect on brand preference. Halal certification strengthens consumer preference for the brand, which in turn increases customer loyalty. This finding is supported by Wahid et al. (2021), who demonstrated that brand preference mediates the effect of halal certification on customer loyalty in the food industry, indicating that consumers’ preference for a halal-certified brand enhances their loyalty towards it.

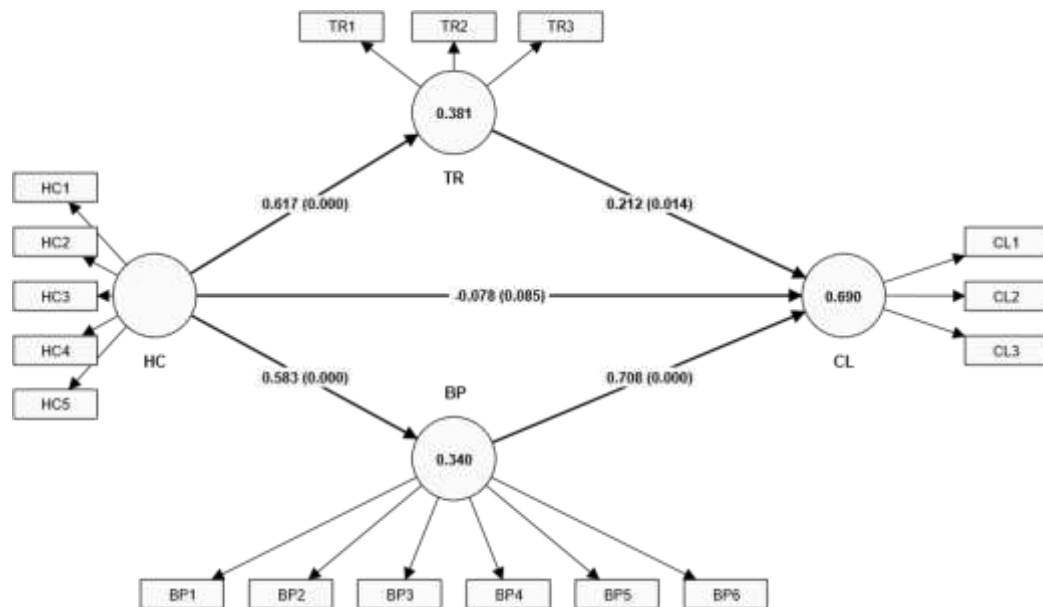


Figure 2. The Bootstrapping Result

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of Halal Certification in shaping consumer perceptions and behavior within the Indonesian fast food industry, particularly among Gen Z Muslim consumers. For many young Muslims, halal certification is more than just a label; it is a key indicator of a product's trustworthiness and quality. In Indonesia, where the majority of the population adheres to Islamic dietary laws, consumers are highly sensitive to whether food products meet halal standards. This study shows that halal certification directly influences trust, indicating that when consumers are assured that a product meets these religious and ethical requirements, their confidence in the brand increases. This result is consistent with previous studies which have emphasized that halal certification serves as an assurance of quality, safety, and religious compliance, ultimately enhancing consumer trust (Mollah, Rahman, & Jahan, 2021). Gen Z consumers, who are more informed and conscious of their purchases, view halal-certified brands not only as meeting their religious needs but also as offering higher standards of quality and safety, which further builds trust in the brand. For this demographic, halal certification is not merely a functional aspect but a reflection of the brand's alignment with their cultural and religious values (Fortunata & Hanafiah, 2024).

Furthermore, this study reveals the crucial role of brand preference in transforming trust into customer loyalty. Once young consumers trust a halal-certified brand, they are more likely to prefer it over other options, leading to long-term loyalty. Brand preference reflects a consumer's positive experiences and emotional connection with a brand, which is especially important for Indonesian Gen Z, who tend to prioritize brands that align with their ethical, cultural, and religious values. This study aligns with previous research that highlights the strong link between brand preference and loyalty, particularly in sectors where ethical considerations are central to decision-making (Kumar & Shah, 2020). In a fast food market where Gen Z consumers have many choices, brand preference plays a key role in ensuring loyalty, particularly when a brand's ethical values resonate with consumers. Moreover, trust not only directly influences loyalty, but also acts as a mediator between halal certification and customer loyalty. This suggests that halal certification fosters trust, which, in turn, strengthens consumer loyalty, especially among young consumers who prioritize ethical, cultural, and religious factors in their purchasing behavior (Hanafiah et al., 2023; Sari & Wahyuni, 2020). These findings underscore the importance of halal certification and its connection to building long-term relationships with Indonesian Gen Z Muslim consumers.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this study highlights the crucial role of halal certification in influencing consumer trust, brand preference, and customer loyalty among Indonesian Gen Z consumers in the fast food industry. The findings suggest that Gen Z consumers are more likely to trust and prefer brands offering halal-certified products, which significantly enhances their long-term loyalty. Moreover, trust and brand preference act as important mediators in the

relationship between halal certification and customer loyalty. These results emphasize that halal certification not only has a direct impact on consumer attitudes but also contributes to the development of brand reputation and customer loyalty, particularly in a market where ethical and religious factors are central to consumer decision-making..

Based on these findings, fast food brands targeting Indonesian Gen Z consumers should prioritize obtaining halal certification and ensure that its significance is communicated effectively to this demographic. As Gen Z values transparency and ethical standards, companies should focus on building trust through ethical practices and clear communication. Furthermore, brands should invest in educating Gen Z consumers about the benefits of halal-certified products, highlighting how these offerings align with their ethical and religious values. Lastly, future research could explore how halal certification impacts different segments within the Gen Z cohort and across various product categories, providing a deeper understanding of this trend in the food industry.

### **FURTHER STUDY**

This study is limited to KFC in the Indonesian fast food industry, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other fast food brands. Future studies could expand the scope by comparing Indonesian Gen Z with Gen Y to examine generational differences in halal certification perceptions and brand loyalty. Additionally, future studies could include variables like consumer involvement, perceived value, or brand reputation, which have been shown to influence loyalty and decision-making (Hanafiah et al., 2023; Mollah et al., 2021), providing a broader understanding of consumer behavior in the fast food sector.

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