Islamic Media Algorithms and Halal Perception in Malaysia

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

In today's algorithm-driven digital age, Islamic and Halal content is often promoted not for its authenticity or quality, but for its ability to attract engagement, frequently amplified by deceptive artificial intelligence (AI) systems. This article examines how viral trends and algorithms shape public perceptions of the Halal concept online, particularly through sensational, divisive, or misleading Islamic content. The study aims to assess Muslim users' responses to online Halal-related material and evaluate the influence of algorithmic curation on their perceptions and decisions. Using a qualitative approach such as content analysis, findings reveal that platform algorithms contribute to misinformation, confusion, and a distorted understanding of Halal principles. Furthermore, the absence of specific digital ethics guidelines for Islamic-Halal content enables misuse of the "halal" label. This paper proposes an Islamic media ethics framework grounded in *Maqasid Shariah* and digital media literacy to promote authentic, responsible, and positive online discourse. The study underscores the need for proactive governance and collaboration between media actors, policymakers, and Halal authorities to safeguard the integrity of Islamic content in the digital sphere.

INTRODUCTION

Digitalisation and Religion

The digital era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 has transformed how societies engage with knowledge, culture, and values, including religion. The rise of social media and algorithm-driven platforms enables information to spread widely and rapidly, offering both opportunities and challenges. Scholars highlight that social media creates a new "digital public sphere" where religious ideas and expressions are increasingly visible (Ab Latif et al., 2022). Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have become new arenas for religious practice and da'wah (Choirin et al., 2024). The emergence of so-called "digital clerics" has even reshaped perceptions of religious authority (Akbar, 2020). However, most existing

studies tend to emphasize communication and outreach, while less attention is given to how social media constructs, commodifies, and challenges Islamic values, particularly within the halal ecosystem.

Halal Issues in Digital Space: Malaysia Context

In Malaysia, these dynamics are especially evident in the halal sector. Viral debates surrounding halal compliance, such as the case of "rice wine" in a restaurant menu or recurring rumours about Cadbury products containing porcine DNA, illustrate the disruptive influence of digital media on consumer perceptions and trust. Although authorities such as JAKIM have clarified these issues, the power of virality and algorithmic amplification continues to spread misinformation (Atan & Zur Raffar; 2024). In response, awareness campaigns like *"Not Sure, Don't Share"* by MCMC and JAKIM attempt to mitigate the effects of fake news, yet consumer anxiety persists. These cases demonstrate that in the digital age, halal is no longer merely a matter of regulatory enforcement but also a battle of narratives and credibility in online spaces.

Halal Certification and Digital Marketing

The urgency of halal certification has intensified in the digital economy. Certification is not just an administrative process; it functions as a marker of producer integrity and consumer trust, particularly in e-commerce where physical inspection is absent (Saharani, 2025). At the same time, digital marketing opens new opportunities for halal businesses through targeted segmentation, interactive engagement, and cost efficiency, but also raises challenges of ensuring that Islamic principles are consistently and ethically communicated. Malaysia's halal industry already enjoys strong infrastructure, government recognition, and international credibility (Jamaluddin et al., 2019); (Imroatul, 2024). Beyond food, the sector now spans pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, logistics, and finance, reflecting both global demand and local expertise.

The interests of the halal product industry began to be given attention in the Industrial Master Plan II (PIP 2), 1966-2005, and given emphasis in the Third Country Agricultural Policy (DPN3), 1998-2010 (Imroatul, 2024). Furthermore, the halal industry has now expanded beyond the food sector to include pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, health products, toiletries and medical devices as well as service sector components such as logistics, marketing, print and electronic media, packaging, branding, and financing (Jamaluddin et al., 2019). This industry has the potential to be developed considering that Malaysia has easy infrastructure and expertise in processing technology. This is also supported by the government's commitment and recognition of the Malaysian halal logo at international level (Nor & Hassan; 2022) Awareness about the importance of halal and safe products is increasing in line with the increase in the number of Muslims in the world. Halal includes aspects of no fraud, no harmful poisons and so on. Fraud includes cheating on weight, quality, expiration date, content and brand (Mohd Farid, 2020). The concern for the attitude of Muslim users in this country will give birth to Muslims who are faithful and devout (Imroatul, 2024).

Although prior studies have examined digital media in religious communication and halal industry development, they have largely overlooked how algorithmic logics shape Muslim consumer trust and halal perception. Existing works remain descriptive, focusing on compliance and awareness, but fail to interrogate the discursive and ethical implications of halal content circulating in algorithm-driven platforms. This study addresses that gap by critically analysing the intersection of social media algorithms, halal integrity, and Islamic ethical principles, thereby extending both theoretical and practical understandings of halal in the digital age.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, structured according to the PRISMA framework to ensure transparency and replicability. The literature search was conducted in Google Scholar, focusing on journal articles published between 2019 and 2025, to reflect recent developments in digital platforms. Keywords such as *"halal products," "social media influence," "consumer knowledge," "purchasing decisions,"* and *"Malaysia"* were applied. The initial search produced approximately 8,000 records. After removing duplicates and applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, 100 articles were shortlisted for screening, 50 underwent full-text review, and 23 studies were retained for final analysis. The inclusion criteria comprised peer-reviewed journal articles in English or Malay that examined the intersection of social media, halal awareness, and consumer purchasing behavior in the Malaysian or broader Muslim context. Studies were excluded if they were conference papers, non-scholarly sources, or focused exclusively on technical certification issues without addressing consumer or communication aspects. The selected studies were thematically analysed and categorized into three domains: (i) the influence of social media on halal consumer behavior, (ii) consumer knowledge and awareness of halal products, and (iii) the impact of halal branding and certification on purchasing decisions.

RESULT / DISCUSSION

Role of Social Media in Halal Industry

In Malaysia, Multi-Level Marketing (referred to as MLM) is one of the rapid growing industries. However, the conventional practice of marketing is doubted to be fair to the people. Therefore, the Islamic principle stresses justice should be implemented to overcome the injustice practices in this field (Yaakob et al., 2020). In this digital era, businesses are required not only to utilize digital media as a promotional tool but also to build consumer trust and loyalty through a valuable and ethical approach. The analysis of the various literature reviewed shows that digitalization offers significant opportunities for expanding the reach of the halal market, while simultaneously challenging businesses to maintain the integrity of Islamic values in their marketing practices (Saharani, 2025). Shariah Compliant Marketing should be implemented in Halal Industry based on Shariah guidelines (Yaakob et al., 2020).

Digital platforms offer businesses and preachers alike a channel to extend outreach but also raise ethical and regulatory concerns. Shariah-compliant marketing, when embedded with halal certification, serves as a differentiation factor in an increasingly competitive digital market (Febrian., 2024). The integration of halal certification into digital marketing strengthens consumer trust, especially when reinforced by content strategies that highlight transparency, ethical values, and Islamic narratives (Saharani, 2025).

Halal Non-Compliance Issues vs Viral Narratives

Content plays a crucial role in differentiating halal marketing campaigns from conventional marketing. In the highly visual and rapidly changing digital era, innovation in content and the use of religious narratives are key factors for success. Saharani (2025) emphasized that, from a *Maqasid Shariah* perspective, halal marketing content is not merely intended to attract buyers but also serves as a means of education, ethics, and transformation. Narratives such as halal and thoyyib, blessed product, and buying while preaching serve as powerful symbols that strengthen the halal brand image in the eyes of consumers. The use of video content, testimonials from Muslim consumers, documentation of the production process, and collaboration with sharia influencers are effective strategies for building public trust. Furthermore, Febrian (2024) added that the application of information technology in Islamic banking has demonstrated similar success, combining digital system transparency and spiritual values to reach consumers accustomed to digital technology (Saharani, 2025).

Empirical evidence suggests that viral non-compliance cases, such as Cadbury chocolates and rice wine chicken rice erode consumer confidence because misinformation often spreads faster than corrective statements. The amplification of these cases by social media algorithms demonstrates that halal trust is no longer mediated only by religious authorities but also by the virality of digital discourse. Table 1 below summarises key Malaysian halal controversies, highlighting their triggers, digital spread, and institutional responses.

Table 1. Viral Halal Issues in Malaysia

Cases	Trigger	Platform Amplification	Institutional Response	Outcome
Cadbury DNA (2014 & 2020)	Alleged pig DNA in chocolate	Facebook, WhatsApp	JAKIM lab tests & clarification	Issue re-emerged despite solution
Rice Wine in Chicken Rice (2023)	Ingredient with 'wine' in name	TikTok, Instagram	Media clarification & halal authority inspection	Consumer confusion, trust deficit

Source: Astro Awani (2014); Risalah USIM (2023); Harian Metro (2023)

Fig. 1. Viral news on the alleged pig DNA in chocolate and content on TikTok app about the use of rice wine in claypot chicken rice

Source: Facebook Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia (3 June 2014); The Straits Times (11 September 2023)

Algorithmic Influence and *Maqasid Syariah*

Algorithms privilege speed, popularity, and engagement values that often conflict with the ethical principles of Islam. Viral circulation of halal-related misinformation illustrates the risk of consumers making decisions based on algorithmic visibility rather than verified Shariah-compliant knowledge. This raises critical questions of digital ethics: how can halal authorities, businesses, and consumers navigate platforms that structurally favour controversy and virality? From a *Maqasid Shariah* perspective, safeguarding religion (*hifz al-din*) and protecting consumers from harm (*hifz al-nafs* and *hifz al-mal*) require not only robust certification but also algorithm-aware communication strategies (Rosidi et al., 2022).

Research consistently highlights the need for halal awareness through education and transparent disclosure of production processes (Shamsuddin, 2024). However, education must adapt to algorithmic

realities by leveraging engaging content formats such as short videos, influencer partnerships, and behind-the-scenes production transparency that simultaneously inform and counter misinformation. In this sense, halal marketing should serve a dual role: promoting products and educating consumers as part of a wider ethical commitment (Shamsuddin, 2024).

Consumer Education and Trust Building

In general, many studies detailing halal awareness have been conducted extensively. Most of them revolve around the importance of halal awareness to consumers where it involves Sharia law. Because of that, it has a great influence on a buyer's decision, whether it is a Muslim or a non-Muslim. Therefore, an important element in ensuring that consumers have knowledge about this matter is exposure to education, both through social media and face-to-face learning (Rusli et al., 2022); (Zailan & Noordin; 2025). If a consumer understands this issue, at least they will be spared from assuming that all products on the market are 100% halal without first checking the authenticity of the halal certificate (Omar & Haizat; 2024). Therefore, the government and certification bodies such as JAKIM in Malaysia must play a role in providing correct data to manufacturers so that they can ensure that their products and goods comply with halal standards in the market. This is important to ensure the accuracy of consumer choices and are accurate with their religious beliefs, especially Islam (Amalia & Rozza; 2022).

Following the increasing knowledge and awareness of consumers, several article studies have focused on the importance of knowledge about halal products among consumers. These include awareness of the details of the products purchased such as the production process, Shariah compliance in the entire supply chain and halal certificates. If this matter is not disclosed from the beginning, it will result in confusion in the concept of halal, especially in the chapter of faith (Taufiq, 2024). According to Amin & Lahaji (2021), the concept of halal is not only about halal products, but also revolves around cleanliness, quality, safety and health. Through this awareness, a consumer can buy wisely and more ethically. Because many consumers, both Muslim and non-Muslim, are still not aware of this concept, educational and social media initiatives should be highlighted. This also centers on safety and health issues due to the consumption of unsafe food and products (Omar & Haizat; 2024).

Among other factors, non-compliance with halal food is also caused by the spread of trending non-halal food on social media. The rapid use of social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and the most recent is TikTok, making the world borderless, including the spread of non-halal food. According to Rahim et al., (2021), the Malay community has experienced an evolution from local tastes to international ones and is more open to trying foreign food from time to time. There are users who are willing to queue up long to enjoy food that is viral on social media without considering the halal issue that has been outlined in Islam. This shows that the factor of food spread on social media makes Muslim consumers ignore the halal status of food and consume it without concern because the Muslim community itself is spreading it (Rusli et al., 2022). This increases the belief of Muslim consumers that the food can be consumed without checking its halal status.

Maqasid Syariah-Based Principles

Table 2. The five principles of *Maqasid Syariah* offer a moral foundation for evaluating online halal content

Maqasid Principle	Meaning	Application in Media
Protecting religion (*Hifz al-Din*)	Preserve Islamic teachings	Avoid false claims or misuse of Islamic symbols in product promotions
Protecting the intellect (*Hifz al-'Aql*)	Encourage rational thinking	Check facts before sharing, avoid spreading misleading information

Protecting life (*Hifz al-Nafs*)	Safeguard human well-being	Promote verified halal products to protect health and safety
Protecting wealth (*Hifz al-Mal*)	Prevent financial harm	Ensure transparency in halal certification and avoid exploitation
Protecting lineage (*Hifz al-Nasl*)	Respect values and identity	Avoid content that contradicts Islamic values or confuses audiences

Such framework is underpinned by five central aims of the Islamic law (*Maqasid Syariah*) which may be taken all together to serve as a framework of ethics in production, dissemination and consumption of media content touching on halal products. *Hifz al-Din*, or protection of religion, is the first goal where communicators are required to promote the Islamic culture but not at the expense of distortion of religious fatwas and making profit by using the Islamic sentiments. The second goal, *Hifz al-'Aql* (protection of intellect) certifies rational thinking and thoughtful choices and thus necessitates minimizing bogus statements and topical information that can give false indications to the consumer. *Hifz al-Nafs* (protection of life) is the third objective, and its purpose is to address the safety and healthy lifestyle of people in the context of publicity of food and pharmaceutical products and provides a guarantee that, in case such claims are made as halal, they are true, and they have been checked. The fourth aim, *Hifz al-Mal* (preservation of wealth), promotes openness in transactions and promotes against acts perpetrations of fraudulent activities like the labelling of products labeled as halal on falsified claims that can win Muslim consumers. The last of the objectives, *Hifz al-Nasl* (protection of lineage), promotes the conservancy of culture and religion particularly to the younger generation by avoiding contents that can trivialise or misrepresent the Islamic principles. In sum, these aims define the limits of what is ethically permissible when it comes to interaction with the content that is related to halal in the virtual realm.

Digital Media Literacy Components

Table 3. Digital media literacy skills help users engage with online content wisely

Literacy element	Role in Halal Media Use
Verification	Cross-check halal status using official sources (e.g., JAKIM)
Critical Thinking	Question and evaluate claims, especially viral or trending issues
Awareness of Platform Bias	Recognize how algorithms may amplify unverified or sensational content
Responsible Sharing	Avoid reposting content that is unverified or emotionally manipulative

Based on Table 3, Media literacy should be regarded as an essential code of ethics to navigate the modern informational environment, and especially the social-media complex where halal-related texts are systematically shared. Such literacy enables users to critically and intelligently receive and distribute information based on the ability to ascertain the validity of sources and reliability of source content. Verification is one of the key aspects of such a framework: it encourages users to confirm the halal certification status of the product by using the definite authority like JAKIM as opposed to viral or crowd-sourced information. In parallel to this, critical thinking will drive users to question the purpose, veracity, and consequences of messages relating to halal and this is especially online via influencers or sponsored content. A concept of the platform bias, which means that algorithmic platforms are now focusing on popular traffic, rather than on empirical truth, also prepares the users to realize that popular content does not always mean it is true or beneficial. Lastly, responsible sharing encourages users to share content in a mindful way and with ethical intent. One must also avoid the temptation to spread materials that are

provocative or strongly emotional without the supporting facts in order to reduce the chances of misinformation or religious uncertainty. These digital competencies in sum enable the various stakeholders of consumers, influencers, businesses, and policymakers to preserve integrity and transparency in the online halal communication.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the critical role of social media in shaping consumer knowledge and purchasing decisions regarding halal products in Malaysia. Beyond serving as an information channel, social media has emerged as a powerful driver of consumer trust, brand loyalty, and religious assurance. The novelty of this study lies in linking algorithm-driven content dissemination with consumer attitudes towards halal products, highlighting the dual potential of social media to strengthen awareness while simultaneously exposing consumers to risks of misinformation and non-compliance. For the halal industry, the findings point to the urgency of adopting transparent, ethical, and Shariah-compliant digital marketing strategies that go beyond promotion to include consumer education. Industry players must strategically leverage religious narratives, credible influencers, and content authenticity to enhance consumer trust. Policymakers, particularly JAKIM and MCMC, are urged to reinforce regulatory frameworks, ensuring that halal certification is not only technically verified but also digitally safeguarded against misinformation. Future research should explore the algorithmic mechanisms that amplify halal-related content, the role of artificial intelligence in monitoring compliance, and comparative studies across different Muslim-majority and minority contexts. By addressing these gaps, scholars and practitioners can develop an integrated framework that strengthens halal integrity in the digital economy, ensuring that halal consumption continues to serve both material and spiritual well-being.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Nur Liana Izzaty Rosli carried out the research, wrote and revised the article. Irhamuddin Ibrahim designed the research, supervised research progress. Mohammad Aizat Jamaludin anchored the review, revisions and approved the article submission.

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