

## **2001- SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AND HALAL FOOD CONSUMPTION IN MALAYSIA: AN ANALYSIS FROM SHARIAH PERSPECTIVE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In the modern age of technology, social media influencers wield considerable influence over consumer behaviour, encompassing decisions regarding the consumption of halal food. While there has been a growing body of research on the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer behaviours and preferences, a noticeable gap exists in the context of halal food consumption within Malaysia. Existing studies often focus on the broader impact of influencers on consumer behaviours, but there is a dearth of research that delves deep into the alignment of these endorsements with the ethical and normative standards set by Shariah principles. Therefore, this study examines the influence of social media influencers on the demand for halal food products in Malaysia, scrutinizing their impact through the lens of Shariah principles. This study is qualitative and involves the use of secondary data sources along with the content analysis method. Consequently, this study reveals that there are ten Shariah elements which need to be considered by social media influencers on the demand for halal food products in Malaysia. From Shariah perspectives, social media influencers have a significant role in influencing halal food consumption in Malaysia. Their endorsements should be rooted in honesty, authenticity, ethical considerations, and alignment with Islamic principles. By promoting halal food products that adhere to Shariah values, influencers contribute to fostering a consumer culture that is not only halal but also morally and spiritually conscious.*

**Keywords:** *Social media influencers, Halal food consumption in Malaysia, Consumer behaviour in Islam, Shariah-compliant products*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The emergence of social media influencers has transformed the landscape of consumer behaviour, wielding a powerful influence over the choices individuals make, including their preferences in food consumption. In the digital age, these influencers have become pivotal figures, often revered for their ability to sway opinions and shape trends, and their impact extends significantly into the realm of food choices, especially in the context of halal food consumption in regions with significant Muslim populations, such as Malaysia. The meteoric rise of social media platforms - ranging from Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, to blogs and other online spaces - has given birth to a new breed of individuals known as influencers. These are charismatic personalities who amass large followings and wield substantial persuasive power due to their ability to engage and resonate with their audiences.

In a country like Malaysia, where the majority of the population adheres to Islamic beliefs, halal food isn't merely a dietary choice; it's deeply embedded in the cultural fabric and religious practices. Social media influencers have recognized this cultural significance and have actively engaged in promoting halal food experiences, contributing to the cultural conversation and influencing consumer behaviour in this specific domain. What sets these influencers apart is their perceived authenticity. Followers often consider them more trustworthy than traditional advertisements or marketing campaigns. As they showcase their dining experiences, review halal food products, and collaborate with halal-certified brands, their authenticity resonates with their audience, impacting their choices.

The power of these influencers lies in their ability to not only suggest but also shape the perception of what's trendy, popular, and desirable in the realm of halal food. They create a narrative around food experiences, fostering curiosity and aspiration among their followers, ultimately impacting their decisions when it comes to dining choices. Social media influencers have become integral in shaping not only consumer behaviour but also the cultural conversation around halal food in Malaysia. Their role in the promotion and endorsement of halal food experiences and products has a significant impact on consumer choices, aligning with both cultural norms and religious values.

Halal food is deeply tied to Malaysia's religious and cultural fabric. Its importance extends beyond dietary rules, reflecting spiritual beliefs and social practices. This food symbolizes purity and aligns with Islamic principles, fostering community bonds and shaping the country's culinary and economic landscape. Social media influencers magnify this impact globally. They reach diverse audiences, not only in Malaysia but worldwide, sharing experiences and shaping perceptions about halal food. Their trendsetting abilities and educational influence contribute to a more informed and conscientious global consumer base, creating a cross-cultural conversation about halal food. This intersection of cultural values and digital influence reflects the fusion of tradition and the modern era.

In the realm of halal food consumption in Malaysia, a noticeable gap exists in research that scrutinizes the alignment of social media endorsements with Shariah principles. While there's ample study on the influence of social media in shaping consumer behaviour, there's a striking scarcity of in-depth analysis specifically examining how these endorsements relate to the ethical and normative standards set by Shariah principles in the context of halal food consumption. Existing research predominantly explores the broader impact of social media

influencers on consumer behaviour and preferences but falls short in delving into the ethical considerations and alignment of these endorsements with the religious guidelines outlined by Shariah principles. This gap underscores the need for a focused examination of the influence of social media influencers on the demand for halal food products in Malaysia through the lens of Shariah principles. Moreover, this study also tries to evaluate the authenticity, ethical considerations and compliance of social media endorsements promoting halal food within the framework of Shariah principles in Malaysia.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Role of Social Media Influencers***

Influencer marketing shapes consumer choices by connecting brands with audiences through personalized advice and engaging content (Chopra et al., 2021). In Slovakia, it significantly influences consumer lifestyles and preferences, often proving more advantageous than traditional marketing (Nadanyiova et al., 2020). Fashion brands are particularly invested in establishing a robust social media presence, and digital influencers play a vital role in this evolution (Zak & Hasprova, 2020; Nurfadila & Riyanto, 2020; Antunes, 2022). Their impact on purchasing decisions is substantial, reshaping marketing strategies from traditional approaches to more dynamic and consumer-driven techniques (Grafstrom et al., 2018; Nurfadila & Riyanto, 2020; Pekovic et al., 2019).

In general, previous researches suggest that influencers have a significant impact on consumer behaviour and preferences. Chopra et al. (2021) found that attitude towards influencers and perceived behaviour control positively influenced consumer behaviour, while the influence of peers had no effect. Additionally, personal relevance, inspiration, and trust were found to have a positive impact on behaviour. Nadanyiova et al. (2020) supported these findings, showing that influencer marketing has a significant impact on consumer lifestyles, particularly among younger consumers. Zak & Hasprova (2020) highlighted the role of influencers as opinion leaders in the consumer decision-making process, with influencers having a strong impact on purchasing decisions, especially in the fashion industry. Nurfadila & Riyanto (2020) focused specifically on the fashion industry and found that influencers have a strong impact on consumer decision-making, leading to transformations in digital marketing strategies.

### ***Halal Food Consumption***

Various factors, including personal, social, psychological, and cultural aspects, significantly impacted over half of halal food consumption following the COVID-19 pandemic (Diana et al., 2023). Moral attitudes, habits, and religious identity, moderated by individualism, strongly influence favourable attitudes toward halal food within a host culture (Shahzad et al., 2021). Consumers' alignment with halal consumption significantly shapes their purchasing decisions (Said & Hassan, 2014). The theory of planned behaviour is useful in understanding the attitudes of Muslim travellers towards halal food in non-Muslim destinations (Hanafiah & Hamdan, 2021). There's a rising demand for clear labelling of halal products, both within and outside Muslim regions globally (Wilson, 2014). The specific slaughtering process is crucial for land animal-based halal meat (Qureshi et al., 2012). Halal food and drinks find acceptance not only among Muslim consumers but also among consumers of other religions (Ambali & Bakar,

2014). The Malaysian government introduced the halal food standard gazette in 2004, further solidifying regulations in this industry (Samori et al., 2014).

Collectively, previous research provides insights into the trends and significance of halal food consumption from various perspectives. Diana et al. (2023) highlights the increased awareness of halal food consumption among Muslims after the COVID-19 pandemic, with personal, social, psychological, and cultural factors influencing halal food consumption. Shahzad et al. (2021) focuses on the causation of halal food consumption in China, emphasizing the importance of moral attitude, habit, religious self-identity, and individualism in influencing halal food consumption. Said & Hassan (2014) explores the antecedents of consumer Halal Consumption Congruence (HaCC) in Malaysia, identifying country of origin, consumer ethnocentrism, and religiosity commitment as factors influencing Muslim consumer attitude and purchase intention towards Halal food products. Hanafiah & Hamdan (2021) examines the determinants of Muslim travellers' halal food consumption attitude and behavioural intentions, highlighting the role of religiosity, subjective norms, and perceived control behaviour in influencing halal food consumption while traveling to non-Muslim destinations. Overall, the researchers shed light on the cultural and religious significance of halal food consumption and the factors influencing its consumption trends.

### ***Shariah Principles***

Adhering to high-quality, Islamic dietary laws significantly correlates with promoting good health and fostering robust human development (Arif & Ahmad, 2011). National food standards should encompass religious considerations (Mohammadi & Farrokhi, 2013). Families are instrumental in instilling the concept of halal food from early childhood (Riaz et al., 2023). However, some halal business cases primarily focus on products and may overlook people's rights (Shahabuddin et al., 2020). The certification and standards for halal are rooted in Islamic law (Midori, 2021). Embracing halal food can lead to a healthy lifestyle, contributing positively to human growth and development (Sawari et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the clarity regarding where food safety regulations stand in relation to the requirements set by halal standards remains uncertain (Demirci et al., 2016).

Majority of previous research provides insights into the ethical and normative standards set by Shariah principles regarding food consumption and endorsements. Arif & Ahmad (2011) emphasizes the importance of implementing food quality standards based on the concept of *halalan tayyiban* (lawful and good) to ensure good quality human capital development. Mohammadi & Farrokhi (2013) discusses the various religious views on halal authentication food and the need for national and international halal food standards. Riaz et al. (2023) highlights the Islamic concept of halal food and the role of families in instilling this concept in early childhood. Shahabuddin et al. (2020) critiques the prevailing product-centric approach in halal business and suggests the need for a fundamental reorientation towards ethical and spiritual standards in Islamic business conduct. In summary, all of these researches emphasize the importance of adhering to Shariah principles in food consumption and endorsements, including the concepts of halal and *tayyib*, the need for clear standards, and the ethical and spiritual dimensions of halal business practices.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is qualitative and involves the use of secondary data sources along with the content analysis method to fulfil its objective.

### ***Research Design***

This research adopts a qualitative approach, focusing on understanding the intricacies and nuances of social media influencers' impact on halal food consumption in Malaysia through the lens of Shariah principles. The qualitative nature allows for a deeper exploration of underlying motivations, perceptions, and the subjective experiences of both influencers and consumers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It's well-suited for examining the alignment of social media endorsements with the ethical and normative standards of Shariah principles. This method involves delving into the qualitative aspects, such as the authenticity of endorsements, ethical considerations and the influencers' role in shaping perceptions about halal food.

### ***Research Data***

The study relies on secondary data sources, including existing research papers, publications, online content, and archived materials related to halal food, social media marketing, and Islamic principles. By leveraging previously conducted studies and available information, this research aims to synthesize and analyse the existing knowledge in this field. It involves a comprehensive review and analysis of data already published or available, allowing for a deeper understanding of the topic by integrating diverse perspectives and findings.

### ***Research Analysis***

Content analysis serves as the primary analytical tool in this study. This method involves systematically examining and interpreting the content found in various forms of media, such as social media posts, videos, articles, and online discussions related to halal food and endorsements by social media influencers. It aims to identify recurring themes, sentiments, and patterns present in the content (Berelsen, 1952). By applying content analysis, the study seeks to uncover insights into how social media endorsements align with Shariah principles concerning halal food. This method enables a systematic and structured approach to extract valuable insights and patterns from a vast array of online content.

By employing a qualitative approach, utilizing secondary data sources, and employing content analysis, this research endeavours to offer a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social media influencers and halal food consumption in Malaysia within the framework of Shariah principles. This methodological choice allows for a nuanced exploration of the ethical and religious considerations in influencer endorsements, providing insights into their impact on consumer choices and cultural perceptions.

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

Through in-depth analysis, ten Shariah elements have surfaced, illuminating how influencers influence the demand for halal food in Malaysia. These elements shed light on the specific ways influencers impact the market for halal food products, aligning with Islamic principles

and guiding consumer preferences. The Shariah elements detailed breakdown are as shown in Table 1:

**Table 1:** How Influencers Impact the Demand for Halal Food Products in Malaysia

Shariah Elements	Description
Authenticity and Transparency	Influencers adhering to Shariah elements prioritize authenticity in their endorsements, ensuring transparency in their promotion of halal food products. This authenticity builds trust and credibility among their audience.
Ethical Sourcing and Preparation	Influencers focus on endorsing products sourced and prepared ethically, ensuring compliance with halal principles. Their promotion emphasizes the importance of adhering to Islamic guidelines in the sourcing and preparation of halal food.
Religious Compliance	Influencers demonstrate a commitment to endorsing products that strictly comply with religious standards, emphasizing the importance of halal certification and verification in their content.
Health and Well-being	Emphasizing the health benefits and well-being aspects of consuming halal food, influencers advocate for its positive impact on health, aligning with both religious and health-conscious audiences.
Cultural Sensitivity	Acknowledging the cultural significance of halal food in Malaysia, influencers showcase respect for cultural values in their endorsements, ensuring their content resonates with local customs and traditions.
Education and Awareness	Influencers take on an educational role, informing their audience about the significance of halal food, Islamic dietary laws, and the ethical considerations related to consumption.
Community Building	Their endorsements foster a sense of community among their followers, creating a shared appreciation for halal food and its significance within the community.
Moral and Spiritual Impact	Influencers highlight the moral and spiritual significance of consuming halal food, connecting it with broader values and principles beyond mere dietary choices.
Responsiveness to Audience Queries	Influencers actively engage with their audience, addressing queries about halal food, and providing clarifications, which helps in shaping consumer perceptions and understanding.
Influence on Market Trends	Their impact goes beyond mere endorsement, influencing market trends and fostering a broader acceptance and demand for halal food products within Malaysia.

These Shariah elements, reveal how influencers exert a significant influence on the demand for halal food in Malaysia, aligning their endorsements with religious, ethical, and cultural values. Their role goes beyond mere promotion, shaping consumer behaviour and preferences while upholding the tenets of Shariah principles. In the realm of halal food consumption, influencers play a substantial role in shaping consumer behaviour and perceptions. Their impact goes beyond mere marketing; it extends to ethical and religious considerations as dictated by Shariah principles as mentioned in Table 2:

**Table 2:** How Influencers Exert a Significant Influence on The Demand for Halal Food in Malaysia

Aspect	Description
Influencers' Role	Influencers significantly shape consumer behaviour and perceptions in the halal food market, surpassing traditional marketing. They possess the ability to influence what's desirable and acceptable, impacting consumer choices and preferences within this domain.
Educational Function	Influencers take on an educational role, enlightening their audience about the importance of halal food, Islamic dietary laws, and ethical considerations tied to consumption. Their content fosters awareness and understanding among their followers, playing a critical role in disseminating information.
Alignment with Islamic Principles	Endorsements by influencers must prioritize honesty and authenticity. They are responsible for genuinely representing products that adhere to halal principles, ensuring their endorsements are credible and truthful. Additionally, influencers must consider and promote products meeting ethical standards outlined by

	Islamic principles, emphasizing sourcing, preparation methods, and community and environmental impact.
Upholding Shariah Principles	Influencers play a pivotal role in ensuring endorsements align with Shariah guidelines for halal food. Compliance with these guidelines is crucial, warranting that the products they endorse adhere to religious and ethical standards.
Cultural and Spiritual Relevance	Highlighting the cultural and spiritual significance of halal food is crucial. Influencers should connect dietary choices with broader values and principles, resonating on a deeper level with their audience, beyond mere consumption, aligning with cultural and spiritual significance.

The influencers' role is not merely commercial but extends to moral and spiritual consciousness. Their significant impact lies in shaping consumer behaviour while upholding and promoting ethical and religious guidelines dictated by Shariah principles. Aligning endorsements with honesty, authenticity, and ethical considerations, in line with Islamic principles, ensures a morally and spiritually conscious market impact.

Meanwhile, the implications of the influence of social media influencers on halal food demand and their role from a Shariah perspective on consumer behaviour and the influencer marketing landscape in Malaysia are profound as follow:

### ***Consumer Behaviour***

The influence of these influencers aligned with Shariah principles will likely prompt a notable shift in consumer preferences. Consumers may increasingly favour halal-certified products, viewing them as more trustworthy and in line with their ethical and religious considerations. The educational role of influencers in promoting halal food aligned with Shariah principles could significantly heighten awareness among consumers. This understanding may lead to more informed and conscientious decisions regarding halal food consumption. Consumers may increasingly trust influencer endorsements that align with ethical considerations outlined by Shariah principles. This alignment could lead to enhanced credibility and trust in these endorsements, influencing consumer choices.

### ***Influencer Marketing Landscape***

Influencers may face growing pressure to ensure their endorsements resonate with the ethical standards set by Shariah principles. This could lead to a transformation in the influencer marketing landscape, emphasizing honesty, authenticity, and ethical considerations in their promotions. Influencers might pivot towards more responsible marketing strategies, prioritizing transparency and ethical alignments in line with Islamic principles. This shift could enhance their credibility and trust among their audience. Influencers could gain more influence in shaping market trends and consumer behaviour. Their impact on the halal food market may become more pronounced, further steering purchasing decisions and market demands.

Finally, the implications of these findings hold the potential to significantly impact both consumer behaviour and the influencer marketing landscape in Malaysia, fostering a market that is more ethically conscious and informed, especially within the realm of halal food consumption.

## CONCLUSION

This study revealed the substantial influence of social media influencers on halal food consumption in Malaysia from a Shariah perspective. Key findings highlighted the pivotal role of influencers in shaping consumer behaviour and preferences. It emphasized the significance of their endorsements aligning with ethical and Shariah principles. This alignment impacted consumer choices, fostering heightened awareness and trust among the audience. The influencers' educational role emerged as a crucial factor in promoting understanding and adherence to halal practices, creating a more informed consumer base. In conclusion, the study underscores the critical importance of influencers aligning their endorsements with ethical and Shariah principles. Their role extends beyond mere marketing, impacting consumer behaviour and perceptions. Upholding honesty, authenticity, and ethical considerations in line with Islamic principles is vital in fostering a conscientious consumer culture in the realm of halal food consumption. This alignment not only influences market trends but also contributes to a morally and spiritually conscious consumer base, creating a significant impact in the landscape of halal food consumption in Malaysia.

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