

HALALSPHERE

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Applying Ethical Climate Theory in Whistleblowing Intentions Study among Employees in *Halal* Food Companies: A Protocol

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Abstract

Halal food fraud, such as fake *Halal* logos and adulteration, may happen due to irresponsible manufacturers seeking to maximise profit. Furthermore, *Halal food* fraud has been increasing over the years in Malaysia, and this issue needs to be considered since it is a major threat to Malaysia's reputation as an international *Halal* hub. One of the effective measures in reducing *Halal food* fraud is whistleblowing. In order to encourage whistleblowing, governments have established laws and policies to protect whistleblowers, but a lot of people are still unwilling to blow the whistle due to the retaliation that whistleblowers will face. Factors that may influence this ethical behaviour need to be studied. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to conceptually discuss potential factors (ethical climate types, organisation size, tenure, supervisor status, and religious obligation) that influence employees' intention to be involved in whistleblowing. A research model is proposed, followed by the developing of research hypotheses to test the model. In addition, the study's protocol (detailed plan) is later described. The theory of Ethical Climates will be used to guide this study. Data will be collected through convenience sampling by distributing self-administered questionnaires to 300 employees from *Halal food* companies in Malaysia. The collected data will be tested using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Structural Equation Modelling-Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS). The findings from this study will help *Halal food* companies improve their whistleblowing practices. In addition, this study is useful for relevant policymakers to support whistleblowing practices.

Keywords:

Whistleblowing;
Ethical climate;
Religious
obligation; *Halal*
food companies;
Food fraud

1. Introduction

The *Halal* industry is extremely important to Muslims worldwide because it assures them that whatever they eat or buy complies with *Shari'ah*. The *Halal* industry has expanded enormously since the initiation of the Malaysian International *Halal* Showcase (MIHAS), which was held in 2004. In the past decade, the *Halal* industry has been one of the major contributors to economic growth in many countries (Mujar & Hassan, 2014). The *Halal* industry's growth is mainly due to the growth of the Muslim population over the years, reaching 25% of the world's population, or 1.9 billion (World Population, n.d). The rise in the number of Muslims has led to a rise in demand and awareness for Shariah-compliant products and services, creating a significant opportunity for *Halal* business growth (Jaffar & Musa, 2014).

Amidst its rapid growth, the *Halal* industry continues to encounter a number of challenges that threaten the integrity of *Halal* and *Toyyib* products. It is important to note that *Halal* products must be free from prohibited ingredients and be accurate in terms of quality, weight, content, expiration date, and brand. Due to personal interests and profit maximisation, fraudulent practices such as mislabelling, contamination, or

adulteration are becoming more common in the *Halal* industry (Ariffin *et al.*, 2021). Spink and Moyer (2011) identified seven types of food fraud: adulteration, theft, tampering, diversion, simulation, over-run, and counterfeiting. Each food fraud potentially threatens public health and may lead to illness or death.

There have been a lot of cases of food fraud in Malaysia. Several cases have been reported in the *Halal* food context, such as the intentional exchange of prohibited meat (pork or dog meat and meat that has not been properly slaughtered according to Islamic law) for *Halal* meat (Ramli, 2018). These fraudulent practices can negatively impact Muslim consumers' confidence and damage the brands' reputations. Therefore, a deterrence measure such as whistleblowing should be promoted as an effective way to discourage fraud or other wrongdoings (Schultz & Harutyunyan, 2015).

Whistleblowing is defined by Near and Miceli (1985) as the act of former or current members of an organisation disclosing their coworkers' immoral or unlawful actions to other individuals within or outside the organisation. There have been countless examples of how whistleblowing incidents have helped expose fraud or malpractice that has occurred in the food industry over the course of the years. One of the examples

was in 2012 when a local Chinese TV broadcast reported that a number of poultry suppliers in Shandong Province, China, were using harmful chemicals in their feed to accelerate the growth of chickens. One of the suppliers, the Liuhe Group, was supplying chicken to Yum Brands, the parent company of Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) restaurants. It was reported that even though Shanghai food safety officials had informed Yum Brands that excessive antibiotics were found in their chicken supplied to them, the company did not report it and continued to purchase the chicken from the same supplier. Upon the news release, the company promptly published an open letter to customers on their official website to apologise for their lack of action (Soon & Manning, 2017). This case, however, pales in comparison to the Chinese milk scandal, when melamin was found in milk and made public by a whistleblower. In 2008, melamine was intentionally added to diluted raw milk to increase the protein content. This major food safety incident caused about 300,000 Chinese infants and young children to be affected by kidney and urinary tract effects. Six deaths were reported. In another case in the United States of America, a manager of Peanut Corporation America (PCA) internally reported the leaky roof and mouse infection to the company's owner, but his complaints were ignored. The manager was prompted to blow the whistle externally when his granddaughter became ill after consuming one of the products from PCA (Soon & Manning, 2017). The salmonella outbreak linked to bad peanuts from the plant has resulted in 600 illnesses and an estimated nine deaths. As a result of the action, massive amounts of peanut products were recalled, which saved lives.

In the *Halal food* context, the most recent issue was the illegal meat cartel syndicate, which happened at the end of 2020 and was reported by an anonymous whistleblower to the local media. The local media revealed that an illegal meat cartel smuggled 1,500 tonnes of non-halal certified meat from foreign countries, namely Brazil, China, Argentina, and Ukraine. Among the smuggled meats were buffalo, kangaroo, and horse, then sold in the domestic market with a counterfeit *Halal* logo. The diseased and low-quality meat, hazardous to consumers' health, was also sold as *Halal*-certified meat. This appalling scandal exposed a wide range of issues, including non-halal meat processing, the issue of integrity in the *Halal* supply chain, the safety issues of imported meat, and illegal slaughterhouses. This issue also indicates the loophole in the governance of the *Halal* meat supply chain that fails to ensure its *Halal* integrity (Ariffin *et al.*, 2021). This scandal reflects the importance of not relying only on the *Halal* authorities to safeguard the *Halal* supply chain. The fight against *Halal* fraud is the responsibility of all stakeholders, including suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, and consumers. Therefore, whistleblowing is one of the countermeasures that can be used against fraud and crime. Soon and Manning (2017) argued that a whistleblowing strategy can form an effective part of the food crime management system (FCMS).

The establishment of laws and policies could encourage an individual to speak out against any malpractices or wrongdoings in an organisation without fear of retaliation. In order to encourage whistleblowing, Malaysian governments attempt to protect whistleblowers by establishing laws and policies. Malaysia introduced the Whistleblowing Protection Act (WPA) in 2010, replacing the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) Act in 1997, in order to create a more comprehensive whistleblowing system and encourage more individuals to come forward and report any corruption, fraud, or

misbehaviour (Rachagan & Kuppusamy, 2013). Whistleblower protection is critical for individual protection, reducing food crime, and protecting consumers from harm. Even though the Malaysian government has established a whistleblower protection act, many people are still hesitant and unwilling to report any wrongdoings or misconduct within an organisation due to the potential retaliation that whistleblowers will face (Dasgupta & Kesharwani, 2010).

Halal food fraud is a serious issue, which is why it is encouraging to see companies take steps to prevent it. One effective strategy for reducing food fraud is to have a workplace whistleblowing culture. For example, when employees have a safe and secure channel to report food fraud without fear of retaliation, it is easier to catch and prevent it before it reaches consumers. On the other hand, the internal whistleblowing system enables confidential reporting of irregularities. Internal reports can help to uncover cases of wrongdoing and minimise financial damage. Therefore, it is critical to investigate potential factors influencing employees' willingness to participate in whistleblowing in *Halal* companies. This study aims to investigate whistleblowing behaviour in *Halal* companies to address the problem by exploring potential predictors influencing employees' intentions to be involved in internal whistleblowing.

In an effort to improve employee reporting behaviours, organisations must understand and pay attention to the factors that facilitate and hinder whistleblowing intentions. Several attempts have been made to determine the factors that encourage an individual to perform whistleblowing. Previous studies have identified a number of different possible factors in the individual's willingness to blow the whistle, which are personal (Ahmad *et al.*, 2012; Said *et al.*, 2017), organisational (Ab Ghani *et al.*, 2011; Ahmad *et al.*, 2010; Wen & Chen, 2016) and situational factors (Ahmad *et al.*, 2010; Apadore *et al.*, 2018; Vadera *et al.*, 2009). Many previous studies have tried to use a variety of theories to explain why people want to report wrongdoing. These include the Theory of Planned Behavior (Mustafida, 2020; Owusu *et al.*, 2020), the theories of prosocial behaviour (Ahmad *et al.*, 2010; Ahmad *et al.*, 2012), and the Theory of Marketing Ethics (Zakaria, 2015). On the other hand, Hadiyati and Yusup (2020) used the Ethical Climate Theory.

In highlighting the chosen respondents among employees in *Halal food* companies, this study deviates from typical samples of auditors (Ahmad *et al.*, 2010; Alleyne *et al.*, 2013), police departments (Park & Blenkinsopp, 2009; Zakaria *et al.*, 2016), public sector (Salleh & Yunus, 2015; Park *et al.*, 2005), supervisors (Ab Ghani *et al.*, 2011), undergraduate students (Apadore *et al.*, 2018; Pangestu & Rahajeng, 2020) and accounting (Gao & Brink, 2017; Latan *et al.*, 2018). It is equally important to reduce wrongdoings and fraud associated with *Halal food* products as it is to raise ethical standards in the *Halal food* industry. Employee professional and ethical conduct, such as their willingness to whistleblow, is influenced by their personal moral values and professional ethics and the companies in which they work. This study, therefore, leverages Ethical Climate Theory to study the association between ethical climate and whistleblowing intention. Furthermore, most of the research into whistleblowing is conducted in Western countries. Therefore, this study intends to fill the research gap by extending the whistleblowing study to a Malaysian context, specifically in *Halal food* companies.

2. Literature review

2.1 Whistleblowing

2.1.1 Definition of whistleblowing and whistleblower

There is no universally accepted definition of whistleblowing. However, in the literature, one of the most commonly used definitions is by Near and Miceli (1985), who define whistleblowing as the act of former or current members of an organisation disclosing their coworkers' immoral or unlawful actions to other individuals within or outside the organisation. On the other hand, Jubb (1999:78) proposed that whistleblowing is a "deliberate, non-obligatory act of disclosure, which gets onto the public record and is made by a person who has or had privileged access to data or information of an organisation, about non-trivial illegality or other wrongdoing, whether actual, suspected, or anticipated, which implicates and is under the control of that organisation, to an external entity having the potential to rectify the wrongdoing." Under this definition, whistleblowers could be employees, suppliers, or even consumers. In the context of food safety, instead of using the term "wrongdoing," the term "incidence" is used.

A "whistleblower" is defined as "a person who is not indifferent to food safety incidents and reports them to protect the consumer and the food company's reputation." The incident, in this context, refers to "events that occurred as a result of the employee's misbehaviour, intentional and unintentional, which led or could have led to negative consequences for the safety and health of the consumer." It is important to note that terms such as "raising concerns," "speaking up," and "whistleblowing" are sometimes used interchangeably in the whistleblowing literature (Blenkinsopp *et al.*, 2019).

2.1.2 Whistleblowing channels (internal and external whistleblowing)

Internal whistleblowing occurs when a report of wrongdoing is made to people within the organisation, such as high-level and immediate supervisors, the personnel office, the CEO, and managers (Jeon, 2017). Meanwhile, external whistleblowing occurs when the report is made to an external body outside the organisation, such as the news media, government, law enforcement agencies, or law minister (Azis *et al.*, 2019). Each type of whistleblowing will have a different outcome for the whistleblower, the organisation, and the societal efforts to control organisational wrongdoing. Several factors may affect the choice between internal or external complaint recipients. Dworkin & Baucus (1998) found that employees with long tenures tend to choose internal reporting channels. Meanwhile, Jeon (2017) found that fear of retaliation, supervisors' status, proper education, and fair treatment from the organisation are predictors of employee selection of internal whistleblowing channels.

2.1.3 Islamic perspective of whistleblowing

An effort to combat fraud, corruption, and wrongdoing is a noble act demanded by Islam to produce a harmonious and prosperous community. Even though whistleblowing is not specifically mentioned in the *Qur'an*, the Islamic concept of "*Amr ma'ruf nahi munkar*" is similar to whistleblowing action since both attempt to defeat injustice in society (Khalid *et al.*, 2015). The importance of reporting or exposing any corruption

or wrongdoing is clearly stated in the *Qur'an* through the concept of "*Amr ma'ruf nahi munkar*" (Enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong) (Qudus & Fahm, 2021). For example, as stated in *Al-Imran*, 3:104:

"And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be successful."

According to Abd Samad and Khalid (2015), the whistleblowing report is not limited to wrongdoings that Allah and the Prophet prohibit but also includes violations of laws and regulations and actions that may cause harm to society. Furthermore, Muslims are obliged to protect people's interests from harm, particularly when it comes to the five basic needs established in the Maqasid al-Shariah framework, which are to preserve religion, life, intellect, and property/wealth selection of internal whistleblowing channels.

2.2 Previous studies on whistleblowing intention

Several studies have examined the factors that make people want to blow the whistle. These factors can be put into three groups: personal factors of the whistleblower, organisational factors, and situational variables (Vadera *et al.*, 2009).

Personal factors are based on two moral philosophies: deontological (rule-based views) and teleological evaluations (consequences-based views). Any individual who inculcates both moral philosophies will measure goodness against badness and have a feeling of moral responsibility and obligation to expose and report any wrongdoings within an organisation (Zakaria, 2015). A number of factors thought to be influencing whistleblowing intentions have been explored in several studies. Research conducted by Fitri *et al.* (2019) showed that locus of control affects whistleblowing intention among internal auditors in Indonesia. Thus, the whistleblowing action is driven by circumstances beyond their control. Ahmad *et al.* (2012) found that the higher the ethical judgement, the more likely to engage in internal whistleblowing among internal auditors in Malaysia.

Situational factors (sometimes called contextual factors) describe environmental or external decision factors such as situation cues, psychological situation characteristics, or situation classes (Kandala *et al.*, 2011). Vadera *et al.* (2009) discovered two situational factors influencing whistleblowing intention: perceived wrongdoings and the job or organisation. Other situational factors that positively impact whistleblowing intention include the seriousness of wrongdoings and the status of wrongdoers. The seriousness of wrongdoing has been identified as a variable that may influence whistleblowing intention among Malaysian internal auditors (Ahmad *et al.*, 2010). Seriousness can be measured by the risk to one's safety and health, the financial consequences, and the frequency of wrongdoing. For example, Winardi (2013) found that the status of wrongdoers positively correlates with whistleblowing intention among civil servants in Indonesia. If a higher-level organisation member commits the wrongdoing, civil servants in Indonesia may be hesitant to report it.

The term "organisational factors" refers to factors that influence how the organisation and its employees act. Organisational factors such as the organisation's ethical culture can influence employees to have a strong conscience and report any fraud or wrongdoings. According to Kwon *et al.* (2021),

public organisations should provide training programmes and whistleblowing policy guidelines to increase employees' knowledge regarding the whistleblowing process and protection. Chane *et al.* (2007) proved that greater knowledge of whistleblowing procedures and channels would increase whistleblowing intention among South Korean public officials. Meanwhile, Ab Ghani *et al.* (2011) found that ethics training has a positive relationship with whistleblowing intention among supervisors from manufacturing companies in Malaysia since ethic training helps the employees learn how to act ethically during the decision-making process. Wen & Chen (2016) conducted a two-wave survey and found that ethical leadership has significantly influenced whistleblowing intention among managers from China's public universities. This study found that leaders with ethical leadership will become role models for others and influence their employees' behaviour and attitudes.

2.3 Ethical climates theory

The ethical climate theory is one of the theories that is frequently used in the context of whistleblowing. An organisational factor that significantly impacts employees' ethical decision-making in the workplace is the ethical climate (Ismail, 2017). An ethical climate is defined as the prevalent perception of common organisational procedures and practises that include ethical content (Victor & Cullen, 1988) or aggregated individual views of ethical norms in an organisation (Cullen *et al.*, 1993). Ethical climates are not based on an individual's level of moral development or ethical standards but rather represent components of the individual's environment as perceived by its members. Furthermore, ethical climates help employees during the decision-making process when dealing with any ethical issues or dilemmas that may occur within an organisation by serving as a perceptual lens through which the employees may access and analyse situations (Cullen *et al.*, 2003)

2.4 Potential factors influencing internal whistleblowing intention

Possible factors from organisational, situational/contextual, and personal aspects that influence internal whistleblowing intentions are discussed. This includes ethical climate types, organisation size, tenure, supervisor status, and religious obligation.

2.4.1 Ethical climate types and whistleblowing intention

As mentioned in section (2.3), crossing the locus of analysis and the ethical criterion yields nine ethical climate types. However, these nine ethical climate types are not expected to exist in all organisations (Martin & Cullen, 2006). Several empirical studies have shown that different ethical climate types emerge from different organisations. Among the nine ethical climate types, Victor and Cullen (1988) found only five ethical climate types, which are: "law and code," "caring," "rules," "instrumental," and "independence" climates. Kim and Miller (2008) found six ethical climate types, which are "moral caring," "team spirit," "efficiency," "self-interest," "law and code," and "rules" climates in the Korean tourism industry, and these ethical climate types are affected by individual and organisational characteristics. Meanwhile, Agarwal and Malloy (1999) found "individual caring," "social caring," "machiavellianism," "independence," and "law and code" climates in not-for-profit organisations, and these emerging ethical climates are dispersed only between individual and cosmopolitan loci. The differences in ethical climate types within organisations may be due to several factors, which include organisational and cultural contexts, organisational practices, leadership and managerial practices, and individual differences (Newman *et al.*, 2017).

Previous studies have indicated that whistleblowing intention is related to an individual's perception of the ethical climate within an organisation. Rothwell and Baldwin (2006) discovered a significant relationship between "instrumental," "caring," and "rules" climates and their willingness to blow the whistle and the frequency of whistleblowing among civilian public employees in Georgia. Then, in 2007, Rothwell and Baldwin found that a "friendship or team" climate positively correlates with the willingness to blow the whistle among police officers in Georgia. In addition, Huang *et al.* (2013) research show that the "law and rules" climate has a positive relationship with internal and external whistleblowing among workers in Taiwan's construction industry. Therefore, this study hypothesises that:

H1: Ethical climate type has a significant relationship with the intention of employees from *Halal* companies to carry out internal whistleblowing actions.

		Locus of Analysis		
		<i>Individual</i>	<i>Local</i>	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>
Ethical criterion	<i>Egoism</i>	Self-interest	Company Profit	Efficiency
	<i>Benevolence</i>	Friendship	Team Interest	Social Responsibility
	<i>Principle</i>	Personal Morality	Company Rules and Procedures	Laws and Professional Codes

Figure 1: Original conceptualization of ethical climate - Nine theoretical types of ethical climate (Victor & Cullen, 1987).

2.4.2 Organisation size

According to the bystander effect by Darley and Latané (1968), the larger the number of observers present, the possibility of bystander intervening in an emergency is lower since the responsibility for intervention is shared among all the observers. In the current situation, the bystander effect suggests that an individual would be less likely to blow the whistle when he or she is in a larger organisation than a smaller one. According to Miceli and Near (1992), there are three reasons why internal whistleblowing would be more likely in a smaller organisation. Firstly, employees in large organisations may be reluctant to report wrongdoing to upper-level managers because whistleblowing channels may be impeded. Reporting to the upper level requires a lot of parties and processes that may slow down or inhibit communication flow. Secondly, it is difficult for top managers in large organisations to ensure all their employees are aware of the establishment of whistleblowing channels. Lastly, employees in small organisations may feel more satisfied than those in large organisations because they believe choosing internal channels would be less damaging than external channels. Empirical research and review show that the small size of an organisation encourages whistleblowing action (Keenan, 2000; Miceli & Near, 1992; Near & Miceli, 1985). However, several prior studies failed to predict a relationship between organisation size and whistleblowing intention (Ahmad *et al.*, 2010; Rothwell & Baldwin, 2006). Hence, it is proposed that:

H2: Employee from *Halal food* company is more likely to whistle blow if the person is from smaller companies

2.4.3 Tenure

Tenure is the period an individual has spent in an organisation or job. Tenure is one of the crucial factors that may affect different employee attitudes in organisational settings, including whistleblowing intentions (Maden, 2014). According to Miceli and Near (1992), employees having a longer tenure are more likely to engage in whistleblowing since they are familiar with whistleblowing channels and procedures. Older employees with more years of experience have a better understanding of their organisation's formal and informal authorities and control systems (Keenan, 2000). Longer tenure also leads to greater organisational commitment, which can increase the desire to correct any wrongdoing within an organisation via whistleblowing. Furthermore, employees with more tenure will have stronger power bases, which may give them more confidence in reporting any wrongdoing through whistleblowing channels (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005).

A number of authors have demonstrated a positive relationship between tenure and whistleblowing intention (Ahmad *et al.*, 2010; Miceli & Near, 1988). However, several studies fail to show such a relationship (Cassematis & Wortley, 2013; Rothwell & Baldwin, 2007). Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran (2005) found that tenure appears to be related to actual whistleblowing but not to whistleblowing intention. Rothwell and Baldwin's (2007) study fails to predict a relationship between tenure and whistleblowing intention among police officers in Georgia. Such a result is due to the impact of social pressure over time on police culture and the emergence of the code of silence. Employees that have worked for a long time have more time to develop strong relationships with other employees, which might reduce the tendency to engage in

whistleblowing. Regardless of the mixed results from previous studies, this study expects that longer tenure positively impacts whistleblowing intention. Therefore, this study hypothesises that:

H3: Employee from a *Halal food* company is more likely to whistle blow if the person has longer tenure in the organisation.

2.4.4 Supervisor status

Employees with supervisor or managerial status often have role prescriptions that command reporting any misbehaviour. Whistleblowing is an action that is consistent with their role as they are responsible for the misconduct of their subordinates. Therefore, supervisors enforce standards and regulate employee behaviour (Rothwell & Baldwin, 2006). Furthermore, supervisors and upper-level managers set the ethical climate and culture for their employees at lower levels and are responsible for providing the necessary direction and objectives for the organisation in order to maintain a competent connection between the organisation and the external environment (Keenan, 2000). The willingness to blow the whistle is high when an individual has supervisor status because they may receive a lot of support from outside the organisation due to their socialisation process (Miceli & Near, 1988).

Studies on the relationship between supervisor status and whistleblowing intention support a positive and significant relationship between these two variables (Ahmad *et al.*, 2010; Keenan, 2000; Rothwell & Baldwin, 2007). These studies found that supervisor status is the most consistent predictor of whistleblowing intention. Keenan (2000) found that the different managerial levels (first-level, middle-level, and upper-level managers) have different attitudes towards whistleblowing behaviour and found that whistleblowing is more favourable among upper-level and middle-level managers compared to first-level managers. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that:

H4: Employee from a *Halal* company is more likely to whistle blow if the person is holding supervisor status.

2.4.5 Religious obligation

Religiosity refers to terms that relate to cognition (religious knowledge and belief), affect (emotional attachment to religion) and behaviour (Barnett *et al.*, 1996). Religiosity has been associated with spiritual values, which play a crucial role in work behaviour. Religious values will influence human behaviour, which varies for every person from different societies (Othman & Hairi, 2012). Individuals who behave according to the values inherent in religious behaviour will not tolerate any unethical behaviour. Thus, the probability of whistleblowing in the workplace is high (Fernando & Jackson, 2006). Religiosity can influence ethical decision-making through personal characteristics, cultural environment, and a dominant basis for deontological norms (Rashid & Ibrahim, 2008).

Furthermore, religion can answer questions about the meaning of life and activities. Every religion teaches people to be good. Islam provides a complete code of life and builds the basis of belief in right and wrong rules and regulations based on the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. These rules will produce a standard of morality that can impact how an individual responds to any

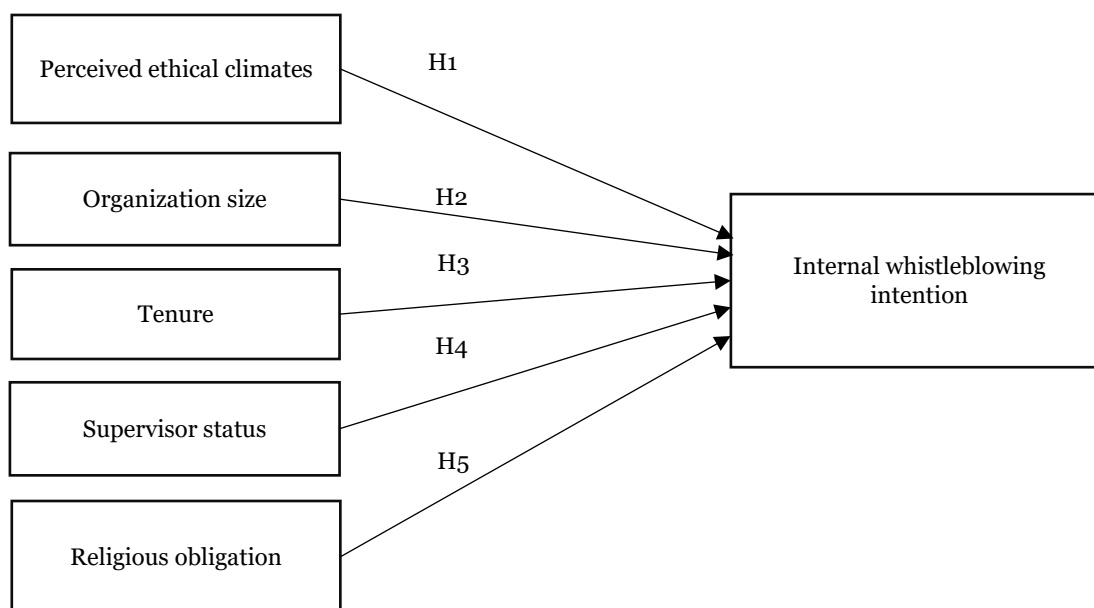


Figure 2: Conceptual framework for the whistleblowing intention among employees from *Halal food* companies.

ethical issues in an organisation (Fitri *et al.*, 2019).

A lot of previous studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between religious obligation and human behaviour, such as *Halal* purchase intention (Astuti & Asig, 2021; Khan *et al.*, 2019); environmental behaviour (Ghazali *et al.*, 2018); and prosocial behaviour (Xygalatas, 2013). Our aim is to investigate the relationship between religious obligation and whistleblowing intention among employees in *Halal food* companies. Several previous studies showed a positive relationship between religious obligation and whistleblowing intention (Fitri, 2019; Puni *et al.*, 2016; Toker Gokce, 2015). However, Yudha and Rizal (2018) found no significant relationship between whistleblowing intention and religion, as religious respondents reported a low desire to report wrongdoing. Despite mixed results, this study proposed that:

H5: Religious obligation is positively associated with internal whistleblowing intention among employees from *Halal food* companies.

2.4.7 Conceptual framework

Based on the ethical climate theory and evidence gathered from a literature review, this study proposed several factors that may influence the whistleblowing intention of *Halal food* companies' employees in Malaysia. This study proposed five independent variables: perceived ethical climates, organisation size, tenure, supervisor status, and religious obligation (as shown in Figure 2).

3. Methods

A quantitative approach will identify the relationship between the proposed variables. Respondents will complete a self-administered questionnaire with close-ended or structured questions at their convenience. The questionnaire has two parts: part A and part B. Part A consists of gender, age, marital status, religion, educational level, size and type of organisation,

length of tenure, nature of employment and position in company. Meanwhile, part B consists of questionnaire items for ethical climate, religious obligation and internal whistleblowing intention. The questionnaire items were adapted from various literature, and all items are based on a 5-point Likert scale. Ethical Climate Questionnaires (ECQ) 36 items from Cullen *et al.* (1993) and Victor and Cullen (1988) will be used as the construct items for the ethical climate. Meanwhile, the questionnaire items from Ghazali *et al.* (2022) will be used for the religious obligation. The last construct item, internal whistleblowing intention, will be adapted from Park and Blenkinsopp (2009). Prior to the main data collection, an expert review (n=5) and a pre-test (n=5) will be conducted. Based on the feedback and recommendations, modifications will be made to the original statements used in the questionnaires.

The target population selected for this study is employees from *Halal food* companies in Malaysia. The companies must be listed in JAKIM's database (www.Halal.gov.my) as *Halal*-certified companies and may produce multiple *Halal* products such as beverages, dairy, seafood, beef, chicken, and bakery products, among others. This study uses a non-probability sampling design and a convenience sampling method (Ludin *et al.*, 2014; Reza *et al.*, 2021). Convenience sampling often helps researchers overcome some limitations associated with the research since this method is convenient, affordable, and less time-consuming (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). For the data collection, researcher will use the drop-off and pick-up (DOPU) method to distribute questionnaires (Trentelman *et al.*, 2016). This method requires the researcher to first contact the *Halal food* companies to schedule appointments. Then, the researcher will travel to the respondents' locations to drop off questionnaires that will be picked up. Hair *et al.* (2019) recommends a minimum sample size based on the basic measurement model characteristics. A minimum sample size of 300 for models with seven or fewer constructs and a minimum sample of 500 for models with a large number of constructs. Therefore, this present study uses a sample size of 300 since this study uses a model with five constructs.

After the data collection is complete, the overall profile of the respondents will be analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 for its frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Before hypotheses testing, this study will use exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to investigate the ethical climate types present in *Halal food* companies. EFA attempts to access the linkage between hypotheticals (latent variables) and observed variables (indicators). Principal component analysis (PCA) will be used to analyse the correlation matrix. To test the relationship between variables, this study will employ partial least-squares path modelling (PLS-SEM) using Smart-PLS as the software. This study will assess the properties of measurement scales for convergent and discriminant validity and then construct composite reliability (CR) by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). SEM followed the analyses to verify the path relationships of independent and dependent variables. This study will also employ a one-way ANOVA or t-test using SPSS to compare differences between whistleblowing intention and organisation size, tenure, and supervisor status.

4. Conclusion

Halal food fraud is a major concern that should be considered since it negatively impacts the *Halal* industry. One of the most effective efforts in reducing *Halal food* fraud is whistleblowing. Therefore, this study recommends several key factors that may influence internal whistleblowing intention among employees of *Halal food* companies. Understanding these factors could help organisations, specifically *Halal* companies, improve their current practices to encourage their employees to whistleblow any fraudulent activities in the company. This is important in order to protect the reputation of the company and to avoid consumers' having a negative perception of the company, which makes it seem untrustworthy. In addition, this study also investigates the ethical climate types that may be present in *Halal food* companies, and the findings of this study may have important applications for future studies.

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