



# ISLAMIC MORAL ECONOMY IN TRANSITION: THE SHIFT FROM RELIGIOUS ETHICS TO MARKET MORALITY IN INDONESIA'S HALAL INDUSTRY

Subambang Harsono<sup>1</sup>, Zuhri M. Nawawi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

The halal lifestyle phenomenon in Indonesia reflects social, cultural, economic, and spiritual shifts within urban Muslim communities. This study analyzes how pious values are commodified and consumed within capitalist modernity. Using an interpretive qualitative approach with cultural ethnography, the study includes interviews, participant observation, and digital discourse analysis of halal industry actors, middle-class Muslim consumers, and the hijrah community in Medan, Deli Serdang, and Binjai. Reflexive thematic analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) uncover the dynamics of meaning, symbols, and ideology in halal consumption. The findings reveal three key points: (1) the commodification of piety as an economic asset; (2) performative Muslim identity through digital media; and (3) the shift from Islamic moral economy to moral capitalism. This study offers an interdisciplinary perspective on halal lifestyle as both a consumption practice and an ideological discourse that negotiates spirituality, identity, and capitalism, contributing to the development of Islamic consumer culture and ethical business practices.

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## Corresponding Author:

Subambang Harsono  
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia  
Email: [subambangharsono@gmail.com](mailto:subambangharsono@gmail.com)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of the halal lifestyle has experienced rapid development and has become one of the most influential global trends among the Muslim community worldwide. The concept of halal, which initially stemmed from Islamic legal norms, is now experiencing an expansion of meaning, encompassing religious, social, cultural, and economic dimensions (Fischer, 2011; Ö. Sandikci & Ger, 2010). The halal label is no longer merely a marker of religious law compliance, but has transformed into a symbol of social status, an expression of moral identity, and an economic strategy in an increasingly competitive global market (Fountain, 2012; Jafari, 2018).

In Indonesia, this transformation appears prominent and multidimensional. As the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia has become a kind of social laboratory for the development of the halal industry, which encompasses various sectors such as food, cosmetics, fashion, tourism, and Islamic finance (Fealy & White, 2008). The halal industry's growth, exceeding 10% per year, indicates both an increase in religious awareness and a shift in the consumption patterns of the Muslim middle class (Hasan, 2009). However, behind the economic euphoria lies a deeper cultural dimension:

halal consumption in Indonesia is not merely a consumption practice, but also a mechanism for negotiating piety and identity amidst secular modernity (Howell, 2005).

The dynamic interaction between cultural and religious dimensions plays a significant role in shaping halal consumption patterns in Indonesia. The continuously growing halal sector reflects not only economic enthusiasm but also the expression of spiritual values and religious identity inherent in modern society, which is dominated by secularization. In this context, halal consumption serves a dual function: fulfilling religious obligations and acting as a symbol of cultural identity that demonstrates piety in public space.

Halal consumption in Indonesia is deeply rooted in religious beliefs and spiritual awareness. Various studies indicate that religious self-identity, moral obligations, and positive attitudes are determining factors in shaping the intention to consume halal products (Vanany et al., 2020). Although the fatwa of the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) is not legally binding, it has a significant influence in guiding consumer behavior, affirming that halal practices are an intrinsic part of religious obligations, and strengthening inclusivity within Islamic beliefs (Hardiyanto et al., 2024).

Personal values that drive halal consumption also go beyond mere religious compliance. Security, tradition, and a commitment to virtue and achievement are the main motivators for consumers, confirming that halal consumption reflects aspirations toward a safe and virtuous future (Arsil et al., 2018). Thus, halal products gain appeal not only as a symbol of piety, but also as a manifestation of the moral and social goals of modern Muslim society.

For Indonesia's younger generations, including Millennials and Generation Z, halal products have a meaning closely tied to modern lifestyles. Attitudes, subjective norms, and social expectations have been proven to significantly influence purchase intention (Amalia et al., 2020; Pradana et al., 2024). Although Islamic branding is not always the primary factor in purchasing decisions in Muslim-majority societies, awareness and knowledge of halal principles remain key elements in determining consumer behavior (Febriandika et al., 2023). This indicates that the halal lifestyle in Indonesia has become ingrained as a social habit and everyday cultural practice, rather than merely a formal religious expression.

The halal label in the Indonesian context has strong symbolic value. Its presence increases consumer trust and intention to purchase products, while also connecting consumption behavior with spiritual and cultural expectations (Millatina et al., 2022). Thus, the halal industry in Indonesia not only reflects economic dynamics but also illustrates the complex negotiation between belief, identity, and modernity, where halal consumption serves as a form of religious compliance and an expression of Muslim identity in a secular society.

From an anthropological and cultural sociological perspective, a halal lifestyle can be understood as a manifestation of the concept of cultural distinction as explained by Bourdieu (1984), namely when consumption practices become an arena for identity formation and social class differentiation (Bourdieu, 2018; Murdock, 2010). In this context, halal consumption serves as a symbol of piety that is constructed and exchanged thru market mechanisms and media discourse (Ö. Sandikci & Ger, 2010). This phenomenon aligns with the idea of the commodification of piety (Fischer, 2011), which is the process by which religious values and spirituality are produced and consumed as economic commodities.

The commodification of piety in Indonesia is evident in various industrial sectors, such as Muslim fashion and halal tourism. Studies show that purchasing decisions are not solely determined by the level of religiosity, but also by factors such as social media marketing and Islamic branding strategies, indicating that religious symbols have been integrated with commercial trends and modern lifestyles (Mutmainah & Romadhon, 2023). In fact, social media also plays a role in shaping positive perceptions of halal products, including in the context of halal tourism in non-Islamic countries (Millatina et al., 2022; Xiong & Chia, 2024).

Furthermore, the commodification of religious values also extends to the financial and tourism sectors, where halal certification and regulation have become the primary means of meeting the demands of consumers who are increasingly aware of ethical and spiritual aspects (Rahman et al., 2024). Thus, the halal lifestyle in Indonesia demonstrates how religious values can serve a dual function as a means of social distinction and economic commodity, with marketing and certification playing a crucial role in shaping perceptions and consumption practices among urban Muslim communities.

Nevertheless, there is a significant gap in the literature. Most international research on the halal lifestyle still focuses on the marketing dimensions and consumer behavior of Muslims in the Middle East and South Asia (Ali et al., 2018; Wilson, 2014). In-depth studies that discuss the Indonesian context, particularly thru an interdisciplinary approach combining cultural anthropology, consumer sociology, and Islamic moral economics, are still limited. Previous studies have focused more on halal within an economic and certification framework, rather than as a social practice representing the performativity of piety.

Research in Indonesia largely highlights the determinants of halal consumption behavior using the extended theory of planned behavior (Vanany et al., 2020), the influence of religiosity and digital content

on the purchasing behavior of young generations (Arifin et al., 2023), and personal values such as safety, tradition, and virtue in consumption decisions (Arsil et al., 2018). Meanwhile, another study highlighted the ethical and sustainability dimensions within the halal meat industry (Rahman et al., 2024) as well as the challenges of halal certification awareness in various regions of Indonesia (Prabowo et al., 2015). All these findings confirm the need for an interdisciplinary approach to understanding halal lifestyles as a social practice involving the interaction between moral, cultural, and economic values.

The novelty of this research lies in its approach, which integrates cultural analysis and moral economy to understand how piety is consumed in urban Muslim Indonesian society. Unlike previous studies that focused on the normative aspects of halal or consumer behavior, this research highlights halal as a cultural phenomenon and economic moral that reflects the dialectic between spirituality and capitalism (Chapra, 2008; Tripp, 2006). This approach is also in line with the discourse of moral economy, which examines how consumption practices are fraught with ethical and spiritual dilemmas in the context of modernity (O. Sandikci, 2021).

Additionally, cultural political economy theory asserts that economic activity cannot be separated from the cultural context and moral values that surround it. In this case, halal consumption in Indonesia demonstrates a hybridity between religious ethics and modern economic practices (Amin & Thrift, 2007). Therefore, this study offers both conceptual and empirical contributions to the discourse on Islamic consumer culture, highlighting how Islam navigates the logic of the modern market while maintaining its ethical values.

The urgency of this research is driven by the fact that the halal economy has become one of the main pillars of national development and Indonesia's global cultural identity. The Indonesian government, thru the 2024 National Sharia Economic Masterplan, aims to establish Indonesia's strategic position as a global halal industry hub. However, without a critical understanding of the socio-cultural dimensions of halal consumption, there is a risk that the religious spirit that is supposed to be ethical will be trapped in market mechanisms that give rise to the symbolism of false piety (Bauman, 2007; Mussell, 2009). Therefore, understanding how piety is consumed becomes crucial for formulating policy directions and halal industry practices based on authentic Islamic moral values.

Based on this background, this study aims to: (1) analyze how halal culture in Indonesia represents piety thru consumption practices; (2) explain how modern Muslim identity is constructed and negotiated thru halal symbols and commodities; and (3) explore how Islamic moral economy interacts with the logic of capitalism in shaping the dynamics of halal lifestyles in modern Indonesia. Thus, this research seeks to answer the central question: how is "piety" articulated, commodified, and consumed within the cultural and moral economic context of contemporary Indonesian Muslim society?

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs an interpretive qualitative approach with a cultural ethnographic framework to understand the social meaning behind halal consumption practices in the lives of urban Muslim communities in Indonesia. This approach is suitable for examining phenomena rooted in symbols, values, and social practices that cannot be measured quantitatively (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethnography was chosen to observe the daily practices and discourses that shape halal culture, as well as how Islamic values are manifested in consumption practices within the context of the modern moral economy (Fischer, 2011; Sandikci & Ger, 2010).

This research focuses on urban Muslims in Indonesia, specifically in Medan, Deli Serdang, and Binjai, which are centers of growth for the Muslim middle class and the halal industry. A total of 20 key informants were selected thru purposive sampling, consisting of halal industry players, middle-class Muslim consumers, and halal community and hijrah activists. Interviews were conducted for 60–90 minutes using a semi-structured guide. Data were analyzed using NVivo 12 thru five stages of thematic analysis (Byrne, 2022; Dalkin et al., 2021).

Data was collected thru three techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and analysis of digital documents and social media. Participant observation was used to understand halal practices in daily life, while interviews explored informants' subjective narratives about piety and halal consumption. Document and social media analysis followed digital ethnography methods to trace public discourse on halal lifestyles (Pink et al., 2016).

Data were analyzed using a reflexive thematic analysis approach and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to understand the social meanings and ideologies embedded in halal practices. Thematic analysis identified three main themes: the commodification of piety, performative Muslim identity, and Islamic moral

capitalism. CDA is used to explore the meaning behind the halal discourse operating within the framework of ideology and power relations in Indonesian urban Muslim society.

### 3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The research findings indicate that the halal lifestyle phenomenon in Indonesia not only represents religious consumption patterns but also reflects a complex process of social, cultural, and economic transformation. Piety, identity, and the moral economy are mutually constitutive within a symbolic ecosystem that links spirituality with modern capitalism. Thru critical discourse analysis and thematic reflection on field data, it was found that halal consumption practices operate as a symbolic arena where Islamic values are negotiated, reproduced, and adapted to the logic of the contemporary market. From the results of the thematic analysis, three major themes emerged as the main findings, namely: (1) the commodification of piety and religious esthetics, (2) performative Muslim identity and digital religiosity, and (3) the transformation of Islamic moral economy into moral capitalism. The three interact to form what can be called the social ecology of the consumption of piety.

#### Commodification of Religious Piety and Esthetics

The results of this study indicate that the phenomenon of halal lifestyle in Indonesia is not merely a representation of religious consumption patterns, but also reflects a deeper transformation within the social, cultural, and economic context. The commodification of piety is one of the most dominant themes in the findings of this study, where piety, previously seen as a pure religious value, has now transformed into a tradable commodity. This is evident in various sectors, particularly in the Muslim fashion, cosmetics, food, and other halal products industries, where these products not only meet religious standards but also contain esthetic values and religious symbolism.

The practice of halal consumption is now seen not only as an effort to fulfill religious obligations, but also as part of a lifestyle and a symbol of moral identity in urban Muslim communities. Many Muslim fashion brands, for example, market their products with narratives that combine piety and Islamic lifestyles, such as by using slogans like "dress for blessings" or "blessed feeling." This kind of promotion not only emphasizes compliance with Sharia but also attempts to blend piety with consumer esthetics, making it more appealing to modern consumers who are also seeking spiritual values in their consumption choices (Ahmadi et al., 2022; Budak, 2018).

However, this phenomenon of commodification of piety is not only occurring in the realm of consumption, but is also influencing political and social dynamics. Piety is often exploited as a tool to gain electoral advantage in various political contests, where politicians and certain groups use religious symbols to strengthen their position in the eyes of voters (Karman et al., 2024). Thus, piety not only serves as a spiritual symbol but also as an instrument for achieving higher social and political mobility. However, criticism of this commodification has also emerged, stating that commercialized piety can lead to social fragmentation and widen economic disparities, ultimately contradicting the principles of justice and equality taught in Islam (Millie & Hosen, 2024).

This phenomenon aligns with the concept of the aestheticization of piety proposed by Sandikci & Ger (2010), which describes how piety is combined with the esthetics of consumption, creating a new form of piety that can be marketed in the global market. From this perspective, piety is no longer seen solely as a practice of pure worship, but has become symbolic capital that can be consumed by urban Muslim audiences, creating a new identity formed from the combination of piety and modern consumption (Bourdieu, 1986; Fischer, 2011).

#### Performative Muslim Identity and Digital Religiosity

Modern Muslim identity in Indonesia, especially among the younger generation, is now increasingly performative and influenced by the digital world. This phenomenon shows that piety is now not only practiced in places of worship or within families, but is also openly displayed thru social media. The use of social media as a space to showcase Muslim identity, such as sharing photos of halal food, modest Muslim fashion, and other religious activities, confirms that halal consumption now also serves as a way to articulate moral identity in the public sphere, which is increasingly connected thru digital technology (Hasan, 2009; Millie & Baulch, 2024).

In this digital age, the representation of piety is no longer limited to personal religious practice, but has become part of a public expression displayed on social media. For example, reports from the middle-class youth show them displaying their halal lifestyles thru uploads about halal food, modest fashion, and other religious activities. This practice demonstrates how religious identity now plays a role in self-representation connected to social recognition and public visibility (Rakhmani, 2024; Noor, 2015).

The phenomenon of the visibility of piety occurring in the digital world is leading to a new concept of Muslim identity. Piety, which used to be more personal and intimate, is now increasingly visible thru self-representation on social media. This creates new space for individuals to openly display their religious identities, gain social recognition, and participate in online communities (Sandıkcı, 2018). Social media has now become an arena for individuals to showcase their piety in a more mediated and performative way, which is not only related to spirituality but also to achieving social status in the virtual world.

This phenomenon also shows that Muslim identity is now shaped thru a mediative process, where piety is not only judged by one's actions, but also by how it is displayed in digital public space. Digital platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, have become spaces where expressions of faith can be openly seen, shared, and displayed, creating digital communities based on performative religious identity. In this case, piety is not only a spiritual practice but also a social strategy aimed at gaining recognition and status in an increasingly interconnected global society (Hasan, 2009).

### **The Transformation of Islamic Moral Economy into Moral Capitalism**

Significant shifts are also evident in the transformation of the Islamic moral economy, which is increasingly moving toward moral capitalism. In this study, it was found that the principles of Islamic ethics are increasingly internalized in modern economic practices, resulting in a system that combines religious values with capitalist logic. The halal economy in Indonesia demonstrates how the halal industry not only offers products that comply with Islamic law but also positions itself as a legitimate and potentially profitable business strategy.

This process is evident in the use of slogans such as "sharia business for blessings" or "shop halal, maximize rewards," which serve not only as advertisements but also as moral legitimization for economic activities. In this context, halal businesses strive to blend spiritual orientation with capitalistic efficiency in contemporary market practices (Tripp, 2006). Halal business is not only considered a means to meet spiritual needs, but also a system designed to generate profit while upholding Islamic ethical values.

This phenomenon describes the emergence of the concept of a "spiritual economy," where economic activities are seen as a form of worship with religious value. This reflects how Islamic principles are internalized in the business and financial world, which seeks to create a system that combines productivity and spirituality. Thus, an economic system rooted in Islamic values is now increasingly developing in Indonesia, creating a new form of moral capitalism based on Islamic spiritual values (Rudnyckyj, 2009).

However, this shift is not without its challenges, particularly regarding how Islamic principles can be maintained amidst the dynamics of modern capitalism, which highly prioritizes efficiency and profit. Some critics argue that this transformation has the potential to commodify the spiritual values of Islam, making them more of a market symbol that can be consumed by global society (Millie & Hosen, 2024). Therefore, there needs to be ongoing dialog between halal industry players, religious scholars, and academics to maintain a balance between spiritual and economic goals in halal practices in Indonesia.

### **The Social Ecology of Consuming Piety**

The three main themes found in this study – the commodification of piety, performative Muslim identity, and moral capitalism – form an interconnected and interacting social ecology within Indonesian urban Muslim society. This social ecology describes how piety, once confined to the ritual sphere, is now articulated in consumption, lifestyle, and economic activities grounded in Islamic values.

The commodification of piety has created space where religious symbols can be marketed and consumed by the public, forming a consumption ecosystem that includes a variety of halal products and Islamic lifestyles. Performative Muslim identity, which is increasingly visible in the digital world, illustrates how piety is not only practiced in daily life but also displayed in digital public spaces. Meanwhile, moral capitalism demonstrates how Islamic values are integrated into the modern economic system, resulting in an economic system based on the principles of Islamic ethics.

This social ecology shows that piety is not only part of worship practices, but also serves as a symbol of social status and cultural identity that interacts with the logic of modern capitalism. Within this framework, piety in Indonesia has undergone a complex transformation, where Islamic spiritual values have adapted to the demands of the global market without losing their deep religious meaning.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

This research concludes that the halal lifestyle phenomenon in Indonesia is not merely a religious consumption practice, but a representation of a complex process of social, cultural, economic, and spiritual transformation. Piety in the context of Indonesian urban Muslim society has shifted to become a symbolic

practice negotiated thru market mechanisms and media discourse. Thus, halal consumption serves as an arena for interaction between Islamic values, middle-class identity, and the logic of global capitalism.

Three key findings support this conclusion: (1) the commodification of religious piety and aesthetics, which shows how spiritual values are materialized into consumer products; (2) performative Muslim identity and digital religiosity, which confirms that piety is now mediated by technology and social media as a means of moral representation; and (3) the transformation of Islamic moral economy into moral capitalism, which demonstrates the negotiation between Islamic ethics and the logic of the neoliberal market. Conceptually, these findings lead to the formulation of Islamic discourse as market morality, where religious values operate as moral legitimacy for the modern economic system.

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