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HALAL PURCHASING PATTERNS OF MUSLIM CONSUMERS IN LINXIA


Maoqin Guo¹, Betania Lartika², and Aizat Jamludin³

Abstract: This paper aims to look at the Halal purchasing patterns of Muslim consumers in Linxia, so the opportunities and the challenges in the Halal industry can be identified. The findings show that future market demands and Halal industry-related competitive opportunities are the main motivators for China to take significant regulatory, trade, and industrial support initiatives to strengthen its status as a Halal hub. The proposal and implementation of the "One Belt and One Road" strategy make China have closer ties with Southeast Asia, West Asia, North Africa, and other regions and more frequent trade exchanges, thus bringing unprecedented development opportunities and impetus to the domestic halal industry, but it also faces many challenges and has many problems. In the new era, Chinese halal enterprises should take the northwest region as the center, the food industry as the core, firmly grasp the development opportunities in various ways, and promote the rapid development of the halal industry. The findings of this study may assist government policymakers in identifying concerns that need to be addressed to encourage industry participants to embrace halal practices. This research adds to the growth of information on the obstacles and benefits of halal certification adoption in China.

Keywords: *Halal Industry, Trade, Halal Enterprise, Linxia, China.*

PRELUDE

Linxia is a place where many ethnic groups live together. The Hui, Dongxiang, Baoan, Salar, and other Muslim ethnic groups accounted for 56.2% of the total population of the

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prefecture. Islam has a long history of dissemination and far-reaching influence in Linxia. As early as the Tang Dynasty, along with the long camel bells of the Silk Road, Islam began to take root here. After the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing, it spread widely and gradually became China. The place where Islam is prosperous is also called "The Little Mekka", which shows the prosperity of Islam here. Hui is the most populous group of Muslims in Linxia, with 627,000 people; Dongxiang and Baoan are two Muslim ethnic minorities whose main residence is Linxia. The Muslim ethnic groups in *Linxia* have maintained a relatively complete Islamic style in terms of clothing, food, weddings and funerals, festival etiquette, cultural life and preferences, fashions, etc., which have been passed on from generation to generation and gradually formed a unique ethnic custom. Nearly a thousand *Linxia* Muslims go to Mecca for the Hajj every year. The annual ceremonious Eid al-Fitr, Eid Al-Adhḥā, and Mawlid al-Rasul are the traditional festivals of Linxia Muslims.

Currently, an expected 1.8 billion population, where 24% of the world's population, are believers of Islam.¹ By 2050, the Chinese Muslim population will grow up to 95 million, building it the largest Muslim population in the world, according to Pew Research Center projections in 2015. Still, Chinese Muslims are projected to remain a minority in their country, making up about 18% of the total population at mid-century.² Food as a product or commodity derives its values from society. Within society, social institutions such as religion have a significant influence on our perceived value for food products.³ Thus, the fact that halal products as food items derive their value from religion and society is not shocking.

Millions of Muslims in China have a significant need for halal goods, which is also noteworthy.⁴ China has the ninth-largest Muslim population in the world, and its

¹ *The Future of the Global Muslim Population: Projections for 2010-2030* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2011).

² Barbara L.K. Pillsbury, "The Muslim Population of China: Clarifying the Questions of Size and Ethnicity," *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs. Journal* 3, no. 2 (1981): pp. 35-58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02666958108715835>.

³ Ahmad Jamal and Juwaidah Sharifuddin, "Perceived Value and Perceived Usefulness of Halal Labeling: The Role of Religion and Culture," *Journal of Business Research* 68, no. 5 (2015): pp. 933-941, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.09.020>.

⁴ Isa Ma, "An Empirical Study on Halal Markets in China," *International journal of Science Commerce and Humanities*, Volume 2, No. 2 (February 2014): pp. 142-143.

halal marketplaces are also among the most active in the industry. It is estimated that China's halal business is valued at US\$2.1 billion, with yearly growth of 10%.¹ While the halal industry and certification system in China is developing, it is still in its infancy compared to the halal industries and certification systems in Muslim-majority countries. Although there are a large number of halal certification agencies in China, they do not collaborate and do not adhere to centralised halal guidelines and certification frameworks.² A similar situation exists concerning Chinese halal producers, who do not share the common knowledge of or adherence to halal manufacturing laws and guidelines. Aside from a lack of credibility in its supply chain operations, the Chinese halal sector also lacks appropriate technology and human capacity, not to mention a lack of international credibility. Non-halal components are often substituted in the manufacture of halal products in China; one extreme example involved the sale of pork that had been labeled as “halal beef” in one province.³

As a result of concerns about product adulteration, Chinese Muslims have turned their attention to authentic halal goods that are manufactured using only halal ingredients and manufacturing procedures. In China, there is an enormous demand for a genuine halal industry, which is currently lacking. The Chinese government is aware of the difficulties associated with halal goods, and it has recently solicited international assistance in organizing and upgrading its halal certification program, as well as in collaborating with the halal industry. The opportunity for halal merchants to advertise their products to this rapidly growing and potentially massive market is tremendously advantageous. At this point, however, there is only a limited awareness of Chinese Muslims' halal consumption practices. This research will give new insights into the use of halal commodities by Chinese Muslims, which is currently understudied. The study makes a significant contribution to our understanding of Chinese Muslims' consumption in general, but it is particularly concerned with uncovering the necessities and factors that influence Chinese Muslims' consumption of halal everyday products, as well as their intentions when purchasing halal goods.

¹ Dar, H., Azmi, N., Rahman, R. and Malik, R. (Eds), “Global Islamic Finance Report,” Edbiz Consulting Limited, London (2013): p. 209

² Ibid, p. 211

³ Ahmad Khaliq, “Police in China Seize Pork Being Sold as Halal Beef,” *The Muslim News*, November 29, 2013.

HALAL AWARENESS AMONG THE CHINESE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

In China, the concept of halal is very vaguely understood. Surprisingly, 98% of Muslims believed that halal refers to the giving of prayers before or during the slaughter of a permitted animal. Because of the limited usage of halal products in the country, as well as the lack of availability of halal products in the study's sampled Muslim communities (both urban and rural), the majority of Chinese Muslims stated that halal is only concerned with prayer offerings before and during the slaughtering of animals. This type of perplexing perception was conveyed by Muslim respondents, uncovering their insufficiency of understanding of the basic interpretation of the halal standards.

Consumers who are concerned about food safety and living a healthy lifestyle are more likely to embrace Halal products because of the sustainability idea of cleanliness, sanitation, and safety.¹ Additionally, this is essential in the area of Halal product marketability where producers must not only concentrate on Islamic handling but also adopt an overall continuous improvement process that adheres to food safety standards for their goods to be competitive. Food safety concerns both the familiarity of the customer with the ingredients and the quality of the product as well as the safety of the product's contents. As a result, knowing the contents of a product is crucial for buyers since the chance of being accepted or rejected occurs throughout the purchase decision process.

There are numerous characteristics to Linxia Muslim food intake. In the first place, the ethnic features of Chinese Muslims' economies are fundamental aspects of their industries. These features include manufacturing systems, housing, food, marriage, religion, and way of life. Second, it is limited to a certain territory. Muslims reside in the nearby areas of the mosque, have intermarried with local ethnic groups, and speak dialects unique to their localities. Muslims typically establish themselves in the area where their ancestors first settled. In the third case, it is a religiously oriented

¹ Mohamed Zainalabidin, , Rezai Golnaz and N. S. Mad. "The complementary effect of Halal Principles and sustainable concept." *Journal of environmental science & engineering* 5 (2011): p. 652-659.

consumption pattern, in which people only consume halal food supplied by religious leaders, family members, or other trustworthy friends and relations.¹

SECTIONALISATION OF THE HALAL MARKET

The concept and essence of Islam are unique to the Halal framework. The area of halal is not just a food industry but also may include the Islamic financial sector with halal feed, Islamic fashion with halal travel, cosmetics, toiletries, pharmaceutical, nutraceuticals, and other services. Currently, the halal certification of halal-made items is a particular level of assurance, which can in any event be granted by any of over 100 halal certification bodies throughout the world². The Halal criteria and rules are in each organization's own set. The fragmentation is further accentuated when crossing national boundaries where to date there is no functioning mechanism for mutual recognition between countries. The lack of proper regulation of certification means that non-halal produce has unknowingly ended up on the sheets of Muslim households³.

Shaharudin, Pani, Mansor, and Elias were in charge of gathering and analyzing the data⁴. Religiosity is found to be positively linked with customers' purchasing intentions, according to a standardized and adapted questionnaire distributed in 2010. It showed that Muslims' desire to purchase halal meals was strongly influenced by their level of halal awareness and the components of the products they were considering. Swimberghe, Sharma, and Flurry (2009) have a similar point of view on this subject. In their investigation, they came to the same conclusion: religious membership is related to consumption⁵. In a recent study, Ahmed, Najmi, Faizan, and Ahmed (2018) discovered

¹ Lee Zhu, "Hui Zu Jing Ji Si Xiang Yan Jiu [the Hui's Economic Ideology]," Ning xia ren min chu ban she, Ningxia, (2011).

² Halal Journal, "Halal Food Market a Multi-Billion Dollar Global Opportunity," Halal Journal, (2008).

³ Shahar, W, N Mohd and N Hashim. "Halal Economic: Challenges and Emerging Opportunities in Malaysia." Proceedings of the 7th South East Asia International Islamic Philanthropy Conference, 1(April), 29-37. (Retrieved October 4, 2021).

⁴ Mohd Rizaimy Shaharudin et al., "Purchase Intention of Organic Food in Malaysia; a Religious Overview," *International Journal of Marketing Studies* 2, no. 1 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijms.v2n1p96>.

⁵ Krist Swimberghe, Dheeraj Sharma, and Laura Flurry, "An Exploratory Investigation of the Consumer Religious Commitment and Its Influence on Store Loyalty and Consumer

that religious affiliation had a substantial impact on customers' willingness to pay for halal items¹.

CHALLENGES IN THE HALAL INDUSTRY

The "halal food" definition is about describing the meaning of the "halal" concept. Halal is "clean inside and out, refusing the false and maintaining the truth," as the term suggests. Halal food has two major features, as well as the usual characteristics of foods: the first has a clear halal mark, and it complies with Islamic Regulations. At present "Halal," which means "legal or authorized" in line with Islamic teaching, is the halal mark used in international halal food universally. Halal food, as a carrier with both natural and social characteristics, is founded on Halal culture. Attribution is a realized culture integrating several fields, including scientific sciences and social sciences.

Certification, standardization, intensification, and internationalization through certification of the production and operation of halal products, the development of a united domestic halal industry and the normal development of international trade, and the attraction and mutual recognition with Muslim world countries of halal standards. Chinese Halal problems must also be considered if the sector is going worldwide.

Aside from halal food certification, transportation has become an issue that has influenced the "getting out" of the halal sector in Northwest China to some level. Transportation (for the growth of the halal sector) is also a limitation, according to Linxia. "Because the cost of air transportation is too expensive, it would be highly helpful to cut logistics costs in the future if a road-rail combined transportation system and a broad Eurasian corridor could be created."

The volume of import and export commerce between China and nations along the New Silk Road Economic Belt surpassed US\$500 billion, with the halal business accounting for just around 16% of the total. China, as the world's largest trading country,

Complaint Intentions," *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 26, no. 5 (2009): pp. 340-347, <https://doi.org/10.1108/07363760910976592>.

¹ Waqar Ahmed et al., "Consumer Behaviour towards Willingness to Pay for Halal Products," *British Food Journal* 121, no. 2 (April 2019): pp. 492-504, <https://doi.org/10.1108/bfj-02-2018-0085>.

is nevertheless trailing behind in comparison to the enormous scope of the global market: China's yearly halal food export trade volume is just approximately 200 million US dollars, representing a relatively small percentage of the worldwide market. Food production is irreconcilable with the history and reality of a 23-million-strong Muslim people.

EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE HALAL INDUSTRY

The halal industry has risen to prominence in the global economy, with a substantial presence in industrialized countries. The sector's difficulties are, in reality, a gap and opportunity for industry participants to exploit. As a result, Islamic economy firms play a critical role in meeting the requirements of Muslim consumers as well as generating economic growth and activity. The Islamic Economy Robustness Indicator assesses the strength of the Islamic economy in 73 countries, considering supply and demand drivers, governance, awareness, and societal factors. As a result, below are the major components of the Halal industry's development factors:

Sizeable and growing Muslim population in China: One of the most important features of the Islamic economy is its rapid expansion. China's Muslim population is expected to expand by 76 percent by 2050, compared to 2010. China's Muslim population is expected to grow by 76 percent by 2050, compared to 2010

Islamic principles increasingly leading lifestyle and business practices: For many Muslims, Islam as a 'style of life' continues to govern all areas of their lives, including their own.

The acts that are being performed regardless, Muslims follow and adhere to Islam in a variety of ways, based on their age group, geographic location/nation, cultural influences, and other reasons. According to a Pew Global Attitudes study of 42 countries, 83 percent of respondents in Islamic countries consider "religion to be very important in their lives." Muslim women wearing hijab are growing more popular in the media, according to anecdotal evidence, as Olympic athletes and professionals adopt Modest Casual Clothing to assert their position. Some of these concepts are universally appealing, thus many items and services do not need to be designated exclusively for Muslims.

Increasing economic development of halal business: Young Muslims are asserting their values and requiring businesses to provide goods and services that satisfy their religious demands, causing the Islamic economy system to change. Non-Muslim engagement also contributes to the globalization of the Islamic economy. Non-Muslims have been lured to this business because of the possible economic rewards and changing lives for safe and moral virtue.

PURCHASING PATTERNS OF MUSLIMS IN CHINA

The purchasing patterns of Muslims in China are shifting over time. The boost in income has resulted in a variety of newly imported commodities being available. Fashion from the Middle East is emulated, and the younger generation has begun to adopt Western fashion styles as well. China's Muslims are, to put it succinctly, vibrant, evolving, and multicultural. For halal products of various sorts, they offer a potentially enormous market. However, nothing is known about their use of halal products, and there is little information available in the literature on this subject. Investigating what motivates and influences their need for halal personal care products is therefore necessary.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, the demand for halal food is increasing as people resort to religious traditions for consolation and as people become more conscious of the significance of eating only halal and sanitary food¹. Since the outbreak, every person's dietary and lifestyle selection criteria have been radically altered, with food quality now being the primary concern for many Muslims and non-Muslims alike². Employees in the global food supply are being referred to as 'frontline' workers who assert that food-related employment has been redefined as "vital." As far as halal consumption pattern is concerned, customer trust is one of the most important factors in their decision-

¹ The Jakarta Post, "Halal Food Rising in Popularity amid Covid-19 Pandemic, Reports Indicate," APSN, accessed October 13, 2021, <https://www.asia-pacific-solidarity.net/news/2020-05-08/halal-food-rising-popularity-amid-covid-19-pandemic-reports-indicate.html>.

² Arif Billah, Md Ahbabur Rahman, and Md Tareq Hossain, "Factors Influencing Muslim and Non-Muslim Consumers' Consumption Behavior: A Case Study on Halal Food," *Journal of Foodservice Business Research* 23, no. 4 (2020): pp. 324-349, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15378020.2020.1768040>.

making¹. Searching for halal food, whether through an offline or online purchase, is geared more toward establishing trust between both the buyer and the items offered by the merchants.

During the COVID-19 crisis, delivery services have become increasingly vital for people to get food and other supplies². This is common in various regions of the world. Although the government has advised the citizens to stay at home, many Muslims are nonetheless leaving their homes to purchase Islamic halal food due to the lack of online shopping and home delivery services provided by local Islamic retail businesses³. Accordance with these observations revealed that customer behaviour and purchase intention were both strongly impacted by consumers' habits and knowledge of halal foods⁴. Because there is a strong link between religion and the halal mark and ingredients, how a firm handles the relationship of trustworthiness is quite important. When COVID-19 hits, the availability of halal food is not as important in Muslim nations as it is in non-Muslim ones, according to the UN.

Because it restricts access to and sources of food in the marketplace, the current epidemic is considered a worldwide disaster that will continue indefinitely. Corporations and non-profit organizations should take bold efforts to guarantee that their consumers receive the goods and services that they demand⁵. Customers are increasingly resorting to more traditional takeout or delivery alternatives, such as purchasing from local manufacturers or purchasing home-based items in person or through delivery services. Likewise, to adapt to the pandemic scenario, commercial and social entrepreneurs are assisting people and communities in dealing with the uncertainties. The provision of delivery services is considered vital in a society that

¹ Sharifah Zannierah Syed Marzuki, Collin Michael Hall, and Paul William Ballantine, "Restaurant Managers' Perspectives on Halal Certification," *Journal of Islamic Marketing* 3, no. 1 (2012): pp. 47-58, <https://doi.org/10.1108/17590831211206581>.

² Stefanie Haeffele, Anne Hobson, and Virgil Henry Storr, "Coming Back from Covid-19: Lessons in Entrepreneurship from Disaster Recovery Research," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3592966>.

³ El Boujjoufi, M., Mustafa, A., Benkorichi, O. & Teller, J. "COVID-19 and Ethnic-Oriented Shopping." *Advance: Social Sciences & Humanities*. Sage Submissions. Preprint, (2020).

⁴ Arif Billah et al., p: 350.

⁵ Haeffele et al., p: 12.

values physical distance. The important aspect to notice is that when halal food is taken into mind, the legality of food purchased online during MCO is called into doubt.

CONCLUSION

The Halal business is steadily expanding and attracting global attention from industry participants. The industry's completeness, which has been interwoven into all aspects of the economy, makes it an appealing one-of-a-kind product for businesses to invest in since the possibilities are limitless. The Halal sector is likely to continue this route in the future as it gains more attention and exposure throughout the world.

The moment is perfect for present and potential Halal sector players, government agencies, and investment corporations to invest in the Islamic Economy across all major pillars and earn significant returns. Governments and the business sector both contribute to the Halal ecosystem's long-term viability through certification and policy execution by religious authorities, which is critical for the Halal industry's growth. Religious leaders from several nations are also collaborating to create a global Halal standard to safeguard the industry's long-term viability.

There are several chances to adopt correct halal processes in the product manufacturing process. With the rising number of Muslims in China, specifically in the Linxia area, this market sector is projected to develop quickly. Those chances come with a lot of responsibilities. These issues, as described above, should be addressed further by the authorized entities concerned to overcome these concerns. As researchers in the halal sector, we urge that the Chinese government should be actively involved in the industry's preparation, growth, and facilitation for participants to be able to participate in this Halal ecosystem.

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