

PERFORMING PIETY IN THE DIGITAL AGE: HALAL CONSUMPTION AND MUSLIM IDENTITY

Saifudin Asrori

UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta
Djuanda Street 99 Ciputat, Banten, Indonesia
Email: saifudin.asrori@uinjkt.ac.id

Muhammad Isma'il

UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta
Djuanda Street 99 Ciputat, Banten, Indonesia
Email: Muhammad.ismail@uinjkt.ac.id

Joharotul Jamilah

UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta
Djuanda Street 99 Ciputat, Banten, Indonesia
Email: joharotul.jamilah@uinjkt.ac.id

Ahmad Shabbir

University of Sahiwal, Pakistan
Farid Town Rd, Sahiwal, Punjab, 57000
Email: shabbirahmad@uosahiwal.edu.pk

Article received May 29th, 2025; Article revised October 12nd, 2025; Article approved November 05th, 2025

ABSTRACT

Halal consumption has emerged as a central mode of identity performance among Jakarta's urban millennial Muslims, intertwining religious obligation with consumer culture. This study examines how young Muslims navigate their religious identity, ethical values, and digital presence through the everyday practices of halal consumption. Moving beyond theological and market-centered frameworks, the research employs a qualitative design combining semi-structured interviews and digital ethnography to examine how halal is performed, curated, and contested in daily life. The findings show that halal is not merely a set of dietary or consumer rules but a performative and relational identity articulated through four key dynamics: the curation of the "Halal Self" on social media; the deployment of halal as moral distinction and cultural resistance; the negotiation of structural constraints on religious agency; and the formation of a Digital Ummah as a space for soft advocacy and peer-based religious knowledge. The study argues that halal consumption represents a multifaceted ethical practice, embedded in the complex interplay of affective, technological, and sociopolitical aspects of contemporary Muslim life.

Keywords: Digital Religiosity, Ethical Cosmopolitanism, Halal consumption, Identity Performance, Muslim Millennials

INTRODUCTION

Halal consumption in Indonesia has evolved from a religious obligation into a comprehensive lifestyle that shapes identity, economy, and culture. Beyond food, it now encompasses fashion, cosmetics, tourism, and entrepreneurship, reflecting the convergence of faith with

global consumerism (Bella-Salsa et al., 2023). This expansion is closely tied to digital platforms, where Muslim millennials and Gen Z curate their "halal selves" through social media, linking ethical consumption with self-presentation and cosmopolitan belonging (Aruan & Wirdania, 2020).

However, these practices are not free from tension. Online piety often provokes

anxieties about *riyā'* (showing off one's religiosity), raising questions about authenticity in digitally mediated faith (Husein & Slama, 2018). Moreover, motivations for halal consumption extend beyond strict legal compliance, encompassing concerns for health, justice, and identity (Arsil et al., 2018). In fashion, for example, modest wear serves as both a religious expression and a global industry, while Indonesia continues to face challenges of financing, certification, and international market competition (Yuniastuti & Pratama, 2023).

The halal lifestyle also intersects with politics and social movements. Muslim women's communities and influencers blur the boundaries between piety, commerce, and activism, reshaping authority and gendered expressions of Islam. Similarly, initiatives such as One Day One Juz (ODOJ) illustrate how digital infrastructures mobilize semi-virtual Qur'anic communities that combine spiritual practice with networked participation (Nisa, 2018). These developments show how halal consumption is embedded not only in markets, but also in moral economies, social mobilization, and political discourse.

Building on this context, the present study examines how Indonesian millennials and Gen Z experience, perform, and negotiate halal consumption in digital environments. It conceptualizes halal not simply as compliance or market behavior, but as a performative practice and form of social capital situated at the intersection of technology, affect, and identity. By doing so, the research extends existing scholarship, which has been dominated by economic, regulatory, and marketing perspectives, towards a sociological understanding of halal as a fluid, relational identity practice.

Accordingly, this article addresses two central research questions: How do urban Muslim millennials curate and negotiate their "Halal Self" on social

media platforms? In what ways do digital infrastructures, peer interactions, and ethical values shape the performance of halal consumption as an identity practice? To answer these questions, the article first reviews scholarship on digital religion, halal consumption, and identity performance, and then proposes a conceptual framework that integrates rational choice, affective approaches, and digital mediation as a foundation for analysis.

Literature Review

Digital religion studies highlight how technology reshapes religious practices, altering how piety is performed, negotiated, and displayed (Campbell & Vitullo, 2016). This transformation reflects a rearticulation of faith into more participatory and distributed forms, where religious authority and practice are increasingly mediated by online platforms. In the context of halal consumption, this shift indicates a movement from private religious observance to public-facing practices that can be evaluated and validated through digital interactions.

Digital marketing has fundamentally transformed consumer behavior, influenced everyday purchasing decisions, and embedded religious values. Platforms such as TikTok and Instagram not only drive consumer engagement but also serve as spaces where Muslim consumers actively curate halal identities (Wang, 2024; Antczak, 2024). The blending of digital participation with religious obligation suggests a form of participatory piety in which consumption and religious expression intersect in online environments.

Religiosity plays a significant role in shaping consumer behavior, including preferences for ethically sourced and halal products (Minton & Cabano, 2024). In digital contexts, these values are amplified, as purchasing decisions become public acts of identity affirmation and moral distinction. Halal consumption thus

functions not only as adherence to Islamic law but also as a socially responsible practice deeply tied to consumer ethics and spiritual identity (Jabłońska-Karczmarczyk, 2024).

The concept of the digital ummah captures the creation of transnational Muslim communities through online networks (Masinambow & Nassa, 2023; Campbell, 2016). These communities foster a sense of belonging and mutual recognition, while also shaping halal practices through peer validation and collective discourse. The digital ummah expands the scope of identity performance, enabling Muslims to reaffirm their faith and lifestyle choices across geographies.

The abundance of online religious information raises complex questions about authenticity and authority. Consumers face challenges in distinguishing credible halal certification from unverified claims (Aupers & Wildt 2021). Digital influencers, peer groups, and institutional authorities coexist in this environment, forcing consumers to critically evaluate diverse sources of legitimacy. Thus, digital media simultaneously enhances access and complicates the discernment of religious authenticity.

Digital infrastructures, such as online certification systems, product directories, and peer reviews, strengthen consumer agency by making halal consumption more transparent (Kosasih, Kurniadi, & Yunazar, 2023; Puri & Sanjeev, 2023). Access to certification and production details empowers consumers to align their purchasing decisions with faith-based commitments, positioning halal as both a spiritual obligation and a rational market choice.

As the halal market expands, brands increasingly employ strategies that align with Islamic ethical frameworks to attract Muslim consumers (Antczak, 2024). While this development enriches the halal economy, it also introduces ethical dilemmas, such as concerns over consumer

privacy, the commercialisation of spirituality, and the risk of reducing piety to branding strategies (Antczak, 2024). The challenge lies in balancing sacred values with market logics in a digitalised consumer economy.

Scholars argue for a comprehensive framework that incorporates digital media, religiosity, and consumer behaviour into the analysis of halal practices (Evolvi, 2021). Performing piety in the digital age emerges as a multi-dimensional process that combines rational calculation, identity expression, and affective resonance, all mediated by the architecture of digital platforms.

Although studies have examined the relationship between digital marketing, religiosity, and halal consumption, gaps remain in understanding longitudinal impacts on religious identity, the negotiation of authority across different cultural contexts, and the ethical challenges of commercialising spirituality.

Conceptual Framework

This research applies a conceptual framework integrating Rational Choice Theory (RCT), identity–affective approaches, and digital mediation to explain halal consumption practices among Muslim consumers. While RCT has often been criticized for its narrow assumption of rational actors, it remains a valuable starting point. Although Rational Choice Theory (RCT) is often criticized for its narrow assumption of purely rational actors, it remains a valuable starting point for analysis. Many aspects of halal practice involve cost–benefit calculations (Iannaccone, 1994). Consumers may rationally evaluate certification logos, production transparency, or price differentials before making a decision. However, this rational dimension alone is insufficient to capture the full spectrum of halal consumption.

The identity–affective perspective complements this limitation by showing that halal consumption is equally, if not

more strongly, an expression of belonging, symbolic distinction, and emotional resonance. As Ahmed (2004) argues, emotions actively shape social action through affective economies. Purchasing halal cosmetics or posting halal meals online is not only about compliance or utility but also about cultivating pride, signaling moral worth, and enacting solidarity within the global Muslim ummah.

Digital mediation weaves these two logics together by transforming both rational calculations and affective resonances into visible, measurable practices. On platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, *likes*, *shares*, and *comments* serve both as means of utility maximization (by increasing social capital, reputation, and influence) and as affective validation (by generating pride, reassurance, or communal belonging). In this sense, digital infrastructures amplify rational choice mechanisms while simultaneously reshaping them into emotionally charged performances. The decision to purchase or promote a halal product is thus mediated not only by rational utility and religious obligation but also by the promise of visibility, recognition, and affective resonance in online communities.

This framework highlights that halal consumption is not merely the outcome of rational calculation or emotional identification in isolation. Instead, it emerges from the intersection of rational utility, affective identity, and digital mediation, where online infrastructures transform everyday consumption into performative acts of faith, recognition, and belonging.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study design to investigate how halal consumption is performed and negotiated in the digital era, particularly in relation to identity formation and the emergence of

the digital ummah. The case study method was chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of consumer behavior, religiosity, and digital technologies within a specific socio-cultural context. A qualitative orientation was considered appropriate, as it provides access to the lived experiences, symbolic practices, and affective dimensions of Muslim millennials navigating halal choices online.

The study targeted Muslim millennials aged 20–35 residing in urban Jakarta, reflecting Indonesia's largest Muslim-majority demographic and one of Southeast Asia's most dynamic digital markets. A total of 20 participants were recruited through snowball sampling (Neuman, 2014). The gender distribution was relatively balanced (12 females, eight males) with diverse socio-economic backgrounds, including university students, professionals in marketing and education, and entrepreneurs in modest fashion, food, and online content creation.

Data collection was conducted using two complementary methods. First, online observations were conducted over six months (October 2024 – March 2025) across several social media platforms. While Instagram and TikTok were the primary sites due to their popularity among Indonesian millennials. Additional attention was given to YouTube (halal product reviews, vlogs, and da'wah content), Twitter/X (micro-debates on halal issues and trending hashtags), and WhatsApp/Telegram groups (peer-to-peer discussions, product recommendations, and community fundraising). The observed materials included posts and uploads such as images, reels, vlogs, and infographics; stories and ephemeral updates; comment sections, and group discussions.

One-on-one online interviews were conducted with 20 participants, each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. The interviews explored motivations for halal consumption, perceptions of authenticity,

and the role of digital platforms in shaping religious practices. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized with participant.

Data analysis employed a thematic analysis approach. Initial coding of interview transcripts and digital content focused on identifying descriptive patterns, which were grouped into categories such as halal as identity performance, digital validation, and peer influence, and navigating authenticity and authority. These categories were then synthesised into higher-order themes that reflect the interplay between rational choice logics, affective resonance, and digital mediation. To ensure validity and reliability, the study employed triangulation by comparing interviews and digital observations, member checking through inviting participants to review interpretations, thick description to enhance contextual richness, and an audit trail of coding decisions.

Ethical considerations extended beyond informed consent and anonymity to the specific challenges of digital ethnography. Public posts on social media platforms such as Instagram or TikTok were treated as open data, whereas interactions in semi-private spaces, such as WhatsApp or Telegram groups, were only included with explicit participant permission. When quoting digital content, pseudonyms were used, and identifying details, such as usernames, hashtags, or visual cues, were altered to safeguard participants' privacy. For instance, if a participant posted an Instagram story with a visible profile picture, the visual element was described narratively rather than reproduced directly. Similarly, hashtags were paraphrased to retain thematic meaning without enabling traceability. These strategies aim to balance between the integrity of ethnographic evidence and the ethical imperative to protect participants' digital identities.

The scope of the study was geographically limited to urban Jakarta

and demographically focused on millennial, middle-class Muslims, which may not capture variations across other age groups, socio-economic classes, or rural contexts. Additionally, the study primarily focused on Instagram and TikTok, potentially overlooking the role of alternative platforms.

DISCUSSION

Curating the Halal Self

In the contemporary digital landscape, social media platforms, particularly Instagram and TikTok have become pivotal arenas where halal identity is not only curated and performed but also evaluated and reinforced through audience reception. Participants in this study regularly shared content showcasing certified halal food, modest fashion, halal travel experiences, and ethical endorsements. These digital performances were often framed as a form of everyday *da'wah*, public yet personal gestures of religiosity. However, the effectiveness and meaning of these performances were shaped not only by the poster's intent but also by how followers engaged with them.

Audience reception played a crucial role in sustaining and amplifying the performance of the halal self. Participants frequently monitored the number of likes, comments, and shares as indicators of moral resonance and communal validation. For instance, Dewi (27, entrepreneur) noted, "When I post about ethical fashion and get lots of positive comments like 'MasyaAllah, inspiring!' or 'I want to follow your style,' it motivates me to keep going." These engagements created emotional feedback loops that affirmed their pious persona and encouraged continuity in posting halal-related content.

At the same time, participants were acutely aware of the implicit social expectations that shaped their digital self-presentation. Some expressed anxiety over receiving critical or judgmental comments when their posts were perceived as

insufficiently modest or overly commercial. Yusuf (28, marketing executive) reflected, “Sometimes people say I’m showing off, or that it’s not sincere. It makes me cautious about what I post.”

This anxiety reveals how digital performances of piety are haunted by the specter of *riyā’* (showing off one’s religiosity), a concept deeply rooted in Islamic moral discourse. Participants were aware that their online *da’wah* could be perceived as either a sincere act of religious encouragement or self-promotion. For example, Aisyah (24, university student) admitted, I often worry about being perceived as showing off when I upload photos reciting the holy Qur’an or wearing a *syar’i* dress. My intention is solely to share but sometimes the others may interpret it differently.

Such statements illustrate how participants constantly negotiated their intentions, framing their actions as “inspiration” rather than “show”.

The subtle line between authentic *da’wah* and the danger of *riyā’* imposed a psychological burden on participants, compelling them to carefully curate content in ways that minimized accusations of insincerity while still signaling visible faith. The interplay between performance and reception highlights how identity works on social media is dialogic and contingent. Religious subjectivity is shaped not only by individual expression but also by the collective gaze of peers, followers, and broader digital publics. In this way, social media functions simultaneously as a stage and a feedback loop, where *halal* identity is continuously affirmed, recalibrated, or contested through audience interaction. This dimension of moral surveillance and peer recognition adds another layer of complexity to the performativity of *halal* identity in the digital age.

These conceptual distinctions lay the groundwork for understanding how *halal* is not only practiced but also narrated and

negotiated in digital spaces. Notably, young Muslim women, particularly hijabi influencers, were at the forefront of this identity performance. Through curated visual content, they contested the perception that *syar’i* (sharia-compliant) fashion must be austere or unattractive. Instead, they reframed modesty as both faithful and fashionable, successfully negotiating aesthetic and spiritual norms within public-facing digital spaces. As Aulia (25, fashion entrepreneur) explained, “I started posting modest fashion because people need to know that *syar’i* does not mean boring. It can be elegant, stylish, and empowering.”

This performative identity work also reflects a broader shift in religious authority. Rather than relying exclusively on clerical figures or institutional fatwas, many participants trusted influencers and peer communities whose ethical values and daily struggles mirrored their own. As Fikri (29, social media strategist) put it, “If I’m unsure about a product’s *halal* status, I trust influencers who are honest about what they use; it’s more relatable than waiting for official fatwas.” While this shift democratizes religious interpretation, it also introduces new pressures.

The interplay between performance and reception underscores how identity works on social media is dialogic and contingent. Religious subjectivity is shaped not only by individual expression but also by the collective gaze of peers, followers, and broader digital publics. In this context, social media, thus, functions as both a stage and a feedback arena where *halal* identity is continuously affirmed, recalibrated, or contested through audience interaction. This dimension of moral surveillance and peer recognition adds another layer of complexity to the performativity of *halal* identity in the digital age.

Several participants reported feeling an unspoken obligation to present themselves as “visibly good Muslims” online. Yusuf (28, marketing executive)

reflected, “It feels like there’s a silent standard, you’re expected to post halal food, modest outfits, or prayer corners, otherwise people think your faith is lacking.” Such sentiments point to an emergent form of moral surveillance, where piety is no longer private but constantly evaluated through likes, comments, and follower counts. While traditional analyses often treat halal branding as a function of compliance or market segmentation, recent scholarship has drawn attention to the symbolic and affective dimensions of halal identity in digital spheres.

In a similar vein, the socialization function of social media extends beyond information dissemination to the cultivation of ethical awareness and the facilitation of participatory knowledge production. Khasanah (2020) underscores the role of digital platforms as key agents in promoting halal consciousness and ethical literacy, while their capacity to foster interactive spaces for halal discourse, including debates over certification and evaluations of product integrity. Rather than relying solely on institutional fatwas or official guidelines, participants in this study frequently turned to peer-generated content, such as infographics, viral videos, and online discussion groups as their primary sources of halal knowledge. Indicates a paradigmatic shift from vertical (ulama-centred) models of authority to more horizontal, peer-driven forms of religious learning and validation.

Moreover, social media plays a pivotal role in amplifying halal tourism and lifestyle branding through electronic word-of-mouth (e-WoM), which not only influences purchasing decisions but also reshapes the relationship between religiosity, aesthetics, and ethical aspiration. The circulation of travel vlogs on Instagram and short-form reviews on TikTok has become a key source of reference for users seeking halal-friendly leisure experiences, highlighting how

digital platforms mediate and aestheticize halal consumption.

Research on MSMEs in Pakistan reveals that digitalization, facilitated by blockchain-based certification, e-commerce, and Sharia-compliant fintech, significantly enhances transparency, efficiency, and consumer trust (Khan, Rehman, and Ali, 2022). In the Indonesian context, the performance of halal identity on social media platforms mirrors this structural transformation, in which digital tools not only facilitate ethical consumption but also reconfigure authority and trust in halal certification. Thus, halal practices in the digital age emerge as a convergence of personal piety, market competitiveness, and institutional accountability.

From a generational perspective, the Theory of Planned Behaviour provides a valuable lens for understanding how social norms influence halal purchasing behaviour among Millennials and Gen Z (Khasanah et al., 2020). These digital-native generations demonstrate distinctive modes of halal consumption shaped not only by doctrinal adherence but also by aesthetics, peer validation, and ethical resonance. Such generational shifts are reflected in how young Muslims negotiate the tension between religious authenticity and social visibility within their everyday online performances

Social media also serves an important educational function in developing the halal ecosystem, particularly by increasing awareness and facilitating access to halal certification for small and medium enterprises. By circulating success stories and demystification of bureaucratic processes, digital platforms help entrepreneurs navigate certification procedures while simultaneously building consumer trust and strengthening ethical branding. Participants noted that campaigns led by halal entrepreneurs and micro-influencers played a key role in making certification criteria more intelligible and promoting

solidarity around ethical Muslim consumption. This aligns with findings that digital engagement fosters not only market expansion but also the formation of ethically oriented communities.

The curation of the “Halal Self” on social media reveals a layered dynamic wherein religious identity, consumer trust, aesthetic values, and community belonging intersect. Social media serves not only as a marketing conduit but as a moral stage where young Muslims perform, negotiate, and reconfigure halal identity in real-time. As the halal market and digital public sphere continue to expand, understanding these platforms as spaces of religious subjectivity and social influence becomes essential for capturing the evolving landscape of Muslim life in the digital age.

Ethical Cosmopolitanism

Halal consumption is increasingly resonating with global ethical discourses that extend beyond the realm of ritual legality. While halal guarantees permissibility, many Muslim consumers now seek practices that also align with concerns of sustainability, fairness, and social justice. This shift reflects a form of ethical cosmopolitanism, in which religious observance intersects with broader global values.

The notion of *tayyib*, emphasizing goodness, wholesomeness, and purity, provides a crucial bridge between traditional fiqh and these contemporary ethical concerns. While halal ensures permissibility, *tayyib* expands the framework to include environmental responsibility, humane practices, and fairness in production. Wardah Cosmetics exemplifies this shift, as its branding combines halal certification with commitments to health, safety, and women’s empowerment, showing how piety and ethical responsibility are mutually reinforcing.

However, the embrace of global ethical values is not without tension.

Several participants acknowledged conflicts between liberal cosmopolitan ideals, such as gender equality and feminist activism, and more conservative interpretations of Shariah. For example, Dina (26, postgraduate student) remarked: “I support sustainability and women’s empowerment, but I’m not comfortable when feminism is linked to rejecting family values or sharia obligations. For me, halal must stay within religious boundaries.” These examples illustrate that ethical cosmopolitanism is often negotiated selectively, with participants adopting values such as sustainability or fairness while distancing themselves from aspects perceived as incompatible with Islamic principles.

Such negotiations reveal a pragmatic balancing act: global values are adopted to the extent that they can be reconciled with Islamic frameworks. When conflicts arise, participants often reframe ethical cosmopolitanism through Islamic concepts such as *maslahah* (public good) or *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* (higher objectives of Islamic law), thereby legitimising selective adoption while preserving religious coherence. For instance, support for women’s empowerment is articulated in terms of educational access and workplace dignity, but not necessarily in the language of liberal feminism. These enable participants to align themselves with global ethical imaginaries without abandoning their religious commitments.

At the same time, Gen-Z consumers increasingly demand halal products that reflect not only ritual compliance but also innovation, safety, and peer influence, signaling that their orientation toward halal cosmetics is deeply aligned with *tayyib* values of well-being and ethical assurance (Gumus & Onurlubas 2023; Febriandika, Wijaya, & Hakim, 2023). In this way, *Tayyib* grounds Indonesian Muslims’ engagement with global ethical cosmopolitanism while remaining rooted in Islamic tradition.

Beyond the cosmetic sector, similar logics are evident in halal food and tourism industries, where ethical concerns intersect with global discourses of sustainability and authenticity. In West Sumatra, for instance, halal tourism integrates *‘urf* (local wisdom) with Islamic principles, combining cultural heritage with ethical assurance (Rusyaida, 2024).

Likewise, global halal supply chains are increasingly evaluated not only for their compliance with Islamic legal standards but also for their transparency, fairness, and ecological impact. Through these practices, Indonesian Muslims demonstrate how local religious commitments can be aligned with cosmopolitan ethical imaginaries, positioning halal as both a marker of piety and a vehicle for global moral engagement. As one participant, Aminah (26, environmental activist), observed: “Halal is not just about fiqh, it’s about clean products, free from harm and exploitation. It goes hand-in-hand with sustainability.” This perspective aligns with the argument that ethical consumption can serve as a form of cultural resistance and expression of identity within global consumer culture.

At the heart of halal consumption lies a dynamic interplay between identity and morality, wherein consumer choices are increasingly understood as expressions of ethical selfhood. Each act of purchase becomes imbued with symbolic meaning, reflecting broader commitments to value alignment and moral coherence. Within this framework, halal consumption transcends its role as a religious obligation and becomes a moral signifier that reinforces social belonging and affirms cultural heritage. As Rafi (28, food blogger) remarked, “Halal is about choosing cleanliness and fairness. Even my non-Muslim friends are drawn to halal for its integrity.” Halal consumption, in this sense, becomes a participatory form of critique against dominant food systems perceived as unethical, exploitative, or spiritually void. Community norms

emerge around the valorisation of small ethical businesses, local products, and eco-conscious packaging, trends that signify halal as both spiritual and civic engagement.

Participants also emphasized the social and political dimensions of halal consumption, framing their choices not merely as personal or religious acts but as forms of resistance against dominant consumption logics. By redefining what constitutes “good” or “clean” consumption, respondents positioned halal practices as subversive alternatives that challenge mainstream food ideologies and commercial norms. Lutfi (25, digital marketer) noted, “When I promote halal food, I link it to local sustainability and packaging ethics. Being Muslim is also about caring for the planet.”

The connection between halal consumption and broader global ethical concerns is evident in the motivations that underpin millennial consumer behavior. Rather than viewing consumption as merely utilitarian, participants articulated a desire to align with communities defined by shared moral commitments. This resonates with the argument that ethical consumers are often motivated by the aspiration to affiliate with a “better group” through value-driven consumption practices. Several participants in this study echoed this sentiment, framing their halal choices as a means of belonging to a morally conscious and socially responsible community. Nurul (24, university student) recounted a campus event where halal consumption was framed in relation to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), noting, “Being Muslim today is also about being a responsible global citizen.”

However, halal identity is not solely anchored in moral or religious commitments; it also intersects with questions of social distinction and status. Ethical consumption, including halal practices, can serve as a form of identity capital, enabling individuals to signal not

only their piety but also their sophistication, cultural literacy, and moral awareness within aspirational social circles. While some participants resisted this commercialization, others acknowledged that halal branding had become aspirational. As Dewi (27, entrepreneur) remarked, “Sometimes halal is just a label to sell more. But when it’s done right, it creates trust and elevates the brand.”

This sense of elevation draws on cultural knowledge, aesthetic judgment, and consumption practices that align with dominant moral narratives. However, such symbolic capital is unevenly distributed, shaped by access to education, digital literacy, and socioeconomic privilege, thereby reinforcing new forms of distinction within the halal consumer landscape. Participants, such as Ilham (28, a gig worker) and Amira (23, a student), voiced frustrations over access to affordable, halal-certified goods, especially in skincare and imported snacks. These accounts resonate with critiques of ethical consumption as potentially exclusionary, as they reinforce economic stratification under the guise of moral superiority.

The emotional dimension of halal identity also emerged as significant theme in the analysis, underscoring the role of affect in shaping consumption practices. Rather than being purely rational or doctrinal, participants’ halal choices were often informed by feelings of empathy, a sense of belonging, and moral resonance. These align with the view that moral consumption is driven not solely by deliberative reasoning, but also by social intuition and emotional cues that guide ethical decision-making in everyday life. Participants frequently described halal as a heartfelt commitment, one that brought peace, pride, and even spiritual solidarity. Aisha (25, environmental activist) noted, “Halal for me is about emotional connection; it reminds me of who I am, where I come from, and what matters.”

This perspective is further reinforced by the fact that ethical consumption is shaped not only by individual moral intuition but also by contextual reasoning embedded in social environments. In the case of halal, participants’ decisions were rarely made in isolation; instead, they emerged through complex negotiations involving family expectations, social media discourse, and everyday economic constraints. These practices exemplify embedded ethics, where moral choices are situated within shared cultural scripts, relational obligations, and historical experiences that collectively shape what is perceived as the “right” or “ethical” path.

As ethical consumption becomes more widespread, halal practices stand out as a form of cultural resistance that upholds alternative value systems. The performance of halal identity in this study is thus both assertive and adaptive: it challenges prevailing norms while constructing new spaces of belonging, solidarity, and moral distinction.

Understanding halal consumption through the lens of ethical cosmopolitanism reveals its dual role as both an ethical and cultural project. It is not merely a matter of personal dietary preference but a broader social performance, an assertion of moral agency, identity, and community in the face of global standardization. As consumers continue to seek meaning, belonging, and ethical coherence in their choices, halal offers a compelling model for how religious tradition and modern ethics can converge in shaping alternative futures.

Navigating Structural Barriers

Despite the moral and aspirational framing of halal lifestyles, Muslim millennials face numerous structural constraints that limit their religious agency. These constraints manifest not only as economic or infrastructural obstacles, such as a lack of access to certified halal products, but also as deeper sociocultural and psychological barriers

that shape how religious identity is expressed, perceived, and negotiated.

Participants in this study frequently cited challenges in accessing halal-certified cosmetics, imported snacks, or affordable meat. Many relied on trusted local vendors or peer recommendations, underscoring a lack of institutional trust. As Amira (23, student) shared, “It’s easy to find halal restaurants in malls, but finding halal skincare or imported snacks is difficult. Sometimes I trust brands even without certification.” These decisions reflect everyday religious negotiations shaped by limited infrastructure, economic disparity, and partial information. Ilham (28, gig worker) added, “Certified halal meat is expensive. I rely on traditional vendors I know follow Islamic practices even if they don’t have official logos.”

Such structural barriers directly affect how participants perform their “Halal Self” in digital spaces. Some became more creative by highlighting everyday practices that could still signal piety, such as showcasing home-cooked meals or modest fashion rather than products that were hard to certify. Others chose silence, deliberately avoiding posts about contested or uncertified items to prevent criticism or accusations of insincerity. In this way, the availability and affordability of certified goods shaped not only private consumption but also the online visible repertoire of halal identity.

To understand these constraints more comprehensively, it is essential to consider how structural barriers affect religious agency, both as a personal expression and a collective identity, particularly for marginalized communities. In Indonesian urban life, where Islamic expression is often filtered through dominant interpretations, leaving little room for diverse and localized religious subjectivities. As Siti (26, NGO worker) noted, “Sometimes the halal label feels like a formality. I trust my community more than government logos. It’s about relationships, not institutions.”

This helps explain why participants performed halal consumption in flexible ways, sometimes visibly online, sometimes quietly through daily habits. Their expressions of faith often reflected pragmatic responses to structural limitations, rather than rigid doctrinal adherence. The result is a religious agency that is both responsive and constrained, constantly adapting to socio-economic, institutional, and cultural pressures.

These pressures are also gendered. Muslim women in particular reported the double burden of navigating not only market limitations but also communal expectations regarding their visible piety and modesty. For many young women in this study, the decision to perform a visible halal lifestyle online came with fear of judgment, either for being too strict or not pious enough. This reflects a deeper tension between autonomy and conformity, mediated by both societal surveillance and intra-community norms.

From a psychological perspective, individuals reconcile their religious commitments with societal expectations. Participants in this study exhibited signs of dual commitment, simultaneously striving to uphold spiritual principles while adapting to urban, secular, or neoliberal environments. This duality complicates their psychological adjustment and social positioning, particularly in navigating peer groups, online visibility, and professional aspirations.

The negotiation between structural barriers and digital performance reveals that identity work is not solely a matter of personal choice or intention. Instead, I am materially conditioned: limited access to certified products can narrow, reshape, or redirect how halal subjectivities are curated online. For some, these constraints foster creativity and resourcefulness; for others, they produce silence and absence in digital self-presentation.

Moreover, Indonesia’s broader climate of religious tolerance adds another layer of complexity. While the Indonesian

constitution guarantees religious freedom, studies show that interfaith understanding and inclusivity remain limited. Minority expressions within Islam, such as alternative practices, cultural adaptations, or hybrid halal interpretations, often face suspicion, not only from state institutions but from fellow Muslims.

At the same time, the rise of digital communities offers a partial remedy. Participants relied heavily on peer-to-peer halal validation via social media, sharing product reviews, informal fatwas, and behind-the-scenes production insights to bypass institutional shortcomings. For many participants, the ability to access and display ethically sourced halal products online was as much about belonging and recognition as about piety. Nadia (27, community organizer) observed, "Government talks about halal economy, but in reality, it's expensive and confusing. Grassroots networks make it feel real." As such, religious agency is not simply a matter of private faith, but a structurally embedded process, shaped by access, visibility, status, and trust. When economic inequality, institutional ambiguity, and social judgment converge, agency becomes fragile and selective.

The constraints on halal practice among Indonesian Muslim millennials illustrate how religious agency is not a given, but something continually negotiated under pressure. Structural barriers, including economic, social, and political, shape how piety is lived and expressed. This study reveals that halal, as a performative and relational identity, is deeply impacted by material access, peer influence, and institutional trust. Addressing these barriers requires more than policy reform; it demands sustained attention to the everyday realities of those seeking to live ethically and faithfully within structurally uneven systems.

The Digital Ummah

The rise of the Digital Ummah represents a fundamental transformation in

the way Muslim communities engage in religious discourse, identity formation, and communal solidarity through digital platforms. In this study, social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok emerged as essential spaces where participants shared, supported, and celebrated their halal lifestyle, while simultaneously building relational ties with fellow Muslims across diverse geographies.

At the heart of this digital transformation is the dual role of soft advocacy and community building. Participants used online spaces not only to recommend halal brands and review restaurants but also to advocate for ethical consumption, sustainability, and inclusive representations of Islam. Nadia (24, lifestyle influencer) remarked, "Through Instagram, I connected with Muslim women who care about ethical fashion. We support each other and learn together." Fahmi (29, food content creator) similarly noted, "My TikTok started as a halal food review, but it became a forum for talking about ingredients, hygiene, and even animal welfare."

This shift aligns with the conceptualization of the Digital Ummah as an imagined community (Kirmayer et al., 2013), drawing on Benedict Anderson's idea that shared narratives and symbols, not physical proximity, construct communal bonds. Social media fosters these bonds by enabling distributed piety, in which Muslims find validation, solidarity, and learning within digital collectives. Through hashtags, comment sections, and live discussions, participants formed what Jamil et al. (2020) describe as the e-Ummah, a virtual Islamic collective engaged in peer-to-peer exchange, support, and da'wah.

Recent developments in digital da'wah have expanded the reach and inclusivity of Islamic education. The technological mediation opens up new horizons for multicultural engagement, enabling Muslims in remote or minority

contexts to access diverse perspectives and participate in global religious discussions.

Digital religious activism also manifests through virtual charity and social justice efforts. During the pandemic, participants described how online zakat campaigns and virtual fundraising initiatives became central to promoting collective care and financial transparency. These efforts linked spiritual obligations with the immediate needs of vulnerable communities, reinforcing a sense of shared moral responsibility. For instance, Irwan (30, community mobilizer) recounted organizing an online halal bazaar during Ramadan to support Muslim microenterprises and foster faith-based solidarity in the midst of economic uncertainty.

However, the Digital Ummah is not without its contradictions. While it offers expanded access to religious discourse, it also raises critical concerns regarding authority, authenticity, and representation. Participants in this study echoed these concerns, highlighting the tension between inclusivity and reliability in digital da'wah. Rizal (27, marketing professional) reflected, "Sometimes digital da'wah feels more like branding. I still respect ulama, but I get more relatable insights from influencers." This comment underscores the broader decentralization of religious authority, in which personal charisma, narrative appeal, and social proof often supersede formal scholarly credentials in shaping religion's influence.

The role of platform dynamics further complicates this landscape. Twitter, as a powerful platform for micro-dakwah among millennials, enables the rapid dissemination of religious messages and mobilization around socio-religious issues. However, the platform's brevity and algorithmic virality frequently reduce complex theological discussions into simplified or sensationalized soundbites. These dynamics underscore the importance of critical engagement and digital literacy in navigating the evolving

contours of religious authority and preserving the ethical and intellectual integrity of Islamic discourse in increasingly mediated public spheres.

Ultimately, the Digital Ummah represents a transformative force that reshapes how Muslims connect with their faith, advocate for shared values, and form communities beyond geographic and cultural boundaries. It combines tradition with technology, individual expression with collective practice, and local specificity with global imagination. However, as this ecosystem evolves, it must also grapple with new forms of fragmentation, misinformation, and gatekeeping, requiring reflexivity, ethical design, and inclusive participation.

The Digital Ummah is both a space and a process, a space for expressing identity and solidarity, and a process of negotiating authority, meaning, and belonging in the digital age. By embracing the possibilities of digital tools while acknowledging their limitations, contemporary Muslims are not merely adapting to technology; they are actively shaping a new era of Islamic connectivity and communal consciousness.

Although the Digital Ummah opens spaces of solidarity and cross-boundary participation, it simultaneously generates dynamics of conflict and exclusion. On various platforms, religious content often becomes a site of contestation between Muslim groups with divergent ideological orientations, such as hijrah communities, Salafi networks, Sufi orders, and progressive Muslims. Rather than simply reinforcing ukhuwah (brotherhood), digital arenas frequently intensify identity boundaries. Debates over the validity of halal certification, modes of dress, and specific ritual practices often turn into practices of othering, where religious authority is disputed and opponents are labelled as less pious or even deviant. These suggest that the Digital Ummah is not always harmonious, but also serves as a contested arena of authority,

representation, and legitimacy (Campbell, 2016).

The algorithmic logics of platforms such as TikTok and Instagram further amplify these dynamics. Content that provokes strong emotional reactions, whether outrage at perceived deviations from sharia norms or admiration for visible piety, is more likely to be promoted, shared, and circulated. As a result, polemical posts about hijab styles or halal status often receive disproportionate visibility, reinforcing polarization and deepening identity boundaries. Participants noted that “controversial” content tended to trend faster than balanced discussions, suggesting that algorithms reward division and spectacle over nuance. In this way, platform infrastructures not only host but actively intensify the fragmentation of the Digital Ummah.

Additionally, the pressure to appear visibly pious in digital spaces often creates new psychological burdens for individuals. Narratives emphasizing visual markers of piety, such as posts about syar’i fashion, worship routines, or halal consumption, impose standards of religious perfectionism that are often unattainable. Many young Muslims feel trapped within a piety economy, where the number of likes, comments, and followers measures faith. Such pressures risk generating anxiety, guilt, and exclusion for those unable to meet digital standards of religiosity (Aupers & Wildt, 2021; Nisa, 2018; Aruan & Wirdania, 2020).

These barriers not only shape the authenticity and visibility of halal practices but also compel individuals to seek alternative spaces of legitimacy and recognition. Here, ethical cosmopolitanism provides a framework for Indonesian Muslims to situate their practices in dialogue with global ethical concerns, such as sustainability, fairness, and transparency, while remaining grounded in their religious obligations.

However, the translation of these values often requires mediation through new infrastructures. It is precisely in this context that the Digital Ummah becomes indispensable: digital platforms not only facilitate identity curation and community affirmation but also function as arenas for overcoming institutional limitations, amplifying ethical aspirations, and reconfiguring authority. Thus, the negotiation of halal identity in contemporary Indonesia can be understood as an interplay between individual self-presentation, global ethical imaginaries, structural constraints, and the digital infrastructures that mediate them all. Ultimately, this synthesis underscores the need for the sociology of religion to consider how digital mediation reshapes the interplay between piety, authority, and consumer practices in Muslim societies.

CLOSING

In the digital age, Halal is not simply consumed; it is enacted, narrated, and negotiated in public. Framed within the theoretical lens of performativity, ethical cosmopolitanism, and digital religiosity, the findings reveal how young Muslims negotiate and enact their faith through daily consumption practices, encompassing fashion, food, social media, and charitable activism. Through curating the “Halal Self” on digital platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, participants engage in moral signaling and everyday da’wah, blending aesthetic expression with ethical commitment. These performances are not merely symbolic; they constitute genuine practices of religious subjectivity, shaped by peer validation, social expectations, and the pursuit of authenticity in a rapidly mediatized world.

This study reveals that halal practices are increasingly framed by participants as a moral and cultural stance, not only distinguishing them from non-halal consumers but also resisting the homogenising forces of global consumer

capitalism. This aligns with the notion of ethical cosmopolitanism, understood here as a disposition in which individuals make consumption choices grounded in trans local moral commitments, such as sustainability, fairness, and social responsibility, while remaining rooted in their religious and cultural identities.

The rise of the Digital Ummah further illustrates how technological affordances enable new forms of soft advocacy and community formation. Participants used digital tools not only for consumption and education but also to construct imagined communities of support, solidarity, and ethical engagement. However, challenges of authority, representation, and digital inequality remain pressing, pointing to the need for more inclusive and ethically grounded digital ecosystems.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that moves beyond theological or market-based analyses of halal to centre the lived experiences of young Muslims navigating modernity, faith, and digital life. It underscores that halal is not a static category but a relational and evolving practice, embedded in socio-technical networks, mediated by emotion and aspiration, and grounded in both personal conviction and collective negotiation.

Despite its contributions, this study acknowledges several limitations that may affect the generalizability of its findings. First, the research is geographically limited to urban settings, which may not capture the experiences and expressions of halal consumption among rural or peri-urban Muslim communities in Indonesia. Second, the participant pool was predominantly female, particularly in discussions around fashion and digital performance, which may introduce a gendered bias in the representation of halal identity. While this reflects broader patterns of visibility in the halal influencer ecosystem, it also warrants further investigation into male perspectives and

other gendered dimensions. Third, the study primarily focused on two dominant social media platforms, potentially overlooking alternative expressions of halal religiosity on other digital forums such as YouTube, Twitter, or community-based messaging apps like WhatsApp. These limitations present valuable avenues for future research seeking to deepen and diversify the understanding of halal subjectivity across spaces, genders, and technological mediums.

Future research may build upon these findings by exploring the intersections of class, gender, and regional variation within halal consumption, or by examining how state and corporate institutions shape the evolving contours of the halal economy. In an era where identity, commerce, and religiosity increasingly converge online, understanding halal as both a performance and a form of resistance remains crucial for mapping the moral geographies of contemporary Muslim life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors gratefully acknowledge the invaluable support received during this research. We express our sincere gratitude to the faculty and administration of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at UIN Jakarta for providing a conducive environment for this study and for their commitment to academic excellence. We also appreciate the institutional support, which was instrumental in facilitating the research and learning process. Additionally, we would like to thank Ahmad Shabbir from the Department of English Literature at the University of Sahiwal for his insightful feedback and valuable collaboration throughout the development of this article. Finally, we extend our gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive suggestions, which significantly enriched the discussion presented in this article.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Amiruddin, M., and Wahyudi, A. 2023. "Dissemination of Religious Moderation Through the General Sudirman Mosque in Yogyakarta." *Al-Qalam: Jurnal Penelitian Agama dan Sosial Budaya* 15(2):210-228.
- Antczak, B. 2024. "The Influence of Digital Marketing and Social Media Marketing on Consumer Buying Behavior." *Journal of Modern Science* 56(2):310–35.
- Arsil, Poppy, Yeong Sheng Tey, Mark Kennion Brindal, Cun Uei Phua, and Denisa Liana. 2018. "Personal Values Underlying Halal Food Consumption: Evidence from Indonesia and Malaysia." *British Food Journal* 120(11):2524–2538.
- Aruan, Daniel Tumpal H., and Iin Wirdania. 2020. "You Are What You Wear: Examining the Multidimensionality of Religiosity and Its Influence on Attitudes and Intention to Buy Muslim Fashion Clothing." *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 24(3):1–16.
- Batubara, Chuzaimah, and Isnaini Harahap. 2022. "Halal Industry Development Strategies: Muslims' Responses and Sharia Compliance in Indonesia." *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 16(1):103–132.
- Bella-Salsa, Aisah, Betania Kartika, Haruna Babatunde Jaiyeoba, and Mohammad Aizat Jamaludin. 2023. "Halal Lifestyle Entrepreneurship: Concept, Practice, Prospects, and Challenges." *Journal of Halal Science and Technology* 2(2):19–25.
- Bentsen, Kristin, and Per Egil Pedersen. 2024. "Can Digital Platforms Support Moralized Markets? An Analysis of Affordances that Matter to Moralization." *Marketing Theory* 24(3):465–480.
- Campbell, Heidi A. 2016. "Surveying Theoretical Approaches within Digital Religion Studies." *New Media & Society* 19(1):15–24.
- Fealy, Greg, and Sally White, eds. 2008. *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing.
- Febriandika, Nur Rizqi, Vamel Wijaya, and Lukmanul Hakim. 2023. "Gen-Z Muslims' Purchase Intention of Halal Food: Evidence from Indonesia." *Innovative Marketing* 19(1):13–25.
- Gumus, Niyazi, and Ebru Onurlubas. 2023. "Investigation of Factors Affecting Generation Z's Halal Cosmetics Adoption." *Marketing and Management of Innovations* 14(1):1–11.
- Husein, Fatimah, and Martin Slama. 2018. "Online Piety and Its Discontent: Revisiting Islamic Anxieties on Indonesian Social Media." *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46(134):80–93.
- Iannaccone, Laurence R. 1994. "Why Strict Churches Are Strong." *American Journal of Sociology* 99(5):1180–1211.
- Jabłońska-Karczmarczyk, Katarzyna. 2024. "Towards Socially Responsible Consumption: Assessing the Role of Prayer in Consumption." *Religions* 15(4):445.
- Jailani, Novalini, and Hendri Hermawan Adinugraha. 2022. "The Effect of Halal Lifestyle on Economic Growth in Indonesia." *Journal of Economics Research and Social Sciences* 6(1):44–53.
- Khan, M. A., Rehman, S., and Ali, H. 2022. "Digital Transformation Strategy for Implementing Halal Management: A Case Study of the MSME Industry in Pakistan." *Al-Qalam: Jurnal Penelitian Agama dan Sosial Budaya* 12(1):45-62.

- Minton, Elizabeth, and F. Cabano. 2024. "Religion's Influence on Consumption: A Life Course Paradigm Perspective." *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 48(2).
- Neuman, W. Lawrence. 2014. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. 7th ed. Harlow: Pearson.
- Nisa, Eva F. 2018. "Social Media and the Birth of an Islamic Social Movement: ODOJ (One Day One Juz) in Contemporary Indonesia." *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46(134):24–43.
- Nurhayati, S., and Rahman, F. 2022. "Representation of Popular Islam Through Sufi Aesthetic on Instagram." *Al-Qalam: Jurnal Penelitian Agama dan Sosial Budaya* 60(2):351-378.
- Pratiwi, H., and Ismail, M. 2023. "Safeguarding Innocence: Developing Curriculum of Islamic Sexual Education in Early Childhood." *Al-Qalam: Jurnal Penelitian Agama dan Sosial Budaya* 29(2):316-330.
- Puri, M., and K. Sanjeev. 2023. "Religious Influences on Impulse Buying Behavior." *Economics, Entrepreneurship and Law* 13(5).
- Rukiah, S., Baharuddin, B., and Rosdiana, R. 2023. "Improving Students' Digital Literacy through the Religious Character in Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 1 Sidrap." *Al-Qalam: Jurnal Penelitian Agama dan Sosial Budaya* 28(2):120-135.
- Rusyaida, D. 2024. "Local Wisdom as Halal Tourism Model in West Sumatera: an 'Urf Perspective." *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 14(2):259–287.
- Salsabila, Aulia Ziyadaturrahmah, and Siti Kalimah. 2024. "The Influence of Halal Awareness, Knowledge and Regulations on Submitting Halal Self-Declare Certification for Micro and Small Business Actors in the Culinary Sector in Pacet District, Mojokerto Regency." *Iqtishodia: Jurnal Ekonomi Syariah* 9(2):12–21.
- Slama, Martin, and Bart Barendregt, eds. 2018. *Digital Indonesia: Connectivity and Divergence*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing.
- Wang, X. 2024. "Digital Marketing Strategies and Consumer Engagement: Unveiling TikTok's E-commerce Dynamics." *Advances in Economics, Management and Political Sciences* 103(1):183–90.
- Yuniastuti, Viviyanti, and Andrey Achmad Pratama. 2023. "Portraits and Challenges of Indonesia's Modest Fashion Industry on the Halal Industry Competition in the World." *Indonesian Journal of Halal Research* 5(1):21–29.
- Zamrudi, Yul, and Bae Il-Hyun. 2022. "Social Media Marketing Strategies in the Global Halal Industry." *Comserva: Indonesian Journal of Community Services and Development* 2(1):35–48.

Interview :

- Interview with Dewi (Entrepreneur), 2024
 Interview with Yusuf (Professional), 2024
 Interview with Aisyah (Student), 2024
 Interview with Aulia (Entrepreneur), 2024
 Interview with Fikri (Social Media), 2024
 Interview with Dina (Student), 2024
 Interview with Aminah (Activist), 2025
 Interview with Rafi (Writer), 2024
 Interview with Lutfi (Entrepreneur), 2025
 Interview with Nurul (Student), 2025
 Interview with Ilham (GIGI Workers), 2025
 Interview with Amira (Student), 2025
 Interview with Siti (LSM), 2025
 Interview with Nadia (LSM), 2025
 Interview with Nadia (Influencer), 2025
 Interview with Fahmi (Writer), 2025
 Interview with Irwan (Bazaar Committee), 2025
 Interview with Rizal (Worker), 2025
 Interview with Aisha (Activist), 2025