

Muslim Experiences of Halal: Identity, Community, and Practice Today

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Abstract:

This paper dives into the cultural narratives of halal, emphasizing that it's not just a religious guideline but a core part of Muslim identity, community building, and the Islamic way of life today. Halal goes beyond just food; it touches various industries like Muslim identity, fashion, tourism, pharmaceuticals, and cosmetics. The idea of halal not only reinforces religious devotion among Muslims but also promotes social unity, especially for those living in countries where Muslims are not the majority, acting as an important symbol of cultural identity. With the rise of globalization, the appetite for halal products and services has surged, leading many global companies to seek halal certification. Yet, differing interpretations among Islamic scholars and a lack of clarity in certification processes pose significant hurdles. This paper looks into these challenges and discusses how the halal system is crucial for fostering social, economic, and religious harmony within Muslim communities. It also sheds light on the changing landscape of halal in today's society and its promising potential for growth in international markets.

Keywords: Halal, Muslim identity, Muslim identity, halal fashion, halal tourism, halal pharmaceuticals, halal cosmetics.

Interduction

Halal isn't just about what you can eat; it's a whole lifestyle for Muslims around the globe, deeply intertwined with their faith and cultural stories (Ali, 2018). The idea of halal goes way beyond food—it touches on finance, fashion, cosmetics, and even everyday ethics, making it a vital part of what it means to be Muslim (Riaz & Chaudry, 2004). This article dives into the cultural narratives surrounding halal, looking at how it shapes identity, builds community, and adapts to the modern world.

The word halal comes from Arabic and means what's allowed according to Islamic law. It acts as a guiding light for Muslims in many areas of their lives, helping them ensure that their choices and interactions are in line with their religious beliefs. Halal is deeply woven into Islamic culture, affecting everything from what people eat to how they handle money, socialize, and conduct business ethically.

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Over the years, halal has grown into a worldwide trend, impacting industries like food production, fashion, cosmetics, and finance, which highlights its importance beyond just religious contexts.

The Meaning and Scope of Halal:

The Arabic term halal translates to permissible or lawful, and it stands in contrast to haram, which means forbidden (Al-Qaradawi, 1994). The main sources that outline halal practices are the Quran and Hadith, which lay down clear rules about what is deemed acceptable (Laldin, 2006). While many people associate halal primarily with food and drink (especially the method of animal slaughter known as *zabiha*), its relevance actually stretches into areas like financial transactions (think Islamic banking), pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and even clothing (Wilson & Liu, 2010).

The halal food industry has seen remarkable growth, fueled by a rising consumer awareness and a demand for products that are both ethical and compliant with religious standards. The growth of halal certification has been vital in creating consistent halal practices across various regions, ensuring that businesses follow Islamic guidelines. Additionally, the emergence of halal tourism, which provides Muslim travelers with halal-certified hotels, restaurants, and entertainment options, underscores the wide-ranging impact of halal in today's society..

The Foundations of Halal in Islamic Teachings:

Islamic teachings lay a solid groundwork for halal practices, focusing on purity, ethics, and social responsibility (Fischer, 2016). The Quran mentions in Surah Al-Baqarah (2: 172-173):

O you who have believed, eat from the good things which We have provided for you and be grateful to Allah if it is [indeed] Him that you worship. He has only forbidden to you dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah...

This verse underscores the spiritual and ethical aspects of halal, connecting it to gratitude and adherence to divine guidance (Hassan & Hamid, 2019). The dietary rules outlined in Islam aim not just to promote physical health but also to foster discipline, mindfulness, and ethical consumption. The Quran further emphasizes these values in Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:3):

Prohibited to you are dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah... But whoever is forced by extreme hunger with no inclination to sin - then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.

In similar, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) highlighted the significance of halal in his teachings. A hadith from Sahih Muslim states:

Allah is pure and accepts only what is pure. And indeed, Allah has commanded the believers with what He

commanded the Messengers, saying: 'O you who believe! Eat from the good things and do righteous deeds.

This hadith emphasizes the importance of purity in what we eat and how we act daily, connecting halal with a broader sense of righteousness and ethical behavior. Another hadith found in Sunan At-Tirmidhi states:

What is lawful is clear, and what is unlawful is clear, but there are ambiguous matters that many people are unaware of. So, whoever steers clear of these doubtful matters protects their religion and their honor.

This highlights the need for caution and mindfulness to ensure our actions are in line with Islamic teachings, reinforcing how crucial halal is for maintaining both ethical and religious integrity.

But it's not just about food; Islamic teachings stress the importance of ethical behavior in every part of life, including business and financial dealings. The ban on *riba* (interest) in Islamic banking is a prime example of the broader halal concept, which champions fairness and social justice. Likewise, the emergence of halal fashion and cosmetics shows a growing interest in products that reflect Islamic values while keeping up with modern trends.

The narratives around halal go beyond just religious practices; they touch on social identity, economic empowerment, and ethical consumerism. In many Muslim-majority countries, halal is closely linked to national identity, shaping government policies and business practices. On the flip side, in non-Muslim-majority countries, the halal movement has become a way for Muslim communities to express their culture and engage economically, fostering a sense of belonging and inclusivity.

Halal as a Marker of Identity:

For many Muslims, halal is more than just a dietary guideline; it's a vital part of their identity that reinforces their faith and sets them apart from non-Muslim communities (Bonne & Verbeke, 2008). Choosing halal food and products fosters a sense of belonging to the global Muslim *ummah* (community) (Rezai, 2012). Halal serves as a unifying identity marker that goes beyond national boundaries, connecting Muslims through shared practices and ethical values.

The importance of halal in shaping identity is especially clear in the everyday choices Muslims make. Whether it's picking a halal-certified restaurant or choosing ethical financial services, these decisions reflect their commitment to their beliefs. This dedication to halal not only reminds them of their faith but also helps them navigate the challenges of modern life while remaining true to their principles.

The Role of Halal in Muslim Minority Communities:

In countries where Muslims are not the majority, halal practices become even more crucial for preserving cultural identity (El-Bassiouny, 2018). Muslim minorities often depend on halal food businesses, mosques, and cultural organizations to help them maintain their religious identity (Jafari & Suerdem, 2012). Having access to halal-certified products allows these communities to blend

into the wider society without sacrificing their beliefs (Tieman, 2017). This access enables Muslims to engage in social and economic activities while staying true to their religious values.

Additionally, the availability of halal food and services in non-Muslim countries promotes interfaith understanding and celebrates multiculturalism. Businesses and policymakers are increasingly aware of the need to cater to Muslim consumers, which creates a more inclusive environment that honors religious diversity. As a result, we've seen halal sections popping up in supermarkets, halal menu options being offered in restaurants, and the creation of certification bodies that ensure adherence to halal standards.

Halal and Community Cohesion:

Halal practices are really important for building a sense of community (Wilson, 2014). Whether it's through shared meals or group religious events, halal acts as a glue that brings Muslims together (Henderson, 2016). This communal aspect of halal not only strengthens social bonds but also deepens relationships within Muslim communities.

But halal is more than just a religious duty; it's a cultural and social link that helps preserve traditions and values across generations. In both Muslim-majority and minority settings, halal practices create a shared feeling of belonging, ensuring consistency in how faith is observed. It plays a key role in shaping Muslim identity, allowing individuals to express their beliefs through their everyday food choices. The focus on halal promotes ethical consumption, responsibility, and mindfulness, fostering a sense of accountability to both one's faith and community..

Social Gatherings and Religious Festivals:

Events like Eid al-Adha and Ramadan really shine a light on the communal side of halal (Ahmad, 2020). When it comes to Eid al-Adha, the way animals are slaughtered follows strict halal guidelines, and it's not just about the act itself; it symbolizes faith, charity, and togetherness (Minkus-McKenna, 2007). This festival brings families and communities together for Qurbani (sacrificial slaughter), where they share meat with those in need, truly embodying the Islamic principle of generosity.

Similarly, during Ramadan, breaking the fast often means enjoying halal meals with family, friends, and neighbors, which helps strengthen those social bonds (Ayyub, 2015). The daily iftar (the meal to break the fast) gatherings are a wonderful way for people from various backgrounds to come together, fostering a sense of unity and spiritual connection. Community iftars organized by mosques, Islamic organizations, and even local businesses encourage social interaction and engagement among both Muslims and non-Muslims, helping everyone gain a deeper understanding of Islamic values.

These gatherings are fantastic opportunities for Muslims to connect, celebrate their faith, and pass on religious traditions to the younger generations. In our multicultural societies, they also act as a platform to educate and engage with

non-Muslims about the importance of halal, which helps strengthen interfaith relations and promotes cultural inclusivity..

The Role of Halal Businesses:

The surge in halal-certified restaurants, supermarkets, and online delivery services has really bolstered Muslim communities around the globe (Zulfakar, 2014). With halal products now more accessible in mainstream markets, Muslims can easily stick to their dietary and ethical guidelines without any hassle.

Halal food businesses do more than just meet dietary needs; they also open up economic opportunities, helping local entrepreneurs thrive and promoting community growth (Hanzaee & Ramezani, 2011). The growth of halal industries has given Muslims better access to jobs and entrepreneurial ventures in areas like food production, hospitality, and e-commerce. Plus, halal businesses play a vital role in local economies by creating jobs and promoting ethical business practices rooted in Islamic values.

The expansion of the halal industry has empowered Muslim entrepreneurs to launch businesses that align with their beliefs while addressing the needs of their communities. From food carts serving halal dishes to large global restaurant chains, these businesses have adapted to consumer preferences while staying true to religious guidelines. The rising demand for halal products has also motivated mainstream retailers and international food companies to add halal-certified options to their shelves.

Halal in the Globalized World:

The rise of halal in the global market has made it much more visible in everyday shopping spaces (Bergeaud-Blackler, 2017). Big names like McDonald's and Nestlé have jumped on board, tweaking their products to align with halal standards because they see the huge potential in catering to the global Muslim community (Lever & Miele, 2012). Interestingly, the appeal of halal products isn't limited to just Muslim consumers; many non-Muslims are drawn to halal-certified items, viewing them as healthier, safer, and more ethically produced.

As people become more aware of ethical consumption, sustainability, and organic farming, halal has started to resonate with mindful shoppers around the globe. The core values of halal—like treating animals in halal way, ensuring cleanliness in food preparation, and avoiding harmful ingredients—really connect with the growing demand for transparency and responsible sourcing in the food industry.

Moreover, the booming halal market has prompted the incorporation of halal standards into international trade policies. This shift is pushing governments and businesses to create clearer regulations that cater to the needs of Muslim consumers. Halal tourism, fashion, and pharmaceuticals are just a few of the rapidly growing sectors that showcase how halal is shaping the modern economic landscape.

The Rise of Halal Certification:

Halal certification has become a vital part of the global food scene (Fischer, 2011). Certification bodies are key players in standardizing halal regulations, giving Muslim consumers peace of mind about the authenticity of halal products.

Thanks to the standardization of halal certification, it's now much easier for Muslims to find halal products around the world (Tieman, 2013). This certification is particularly crucial in countries where Muslims are not the majority, as it can be tough to verify whether food is truly halal. Moreover, governments in Muslim-majority nations have tightened halal regulations, which helps bolster the credibility of the certification process.

That said, the certification journey isn't without its hurdles. There are varying interpretations of halal standards from one country or organization to another. These discrepancies can create confusion for both consumers and businesses, highlighting the need for efforts to harmonize global halal certification standards.

Challenges and Controversies in Halal Certification:

Even though halal certification is becoming more popular, it's not without its share of controversies (Wan-Hassan & Awang, 2009). Different interpretations among Islamic scholars have resulted in varying certification standards (Regenstein, 2003). These discrepancies can confuse both consumers and businesses, making it tough to maintain consistent halal compliance across various regions and industries.

A major issue with halal certification is the absence of standardized global regulations. While some countries boast well-established halal authorities, others have multiple certifying bodies with conflicting requirements. This lack of uniformity can complicate international trade, as businesses have to navigate different halal certification criteria in various markets (Tieman, 2017).

Moreover, worries about unethical practices, like falsely labeled halal products, have sparked calls for stricter regulations and greater transparency (Talib, 2017). Incidents of mislabeling, contamination with non-halal substances, and fraudulent certifications have eroded consumer trust and led to demands for more robust oversight. In response, governments and halal certification bodies are striving to implement stricter verification processes and leverage blockchain technology to improve traceability and authenticity in the halal supply chain.

As the halal industry keeps growing, tackling these challenges will be essential for maintaining consumer confidence and ensuring that halal certification remains a reliable standard around the globe.

The Expanding Scope of Halal Beyond Food:

The idea of halal has grown to encompass areas like finance, fashion, tourism, and pharmaceuticals, showcasing the varied needs of today's Muslim consumers (Mathew, 2014). As globalization and technology transform industries, the way halal principles are applied is also changing, blending ethical, religious, and cultural values into many aspects of daily life.

i. Islamic Finance:

Islamic banking and finance are guided by Shariah principles, which forbid interest (riba) and encourage ethical investments (Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007). Institutions like the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and Al Rajhi Bank have played a significant role in advancing Islamic finance, providing Muslims around the globe with alternatives to traditional banking (Rahman, 2010). These financial systems focus on risk-sharing, social justice, and transparency, making sure that investments are in line with Islamic values.

As Islamic finance continues to grow globally, we've seen the emergence of innovative financial products like sukuk (Islamic bonds) and takaful (Islamic insurance). Even many non-Muslim countries have started to see the benefits of Islamic finance, incorporating it into their banking systems to attract Muslim investors. The ethical foundation of Islamic finance resonates with a wider audience, including socially responsible investors who are on the lookout for alternatives to interest-based financial models.

ii. Halal Fashion:

Modest fashion has really taken off as a global industry, with big names like Dolce & Gabbana and Nike stepping up to offer halal-friendly clothing lines (Bhatia, 2021). This growing demand for modest fashion shows that many Muslim consumers want to express their faith while still keeping up with modern trends (Sandikci & Ger, 2010). The influence of social media personalities and Muslim fashion designers has also played a huge role in boosting the industry, making modest wear more visible in mainstream fashion markets.

But the halal fashion movement goes beyond just covering up; it's also about ethical sourcing, sustainable production, and fair trade practices. A lot of Muslim consumers are keen on supporting brands that reflect their religious values, ensuring that their clothing is made without exploitative labor or harmful environmental practices. The modest fashion industry has become a vital space for cultural expression, especially for Muslim women, helping them find a way to balance their faith, identity, and contemporary style.

iii. Halal Tourism:

Halal tourism is all about making travel easier and more enjoyable for Muslim travelers. It focuses on providing halal food, prayer facilities, and gender-segregated amenities (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and the United Arab Emirates have really stepped up to become top destinations for halal-friendly travel (Henderson, 2010). Thanks to the emergence of Muslim-friendly travel agencies and accommodations, observant Muslim tourists can now explore the globe without having to compromise on their religious beliefs.

But halal tourism isn't just about food and prayer spaces; it also includes spa services, beach resorts with private family areas, and travel packages that steer clear

of nightlife and alcohol-focused activities. Airlines and hotels are getting in on the action too, offering prayer rooms, halal meal options, and services that cater to Ramadan, all aimed at the growing number of Muslim travelers.

The way halal has expanded beyond just food shows how adaptable and relevant Islamic principles are in today's industries. As more consumers seek out halal products and services, businesses around the world are stepping up their game to ensure that halal remains an essential part of Muslim identity and lifestyle.

iv. Halal Pharmaceuticals and Cosmetics:

The interest in halal-certified pharmaceuticals and cosmetics has really taken off as more consumers look for products that are free from alcohol and animal-derived ingredients (Shaari & Arifin, 2010). Companies like Wardah and Iba Halal Care have jumped on this trend, providing ethical options for Muslim shoppers (Ambali & Bakar, 2014). Halal cosmetics make sure that the products align with Islamic ethical standards, steering clear of ingredients like gelatin, carmine, and certain emulsifiers that come from non-halal sources. In the same vein, halal pharmaceuticals offer medications that avoid prohibited substances, ensuring they respect religious beliefs.

With a growing awareness and demand, regulatory bodies in Muslim-majority countries have set up halal certification systems for pharmaceuticals and cosmetics. This has sparked more investment in research and development, with companies creating products that meet both Islamic guidelines and global quality standards. The halal pharmaceutical and cosmetics sector is on the rise, addressing the ethical and religious needs of Muslim consumers around the globe.

The growth of halal beyond just food shows how adaptable and relevant Islamic principles are in today's industries. As the demand for halal products and services continues to rise, businesses worldwide are finding new ways to innovate, making sure that halal remains an essential part of Muslim identity and lifestyle.

Conclusion:

Halal isn't just a list of dietary rules; it's a rich cultural and religious framework that shapes identities, builds communities, and evolves with modern times. It acts as a common thread for Muslims around the globe, reinforcing their religious values while seamlessly fitting into contemporary sectors like finance, fashion, tourism, and healthcare. The rising interest in halal products and services underscores the importance of ethical consumption and religious commitment in our increasingly interconnected world.

As the halal industry keeps growing, it will face both exciting opportunities and significant challenges. Key issues like the need for standardized halal certification, concerns about supply chain transparency, and the varying interpretations of halal guidelines by scholars are all critical points that need to be addressed. Moreover, the growing interest from multinational companies in the halal

market brings both economic prospects and worries about authenticity and commercialization.

Even with these hurdles, the fundamental values of halal—purity, ethics, and social responsibility—ensure that it remains relevant. The flexibility of halal principles across different industries shows its capacity to adapt to the changing needs of Muslim consumers while still holding onto its religious importance. As global awareness of halal continues to rise, it will undoubtedly stay a vital part of Muslim life, balancing the preservation of religious traditions with the embrace of modern advancements.

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