

Halal Epistemology from a Global Perspective

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Abstract: This study attempts to examine, the halal issue from a global viewpoint and underscore Malaysia's potential of becoming an international halal hub. The main objective of this study is to elucidate the halal concept and its basics from the perspective of the Quran and Hadith. The second objective is to describe and appreciate the halal principle in a broader scope. Finally, this writing tries to lay emphasis on efforts which are needed to be carried out by the various parties in Malaysia towards establishing Malaysia in the ranks of the international halal network. The study employs a qualitative method to achieve the earlier objectives. The study finds that the concept of halal is not only restricted to food, as is widely understood by most but it encompasses various aspects of life and cuts across a broader spectrum. Certain measures are recommended to ensure the successful implementation of the halal concept recognized by the global community.

Key words: Encompasses, implementation, halal network, perspective, Quran and Hadith

INTRODUCTION

The Quran views the message proclaimed by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) which enjoins the Islamic laws or syariah as mercy to all creations. Thus, the underlying fundamental in Islamic laws is compassion towards the whole universe and the objective or maqasid of the syariah is to uphold 3 categories of benefits in descending order of importance; namely the essential, the complementary and the embellishment (Mawsu'ah al-Fiqh al-Islami). These benefits are essential to the well-being of mankind and consist of upholding the following: Faith, life, intellect, lineage and property.

Verses of the Quran are directed to mankind in general with phrases calling the attention of men; O men and believers; O those who believe inclusive of both male and female believers. There are, also verses that are addressed specifically to women only and say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and verses addressed specifically to the wives of the Prophet, peace be upon him. There are, also verses addressed specifically to the Prophet; O Prophet. However, although the verses of the Quran are revealed directly to the Prophet, they are intended for all mankind (Al-Shirazi, 1995).

The verses in the Quran contain direct and indirect instructions for man to fully submit and obey Allah, the sustainer of the worlds. The submission and obedience of man to Allah guarantees a normal order in society and the well-being of individuals for him to fulfill the very essence of his creation, as a slave and the vicegerent of Allah in

this world. Thus, the Quran denounces priests and monks who derogate Allah and proclaim their own laws on what is lawful and unlawful according to their own desires (Surah al-Tawbah, 9:31).

HALAL TERM

Etymologically, the word halal means untying a knot and remove the impediment from my speech (Surah Taha, 20:27). A knotted rope tied to something cannot be used as long as it is still in a knot. It can be used once the knot is untied. The concept of halal springs from this analogy, meaning something that is permissible and lawful under religion. The opposite is haram meaning something which is prohibited and unlawful according to Islamic law. Ibn Manzur (1995) in his writings in Lisan al-Arab states that something which is permitted by Allah, then is halal and something which is prohibited by Him is haram whilst Al-Zabidi (1998) in Taj al-Arus defines the term halal as the opposite of haram, something prohibited or something which is not sinful. From various definitions of the earlier mentioned term, it can be concluded that halal is something which is mubah, lawful or allowable according to Islamic law and it is the opposite of haram.

HALAL THEMES IN THE QURAN

In the Quran, the concept of halal is not restricted to food and beverages. Instead, it is applicable to many aspects of life. For instance, it is lawful for a man to have a sexual relationship with a woman by reason of marriage

or by the reason of ownership of a woman slave: We have made lawful to thee thy wives to whom thou hast paid their dowries and those whom thy right hand possesses out of the prisoners of war whom Allah has assigned to thee (Surah al-Ahzab, 33:50). The halal concept is also applied to food and farmed animals: Lawful unto you (for food) are all 4 footed animals. It is also associated with good food: Lawful unto you are (all) things good and pure (Surah al-Ma'idah, 5:4) and He allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them from what is bad (and impure) (Surah al-A'raf, 7:157).

The halal concept is, also appropriated to consent for war: For they make it lawful 1 year and forbidden another year in order to adjust the number of months forbidden by Allah and make such forbidden ones lawful (Surah al-Tawbah, 9:37). Other activities bound by the halal principle is marriage and divorce: It is not lawful for thee (to marry more) women after this, nor to change them for (other) wives (Surah al-Ahzab, 33:52); they are believers, then send them not back to the unbelievers. They are not lawful (wives) for the unbelievers, nor are the (unbelievers) lawful (husbands) for them (Surah al-Mumtahanah, 60:10).

Additionally, the halal concept is, also linked to manners of conducting business: Allah hath permitted trade and forbidden usury (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:275), speech: But say not for any false thing that your tongues may put forth; this is lawful and this is forbidden, so as to ascribe false things to Allah (Surah al-Nahl, 16:116) and sustenance: So eat of the sustenance which Allah has provided for you lawful and good and be grateful for the favours of Allah if it is He whom ye serve (Surah al-Nahl, 16:114).

From the earlier explanation, it is apparent that the application of halal is expansive, involving many aspects of life and is not restricted to food and marital relationships as it is conventionally understood.

THE SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLE OF HALAL: UNIVERSAL BENEFITS

Modern day living is largely influenced by science and technology and subsequently this has impacted the halal aspect of daily activities. It is human nature to desire everything that is good in life in the form of clothing, food, housing, interaction with fellow human beings and healthy environment. In Islam, anything which is halal brings goodness and prosperity for mankind is not detrimental to life and in effect, it elevates man to a higher level in this world.

On the other hand, something which is haram is perceived as physically and spiritually impure, inferior and

defective, traits which are naturally repulsive to mankind. Anything haram constitutes harmful elements which affect man's psychology and his physical well-being. Research which integrates the halal concept with science focuses on universal benefits, the natural disposition of man, health, cleanliness and quality. The halal concept encapsulates the universal nature of Islam. Thus, scientific research relating to the halal concept is commendable.

GLOBAL HALAL MARKET: STRATEGIC APPROACH

Based on a report from the United Nations, Islam is the 2nd largest religion after Christianity. UN statistics recorded yearly growth of Muslims at around 6.4% compared to 1.46% for Christianity. According to the same statistics, 1 in 5 persons in this world is a Muslim by birth or geography. The average increase of Muslim population from 1989 up to 2012 based on continents is shown in Table 1.

Based on the statistics earlier, Muslims presents a huge global market for halal products and services and since Muslims in general adhere strongly to religious principles and are increasingly particular and sensitive over the halalness of their life style, especially food, the prospect for halal market is enormous. Therefore, to tap into the vast opportunity which the halal industry presents, several aspects concerning the halal concept must be taken into account by all, including non-Muslim businessmen. The following measures present a winning approach for the halal business industry to gain competitive advantage in this promising and lucrative market.

Respect the beliefs of others: Non-Muslim food manufactures must be aware of and respect Muslims beliefs and principles regarding halal which include food, clothing, financial transaction and others. It is part of a belief system and moral code of conduct intergral to the daily living of Muslims. Therefore, it would be unwise and detrimental for the manufactures to purposely challenge the Muslims by introducing non-halal elements into the food, clothing and services claimed to be halal, since this

Table 1: Increase in number of Muslims

| Countries | Years | Values (%) |
|-------------------------------|-------|------------|
| North America | 1989 | 25.00 |
| Africa | 1989 | 2.15 |
| Asia | 1989 | 12.57 |
| Europe | 1989 | 142.35 |
| Latin America | 1989 | -4.73 |
| Australia and Oceania/Pacific | 1989 | 57.01 |

will erode the confidence of the consumers and consequently decrease the integrity of these products and pose a challenge to the growth of this market.

Understand the principles of halal: Global developments and trends today witness a growing tendency of people of different beliefs to get acquainted with the religious beliefs of others and with it comes the awareness of the importance of halal or Shariah-compliant products and services. Halal is being recognized as a new benchmark for safety, hygiene and quality assurance even by non-Muslim consumers (Muhammad *et al.*, 2009). In view of the fact that the concept of halal goes beyond consumption and is no longer purely a religious issue but encompasses business and trade, it is essential that the concept be fully understood and considered from a broader perspective, especially by the marketers of consumer goods be it for food or non-food product categories or services. Understanding what constitutes halal is important because as the consumers become more religious or halal-conscious, they will be looking for products or services that satisfy their religious needs. Hence, it is pertinent for manufactures to understand the concept and principles of halal and adopt stringent regulations and quality standards in producing halal products and services in order to capitalize on this market niche.

Stakeholders from every aspect of the halal industry should know all scope of halal products which encompass various stages from processing, packaging, storing, transporting and cooking, for example in the production of halal chicken. The halal aspect starts from the chicken feed which involves the chicken feed producers. It is their responsibility to prepare halal food ingredients for those in the chicken rearing business. The chicken feed must not come from a source which is unlawful in Islam such as pork, dead animal that are not properly slaughtered, drinks that are mixed with alcohol or something which is unclean and considered haram in Islam. From the packaging aspect, the package must be from halal material too. Its delivery system must also be clear and not doubtful. For example, the chicken feed ingredients must not be mixed with unlawful products during delivery.

Targeting Muslims as halal product consumer: The world Muslim population stands at 2.1 billion in 2012 and it is growing at a rate of 1.84%. Asia represents 32% of the world's Muslim population (<http://www.Muslimpopulation.com/World/>. Access on 1 May, 2013). The number of Muslims which stood at 1.1 billion in 1990 will increase to 2.2 billion in 2030, doubling it. It is

Table 2: Muslim population in South East Asian countries

| Countries | Total populations | Muslim (%) |
|--------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Brunei Darus Salam | 408,786 | 67.0 |
| Malaysia | 29,179,952 | 60.4 |
| Thailand | 67,091,089 | 4.6 |
| Singapore | 5,353,494 | 14.9 |
| Indonesia | 248,645,008 | 86.1 |

(http://www.30-days.net/Muslims/statistics/Muslim_countries/July 2012 estimates)

postulated that the world population will reach to >8 billion in 2030 and 26.4% represents Muslims. Table 2 illustrates the enormous potential of halal product consumers in South East Asia countries alone.

Based on Table 2, Muslims in South East Asia countries exceed 750 million and this presents an enormous market potential for halal product and services. In fact, all over the globe halal brands are gaining popularity. The Muslim population in China, for example is expected to increase from 23.3 million in 2010 to nearly 30 million in 2030. From 1990 until 2010, the number of Muslims in China increased to as many as 6.5 million, an increase of 38.4% and the population is expected to grow in the future. The size of the global halal market is huge and therefore, it is in the best interest of every player in the halal industry to tap into this market potential.

Prioritising the needs of halal consumers: Enhancing research and development to explore new products and improve the processes involved in the halal industry chain will encourage growth in this sector. Those involved in the halal industry should consistently search for innovative products and upgrade their technological capabilities in order to gain customers confidence and satisfaction. Understanding and prioritising customers needs is important in any business more so in the halal industry where the fulfillment of halal standard is stringent. Those involved in the halal industry must be aware that their Muslim customers are bound by the halal requirement in their everyday affairs and it is in their best interest to render their best service to their customers.

Therefore, it must be emphasized that the halalness of a product starts from the beginning of its preparation. In the production of halal chicken, for example the supply chain and the production process must be Shariah compliant at all stages. The halal aspect starts from the chick feed. This involves the chicken feed producers. It is their responsibility to prepare halal food ingredients for those in the chicken rearing business. The chicken feed must not come from a source which is unlawful in Islam such as being mixed with pork, dead animal that are not properly slaughtered, drinks that are mixed with alcohol or anything which is considered unpure from the perspective of Islam. From the packaging aspect, the package must be

made from halal material. Likewise, the transportation of the feed must also comply with the Shariah. The chicken feed, for example must not be stored along with unlawful products. Briefly stated, it is extremely important to ensure that throughout the supply chain, the halal requirements are fulfilled.

Enforcement of halal acts: The Malaysian government has enacted many acts to protect the interests of halal consumers. These acts regulate and monitor the halal industry. It is an offence by law to falsely label food, as halal or use any halal sign or marking on specific food products indicating that such food is halal when in fact it is not halal. Serious attention must be given to the implementation and enforcement of these acts by all parties involved in the halal industry. Qualified and committed enforcement personnels must be made available to ensure that the industry meets the strict halal requirements at all stages of the production and services. Heavy penalties must be imposed as deterrant to those who disobey these acts.

Provision of training to the officers of halal science: Adequate provision in terms of financial and facilities must be made available to train personnel of halal science. The training must, include not only the theoretical aspects of the concept but also the practical aspects of halal. They must be guided by experts in the field and the training centres equipped with the latest technologies. Placement for these trained officers in the various sectors involved with halal food production, food manufacturing, packaging and delivery will create a halal assurance system (Muhammad *et al.*, 2009).

Courses on main principle on halal: Educational institutions must be encouraged to incorporate courses on halal science in their curriculum to prepare a platform for a comprehensive and integrated knowledge of the halal concept. Halal sciences refers to scientific knowledge with multidisciplinary program which is based on halal concept or halal framework (Ahmad *et al.*, 2011).

The exposure to the halal concept based on modern scientific knowledge at an early age is beneficial not only

to the students but also to the industry. Awareness of the benefits of halal to the well-being of man will encourage the population to adhere to the principles of halal in all aspects of their lives. Understanding that halal finance product has manifold benefits without oppression in business promotes honest dealings in business transactions, the awareness on halal socializing can help avoid social ills and stem out babies born out of wedlock and consequently reduces abandonment of babies. By incorporating halal science in the curriculum, the halal industry will be better abled to manage their halal business with knowledgeable manpower.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the concept of halal in its broad and comprehensive meaning is an important step towards embracing life in accordance to Allah's decree. Its implementation is beneficial not only to man's personal well-being but it is also an economically strategic approach in the emerging business climate where halal products and services are gaining wide recognition for its safety and quality assurance. Malaysia and Malaysians stand to reap enormous potential returns spiritually and economically from this lucrative and highly sought after enterprise. Every effort must, therefore be taken to promote this healthy life style.

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