

India – an untapped market for halal products

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halal products

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Abstract

Purpose – India has an over-180-million Muslim population, which makes it an ideal marketplace for halal products. However, not much research has been done to understand the opportunities and challenges pertaining to halal business in India. The purpose of this study is to explore and examine how halal products are perceived by the Indian consumer and how these products are creating values for a larger consumer base.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper opted for an exploratory study using an inductive approach. To understand the peculiarities of the issue, the authors also used the case-research approach to develop a broader understanding of the topic.

Findings – Findings of this study show that the market and consumers are increasingly becoming more aware of halal products in India. Further, the demand for such products is no longer limited to Muslims. Halal products have also become an attractive option for consumers, as they are also addressing safety and environmental concerns. This is an essential factor for a flourishing certification business in India.

Research limitations/implications – A limitation of this study is a quantitative study which could have been conducted to confirm the findings of this research. Further, the sample was limited to participants in the age group of 21-30 years. Older people might share a different perspective on halal products because they are believed to be more experienced and socially conscious. Further, our cases were limited to a certifying agency and cosmetics agencies.

Practical implications – One important implication of this study is that it reaffirms the success of Islamic branding in the India context. Though this research was carried out on a limited scale, it opens up opportunities to examine the halal phenomenon in more detail. Acceptability of halal products among non-Muslims is a sign of growing tolerance among different communities to accept and adopt culture and practices of a different religion in their daily living.

Social implications – The authors have observed that halal products and Islamic branding as a whole can positively help in reshaping the image of Islam across the globe. Observations such as identifying halal products being eco-friendly reflects the increased sensitivity among the consumers in the developing nations, which were earlier a behavior common among the Westerners.

Originality/value – To the best of the authors' knowledge, no other study has been done to explore the halal product market and consumers' perception in the Indian context. This is particularly an important contribution because India is a home for over 180 million Muslims and a marketplace worth trillions of dollars. Further, past research in the area of religious marketing was limited to conceptual papers. This paper is an attempt to re-initiate discussion through empirical studies on Islamic branding in the emerging economies context.

Keywords Sustainability management, Emerging market, Islamic marketing, Halal, Faith-based marketing

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

Marketing is considered a highly context-specific discipline in the field of management (Sheth and Sisodia, 1999). Historically, marketing management evolved through exploration and adoption of new constructs which were unique to specific demographics (Seth, 2011).

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Emerging economies were one such context which was able to draw the attention of marketers (Hitt *et al.*, 2000; Hoskisson *et al.*, 2000; Burgess and Steenkamp, 2006). Partially, this attention helped in the growth and development of emerging nations. For example, since the late 1990s, these nations have been able to attract significant shares of foreign direct investments compared with other countries (Weigel *et al.*, 1997; Moran, 1998; Agrawal, 2015). Multinational corporations (MNCs) are making substantial investments in the emerging economies as part of their global expansion strategies (Cui and Liu, 2000). Initially, MNCs achieved minimal success in penetrating the local markets. Later, the socio-political dynamics in these countries went through series of transformations which facilitated foreign businesses to establish themselves (Murtha and Lenway, 1994; Prahalad and Lieberthal, 1998; Cui and Liu, 2000; Jensen, 2008; Jadhav, 2012).

Marketing in emerging nations has been widely discussed in the literature (Sami, 2004; Seth, 2011; Burgess and Steenkamp, 2006; Guzmán and Paswan, 2009). However, studies on faith-based marketing, especially Islamic marketing, in the context of emerging economies is a recent development, and such studies are limited to few Southeast Asian nations such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam (Wilson and Hollensen, 2010; Haque *et al.*, 2015; Battour and Ismail, 2016; Ahmad, 2018). Review of existing literature shows *halal food*, which is a by-product of faith-based marketing, has not been able to draw adequate attention from the scholars in the India context. This appears to be a severe concern for us because India is home to over 180 million Muslims who are believed to be the largest consumer of halal foods (Census, 2011; Haque *et al.*, 2015; Butt *et al.*, 2017). The global halal product market is currently valued at US\$2.3tn with the most significant market lying in the Asian countries only (Latif *et al.*, 2014). This study is an attempt to understand the perceived value and usefulness of halal products in India on the one hand, and how halal certification can influence this perception on the other hand. Halal products have been found to be widely used by even communities other than Muslims.

Further, the scholarly understanding of halal products has entered into a new paradigm. Speculations are being made that halal products can address some critical socio-political issues affecting Muslims globally (Wilson *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, there is a need to understand the concept in detail. Suggested implications would open ground for further research in this area.

Literature review

Increasing globalization and multiculturalism is giving rise to socio-political and economic changes at different levels (Jamal and Sharifuddin, 2015). Cultural swapping, one such noticeable change was studied by Oswald (1999). He stated that individuals borrow the culture and value of both their home country and the country where they migrate to or settle in. The pertaining question here is: *Does this argument holds in the case of business and religion as well? Do MNCs borrow elements of their culture (home nation) to their host market?* The Japanese firm is an ideal example to answer the question of business (Kelts, 2006). Similarly, Islam would be an interesting example to see how the religion of emigrants in a host country can induce cultural swapping (Soysal, 1997).

Today an estimated 1.8 billion people, i.e. 24 per cent of the world's population, are believers of Islam (Grim and Karim, 2011). Islam has become the fastest growing religion in continents such as Europe and America (Morey, 2011). As a result, the demand for products and services which adhere to Islamic practices is inevitable (Omar and Jaafar, 2011; Wilson and Grant, 2013; Ahmad and Rahman, 2015).

Halal products and consumers

Customers' loyalty is determined by their perceived value for the given products or services (Chen and Hu, 2010). Higher perceived values can offer competitive advantages for the firms (Woodruff, 1997). Food as a product or commodity derives its values from society. Within the society, social institutions such as religion have a significant influence on our perceived value for the food products (Shepherd, 1989; Jamal and Sharifuddin, 2015). Thus, the fact that halal products as food items derive their value from religion and society is not surprising.

The term "halal" is an Arabic word which means *permitted* or *lawful* under Shariah, i.e. Islamic law (Berry, 2000; Mukhtar and Butt, 2012). The concept of halal influences consumption practices of millions of Muslims across the globe. Unlike our general understanding of a product, the concept of halal is not merely a brand element. As Wilson and Fan (2010) stated that halal food "*reflects a larger belief system and moral code of conduct.*" The global demand for products which adhere to Islamic law generates an annual \$632bn worth of sales for the food industry alone (Izberk-Bilgin and Nakata, 2016). Halal is the all-encompassing concept with various connotations because of social and cultural differences. Therefore, a detailed examination of its definition and scope can offer us some exciting management lessons (Alserhan, 2010).

Better opportunities for education, access to new information, advancement in technology and higher income have increased participation of Muslims in consumer culture (Haenni, 2009; Young, 2010). An example of this change can be observed in the banking sector. Introduction of Shariah-compliant financial products such as credit cards and insurance plans has brought a large section of the Muslim population under this business. Similarly, the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) have reported rapid growth in demands and sales of such products (Ameur, 2011; Aoun and Tournois, 2015). The advantages of marketing such products are that their perceived values are governed by the trust which is directly sourced from the religion. Religious conformity prevents further evaluation by the consumers (Batey, 2009).

Theoretically, the consumption of halal products can be understood from the *theory of reasoned action* (TRA). The theory which was proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) states that there are two major determinants of our intentions (*for an action*). The two determinants are individual's characteristics and social factors such as social norms, prevailing ideology or beliefs. The former regulates the individual's decision based on their evaluation of perceived outcomes for their actions. The latter, however, reflects the role of society in creating the necessary pressure to act in a precise manner. We call it subjective norms (Lada *et al.*, 2009). These subjective norms play an essential role in our purchase decisions. For example, Muller *et al.* (2000) found that religion can strongly influence our decisions to buy a product or follow certain dietary. Based on what religion prescribes and availability of that product, we get attracted to certain commodities (Sack, 2001; Dindyal, 2003). Consumers' purchase intentions for meat (and meat products) have been found to be more strongly governed by religious beliefs than those for any other commodities (Shatenstein and Ghadirian, 1997). This is one of the reasons why halal products are prioritized over any other form of processed meat by the Muslims. Figure 1 provides an overview of the process involved in the decision making for the consumers.

The success of halal product market in establishing itself as an emerging new form of business cannot be looked through a narrow lens. Wilson *et al.* (2013) have stated that the traditional understanding about a religion does not necessarily hold in the case of Islam. The authors have described Islam as a way of life and form of lifestyle. This is a compelling argument because if halal as a by-product of Shariah or Islamic jurisprudence has been able

to create and establish a market of its own, why not we have a Hindu product or a Catholic product having an equal demand and status in the marketplace (Kartajaya and Dwi Indiro, 2009; Wilson and Hollensen, 2013)?

Sustainability and halal products

Studies (Verbeke, 2006; Hanzae and Ramezani, 2011; Rezai *et al.*, 2012) have examined the concept of “halal” from the sustainability management frameworks. The term sustainability management has been defined as “the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of both environmental and socio-economic sustainability-related decisions and actions” (Starik and Kanashiro, 2013). Sustainable management involves efficient use of available resources without causing any harm to the environment and society (Fullan *et al.*, 2008; Aras and Crowther, 2009). Sustainability management practices by firms such as manufacturing and sales of environment-friendly products may influence the perception and purchasing behavior of a customer. Customers have been observed to pay even more for such products (Wong *et al.*, 1996; Laroche *et al.*, 2001; Haws *et al.*, 2014). Interestingly, halal products have been found to be environment-friendly, hygienic and safe (Lada *et al.*, 2009; Golnaz *et al.*, 2010).

Sustainability management practice creates values for firms (Oliver, 1997). The consumer is increasingly getting more sensitive toward environmental and health concerns of products. Therefore, sustainability-management practices in manufacturing, operations and marketing can influence consumers’ buying behaviors (Mohr *et al.*, 2001). Studies have shown sustainable features of halal products (Malhotra, 2007; Ismaeel and Blaim, 2012; Teng *et al.*, 2013). However, not much research has been done to understand consumers’ perception about the sustainability features of these products (Rezai *et al.*, 2012).

Study I: case studies

In this section, we have examined the business models of two emerging businesses in the halal segment, namely, a halal-certifying agency and a halal personal care product company. We relied on different secondary sources such as news articles, internet and experts to identify these organizations for the study. The main criteria to shortlist the company was the kind of products and services offered by the company and its relevance to a halal product. An e-mail stating the purpose and objectives of the study was sent to the HR personnel concerned, and telephonic interviews were scheduled. The authors also referred to the company’s official website for more details about their products and services. Finally, the draft case study was shared with the organizations to ensure no information has been left out.

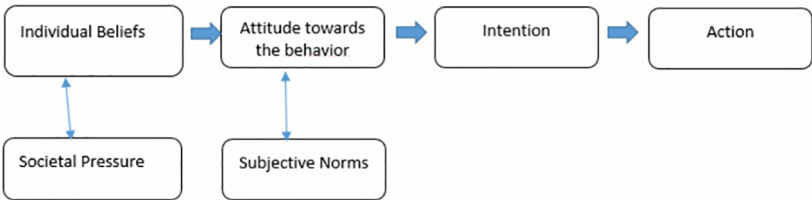


Figure 1.

Source: Developed from Ajzen and Fishbein (1977)

Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind Halal Trust

Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind (here referred to as JUH) is considered the most significant and oldest organization working for the upliftment of Muslims in India. JUH is a registered NGO which was established in the year 1919, with its headquarters in New Delhi. The contributions of JUH to society and politics can be understood from their role in India's independence movement. In 1938, the Founding President of JUL, Sheikhul Muhaddas, exhorted Hindus and Muslims to sink their differences and fight against the imperialism (Datta, 2002). *Deobandi* (followers of revivalist movement within Sunni Muslims), who were represented by JUL, opposed the formation of a separate homeland for Indian Muslims (McDermott *et al.*, 2014). The followers of the organization actively participated in the famous *non-cooperation* and *Quit India movements* which eventually resulted in the creation of India as a free nation (Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind, n.d.). Ever since the Independence, the organization has propounded a theological basis for its nationalistic philosophy. The organization promotes harmony and works for the upliftment of Muslims in India through their educational institutes, hospitals, counseling centers, dailies and other establishments (TOI, 2009).

Jamiat Ulama-E-Hind Halal Trust (here referred to as JUHT) is a registered trust which works under the aegis of JUH. The trust was established in the year 1982 with its first office in Mumbai. The objective was to streamline, unify and standardize halal certification in India. The organization is a member of *the World Halal Food Council*. It is also accredited by Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JKIM), the regulatory authority for halal products in Malaysia (Fischer, 2012; Bohari *et al.*, 2017). The organization has seven regional branches and client dealings in more than 20 nations across the world.

The organization offers halal certification under three categories, namely, *abattoirs*, *processed foods* and *restaurants*. A *halal assurance system* (HAS) in the form of a standard operating procedure is followed to certify the business. The certificate remains valid for one financial year subject to the satisfactory rating from auditors in period inspections. Figure 1 provides an overview of the certification process. The organization provides services to 60 out of the 70 biggest slaughterhouses, more than 400 food-processing companies and over 100 restaurants. The organization deputes full-time *halal supervisors* for slaughterhouses and large processing units. Some top FMCG companies which have been certified by the organization include *Nestlé* and *Patanjali*. Surprisingly, *Patanjali* is a favorite brand that has the majority of its customers from the Hindu community, not Muslim. This is probably because companies such as *Patanjali* and *Sri* (promoted by spiritual guru Sri Ravishankar) are supported by spiritual organizations who are characteristic of traditional religious groups (Sardana *et al.*, 2018).

JUST regularly participates in the *World Halal Forum* which organizes an annual conference of member organizations. Matters on halal products and marketing are discussed at the Forum. The organization also conducts several training programs and workshops to create sensitization among the consumers regarding the certification (Figure 2).

Now let us try to examine JUST from the business model framework proposed by Morris *et al.* (2005, p. 730). A business model is defined as “a statement of how a firm will make money and sustain its profit stream over time.” The above definition was first proposed by Stewart and Zhao (2000). However, a more comprehensive definition was given by Mayo and Brown (1999). It defines a business model as a design for interdependent systems which could retain business and create a competitive advantage for it. Morris *et al.* (2005) provided a list of guiding principles to evaluate a business model. Based on their work, we have examined JUHT under the following heads:

- value creation: how and for whom?
- source of competitive advantage

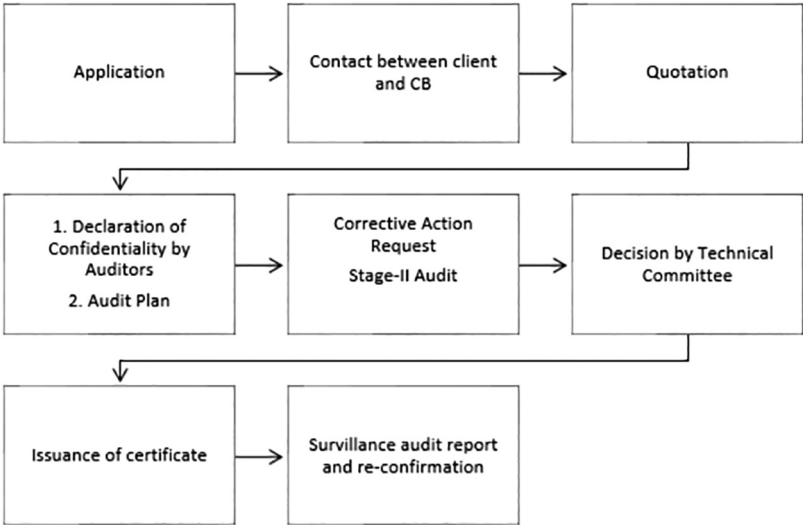


Figure 2.
Stages involved in the
certification process

- the positioning of the firm
- revenue generation
- organizational goals and mission

Let us try to evaluate the organization on each of the above components one by one.

Value creation

JUHT offers halal certification services to manufacturing units, abattoirs and restaurants. Meat products from their client’s abattoirs are meant for export purposes only. The organization is the only authorized certifying agency for meat export from India to countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia. This adds more credibility and value to the organization. The organization conducts regular meetings, workshops and conferences on relevant themes to create awareness about halal certification among the client groups and consumers. The organization takes serious cognizance of inquiries and grievances on halal products to maintain quality services. It has created a set of new jobs by appointing experts on Islamic jurisprudence and food processing as *halal supervisors*, *certified halal auditors* and *grievance redressal managers*. These individuals undergo intensive training programs designed and conducted by international agencies.

With over 400 companies, 60 slaughterhouses and close to 100 restaurants under their preview, their certified products are served more than a 2.5 million people across the globe. The clients and the remaining end customers include not only followers of Islam but also Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Jews and other communities. Nestlé India which itself has a market capitalization of over INR (Indian rupees) 1bn is one of the biggest clients for the organization (ET, 2018). In a way, the organization is creating values for multinational FMCG companies, small-scale industries, retailers and the public. The organization is also contributing to capacity building by training personnel of their clients. Table I summarizes the activities involved in their business.

Table I.

Clients	Products	Services
Food processing units	Halal registration certificate, consignment wise certification, halal processing certification, halal supplier's certification, training of trainers	Pre-audit inspections, Suppliers listing, sanitary and food safety clearance, vocational training, workshops
Abattoirs	Halal meat processing certification, halal packaging and storage certification, food safety and sanitary certification	Dedicated halal supervisor on organization's payroll, month wise, quarterly auditing, periodic free training facilities for employees of clients
Restaurants	Halal registration certificate, safety and sanitary certification, suppliers listing	Pre-audit inspection, customization of kitchens as per halal guidelines, suppliers listing with the organization

Source: Adapted from www.jamiathalaltrust.org/halal-certification-procedure.html

As evident from the above discussion, value creation for halal products and related businesses are driven by religion and not consumers alone. Religion acts as an invisible force to tie these businesses. Further value creation is also done by attaining legal sanctions and privileges. JUHT is creating value by being recognized for its work by the state.

Competitive advantages and positioning

The source of competitive advantage for JUHT comes from JUH. JUH, which is India's largest and oldest Muslim organization, has its regional offices in more than 22 out of 29 states in India and over 100 million membership subscriptions. As a parent organization, JUH regulates the administration and policy decisions of JUHT.

India is home to the world's second largest Muslim population after Indonesia, offering an excellent opportunity for halal product businesses to flourish. Indian brands such as *Bikano* has witnessed a net surge of 30 per cent in their sales in recent years. The company has credited this growth to halal certification which they had acquired a few years ago (TOI, 2012). As is evident, the concept of halal products has gone beyond the meat market. In 2014, *Halal Care* became the first Indian company to manufacture halal cosmetics. The company has a market presence across seven states of India, and recently it raised \$3m in funding to further expand its market share. Halal cosmetics are increasingly becoming an untapped business opportunity for developing countries (Hunter, 2012). Such product positioning is new to India.

Another source of competitive advantage to JUHT is being the sole certifying agency for meat export to Muslim-populated countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia. In 2017, India exported edible meat worth \$370m to Malaysia alone (DGFT, 2018). This does not include other categories of meat products such as frozen meat and food products with meat content. JUHT is also a permanent member of the World Halal Food Council. Being part of the highest appellate body, JUHT enjoys certain privileges which are not available to other Indian agencies.

Revenue generation

JUHT generates its revenue through sales of halal certificates and manpower services. They typically charge \$275.60 (taxes additional) for a halal logo and \$13.78/day for auditing the factory premise. In addition to this, the clients are charged for payment toward the salary of *halal supervisors* and *master trainers* who are deputed at the client's office. The organization

also generates revenue through workshops, seminars and conferences which are being organized periodically. The organization has a regular income-generating model. Having certain competitive advantages as discussed earlier is facilitating its growth at a faster pace.

Vision, mission and goals

The organization has the vision to become the most preferred and reliable halal certification body in India. Its mission is to provide the required halal audit, certification and training services, by pooling subject experts and by standardizing service protocols by applicable global halal standards. Because JUHT is a Muslim charitable organization, it is committed to the welfare of the Muslim population. Theoretically, we can observe a coherence between their vision and mission on the one hand and their business practices on the other.

Halal Care: a household name for cosmetics

Iba Halal Care is India’s first certified halal personal care brand. The company was established in 2014 by two sisters, Mauli Teli and Grishma Teli, who had worked in the USA as professionals in management consulting and biotech R&D, respectively, before quitting their jobs and moving back to their hometown to start the venture. They were joined by Dilip Vadgama, a technocrat with 35 years of experience in consultancy. Carried away by a dream to start a cosmetics and personal care company focused on developing, manufacturing and marketing eco-ethical products, the siblings founded *Eco Trail Personal Care* (parent company of Halal Care). The launch of *Iba Halal* cosmetics was a result of two years of research on market and product development by a dedicated team of experts. The findings of the study showed that the word “halal” might have a limited understanding of the minds of Indian consumers at present. However, the world is rapidly becoming aware of its true meaning and its appeal as a symbol of purity, integrity and authenticity. Halal was found to be a way of life and not just something associated with only foods. It extends to the way one lives, does business and behaves and even to personal care products. The company explored more on the composition and manufacturing processes prevalent in leading cosmetics companies and observed that non-halal ingredients such as *pig fat*, *lanolin*, *keratin*, *gelatine*, *alcohol* and chemicals such as *sulfates* and *parabens* are commonly used in these products.

In the first year of its inception, the company had launched 60 cosmetics products. By the end of March 2018, the company was selling over 100 different products to its valued customers (Table II). Today, the company has exclusive stores in more than seven Indian cities. Further, the company has collaborated with some of the biggest e-commerce groups in India such as *Flipkart*, *Amazon* and *Nykaa*. The company has experienced a five times growth throughout 12 months. It also exports its products to USA, Australia, Russia,

Table II.

Illustrative list of products and collections being marketed by Halal Care

Products	Category	Collection
Aloe Aqua, Face cream, Sunscreen SPF 50, Face Glow	Face	Fairness, nourishing, face glow
Aloe Aqua Body Lotion, Deep Nourishing, Foot Massage Cream, Perfume	Body	Nourishing, body soaps, talcum powder, body wash
Shampoo, Hair Conditioner, Hair Oil, Hair Color	Hair	Nourish and shine, covered hair, hair color
Source: www.ibahalalcare.com/		

Kazakhstan, South Africa, Mauritius and other countries. International news agencies such as *BBC*, *The Week*, *CNN*, *IBC* and *World News* have covered the company's success story.

Value creation, positioning and competitive advantage

The company has been creating values by venturing into the untapped halal segment of the cosmetics market in India. It has been successful in tapping the first-mover advantage which is also evident from the fundings that it has received recently (Nakata and Sivakumar, 1997; Ganguly, 2016). The company has appointed in-house halal experts and certifying agencies to ensure that all its products meet the standard halal norms. It also manufactures cruelty-free PETA-certified products which add more value to its marketing strategies. Scholars have studied the role of product safety or product responsibility in creating values for brands (Dawar and Pillutla, 2000). Organizational efforts to maintain a high standard of quality and safety not only contributes to brand equity but also improves financial performance (Chen, Ganesan and Liu, 2009). *Halal Care* is promoting safety and quality through their unique manufacturing process, i.e. halal processing for cosmetics which were limited to few countries until now (Aziz *et al.*, 2010; Rajagopal *et al.*, 2011). Another source of value creation by the company can be traced back to the concept of halal cosmetics itself. *The concept of halal cosmetics refers to*

[...] cosmetics product that only contains "permissible" ingredients according to Islamic law, which means no animal products and no alcohol, and should ideally be cruelty-free. While, yes these products aren't consumed – many Muslims believe that things applied topically to one's body should also adhere to halal standards (Pathan, 2018).

As a result, these products usually contain natural ingredients such as leaves, fruits and butter. This attracts many non-Muslim men and women who prefer natural makeup products over artificial ones. By making their products more natural and customer-friendly, halal cosmetics are creating value for the cosmetics industry (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Aoun and Tournois, 2015).

Further value addition is also through the fact that *Halal Care* is the first Indian company which manufactures halal cosmetics – a product segment which was earlier dominated by big cosmetics companies such as *Shiseido*, *CavinKare* and *Bakel*. Country of origin and brand loyalty can predict purchasing decisions (Azuizkulov, 2013). *Halal Care* is positioning itself as the first choice for not only Muslim customers but also believers of other religions and sects. Interestingly, the two founders of the company practice *Jainism* which promotes vegan food habits and abstinence from cruelty against animals. Jains are known for their age-old animal welfare practices and vegan food habits (Szucs *et al.*, 2012).

Revenue generation and future goals

The major source of the company's revenue is cosmetics sales. However, recently the company received funding from venture capitalists to expand its business. One such funding was raised through *Advantis Enterprises*, which invested INR 15 crore in 2018. Before this, the company had received an investment of INR 6 crore from GVFL Limited. The company is aiming to become an INR 100-crore-revenue generator by 2019. Currently, the cosmetics business in India is worth INR 60,000 crore. The company has set a target to occupy 12 to 15 per cent of this segment. It is already growing at the year-on-year rate of 400 per cent.

Halal Care embraces an eco-ethical philosophy and aims to serve healthy personal care products to the consumers. The company's core idea is to offer products that can meet the ethical needs of all consumers, including Muslims, Jains, vegetarians and vegans.

Study II: interviews

This section discusses the follow-up we undertook to understand the consumer side of the halal market. This is an important strategy because it helps us to provide a broader understanding of the concept and its implications in the daily enterprise. Study II was guided by the following research questions that we had developed based on the literature review:

- RQ1. How individuals perceive halal products?
- RQ2. Do halal products have any role in an individual's purchase decisions?
- RQ3. Why do individuals prefer or not prefer halal products?
- RQ4. Do individuals perceive halal certification to add any value to a product or service?
- RQ5. What is individuals' perceptions of sustainability management?
- RQ6. Are the consumers able to relate halal products with the concept of sustainability?

The authors conducted a qualitative study in the form of semi-structured interviews because studies have shown that such approaches are more focused on the context and provide an opportunity for better interaction and flexibility (Saunders *et al.*, 2003; Green and Torogood, 2018).

Methodology

An e-mail stating the objectives of the study was sent to first-year participants of the MBA program and academic associates (researchers) of a reputed B-school in India. One reason for choosing participants from this B-school was the diversity regarding *native place*, *religion* and *educational background* in the population which can be found in such groups. The B-school receives an application from individuals across the country and even abroad. Further, existing government policies on reservations for women and certain social groups (e.g. socially backward classes, persons with disabilities) in India facilitate the formation of a diverse MBA class. The academic associates engaged with the institute work as researchers and share similar distinct profiles. Another reason for choosing this sample was the interactive paradigm in our study which allows sampling based on identified criteria (Babbie and Mouton, 2001).

Semi-structured interviews with 15 participants were conducted. Qualitative studies need not have a fixed number or formula for sample size because they offer ample flexibility to the researchers. Further, observation of recurring themes or data saturation also becomes an indicator of what should be the ideal sample for a particular study (Guest *et al.*, 2006; Englander, 2012; Fusch and Ness, 2015). Further, the sample size was consistent with the suggestions made by Guest *et al.* (2006). Purposive sampling technique was used to select participants. This was done by other qualitative studies (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). Out of the total number of participants, seven were males, and eight were females. Our objective was to maintain an adequate sample size because small samples do not wholly represent the population (Saunders *et al.*, 2003). The biographical data of the participants are given in Table III. Each interview lasted for nearly 45 min. The conversations were recorded after seeking prior permission from the participants. Before the interviews, both the authors had developed an interview protocol separately. The two of them then discussed their respective guides to develop a common protocol for the interviews. Contents which could not receive consensus from both the authors were dropped. Interviews were conducted at a location suggested by the participants to address problems concerning the environment familiar in

Table III.

Participant	Age	Religious belief	Gender
Participant-1	26*	Islam	Male
Participant-2	24*	Hinduism	Female
Participant-3	26*	Islam	Female
Participant-4	22	Christianity	Female
Participant-5	26*	Hinduism	Male
Participant-6	26*	Islam	Male
Participant-7	25	Islam	Male
Participant-8	23	Hinduism	Male
Participant-9	25*	Islam	Female
Participant-10	22	Christianity	Male
Participant-11	29*	Hinduism	Female
Participant-12	24*	Islam	Male
Participant-13	24	Hinduism	Female
Participant-14	24*	Hinduism	Female
Participant-15	27*	Islam	Female

Notes: *Participants had prior work experience

qualitative studies (Easton *et al.*, 1965). Name of participants was not recorded to maintain confidentiality (Denzin *et al.*, 2006). Sample interview questions which were used include:

What role religion plays in your life?" "Tell us about your food preference" "Describe your understanding about the concept of halal" "Does religion has any role in your purchase decisions?" "What are the factors that you consider while making a purchase decision?" "How do you identifier a halal food shop in the market?"

Analysis

To prevent individual biases, both the authors were present during the interviews, and each recording was converted into transcripts by both the authors separately. The authors later exchanged their transcripts to evaluate each other's works. Any confusion or disagreement over narrations and other were discussed in detail and resolved (Guba and Lincoln, 2005; Ortlipp, 2008). Authors followed the approach suggested by Whittemore *et al.* (2001) to ensure credibility and validity. The transcripts were shown to the participants to provide them an opportunity to make necessary corrections and suggests anything which remained undiscussed earlier (Hagens *et al.*, 2009). After the first round of coding, themes were developed based on the suggestion given in prior studies (Moustakas, 1994; Ratner, 2002; Marshall and Rossman, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007). The authors also consulted an external expert to make necessary changes in case the authors had missed anything during the whole process. They followed Van Kaam's approach (Moustakas, 1994) for analyzing phenomenological data with some minor modifications.

Findings

Religion and society

The definition of religion has gradually evolved from being limited to the theological concept to something beyond consciousness, accumulated in experiences of an individual's daily enterprises. For example, *Participant 1* was found saying:

I often relate religion with Science. I try to find justifications for rituals in science to satisfy my curiosity. It becomes difficult for us to accept any religious practices without identifying its practical significance.

The idea very well fits into the views on religion and modernity by Bracke (2008). It is important to understand the changing definition of the religion because it is one of the most powerful social institutions as suggested by the many. Understanding religion is the manifestation of self because it defines who we are and what we ought to be.

Participants were also found expressing difficulties in practicing certain rituals on account of social barriers. For instance *Participant 8* expressed, “*We Pay efforts to learn more about the religion. However, lack of certain resources and spare time hinders this learning process.*”

He further supported his argument through the example of cloths: “*What we used to wear earlier is no longer preferred today. You have to develop harmony with time to gain more acceptance from other.*”

The authors noticed an unusual similarity in this theme. Though a majority of the participants considered religion to be their philosophy, they all stated that they find religion as a source of energy and peace. Participants expressed the desire for religion is more convenient and which should pay due consideration for individual-specific variations. Here variations have been defined by participants *as circumstances, skills, social status, work engagement* and others. The above narratives explain the characteristics of postmodern religion and the orientation toward it (Gellner, 2013). We can also relate these views to Turner’s discussion on the science of religion (Turner, 2006). As the author said, socialization is invariably the metamorphosis of religion. The definition of religion keeps on transforming itself representing the transcendence of everyday world (Luckmann, 1967).

Defining halal

The concept of halal as conceptualized by the scholars was to have similar connotations in the Indian context. We found some evidence recognizing halal products beyond the limits of religious obligations. The authors observed an association between halal and individual’s well-being. Halal products are the manifestation of our religion, which are legitimized by their association with other healthy products. In this way, individuals can offer more credibility and justification for their choice for halal products.

For example, one of the participants shared:

According to me, anything which is good for my body, my health should be considered as Halal. Anything which is not good is haram. For example, raw meat (i.e., uncooked meat) is not good for our health. Hence it is haram.

Two other participants expressed their inability to conceptualize the term “halal”.

When participants were asked to share experiences in which they witnessed confusion in judging whether a product was halal, five of the participants expressed difficulty in doing so for *cigarettes and marijuana*. *Participants 5, 10 and 13* shared their experiences with Muslim friends and revealed that their friends never abstained from eating or drinking anything and hence they were not sure which products were to be recognized as halal. *Participant 5* shared that many of his Muslim friends drank alcohol, but there were a few Muslims who discouraged its consumption. Therefore, it could fall under the *haram* category.

Purchase decisions and halal products

Participants expressed that they considered halal products while making any purchase decisions. The general overview of halal products was that it is either they or their friends who encouraged them to buy halal products. For example, *Participant 8* said:

I am not bothered whether the product is halal or not. But I have few friends who eat only halal meat and also avoid food products such as liquor chocolates. So whenever I have to organize a party for them, I prefer arranging and eating only halal products.

Out of the 15 participants, 11 expressed how convenience could play an important role in their decisions to purchase halal products. For example, *Participant 1* shared that he always ate halal meats and never consumed alcohol, especially when he was at his native place. However, in college, it was difficult for him to arrange halal meat products. Therefore, he preferred eating whatever was available to him. Contrary to the general responses, *Participant 15* said she preferred traveling a little more to buy only halal products, especially when it came to meats.

Halal certification and its effectiveness

When participants were asked whether they were aware of halal certification, four participants shared that they had heard about the concept but were not sure what it was. One of these participants said:

There was no KFC in my hometown. When I joined the B-School, I visited a local KFC outlet and identified some Muslims were eating food there. Therefore, I started visiting KFC with the belief that it must be serving halal meat. Recently, I came to know that they have some halal certificate which is available on request. (Participant 9)

One participant expressed how this certification could be effective for both Muslims and non-Muslims in making their purchasing decisions. He said, *Often I find it very embarrassing to ask for halal meat.* When further enquired, the participant shared that people perceived his inquiry being more communal and weird. This caused a lot of embarrassment before his friends and colleagues. Therefore, he abstained from asking for halal foods when accompanied by others. He stated that the presence of a halal certificate could save him from this embarrassment, as it would be easier to identify the quality of food being served which could further influence his decision to eat or not.

Participant 2 said if such certification came with quality assurance, it would be helpful, although she did not restrict her foods to only *halal* or *jhatka*. She further said that she came across some cosmetics with halal tags during her visit to a European country. If such processing were also used in personal care products, it would be interesting to use those products and see how they were better than standard products, the participant opined.

Another participant stated that a certificate could address the trust issue. She explained that when a Muslim visits a restaurant or a meat shop or a shopping mall, he or she tries to identify the owner of the shop. If the owner of the establishment is a Muslim, they invariably accept eating at that place. However, the presence of a non-Muslim owner may prevent a majority of Muslims from visiting that establishment. In such cases, if the owner puts up a halal certificate, it helps in building *trust* between the client and owner.

Halal as healthy and sustainable

Another theme that came out of our discussion with the participants was the sustainable nature of halal products. Out of 15 participants, 8 were MBA participants who had attended the course on suitability management and green products during their first year of the program. One of the academic associates had done her MBA in HR and was equally familiar with the concept. However, two more participants who had no prior training or experience of sustainability management were equally aware of the concept and its scope. When participants were asked whether they could relate halal products with sustainability management, one of them said:

I have seen one of my Muslim friend using Halal nail polish and other cosmetics, and I used them sometimes. They were as good as any other brands. I heard such products does not contains alcohols and harmful chemical.

Another participant shared about his work on product safety during his summer internship. He stated that sustainable products were safe for human and environment. Because halal meats are clean and fresh, they are healthy. If the same is applied to another segment of products, they may be called sustainable products. However, he expressed that he had not come across or noticed any other product which he could share an example of.

Halal, shame and peer groups

Can food choices also become a matter of embarrassment for us? The authors found that some of the participants faced difficulty in expressing their choice of food while they were in a heterogeneous group comprising individuals from different faiths and beliefs. Given below is a narrative to reflect the issue:

I felt embarrassed to ask the owner about the halal thing become whenever you go out with your friends, you are closely watched, and they may ask you questions regarding your choices for which you don't have an answer. (participant-7)

It was observed that the individuals to look at questions on choice of food as undesirable. To avoid such embarrassment, they either prevent such events from happening in the first place or try to look for an available alternative. Historically, the concept of shame has been associated with dirty work (Hughes, 1962; [Rivera and Tracy, 2014](#)). The concept of shame has also been studied concerning social groups ([Gilbert and Andrews, 1998](#)). However, studies on food and shame are scarce.

Discussion

The application of *the halal* concept is no longer limited to meat and processed food products. Halal cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, living, supply chain and tourism are the new forms of product and services which are increasingly creating their consumer base ([Hanzaee and Ramezani, 2011](#); [Wilson et al., 2013](#)). Halal products are an untapped market which can become the next key marketplace for businesses. A report which was recently published had estimated the global halal product industry to be worth US\$6.4tn. Out of this, an estimated US\$26bn were found to be spent by Muslims on cosmetics alone (Global Islamic Economy, 2013; [Halal Industry Development Corporation, 2018](#)). India holds a promising ground for such businesses to flourish. India is home to a culturally diverse population having a unique set of food choices ([Eng and Bogaert, 2010](#)). There is a shortage of studies on halal products in the Indian context.

Interestingly, many popular brands have obtained halal certification for carrying out business in India. These brands include big names such as *BodyShop*, *Patanjali* and *CavinKare*. Due to lack of awareness and stereotypes associated with religious practices, companies and individuals have not been able to promote halal certification and other standardization practices aggressively. It is only the in recent years when a surge has been observed in the demand and supply for halal certifications ([Zamierah Syed Marzuki et al., 2012](#); [Aziz and Chok, 2013](#); [Latif et al., 2014](#)). Countries such as the UK, which have Muslims falling under the in minorities, are setting a new trend by reflecting an overwhelming response from multinational chains to serve halal products ([Wilson and Liu, 2010](#); [Lever and Miele, 2012](#); [Wilson et al., 2013](#)). We believe that India too can experience such changes shortly.

Analysis of the cases and the interviews supports two significant findings. First, not all individuals are aware of the concept of halal. It was observed that participants were relating halal products more with Islam than as a processing technique. Further, responses from some Muslim participants revealed that within the Indian Muslim population, not all are seriously concerned about purchasing only halal products. Our study shows that subjective norms are the core determinants of an individual's choice for halal foods. More awareness about halal products may reduce this tension (Khan and Azam, 2016). Another significant finding was that countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia have regulatory authorities to certify halal products. Such organizations are controlled and regulated by the government. However, in the case of India, there were no government authorities which could restrict such practices. Any individual or an organization can issue a halal certificate in India (Hanzaee and Ramezani, 2011). Such legal voids can have some long-term negative implications especially when we are expecting this market to grow and expand further.

We also observed that the growth of halal product market is a result of not only its consumption by the Muslim community but also access to information about the non-halal ingredients, safety concerns and desire for a healthy lifestyle among non-Muslims. Consumption of halal products and certification can also be explained through the *approach* and *avoidance* concepts popular in the positive psychology literature. An individual's actions are primarily governed by their perception of the situation. Depending upon their personality, individuals may or may not put an additional effort to perform a task such as buying certain products. Further, social groups can also influence one's behavior. Individuals who show personality traits such as openness to experience are more likely to try new products. However, individuals who get more affected by the social norms are expected to avoid any major change in their behavior such as dietary or purchase behaviors (Rook and Fisher, 1995; Smith *et al.*, 2008). As a concluding remark, we would like to say that halal products are no longer a mere representation of Islamic beliefs; they have become a giant brand that has created a sub-area within the field of marketing. Our findings are consistent with observations made in prior studies. These works have recognized halal as a successful branding strategy for businesses today (Alserhan, 2010; Wilson and Liu, 2010). Truly, it is the time when we should look beyond guanxi and mianzi because the market is shifting its views again (Wilson, 2014).

Limitations and future research

There are certain limitations to our study which can be addressed by future research. We did not conduct quantitative research in the form of a survey which could have helped us analyze some more interesting variables. Further, our sample was limited to participants in the age group of 21-30 years. Older people could have shared a different perspective on halal products owing to their prior experiences and a higher degree of social interaction.

Further, our case studies were limited to certifying and cosmetics agencies. Future studies can include halal cases on supply chain and halal tourism in India. Also, there is scope for using a different business model to analyze these cases.

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