Shaping the Halal into a Brand?

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Abstract

Purpose - To review current literature and practices concerning the usage and consumption of Halal, within marketing and branding. Following this, the aim is to both stimulate discussions and encourage further thinking within this field.

Design/methodology/approach - Inductive reasoning and syllogisms, as a basis for conceptual metaphor theory and critical discourse analysis. Evidence gathered from structured and systematic literature reviews - supported by existing empirical data, anecdotal evidence, personal observations and experience.

Findings - In business, the doctrine of what is halal, has culminated in the creation of ingredient brands and in some cases forms of co-branding. However, the halal's full potential has yet to be harnessed and there remain areas of dissonance and misunderstanding. Reasons offered by the authors are that current applications of brand theory unnecessarily restrict the term halal and presuppose that there is one interpretation of its meaning. Also, instead of current trends which focus on rate determining steps within functional marketing approaches per se; halal’s competitive advantage is of more significance when delivered via the tacit elements of strategy and management.

Research limitations/implications - As a conceptual paper, research is limited at times by a lack of empirical data and attempts necessitating the exploration of wide-ranging cross-disciplinary sources and stakeholder engagements.

Originality/value - Growing market interest suggests its significance to both Muslims and non-Muslims. Furthermore, whilst research reveals studies looking at 'meat and money' (halal meat and Islamic finance) centred on functional attributes and monolithic consumption; few explore halal's figurative and brand elements, amongst diverse audiences.

Keywords - Halal, Muslims, Islam, Brand Strategy, Cross-Culture, Ethics.

Paper Type - Conceptual Paper

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Background - Origins of Halal

*Halal* is an Arabic word linked to the Islamic faith. Halal in its general sense can be translated as meaning allowed, or permissible. A basic acceptance and understanding of what is halal, is central to every Muslim’s belief - falling under the umbrella of what is considered to be information that is known by necessity. The opposite of this word in Arabic is *Haram*. A general rule of Islamic jurisprudence holds everything as halal, unless stated otherwise, with the exception of meat. Therefore a Muslim (follower of Islam) who has a sound grounding in Islam, should be able to identify what is halal and what is not. In contrast, Haram appears to resonate in the eyes of individuals with much stronger sentiments. This is because the conscious consumption of or engagement in haram activities, without repentance, carries with them the risk of spiritual or physical punishments (within Islamic law, or in the hereafter). As a result Muslims tend to adopt a position of avoidance, in the face of doubt. In Malaysia the term *non-Halal* is used in preference to Haram, in the signage of non-Muslim restaurants. This appears to confirm the perceptions of the word haram encouraging censure - by both Muslims and non-Muslims.

Introduction

Academic thinking would support the view that Halal can fit within existing branding frameworks. However, the suggestion here is that there remain potential gaps in understanding within much of current business thinking and practices – which are evident especially when examining consumer-based perspectives. Without a review and appraisal of the term halal within business disciplines, there is a risk of sub-optimisation, restrictive practice and a future denaturing of this phenomenon. This is ultimately also to the detriment of consumers, as the dogma of halal should position them as primary stakeholders - to be served by, rather than beholden to businesses.

Where the term *Halal* is recognised as a brand element, its evaluation often appears to suggest functional and materialist interpretations. These deviate from more contemporary marketing and branding constructs - which instead look to focus on aspirational, tacit and intangible components (Keller 1993, 1998; Freling and Forbes 2005; Hayes, et al 2006). With the identification of attitudinal and behavioural components by Aaker (1991), emerging schools of thought suggest that brands are best understood from the perspective of consumers, (Keller 1993; Franzen and Bowman 2001; Czellar 2003; de Chernatony and McDonald 2003; Lindstrom 2005). In light of these consumer-based schools of thought and the authors’ suggestions, a holistic appraisal of halal is germane and subject to dynamic interactions between stakeholder groups.

In line with the findings of (Simon 1996; Fodor 1998; Mason and Bequette 1998) and resulting in what have been defined as brand experiential dimensions by Brakus et al (2009), Wilson and Fan (2010) concur that, “*a posterior concepts* such as brand knowledge and acculturation are experience driven”. de Chernatony (2009) points to the fact that attempts to define brands however often still reflect something of a quest for the ‘Holy Grail’. With halal, organisations either appear to see it as a brand component of sorts; or recognise that within it lies the potential to become a brand –
both of which can help increase market share. In contrast, for Muslims, Halal is not merely a brand element - instead it is part of a belief system and moral code of conduct, integral in daily living.

Current literature indicates literalist and uniform definitions of what is halal; largely housed within product marketing. However, the authors assert that Halal, as a concept, contains within it attributes which render it both a phenomenon and a noumenon. What is deemed halal is ultimately governed by the heavens and subsequently therefore can never remain in its entirety within materialist branding frameworks. Following this, management practices and processes concerned with the halal, should also take into account the implicit views of all stakeholders – and this is where its true potential lies. In addition, whilst there are numerous denominations within the Islamic faith, agreeing upon one paradigm in principle; in practice they struggle to both agree and implement such universals. In light of these factors, conclusions that bring forward one halal brand as something that will fit all, are somewhat naive and perhaps due to a lack of depth in understanding.

The case for Halal as a Brand, or a Brand Ethos?

If the nature of halal exists within both product and brand theory, a question arises whether halal can successfully be defined as forming, a commercial product, a brand, or a combination of both? The position of the authors is that halal as a concept cannot be fully encapsulated only within these constructs. Instead it is a philosophy, which whilst apparent and effective in branding, marketing and product development; stretches much further into disciplines such as management, organisational behaviour, cultural anthropology and sociology. Halal’s roots pre-date formalised marketing and branding practices, therefore in attempting to house it within these constructs; it is akin to attempting to contain the oceans. Instead marketing and brand thinking has to adapt in order to accommodate and preserve the essence of what halal actually is.

If halal is treated as a brand, there is unlikely to be a case where the name Halal could be adopted outright. Therefore its usage would suggest one which positions it as an ingredient brand or compound word, almost assuming the role of a co-brand: for example Halal-OtherWord, or OtherWord-Halal. As a co-brand, a global organisation could create a corporate division, which utilised the term halal. Following this, emerging future practices may yield names such as: Nestlé Halal, Innocent Halal, British Airways Halal, or Cobra Zero Halal beer. However, this would bring more of an organisation’s practices under further scrutiny - for example the treatment of employees and their associated working environment. For service providers, food would have to comply with halal specifications and more efforts would have to be made to preserve Islamic rituals, such as Ramadan and prayer.

Whilst this may appear to be a bold step, it could in fact be an effective strategy when entering Muslim countries – by reducing mistrust and consumer distance; due to what are often perceived as being confusing and somewhat schizophrenic corporate practices. Through this ring-fencing, organisations can distil their strategies, removing the potential for over-kill – as individually branding each product offering with halal, will reduce the term’s efficacy. Such approaches would be a departure though from basic
Islamic principles – where everything is halal, unless stated otherwise. However, they may serve as cues - encouraging and reassuring stakeholders of their halal legitimacy.

The importance of Ethical Supply Chains in Halal Branding

The suggestion here is that supply chain optimisation will encounter difficulties, when addressing fully management issues surrounding brand value. In contrast to Maklan and Knox's (1997) general principle of brand management - which identifies supply chains as being significant, concepts will need further adaptation. This due to the fact that better quality products, delivered more quickly, for lower costs, and with a stronger brand presence, do not constitute what is considered halal – according to definitions derived from Islam. Illustrating this, the following two hadith and a chapter in the Qur'an form the cornerstone of Islamic judgements:

“All actions are judged by intention”
(First phrase extract of a hadith related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim, as a reported saying of the prophet Muhammad)

“Whoever commits an act, or introduces a matter into our religion (Islam), which is not part of it, will have it rejected”
(Hadith related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim, as a reported saying of the prophet Muhammad)

“I (Allah) swear by time, that I have created, that all of mankind is at loss; except for those that (do all of the following): believe (in Islam), do good deeds, guide people to truth and have patience”
(Qur’an, chapter 103)

(Translation by the authors, from the texts, in Arabic)

It appears to be the case that the drivers for halal lie in someone being a Muslim, followed by correct thinking and intentions. Only once these have been achieved, can a review of the supply chain process occur, with its subsequent optimisation.

Following the suggestions by Maklan and Knox (1997) and del Rio et al (2001), the authors assert that ethics also play a pivotal role. Evidence for this is taken from the following:

“Allah’s Messenger (Prophet Muhammad) cursed ten people in connection with (alcoholic) wine: the wine-presser, the one who has it pressed, the one who drinks it, the one who conveys it, the one to whom it is conveyed, the one who serves it, the one who sells it, the one who benefits from the price paid for it, the one who buys it, and the one for whom it is bought.”
(Hadith related by Al-Tirmidhi).

Whilst the drinking of alcohol for recreational purposes, is prohibited in Islam; this hadith also demonstrates that the involvement in, encouragement and consumption of this commodity is also forbidden. Therefore an argument is made to encourage the
decommoditisation of halal concepts; in favour of treating them as processes - where the behaviour and intentions of those involved also fall under scrutiny. This would push practices towards approaches such as: Fair Trade, corporate altruism, sustainability and green marketing. In doing so however, further consideration would have to be made as to which products and services would credibly still remain within this reworked halal framework. Products which profess such levels of ethical practice tend to position themselves as carrying a premium. In contrast, many current halal offerings adopt strategies which price them below their non-halal equivalents, if not cheaper. This is to encourage their consumption - either for religious or commercial reasons (and in some cases both).

Applying current strategic consumer branding frameworks to halal

(Keller 1993, 1998, 2001, 2003), provides the consumer based brand equity (CBBE) model as a method by which the value of brand can be examined - with successful brands demonstrating an ability to move from a position of brand salience, towards actualising brand resonance. Here, a brand demonstrates its worth, when it is known and possesses strong, favourable and unique associations, in the minds of consumers. Following this, the authors note that applying the CBBE framework would prove useful when assessing the reciprocal value of halal as a brand element. In addition, it would appear that halal as a concept, is able to achieve the same resonance amongst Muslims; away from being a brand, by enjoying such a status de facto. However, the question arises whether commodities can as easily achieve such standings, or remain as such; by adopting the halal moniker as a form of overt branding. Brands that abuse the term halal may in fact weaken the strength and resonance of their offering – by losing credibility amongst consumers, through over commercialisation.

Neumeier (2009) states that in the field of design innovation, resonance is achieved through an ideology; where all associated parties experience a tribal connection with the brand. In this, it can be argued that Muslims exhibit traits of tribalism and these should be considered within the brand process. Within Neumeier’s (2009) framework, culture from both organisational and societal perspectives helps to shape perceptions. It would appear that an appreciation of culture and in this instance the concept of halal, viewed through the lens of culture, are essential components at each stage. Therefore, branding should allow for the permeation of halal-centric cultural concepts frequently, in order to gain strategic and sustainable competitive advantages.

The subsequent commoditisation of halal

Whilst global societies are being defined by post-modernist constructs, driven by increased deterritorization and the sharing of practices; three phenomena have emerged:

- A call and desire for clear re-classifications of products and services – with halal monikers
- A movement towards using the term halal within branding more frequently
- And following this, using the term halal as means by which economic gains can be achieved
Halal certification has been used as a quasi co-brand (e.g. Halal Insurance); ingredient brand; and brand extension. Also, it is apparent to a Muslim consumer that the HSBC Amanah Finance product for example, is one which comparably professes to be halal through its name. Amanah is an Arabic word, held to be of religious significance. In its general sense it means ‘trust’; however it also carries the sentiment of that trust being a divine privilege and therefore worthy of serious consideration. It follows that Muslims will only tend to use this word, when they were engaged in something that is deemed halal. It is perhaps for these reasons that HSBC demonstrates an understanding of the Muslim psyche. In avoiding using the term halal, they have circumvented the potential for greater consumer scrutiny; due to the significance and reverence attached to the word halal. However this manoeuvring is perhaps only of cosmetic worth - as Muslims understand that Amanah Finance still tacitly and explicitly markets itself as halal. Therefore this is more perhaps an issue of semantics, comparable with the classification of other commodities. For example, whether a beverage is known as a ‘drink’, ‘juice’, or subsequently can profess to be ‘healthy’.

Halal branding as a means of reducing Muslim consumer dissonance

Within Muslim countries and especially those which have Arabic as their mother tongue, many products have previously taken their halal status as a given. However, many offerings now seek to brand themselves as halal; even within Arab speaking and Muslim nations. This appears to be in cases especially where products are viewed as foreign, or potentially contentious. For example it may be more crucial to brand Han originating Chinese food (largely hailing from a non-Muslim majority) as halal; in comparison to popular dishes native to Chinese Muslim tribes and Muslim countries. Due to the concept of avoidance of doubt, halal branding is in some way differentiated from other ingredient brands, such as ‘Fair Trade’ or ‘sugar free’ and is perhaps more comparable to ‘sugar free’ (for diabetics), ‘suitable for vegetarians’, or ‘nut free’ - where consumers have indelible laws of guidance. Therefore halal often represents something of a “hygiene factor” (Hertzberg et al 1959), and thus presents itself as a potential deal breaker, if absent.

Halal branding as a tool for promoting Islam

By taking an alternative interpretation of the avoidance of doubt concept, a case can still be made for halal possessing similar attributes to Fair Trade ingredient brands; in that consumers are likely to want to support such products or services, because:

- There are fears that a lack of commercial success will drive producers away from producing halal products and services
- There will be associated commercial benefits for Muslims
- This is seen as a form of Islamic worship and assertion of Islamic identity
- This is viewed by Muslims as a legitimate form of Islamic proselytization - which will encourage a climate of Islamic acceptance. Muslims inviting people to Islam, known as da’wah in Arabic, is seen as being central to their beliefs and a praiseworthy act. Whilst this has often been profiled as having sinister undertones; by the vast majority of Muslims it is simply an enactment of the
hadith and saying of the Prophet Muhammad, “None of you truly has faith, until you love for your brothers and sisters, that which you love for yourself”.

**Halal branding as an offensive and/or defensive corporate strategy**

The halal market has seen a growing number of products outside of the food sector, overtly carrying Islamic classifications. Examples range from halal soap, halal perfume, halal chocolate and even Islamic Hip-Hop. Traditionally seen as being non-contentious commodities, explanations for this phenomenon can be viewed in two ways: Optimistically, they serve as a positive reinforcement of the demand for such commodities and their economic market potential. However a polemical case can be argued for increased concerns driving such growth, within the Muslim community. Muslims may feel that not enough of their needs are being catered for; perhaps there is mistrust of larger organisations; or feelings of a lack of control over the Islamic standard. In support of this pessimism, there are cases where minute trace elements of alcohol or *haram* animal products have been found in commodities - despite carrying labelling indicating otherwise. This shows that whilst not considered significant within general manufacturing practices, they still are areas of concern for Muslims. Either way, their presence forms part of both offensive and defensive strategies - regardless of any optimism or pessimism. In a quest for Islamic purity, the purification of both wealth and actions lead to levels of spirituality. These sentiments provide admirable aspirations and great potential, for marketers and brands - whereby consumers sees themselves as being one with the product or service in question, by collectively and if possible collaboratively, achieving halal credentials.

**Catering for and marketing halal to Muslims**

A study conducted by Ahmed (2008) on marketing halal meat in the UK, finds that all respondents selected, stated that the authenticity of the meat being halal, was the most important factor. Whilst supermarkets stocking halal lines are more capable of providing authentic information than some local butchers, Ahmed (2008) finds that Muslim consumers still prefer to their local butchers. He asserts that

“This result could be seen as contradictory, because 94 per cent of respondents thought supermarkets were more hygienic in comparison to only 6 per cent who thought local butchers were... Further questions are raised by the fact that 90 per cent of respondents think that supermarkets sell better quality meat.” (Ahmed, 2008, p.664).

His suggestions were that trust communicated through cultural and long-term human interactions were of more importance to Muslim consumers, in these instances. Following this, Ahmed (2008) also finds that 84 percent of Muslim respondents in fact did not ask their local halal butchers where the meat came from. The significant factor here seems to be identifying that the butcher is an observant and practicing Muslim. Therefore, if Supermarket chains are to win the hearts, minds and purse strings of Muslim consumers, a greater reliance needs to be placed on supporting marketing activities with credible individuals, who readily interact with consumers.
Current approaches have spawned fast food chains such as McDonald’s, KFC, Dominos, and Subway who adapt some of their restaurant chains, even in the UK - by offering halal lines. The Grocer (2007a), states that the halal food market in the UK alone is worth £700 million; with Tesco looking to bring £148 million of Malaysian halal products to the UK over the next five years.

Because environmental factors are also points of consideration for Muslims, such as: whether the restaurant or supermarket also serves non-halal items - such as alcohol or pork (which are also prohibited in Islam); and ambience; there are also potential barriers present to both consumers and providers. Having stated this, there appear to be differing opinions and consumer practices. Some Muslims are happy to eat halal food as they see it, in a restaurant which serves alcohol and pork (both prohibited in Islam) - in the same way that they are happy to buy halal food from a major supermarket chain. Retailers are likely to experience fewer barriers - as food is pre-packed and prepared largely off-site. They are also more easily able to place a distance between contentious products in their stores. However a point worthy of mention, is that Muslims who eat halal food, do not necessarily abstain from drinking alcohol.

In serving grateful Muslim audiences, mainstream corporations have received mixed receptions, with some concerned by a risk of over-exploiting Muslim consumers; which in turn raises ethical issues. Muslims view health as having a strong spiritual element, encompassing elements of fatalism. Therefore once something is been deemed halal, it is not a question of whether it can be consumed or not; but rather the quantity. Furthermore, consumers in developing nations and economic migrants, residing in developed nations, could be seen as being more ‘junior’ members of a global community - due to their recent ascendency towards increased mass consumerism. Ahmed (2008) asserts that Muslims may be more willing to accept products and services of lower standards and quality. Palumbo and Herbig (2003) state that “Minorities are also known to be less cynical about advertising messages because they are actually seeking out information about the product: information that the general public may take for granted” (p.119). Within these, the hand of exploitation presents a clear and present danger. However Rickard (1994) suggests that minority groups have a tendency towards purchasing more branded products and those of quality. Therefore, there appears to be a gap in delivery - typified by what Muslim consumers have to settle for and what they actually want.

Mintel Oxygen (2002), values the UK Muslim population as having a combined spending power of £20.5 billion. The Grocer (2007b) reports Muslims’ concerns at some halal foods not complying with correct preparation procedures, resulting in the boycott of these products and organisations. However, there still remains little indication as to whether these concerns stretch any further than simple materialistic interpretations surrounding the absence of haram ingredients, or correct slaughter procedures. The authors suggest that once these basic concerns have been addressed, Muslim consumers will focus their attentions on the more implicit and aspirational elements of halal - which will necessitate that the more human elements of branding play more of a role, in catering for these desires. Mintel Oxygen (2002), in their future and forecast section, cite branding as being critical factor, which will allow for sector expansion.
In the interests of maintaining quality and control there have emerged halal brands, which also carry additional certification and authenticity from Islamic councils. Their remit nevertheless would appear to be restrictive; in that they simply view products and services according to their ingredients. Collectively if unaddressed, Islamic councils, manufacturers and consumers risk the devaluation of halal as a strategic brand element; in their acceptance of these practices.

An approach which could serve as an interesting bridge and framework for understanding the Muslim gastronomic psyche, may be taken from Bourdieu’s (1984) thesis. Bourdieu (1984) suggests that social class and cultural drivers play a major role in taste - rather than just income; as hypothesised by economic demand theory. This position has been examined by (Tomlinson 1994; Wright et al 2000, 2001), who collectively assert that culture plays a key role within food consumption and associated brand activities. In this a more strategic and consumer-centred approach could be examined over the long term - which blends the rich tapestry and legacy of culture, with modern marketing trends.

**The battle for ethical halal brands**

Whilst Ahmed (2008) indicates that there may be better quality produce on offer from mainstream corporate supermarket chains, something has gone amiss; as they are not being adopted in the numbers that one would expect, according to Rickard’s (1994) judgement. This is perhaps an indication that Muslims also take into account other significant factors. Muslim owned Evoca cola is a drink which contains black seed extract as a key ingredient is (otherwise known as Nigella seeds, black caraway, black onion seed, or kalonji, amongst others). In Arabic its literal translation is ‘seed of blessing’ which has particular significance within Islam, as the Prophet Muhammad spoke of its medicinal benefits. As Muslims are keen to follow the example of their Prophet, taking great interest in his every speech, thoughts and actions; an argument can be made to support the fact that where available and marketed appropriately, Muslim-centric produce and services can in fact succeed.

Another example lies with Abraham Natural Produce - a small online Muslim business that supplies organic meat, condiments and honey; carrying certification from the Soil Association. Their decision to supply organic meat from the UK has meant that they have no option but to source meat which has first been stunned (in compliance with organic standards). As a result, the Halal Food Authority has refused to certify Abraham Natural Produce’s meat, according to their differing interpretation of Islamic law. In response, Abraham Natural Produce has nevertheless provided compelling religious justification and evidence for the 'halal-ness’ of their meat.

Apart from the differences in interpretation regarding slaughtering procedures, a further difference lies in the importance placed on product quality. Abraham Natural Produce suggests that the truly halal places a greater importance on ethics and the wellbeing of animals. In doing so, they are willing to forgo established certifications and recognisable symbolism afforded by existing halal authorities, in favour of mainstream organic produce bodies. Abraham Natural Produce’s interpretation appears to be more in-keeping with the Islamic ethos of halal. However, as a small business, it is unlikely
that they will be able to make significant in-roads within seemingly cautious, parochial and at times tribal Muslim populations. The likelihood is that real in-roads will be made once a larger supermarket chain decides to throw its weight behind this approach, with superior marketing budgets and distribution networks. In this instance, it is also likely that yet another halal authority will be established, with compatible values – in order to gain necessary credibility.

If this does happen, then the battle for halal status and credibility will inevitably be pulled towards a battle of the brands and marketing campaigns. In the advent of such an occurrence, there lie concerns. The scales of religious sensibility have the potential to be tipped towards placing corporations in the driving seat - through heavy-weight marketing and an increased commoditisation of religion. Therefore, the future points to one where ownership of what is halal, will be shifted towards interpretations looking to embed strategic brand theory. Here, there is a distinct possibility that halal will culminate in moving beyond being something of just Islamic significance. The risk associated with this is that Muslim consumers may be irreversibly relinquishing some of their control over definitions of halal, into the hands of marketers. This in itself may provide the oxygen for views espousing an apocalyptic degradation of religion, in need of a remedy through increased extremism. This is comparably seen when observing the views and actions of the most extreme animal rights protestors. Within their commercialisation Fair Trade goods have encountered similar challenges as the tide of opinion turns; whereby they have been perceived significantly to add both a premium and competitive advantage to commodities, for commercial gains.

Segmentation challenges in defining Islam and Muslims

The authors group current business literature in the following ways:

- Verdicts from Islamic jurisprudence, commenting on the permissibility of items and activities
- Muslims having their religion represent an extension of definitions blending nationality and ethnicity
- Commerce and consumption within Muslim countries, or discrete groups of economic migrants
- Analysis which defines Islam in the context of assuming Muslim individuals possess homogeneity
- A failure to accept fundamental differences in mindsets between Muslims, even if significant commonalities are shared. For example differences between Saudis and Iranians, or Indians, Pakistans and Bangladeshis.

Ahmed (2008) presents similar findings:

- Tendencies towards over-generalisation. That is, viewing the Muslim population as a monolithic group
- Concentration, almost exclusively, on more historically and economically visible sub-groups, such as Indian sub-continent Asians
- Inability to capture the dynamically evolving environment of halal and Muslim businesses. The Muslim map of Britain is continuously evolving, as are the businesses with which Muslims are associated (Ahmed, 2008, pp.656-657).
Much of the literature remains restrictive, in that it lacks the psychographic complexities and data mining techniques used currently in wider marketing and branding. The authors are of the opinion that many existing approaches:

- Unnecessarily restrict halal into being an ingredient brand, or at best an extension
- Fail to accurately represent or serve distinct, commercially viable and apparent homogenous Muslim sub-segments
- In the face of increased deterriorization, denationalization and migration, these deficiencies will increase
- Miss opportunities to create new brands and product innovations – rather than mere adaptations or copy-cats
- Subsequently require Muslim consumers adapt, rather than the product or service. This tends strategic marketing towards focussing on short term gains.

As a point of interest, since its existence, Islam has spread for centuries outside of Arabic speaking people. History indicates that soon the death of the prophet Muhammad, close companions went as far as China. Their graves and some of the oldest mosques in Islamic history are testament to these exploits. Luard (2005) also cites Professor Liu Ying Sheng of Nanjing University’s evidence, that Sinbad was in fact a Chinese Muslim, of Muslim lineage. These perhaps contribute to a marketing oxymoron - where Muslims are both similar, yet distinctly different at the same time. The Mintel Oxygen (2002) report on halal foods in the UK states that the wide ranging origins of Muslims makes analysis based on uniformity difficult. Following this, attempts by manufacturers to create halal product offerings which cater for such diverse audiences, is also fraught with difficulties. The authors suggest therefore that brand challenges cannot be simply remedied by one uniform approach to halal.

Abdullah (2008) cites predictions of Muslims becoming a significant religious group in America; hailing from over 80 different countries. Within this African Americans will make up the majority. However despite this conspicuous presence, Abdullah (2008) asserts that,

“the orientalist stereotypes many westerners consume about Islam, prevent them from understanding the complex ways these Muslims negotiate their religious, racial, and ethnic identities” (Abdullah, 2008, p.5).

Abdullah (2008) states that Muslims define their respective identities through a process of boundary shifting which “does not only include a dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion, but refers to those situations where people negotiate multiple belongings or hybrid identities. This means individuals often navigate their personalities in ways that cause two, three or more identity markers to overlap. In other instances, they may revert to a single identity” (Abdullah, 2008, p.9).

These findings suggest that much work has still to be done by marketers in order to enter the psyche of Muslim minds. On one side the strength of Islam lies in its adherence to a framework, which “does not only include a dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion, but refers to those situations where people negotiate multiple belongings or hybrid identities. This means individuals often navigate their personalities in ways that cause two, three or more identity markers to overlap. In other instances, they may revert to a single identity” (Abdullah, 2008, p.9).
younger population, future activities will need cutting-edge approaches, to gain credibility - which cannot be achieved by traditional interpretations of religion. As a precursor, Hip-Hop music and urban fashion labels, such as Mecca USA have also enjoyed global success, through fusing Islamic symbolism into their mainstream product offerings. If halal is to make further inroads, it too should seek associations with partners, which do not just focus on the materialistic.

When undertaking cross-cultural analyses, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952); Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1993); Holden (2002); and Wilson et al (2009) highlight differences in approach between countries and cultures whilst adhering to the same frameworks. Therefore, the position of the authors is that whilst being unified under one ideology and host language of Arabic; it will follow that Muslims from different cultural and national groupings, will also differ in their interpretations and practices concerning what is halal.

Challenges in negotiating the tacit transmission of Halal

A point of interest lies in the fact that whilst MacDonald's offers halal meat in Pakistan (a Muslim country), they have been less keen to overtly brand it as such in neighbouring India; despite it having larger numbers of Muslims. The reason being, that there have been distinct cases where the Indian Hindu consumer majority have boycotted halal restaurants, for reasons driven by politics. This appears to be less of a concern outside of India however, as Hindus have expressed less vociferous opinions and are more likely to consume halal MacDonald’s freely within Muslim countries. The McDonald's case further supports the position that halal is viewed by Muslims and non-Muslims alike, as being more than just an ingredient brand. Instead its sublime symbolism is powerful in having deep structured interpretations. However it does demonstrate the fact that consumers’ interpretations of brand messages are situation-specific. With this in mind, it may well be the case that organisations choosing to use the term halal, will also have to consider much wider societal implications.

The reciprocal market potential of halal offerings

Knight (2006) reported that banks offering such products as Islamic Finance (which by its very nature carries halal status), have attracted British non-Muslims. Malaysia also states that “up to 25% of Islamic accounts are opened by non-Muslims” (Knight 2006). It could be argued that this is surprising - considering that these financial products are non-interest bearing and whilst they may be considered a necessity to someone following the Muslim faith; begs the question why others would want to adopt them? This is especially because economic gains seem to take a back seat. Non-Muslim consumers in Knight’s (2006) article equated Islamic finance with ethical living. They expressed that they were attracted by the prospect of their money not being invested by the bank, in such things as pornography and arms. In addition they also supported the Islamic position of wealth being only generated through legitimate trade and investment in assets, and not by making money from money.
Haron et al (1994), investigated the factors affecting Muslim and non-Muslim patronage of Islamic Banks in Malaysia. Their findings show that “about 39 per cent of the Muslim respondents believe that religion is the only reason why people patronize the Islamic bank, and, surprisingly, the percentage is much lower for non-Muslims. More than half of both respondent groups have indicated the possibility of establishing a relationship with the Islamic bank if they have a complete understanding about the operations of an Islamic bank” (Haron et al 1994, p.38).

Following these findings they conclude that, an Islamic bank “should not over emphasize, and rely on, the religion factor as a strategy in its effort to attract more customers” (Haron et al 1994, p.39). In addition, they assert that dress code and customer relations techniques are also areas which should be emphasised.

Following Metwally’s (1997) assertions concerning the use of Islamic principles and their subsequent economic implications, it would follow that halal-centric brand equity calculations should also be subject to review. Fan (2005), states that conventional brand equity models define their value through economic performance in financial terms. However, he asserts that these models have deficiencies, in not assessing ethical measures. Therefore in the case of halal, where a strong code of ethics exists, the authors suggest that such appraisals will become even more crucial. In the shadow of the current economic climate; highlighting mismanagements in finances and the recent furor over expenses claims made by UK members of parliament; it is likely that the wider population will increase in their desire for more ethically based products.

**Conclusion**

The investigation of halal and more specifically those aspects pertaining to branding, and business, are still in their infancy. However, the wider implications associated with halal and its potential to permeate other disciplines should not be overlooked, or remain restrictive in their approach. Halal is a paradigm which necessitates an appreciation of:

- Multiple, situation-specific, cultural traits
- Figurative, esoteric and symbolic states
- Strong ethical standpoints
- Relationships away from just materialistic and mechanical process-driven thought
- Strategic Management practices

This pushes thought towards comparisons with more emotionally driven and high-involvement luxury purchases. Rickard (1994) suggests that marketers should consider trends, where minority groups have a tendency towards purchasing more branded products and those of quality. This would be in keeping with the postulation that minorities are attempting to build up equity and acceptance - through overtly branded and prestigious artefacts. Through these trends, brands and marketers have the potential to extend their portfolios and equity. This can be further strengthened through embedding more communication - which seeks to mesh with the psyche of diverse multi-cultural audiences. Notably the authors also assert that because of halal’s religious
roots, such traits would also extend to FMCG goods - despite these items being thought of as being traditionally low-involvement, and more rational than emotional purchases.

Furthermore, consumption is currently being actualised in a much wider sense - with indications that not only Muslims crave such commodities. However, the formalisation of this practice consistently within a strategic domain appears to still remain elusive, to both academics and practitioners. A key point to note is that business research requires a different perspective, from what appears to be presently rooted in grafting existing approaches based upon: anthropological observations, theological postulations, or monolithic-culture-based consumption figures.

Finally, what Islam states within its texts and what is practiced by Muslims and non-Muslims offer some form of overlap; but unless each are understood both in isolation and in their dependency, there will remain gaps. However, what is not being suggested here is that full mastery over this field will ever grant complete control over what is halal. Rather, halal will provide more gains and will become less of an enigma.

Future thoughts and areas for consideration

Fan (2000) identifies Confucianism as being the most influential school of thought, when looking to understand Chinese culture. By using Confucianism and the 40 key cultural values developed by the Chinese Culture Collection in 1987, Fan (2000) created 71 values which were grouped under 8 categories of: national traits, inter-personal relations, family (social) orientation, work attitude, business philosophy, personal traits, time orientation and relationship with nature. Upon analysis, it is felt by the authors that these values in fact also translate to the Muslim community remarkably well. Having cross-referenced them with case examples in the paper and against pivotal Islamic texts; the suggestion is that they contain within them an appreciation worthy of the materialistic, philosophical, spiritual and metaphysical - experienced by Muslims alike. As such, the investigation of comparable cross-cultural phenomena would provide useful insight and platforms.

Halal (حلال): Halal is the most common spelling used in the English/Basic Modern Latin alphabet; although it is also sometimes written as Halaal, or Helal - due to the differences in regional accents and
difficulties with creating a transliteration; which accurately represents its correct pronunciation. This however should not be confused with the word *Hilal*, which refers to a crescent moon. The classical Arabic pronunciation is most correctly achieved by the spelling *halal*; with a stress being placed on the last syllable. Similarly the word *Islam* (إسلام) follows the same pattern and is pronounced *Islām*. The word Halal is used universally by all Muslims, regardless of their level of understanding of the Arabic language. It is a word that is considered part of the basic vocabulary of those who choose to follow the Islamic faith and hence its meaning should be understood.

The Qur'an (Koran) states in chapter 5, verse 5, that the meat from Jews and Christians is also permissible for Muslims. Whilst the majority of Muslims would readily consume Jewish (Kosher) meat; perhaps less would feel comfortable doing so from Christians. The reason being that Kosher meat follows stricter rules than in Islam and is assured to be slaughtered by first slitting the throat of the animal. A significant majority of Muslims would consider the stunning of an animal before slaughter to invalidate its permissibility for consumption; which is a method used by many abattoirs. As such many Christian and developed countries have progressed towards using a stunning process. There are clear rules associated with the correct practice of stunning animals for consumption in Islam; but for the purposes of this paper, it is felt that it is unnecessary to go into further detail.

Confusingly for non Arabic speakers, *Haram* (حَرَامِ) [pronounced *Haraam*] is written using the same English/Basic Modern Latin alphabet as *Harām* (حَرَامِ) [pronounced *Harām*]. The second version has a completely different meaning; referring to the holy sites of Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem.

Meat becomes purified (halal) through following correct slaughtering procedures and spiritual practices. In contrast, milk for example is considered pure, unless contaminated with impure substances. These rulings are derived by scholars from the Qur’an (A book which is said to be the word of God/Allah – transmitted by the angel Gabriel/Jibril, to the Prophet Muhammad) and Hadiths/Ahādith (Documented sayings and practices from the Prophet Muhammad and his close companions). These basic principles and frameworks are sufficiently flexible to be able to derive rulings, for any new phenomena – for example the burden of risk and accountability between a buyer and seller, when making an internet transaction.

There is no word for non-Halal in Arabic, other than *Haram* (حَرَامِ) [pronounced *Haraam*]

A month in the year, subject to the moon calendar; where Muslims during this period abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations; between the hours of sunrise and sunset.

Five daily prescribed prayers, at set times; each lasting approximately five minutes in length. A Muslim prostrates facing the direction of Mecca (identified using a compass, or shadow that the sun casts). Muslims are required, where possible, to place their forehead on the floor (something which can also be done for example on a plane or ship).

Consumption of any food products or drinks containing the following are deemed impermissible in Islam:
- Over 0.05% alcohol content through intended fermentation, or the addition of alcohol. (N.B. a piece of fruit which has naturally fermented would not fall into this category)
- Pork or any of its derivatives, for example ham, pigs blood (in black pudding) and gelatine.
There are other animals which fall into this category, such as those that have died by natural causes, snakes and dogs; amongst others. However for the purposes of this paper the main areas have been stated.

Activities which are deemed to encourage inappropriate behaviour. As a result marketing communications and the ambience should steer well away from using images, music, and stories that are provocative, sexually explicit, erotic, encouraging sexual promiscuity; or seen to erode the ideals of marriage. In addition, diners seen to be drinking alcohol heavily and celebrating its consumption; may dissuade Muslim diners from not wanting to eat nearby. The cues are often subtle in this instance. Whilst Muslims of varying degrees of observance may feel comfortable dining in a restaurant like Pizza Express or Nandos; less in contrast are likely to even enter a pub, let alone order food.

Abraham Natural Produce states that The Halal Food Authority is wrong in adopting a position of avoidance of doubt; by deeming that any stunned animal prior to slaughter, renders the meat haram. They
assert that the Islamic position is one where it is permissible to stun an animal (though not ideal); so long as the stunning process does not kill the animal.

References


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**Bibliography of religious texts** (in Arabic)
Aridhat al-Ahwazi bi Sharh Sunan al-Tirmidhi, collection of hadith

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The Qur’an

**Corporate websites**


Halal Food Authority, [http://www.halalfoodauthority.co.uk/](http://www.halalfoodauthority.co.uk/) [Last viewed: 22nd July 2009, 16:02].


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