Foodie Culture, Muslim Identity, and the Rise of Halal through Media

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Introduction

Food is a critical substance that sustains life and facilitates social interactions. Because it is so integral to life, food has shaped peoples and cultures. For example, curry, in many people’s minds, immediately evokes a connection to India and ramen often signals a relationship to Japan. This shows that people have preconceived notions of the connection between food and certain cultures. Culture, as I invoke the term in this thesis, refers to the shared ideals, concepts, symbols, and practices through which groups imagine and institute a cohesive ‘web of significance’ that gives shape to a collective identity. Religion is a dimension of human culture. Religions shape group identities through practices rooted in beliefs in the existence of divine or superhuman forces. Typically, religious practices presume and institute a relationship and a corresponding set of moral obligations between individuals and their groups and the divine powers. These relationships and obligations bind a group and so distinguish it from other groups who do not share or who are excluded from these obligations. Often, these obligations can focus on food practices. Muslims, for example, fast during Ramadan and avoid certain types of food as expressions of their perceived obligations to God. These practices differentiate Muslims from other groups.


Food by itself, however, can become the basis for a shared sense of corporate existence. A common culinary appreciation that emerges through the cultivation of a knowledge of different foods and food preparation practices can generate a gourmand subculture. Such cultures can integrate individuals from diverse social backgrounds. Contemporary social media has facilitated this development, globally. In this thesis, I refer to “foodie culture.” Foodie culture has become a widely-shared term, especially in social media contexts, for groups that cohere around a shared interest in food. Foodie culture incorporates a broad array of religious, racial, and class influences. In this thesis, I focus on the impact of religion, specifically, Islam, on foodie culture. I am also interested in how the appreciation of food can shift perceptions of a religion, especially ones, like Islam, that are generally perceived negatively in North American or European settings. I argue that the interaction between foodie culture and Islamic practices of halal especially in online foodie media sites results in a far more positive portrayal of Islam than is the case in other forms of media with which Westerners engage. This interaction also, I show, expands the meanings of halal beyond the strict religious context of Islam. Foodie culture appropriates halal aesthetically as a manifestation of good but also exotic cuisine.

Contemporary foodie culture and Muslim religious identities sometimes overlap. We see this, for example, in the phenomenon of Muslim food bloggers. I explore this overlap in this thesis. I have decided to focus on halal food because it is a term that easily identifies Islamic cuisine within the Islamic community, the non-Islamic community, and in the media. Halal has become a very
common term in the media in part because the Muslim population in the West has increased, and Muslim demand for halal food has driven the expansion of the halal food market. Likewise, “Diaspora Muslims, members of the middle class and others have sought to demonstrate the compatibility of Muslim dietary rules with ‘modern’ life while presenting alternatives to what are seen to be Western values, ideologies, and lifestyles.” To put this in further perspective, a 2012 report indicated that Muslim consumers represented 16.6% of “global expenditure on food and non-alcoholic beverage consumption.” Not surprisingly, the expanding population of Muslims, especially in the West, has made halal more visible in western media. With increasing visibility comes a variety of reactions, from fear of the “halalization” (the increased prevalence of halal in the public sphere as a threat to societal values) of western cuisine to excitement over the new foods available in western society because of halal.

This paper focuses on the diverse portrayals of halal in the public media. Specifically, I want to understand how foodie social media provides an alternative narrative about Islam, as opposed to more traditional sources of media (i.e. newspaper

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5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

and television) that seldom mention halal. To accomplish this, I will investigate the content that halal food bloggers are developing, as well as foodie reviews of halal food. I will do this to gain a dual perspective on how halal food is presented. I will also evaluate the comment sections on social media platforms to assess public reception of halal posts. Doing so will allow me to contrast the public reception in the comment sections of blogs with how Muslim practitioners view halal. To what extent if any does the reception of halal among foodies align with Muslim norms concerning food? To what extent, if at all, are Muslim norms adapting to the new popularity of halal in the wider food culture? Finally, I will ask Muslim students about their understanding of halal food and interaction with halal on social media.

What is halal?

The simple translation and English definition of halal is “permissible.” However, explanations of halal differ. For example, Sarah E. Robinson, author of “Refreshing Concepts of Halal Meat: Resistance and Religiosity in Chicago’s Taqwa Eco-Food Cooperative,” says, “Halal refers to what is lawful or permissible, more generally, in contrast to haram, the unlawful.”8 Scholars Elif Izberk-Bilgin and Cheryl C. Nakata, expand on Robinson’s definition by saying, “Halal also refers to purity in conscience and conduct, requiring believers to engage in good deeds and make ethical choices.” Thus, halal is not a word exclusive to describing food, although it is widely

used for that. Scholar Nurcan Atalan-Helicke emphasizes the flexibility of the term by stating, “Modern halal cannot be understood simply as part of a stable taxonomy. Not only is there is a gray area between the clearly lawful and unlawful, but interpretations may vary according to time, place, and circumstances.” In other words, not only is halal used in different contexts (i.e. to describe what food is acceptable for consumption or what is considered appropriate dating conduct), but it can also be interpreted differently. For the purposes of this paper, the focus of the term halal will be on its association with food. Therefore, “in terms of food, halal designates food and drink deemed permissible for consumption by Sharia standards. Any unfit food products considered unfit to eat are termed haram, or religiously forbidden.” So, halal food is food that is religiously acceptable to consume, whereas haram food is food to be avoided.

Although halal and haram serve to create categories for what should be consumed and what should not be consumed, the distinction between them can be challenging to determine. For example, one Muslim might eat a cheeseburger from a fast-food restaurant that advertises its meat as halal, while another Muslim may consider the meat haram. This example resembles an actual controversy that took place in the United Kingdom. The controversy surrounded some locations of Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), which received halal certification from the Halal Food Authority of Britain, the oldest halal certifying organization in the nation.10

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Some Muslim authority figures though said the halal certification did not matter because fast food cannot be considered halal, while others upheld the halal certification. The KFC controversy is not uncommon, in part because there are no universally agreed upon halal standards. This means that different Islamic clerics issue different fatwas (legal decision, nonbinding, but authoritative) causing confusion and discrepancy over what is considered halal. Therefore, interpretation, either in the form of a fatwa from an Islamic scholar or by personal decision making, ultimately decides what is halal and permissible to consume. To further elaborate on this point about discrepancies between scholars, it should be noted that there are four madhab (schools) of Islamic jurisprudence (theories of law), which have differing opinions about what halal is. These discrepancies arise because some ingredients change during processing. For example, wine can become vinegar, so some may say wine is haram but vinegar is halal because it is not intoxicating.

Despite discrepancies, Muslims follow instructions from Islamic scholars they know or the imam (prayer leader, lecturer) at their local mosque. Thus, Islamic scholars ultimately “shape public discourse on Islamic practices through their publications that contain contemporary interpretations.” Although most Muslims follow the instructions about halal from imams and scholars, they often interpret halal on their own terms. For example, I spoke to a student from Saudi Arabia who said he

10 Ibid., 44

11 Ibid., 49

12 Alyanak. "Do Your Best and Allah Will Take Care of the Rest: Muslim Turks Negotiate Halal in Strasbourg,” 19.
tries to follow halal guidelines but because it is difficult to get halal food in Athens, Ohio he chooses to buy organic food instead. He is aware that organic meat is not slaughtered in a halal manner, nonetheless he believes it is acceptable due to his limited options. Another student I spoke to also noted the difficulty she has finding halal food in Athens, Ohio. To deal with this problem, she decided to follow a vegetarian diet while confined by the choices at school. However, if she does buy meat or other products she suspects could be haram she looks for kosher labeling. She looks for kosher labeling because kosher (a dietary restriction many Jewish individuals follow) adheres to similar guidelines as halal. The student said that kosher is stricter than halal, meaning more foods are forbidden from consumption under kosher guidelines. So, if a product contains kosher labeling she feels comfortable consuming the product. Hence, the practice of eating halal is open to personal interpretation.

Beyond the socially understood and interpreted meaning of halal, there is a textual basis for its conception, which comes from the Qur’an. Muslims consider the Qur’an to be the word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Rules about food, whether permissible or unlawful, are scattered throughout the Qur’an. Here are some of the important statements the Qur’an makes about food:

“O mankind! Eat of that which is lawful and wholesome in the earth, and follow not the footsteps of the devil. Lo! he is an open enemy for you.”

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“He hath forbidden you only carrion, and blood, and swineflesh, and that which hath been immolated to (the name of) any other than Allah. But he who is driven by necessity, neither craving nor transgressing, it is no sin for him. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.”

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“O ye who believe! Fulfil your indentures. The beast of cattle is made lawful unto you (for food) except that which is announced unto you (herein), game being unlawful when ye are on the pilgrimage. Lo! Allah ordaineth that which pleaseth Him.”

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“Forbidden unto you (for food) are carrion and blood and swineflesh, and that which hath been dedicated unto any other than Allah, and the strangled, and the dead through beating, and the dead through falling from a height, and that which hath been killed by (the goring of) horns, and the devoured of wild beasts, saving that which ye make lawful (by the death-stroke), and that which hath been immolated unto idols. And (forbidden is it) that ye swear by the divining arrows. This is an abomination. This day are those who disbelieve in despair of (ever harming) your religion; so, fear them not, fear Me! This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you, and

14 Ibid., 002.173.

15 Ibid., 005.001.
have chosen for you as religion al-Islam. Whoso is forced by hunger, not by will, to sin: (for him) lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.”

“To hunt and to eat the fish of the sea is made lawful for you, a provision for you and for seafarers; but to hunt on land is forbidden you so long as ye are on the pilgrimage. Be mindful of your duty to Allah, unto Whom ye will be gathered.”

Notable highlights from the verses quoted above are the unlawfulness of eating swineflesh (pig/pork), carrion (decaying animal flesh), blood, and anything not blessed in Allah’s name before death. Although some of these restrictions seem clear, like the necessity for an animal to hear the name of Allah before death, there are also some ambiguities in the rules. One ambiguity surrounds the consumption of intoxicants. As cited above, the Qur’an states, “And of the fruits of the date-palm, and grapes, whence ye derive strong drink and (also) good nourishment. Lo! therein is indeed a portent for people who have sense.” Though this phrase praises alcohol, another verse warns against the dangers of consuming intoxicants: “Satan seeketh only to cast among you

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16 Ibid., 005.003.

17 Ibid., 005.096.

*See appendix for more Qur’anic quotes referencing food restrictions.

**Translations of these verses by Pickthall, which were compiled by the Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement (CMJE)

18 Ibid., 016.067.
enmity and hatred by means of strong drink and games of chance, and to turn you from remembrance of Allah and from (His) worship. Will ye then have done?"\textsuperscript{19} Yet another ambiguity arises from the phrase, “He hath forbidden you only carrion, and blood, and swineflesh, and that which hath been immolated to (the name of) any other than Allah. But he who is driven by necessity, neither craving nor transgressing, it is no sin for him. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful."\textsuperscript{20} If necessary, this phrase permits the consumption of forbidden food.

These ambiguities can be hard to reconcile, but the Hadith, which details happenings in the life of the Prophet Muhammad, helps by providing additional context for Qur’anic statements. Additionally, the Hadith, which is associated with the Sunnah (the hagiographic biography of the Prophet Muhammad), details not only what Muhammad said but what he believed and related traditions.\textsuperscript{21} To understand this better, it is beneficial to analyze an example. Take the ambiguities about alcohol/intoxicants in the Qur’an. One verse says alcohol is permissible and nourishing if derived from fruits, whereas another verse decries the use of “strong drink” because it is sinful. On this one topic in the Qur’an there are many corresponding entries regarding it in the Hadith. However, like the Qur’an, the Hadith has ambiguities. For example, one entry says, "Alcoholic drinks were prohibited at the time we could rarely find wine made from grapes in Medina, for most of our liquors

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 005.091.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 002.173.

were made from unripe and ripe dates” and another says, “The Prophet forbade the
drinking of alcoholic drinks prepared from raisins, dates, unripe dates and fresh ripe
dates.” Despite not being explicitly forbidden, the practice of consuming alcohol
varies among Muslims based on their different understandings of the Qur’ān and
Hadith.

When ambiguities remain after reading the Qur’ān and Hadith, Muslims can
also turn to fiqh or Islamic jurisprudence. Fiqh is a term that denotes human
understanding of Islamic law. It also refers to jurisprudential literature that draws out
in detail the implications of Qur’ānic and Hadith statements for the ordering of
Muslim life at every level and direction—e.g. horizontally in social relations and
vertically in relation to God. An example of this is the “Reliance of the Traveller: A
Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law” by Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri with
commentary and English translation by Nuh Ha Mim Keller. In the manual, a section
is dedicated to food, along with hunting and slaughtering. The “Food” section is
broken up into subsections, which include “Avoiding Doubtful Foods,” “Animals
Lawful and Unlawful to Eat,” and “Other Substances Unlawful to Eat.” In “Avoiding
Doubtful Foods” the manual says, “The hadith shows that when a person is doubtful

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23 Ibid., Volume 7, Book 69, Number 506: Narrated Jabir.

* This manual was compiled in 1999 and belongs to the Shafi’i madhhab
that something is permissible, he should not do it?”25 The manual goes on to discuss that if there is doubt it is best to assume it is unlawful to eat, unless in extreme circumstances. This is only an issue with meat, “since most other foods are permissible.”26 Following this is the section, “Animals Lawful and Unlawful to Eat.” The section begins by listing permissible foods, which include “oryx, zebra, hyena, fox, rabbit, porcupine, daman… deer, ostrich, or horse.”27 Likewise, aquatic game is permissible for consumption except for frogs and crocodile. Then the unlawful animals are listed, which include “any form of pork products,” “cats or distinguishing small animals that creep or walk on the ground, such as ants, flies, and the like,” “predatory animals that prey with fangs or tusks, such as the lion, lynx, leopard, wolf, bear, simians, and so forth,” and “the offspring of an animal permissible to eat and one not permissible to eat, such as a mule.”28 In “Other Substances Unlawful to Eat” the manual addresses particular concerns. One example is the issue of consuming an unslaughtered animal. The manual allows this only if the individual consuming the animal is in dire circumstances. The issue of slaughter is further discussed in the “Hunting and Slaughtering” section. Proper slaughter, according to the manual, is critical. Thus, “It is not permissible to eat any animal… until it has been properly slaughtered, the only exceptions to which are fish… and locust, which are permissible

25 Ibid., 361.
26 See note 22.
27 Ibid., 362.
28 Ibid., 362-363.
to eat even when they die unslaughtered.”  

Also detailed in the manual are the appropriate steps to slaughtering, which are “[to] turn the animal towards the direction of prayer (qibla)... sharpen knife. Cut rapidly... mention Allah’s name... bless the Prophet... Cut the large blood vessels.”  

All this information shows that halal food rules come from several sources. Many of the general rules, such as saying Allah’s name during slaughter and not eating pork, are derived from the Qur’an. The Hadith elaborates and adds onto these general rules established in the Qur’an. Fiqh then further develops and organizes these rules, which ultimately contributes to the modern understanding of halal food restrictions. Although these texts are authoritative for Muslims, they do not necessarily result in a uniformity of practice. Some Sufi mystics, for example, especially those who emphasize ecstatic practice, have used intoxicants such as hashish and alcohol. For these Muslims, the end of divine absorption (tawhid and fana’) has justified the means, including practices that appear to contradict fiqh injunctions. Also, as Muslim societies have urbanized and secularized, the hold of traditional religious norms has weakened for some class and status groups. Individuals in these groups for whom religion has less sway might consume alcohol and eat pork. At the same time, the contemporary resurgence of book-centered, legal-rational Islam has led many Muslims to reject immoral life-styles as part of an attempt to reconstruct an authentic Muslim identity.

29 Ibid., 364.

30 Ibid., 365.
To sum up, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) provides a simplified explanation of halal, of which an abridged version is provided below. This should serve as a frame of reference and general outline to understanding halal guidelines. When referring to this explanation, also consider the original textual sources of halal.

2 DEFINITION

2.1 Halal Food means food permitted under the Islamic Law and should fulfill the following conditions:

2.1.1 does not consist of or contain anything which is considered to be unlawful according to Islamic Law;

2.1.2 has not been prepared, processed, transported or stored using any appliance or facility that was not free from anything unlawful according to Islamic Law; and

2.1.3 has not in the course of preparation, processing, transportation or storage been in direct contact with any food that fails to satisfy 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 above.

2.2 Notwithstanding Section 2.1 above:

2.2.1 halal food can be prepared, processed or stored in different sections or lines within the same premises where non-halal foods are produced, provided that necessary measures are taken to prevent any contact between halal and non-halal foods;
2.2.2 *halal* food can be prepared, processed, transported or stored using facilities which have been previously used for non-halal foods provided that proper cleaning procedures, according to Islamic requirements, have been observed.

3 **CRITERIA FOR USE OF THE TERM “HALAL”**

3.1 **LAWFUL FOOD**

The term halal may be used for foods which are considered lawful. Under the Islamic Law, all sources of food are lawful except the following sources, including their products and derivatives which are considered unlawful:

3.1.1 **Food of Animal Origin**

(a) Pigs and boars.

(b) Dogs, snakes and monkeys.

(c) Carnivorous animals with claws and fangs such as lions, tigers, bears and other similar animals.

(d) Birds of prey with claws such as eagles, vultures, and other similar birds.

(e) Pests such as rats, centipedes, scorpions and other similar animals.

(f) Animals forbidden to be killed in Islam i.e., ants, bees and woodpecker birds.

(g) Animals which are considered repulsive generally like lice, flies, maggots and other similar animals.
(h) Animals that live both on land and in water such as frogs, crocodiles and other similar animals.

(i) Mules and domestic donkeys.

(j) All poisonous and hazardous aquatic animals.

(k) Any other animals not slaughtered according to Islamic Law.

(l) Blood.

3.1.2 Food of Plant Origin

Intoxicating and hazardous plants except where the toxin or hazard can be eliminated during processing.

3.1.3 Drink

(a) Alcoholic drinks.

(b) All forms of intoxicating and hazardous drinks.

3.1.4 Food Additives

All food additives derived from Items 3.1.1, 3.1.2 and 3.1.3.

3.2 SLAUGHTERING

All lawful land animals should be slaughtered in compliance with the rules laid down in the Codex Recommended Code of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Meat [28] and the following requirements:
3.2.1 The person should be a Muslim who is mentally sound and knowledgeable of the Islamic slaughtering procedures.

3.2.2 The animal to be slaughtered should be lawful according to Islamic law.

3.2.3 The animal to be slaughtered should be alive or deemed to be alive at the time of slaughtering.

3.2.4 The phrase “Bismillah” (In the Name of Allah) should be invoked immediately before the slaughter of each animal.

3.2.5 The slaughter device should be sharp and should not be lifted off the animal during the slaughter act.

3.2.6 The slaughter act should sever the trachea, esophagus and main arteries and veins of the neck region.

To condense this information, I will include a simple list of haram foods (or foods that should be avoided). I want to include this as an easy way to remember what is haram, and therefore know what is halal.

- Pork and pork by-products
- Domesticated donkeys and mules
- Predatory animals, including those with fangs and claws
- Some amphibians
- Roadkill or any other animal that dies in an unknown way
- Wine and intoxicants
- Intoxicants (i.e., alcohol)
- Animals killed in a violent way
- Animals (even those considered halal) that are not slaughtered according to halal standards
- Animals dedicated to a god other than Allah (God)

This list serves as a good example for what a modern, halal abiding Muslim would avoid in terms of food. The other aspect of halal that is critical to many modern Muslims is ritual slaughter of animals.

**Foodie Culture**

Alongside halal, the concept of “foodie culture” requires further discussion before we can delve into how these two areas of practice and identity (halal and foodie) interact. Foodie culture can be understood as a social group that has a deep interest in food. Foodies are individuals with a cultivated appreciation for food, which in turn fosters social interaction with other foodies. Generally, foodies seek unique and one-of-a-kind food experiences. For example, some foodies will travel across the globe to find a food that can only be found in that location. Another aspect of foodie culture is an interest in cooking and the process of creating food and new flavors. Not all foodies partake in or enjoy cooking, however many do, and it is often a defining feature of a foodie. Foodie culture connects to halal because halal is a unique way of eating food. Halal food represents Middle Eastern, Indian, and Indonesian cuisine.
(among others), which is intriguing for many foodies since those cuisines are exotic or interesting (at least from a Western perspective). Conversely, halal bloggers who come from or have Middle Eastern, Indian, Indonesian, or other regional backgrounds in which Islam plays a dominant role can be foodies by having an appreciation for their own cuisines (and others) shown again through trying new restaurants or by cooking. In other words, there are many ways to be a foodie.

**What is Media?**

Now that the concepts of halal and foodie have been explained, it is important to define what I mean by “media,” since it is through media that foodie culture discusses halal and in so doing introduces new meanings and associations to it. I define media as a form of mass communication that reaches an audience and has the power to impact or influence that audience. Media consists of broadcasting, publishing, and Internet platforms. Therefore, my understanding of media expands beyond popular news sources to incorporate social media content creators, such as Instagram celebrities, YouTube stars, and popular bloggers (individuals who write, produce, and/or film content connected to their personal interests and/or life). As mentioned above, the focus of my research is on social media, so I give special attention to evaluating content on Instagram, YouTube, and blogs. However, I also look at media in the form of podcasts (which often are attached to blogs and can have more personal content), online newspapers and magazines to investigate their coverage of halal. It should be noted that I do not inspect all social media platforms,
most notably Facebook. I do not include Facebook because it is more focused on connecting with “friends,” rather than solely sharing creative content, as some other social media platforms function. Though this point can be disputed, especially since Facebook is the most popular social media platform (at least among Americans), I feel that other social media platforms provide more creative content that is shared with a more public audience.31 The other reason I have decided to remove Facebook from my analysis is because many things posted on Facebook originate from other sources. For example, news videos posted on Facebook often originate from a news source (i.e. CNN or Aljazeera) or YouTube. Similarly, other social media platforms are connected. For instance, a blogger runs a blog, but also has a connected Instagram and Snapchat account. In other words, social media can be redundant across platforms. Excluding Facebook, therefore, will not affect necessarily my assessment of the range of material that appears in the social media environment.

Besides understanding what media is, it is important to mention what forms of media are most popular, especially for getting news. Statistics, coming from the nonpartisan, US-based Pew Research Center in 2007, indicate that print news sources are declining, but Internet news is spotty outside the developed world. Still, print news came in as the second most popular news source. Although, this source is dated, other global statistics released by the World Internet Project (WIP) support the assertion that the Internet is a primary source of news and information. According to the 2013 study, citizens in all the WIP countries (except Poland) “go online at least daily to look for

news.”

Focusing more specifically on the United States, the primary device Americans use to get news is the television, followed by computers, and the radio. It is important to mention that the survey, conducted again by Pew Research Center, asked Americans “what device or technology people prefer most” and 45% responded that they had no preference, which might indicate Americans receive news across devices. Additionally, the survey asked how Americans discovered news. Many answered stating they used multiple methods, but the most popular overall were “Directly from the news source,” “Word of mouth,” and “Search engines.” “Social media” came in fifth after “online news organizations that combine news.” In addition to this survey, Pew conducted a survey analyzing news use across social media. The survey found that “A majority of U.S. adults – 62% – get news on social media, and 18% do so often,” and “About 6-in-10 Americans get news from social media.” Looking beyond news, Pew, in another study, found that “At least half of all adult global Internet users are social networkers.” Forty countries were surveyed and 76% of Internet users stated that they used social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. Millennials were the age group most likely to use these platforms. In emerging and developing nations, despite Internet access issues, adults were more likely to use social media than their counterparts from developed nations. The conclusion I have come to after evaluating these surveys and data analyses is that social media has become the dominant mode, globally, for obtaining and sharing news and other forms of information. Some people

use social media for news and some use it just to connect with others. Regardless of its function, social media has a very large global audience. This is vital to understand because halal bloggers from one nation can reach those in several other nations. So, halal media has a global reach and the power to influence food decisions among a large audience.

**Media Analysis**

To better understand the intersection of halal, media, and foodie culture, I will analyze several media sources and the halal content found there. I do this to show the different perspectives of halal, and by extension Islam, that emerge. I have separated these media outlets into blogs, YouTube, Instagram, podcasts, and online magazines or news publications. I have decided to use these outlets for several reasons. I have chosen to evaluate YouTube, Instagram, and podcasts because I have been using these platforms for several years, so I have seen halal media content on these platforms before. To find bloggers and online magazines and news publications I utilized Google search. I made the decision to use Google search because I could sort the results easily to locate the most relevant and popular halal media. Thus, my method of search is based on my experiences, as well as locating the most popular sources.

**Bloggers**

First, I will discuss halal bloggers. There are numerous halal bloggers; however, I will focus on one: *My Halal Kitchen*. I have chosen to focus on this blog
because it is one of the most popular and well reported on. *My Halal Kitchen* is run by Yvonne Maffei. Yvonne has a distinctive story. She converted to Islam after graduating college at Ohio University. Prior to becoming a Muslim, Yvonne enjoyed cuisines filled with haram food products. As a world traveler to places like France, and with Italian and Puerto Rican heritage, Yvonne ate plenty of pork and other haram food items. When Yvonne became Muslim she decided to follow halal guidelines. Nevertheless, she still longed for dishes from her pre-Muslim life. This prompted her to create the blog *My Halal Kitchen* and an e-cookbook, “Summer Ramadan Cooking: Recipes & Resources for Healthy Meals All Month Long.” After the blog gained popularity, Yvonne created and released another book, “*My Halal Kitchen: Global Recipes, Cooking Tips, and Lifestyle Inspiration.*” When I spoke to Yvonne, I began to realize that her book, *My Halal Kitchen*, was an expression of her deep passion for food. Yvonne described the process of recipe testing and refining ingredient lists with enthusiasm. I found Yvonne’s dedication to finding good substitutes for haram foods especially noteworthy. Because Yvonne has eaten haram foods in the past, she knows what certain dishes should taste like. For example, many French dishes require sauces made with wine, a haram intoxicant. To formulate the acceptable halal recipe for a French dish requiring wine, Yvonne tried many high quality grape juices and chose the one that mimicked the flavor of wine the most. This is a truly unique feature about Yvonne’s experience and relationship with halal food. Many halal Muslims have never tried sauces with wine. Since Yvonne converted later in life, she has had the opportunity to experience those flavors. This allows her to help other Muslims best
experience the flavors of traditionally haram dishes. Although Yvonne’s relationship with halal and Islam differs from many other halal bloggers, her story provides an image of a modern Muslim. Yvonne’s story also shows how halal functions uniquely for a Muslim based on their experiences. Likewise, Yvonne, despite being a convert, is followed by all types of Muslims, life-long and converts. Thus, Yvonne’s writing speaks to the cultural adaptability of Islamic culinary practices and the willingness of contemporary Muslims to experiment with food across cultural boundaries.

(Homepage of Yvonne’s blog)
**YouTube**

Sameer Sarmast, from *Sameer’s Eats*, is a halal food celebrity on YouTube. *Sameer’s Eats* is a halal restaurant food review show. Sameer also has a website where he posts additional content and offers restaurant consultations. Like Yvonne, Sameer has a unique story and relationship to halal. As a life-long Muslim with Indian heritage, Sameer has been eating halal food all his life. His love and passion for eating halal food led him to create, with a friend, his popular YouTube show. When I spoke to Sameer he emphasized the passion he had for halal food. He also noted that the YouTube channel is a lot of work with little financial reward. Sameer puts a lot of time into thoughtfully creating content for the channel. Sameer’s process for reviewing a restaurant is meticulous. Typically, he hears about a restaurant, either by word of mouth or from reading or hearing about it elsewhere, then he eats there once before returning and filming a formal review. In addition to eating the food to ensure the quality, Sameer will contact the restaurant owner and schedule a time for an interview. Clearly, Sameer spends a lot of time and puts a lot of thought into his method, and his content attracts thousands of people, with 4,174 subscribers and 798,406 total views (as of March 20, 2017).

Another aspect of Sameer’s channel is that he often travels to film content. Sameer is based in New Jersey, so many of his reviews come from the East Coast (New York City, most frequently), but he also tries to film content in other places across the US (like California), as well as other parts of the world (such as Dubai). Most of Sameer’s viewers and commenters are Muslims, which he confirmed when I
spoke to him; nevertheless, many non-Muslims also view and comment on his videos. Thus, Sameer, as the only notable Muslim halal food content creator on YouTube is as a spokesperson for the deliciousness of the food and a verifier of the best places to find halal food. Though Sameer is most connected with the Muslim community, his platform on social media allows him to connect with non-Muslims.

![Sameer's Eats Youtube Channel](image)

(Hompage of Sameer’s YouTube channel)

**Instagram**

Instagram is a platform where people post pictures. Some people casually post photos of friends, family, food, etc., while others, like bloggers, are “Instagram famous” and use the platform to connect with fans or to promote their content. *The Halal Eater* (@thehalaleater) is a Singapore-based account that focuses on capturing
images of halal delicacies. The account is connected to a website of the same name (http://thehalaleater.com); however, the creator, Izad, enjoys using Instagram to share images of food, as he indicates on his website. Although, Izad focuses on photographing halal food in Singapore, he also creates videos, writes articles, and travels to other places. The tagline on his website is “Halal food is not just Malay food.” On The Halal Eater Instagram feed, Izad displays the diversity of halal cuisine through glamorous food photos (which can be seen in the image below, which is a screen shot of the account feed). The food images he posts range from burgers to éclairs to fresh pressed juice to fried duck. With 4,576 followers (as of March 20, 2017), Izad’s audience is small in comparison to other halal content creators and Instagramers, nonetheless his account is distinctive because he posts content that shows halal food is diverse, and not just confined to the category of Malaysian food.
Halal Girl (@halal_girl) is another Instagram account focused on sharing attractive photos (which can be viewed below) of halal food. Unlike The Halal Eater, Halal Girl’s account is very popular with 22.2k followers (as of March 22, 2017). Halal Girl’s popularity on Instagram is due in part to her success as a halal blogger. Halal Girl about Town began in 2012 as a response to the problem of a lack of halal food that this blogger encountered whenever she would go to restaurants that other non-halal food bloggers recommended. Though based in London, Halal Girl About Town has traveled and tried halal food abroad. So, like The Halal Eater, Halal Girl through her blog and Instagram, shows that there are many halal restaurant options in London and beyond. She also emphasizes that halal food is not limiting, rather it is extremely exciting and varied.
Beyond Instagram content creators and celebrities there is a whole world of regular people posting photos to share with family and friends. With the use of hashtags (#) the content these individuals post is available for the public to view. The photos posted vary widely from selfies discussing permissibility (halal, not in food terms) to the cliché food images. Likewise, the locations from where the photos are posted span the globe from Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia to Japan to Dubai to Vancouver, Detroit, and New York City to London and beyond. With this literal global picture of halal food, thousands of different halal narratives emerge. To better understand these diverse narratives, I have selected three photos pertaining to food that all convey a different story about halal.
This first image comes from France. The description translates as “My next mealtime pleasure is found.” Interestingly, this sandwich-of sorts is made using a crepe instead of bread, which creates a link between traditional French and halal cuisines. More importantly, this image comes at a time when France is struggling to
define its relationship to Islam. Presently, France has a complicated relationship with Islam, evidenced by the ban placed on some forms of the hijab (the head covering some Muslim women wear), as well as the national response to terrorist attacks, such as the Charlie Hebdo massacre. So, the prominence of the #halal and #halalparis in this post is surprising because it shows a positive relationship between secular French culture and Muslim-halal culture.

This next image was posted by a London-based “cake-enthusiast,” who makes Moroccan sweets. These whimsical petit fours, or mini cakes, are shaped like a type of traditional hat, called a fez. The fez has a historical association with the Ottoman empire, but it is also related to the Berber (Amazigh) people who live near the Atlas Mountains in Morocco. By making these fez-shaped cakes halal, a connection between
Moroccan culture and halal food is created. Thus, this image portrays a unique halal identity that expresses the creativity of halal food through cake, while also representing Moroccan culture.

Finally, this image – published by The Vegan Taqueria, a vegan pop-up restaurant located in Oakland, California – shows halal tequila shots. In contrast to other understandings of halal, this image proclaims that alcohol is halal. Many Muslims would say alcohol is haram, which is why this image is so interesting. Although #halal is placed in the photo description, it is not the primary point of interest. #vegan dominates the description and further creates an unusual image of halal, since halal often refers to meat and vegans do not consume meat or any other animal products. Another thing to consider about this image is the possibility that it used the #halal to attract more people to its Instagram account. Hashtags have a dual function: first, they allow Instagram users to easily find images that are appealing to
them, and second, they allow people to gain more followers or likes. Therefore, it is possible that *The Vegan Taqueria* uses the hashtags to gain likes and followers, but it is equally possible that they considered these drinks halal. It is also possible that *The Vegan Taqueria* caters to a non-Muslim audience, so they have ignored the religious connotation and practice behind the term to appeal to a secular audience who equates halal food with deliciousness and purity. Whatever the case, this image adds a layer of complexity to the notion of halal food.

**Podcasts**

A quick search of iTunes yields a variety of halal podcast episodes, concerning everything from relationships to food.

Each episode has a different definition of halal. “The Halal Way of Approaching A Girl You Like,” for instance, discusses what is permissible (halal) when interacting with a girl whom you are presumably interested in dating. On the other hand, halal
functions to describe permissible food for the episode “Do Muslims Eat Meat? Islam and Halal.” Thus, podcasts talk broadly about halal, covering a range of halal topics. Podcasts discuss halal in either a formal, academic or lighthearted, comedic manner. Only one podcast episode I came across, “Boycott halal,” takes an opinioned anti-halal stance. The creator and host of the episode, Pat Condell, runs the podcast *Pat Condell’s Godless Comedy*. Condell has a problem with halal food for several reasons. First, he thinks Britain is being forcibly Islamized, and halal serves as an example of Islam overtaking western society. He also argues that halal meat is unethically slaughtered. Although Condell’s podcast addresses other issues like the lack of free speech he perceives in Europe, many of his podcasts are about Islam and the problems he sees with it. One example of this is his podcast titled “Stop sharia law in Britain.” In the episode, he labels Saudi Arabia mentally ill because they abide by sharia. Clearly, Condell has an aversion toward Islam, which reflects again in the “Boycott halal” episode.

Despite Condell’s anti-Islamic tone, it is important to reiterate that the majority of podcasts discuss halal with either an academic or lighthearted tone. The academic, formal versus light-hearted, comedic tones reflect the theme of the episode and creators behind it. Most podcasts that discuss halal are created and run by Muslims, or are foodie podcasts. The Muslim podcasts obviously place a great level of importance on the religious aspect of halal food, while non-Muslim, foodie podcasts tend to focus more on the food and only connect to the religious connotation behind halal when necessary to advance the story. Still, some podcasts discuss halal without focusing
exclusively on religion or food. For instance, the podcast *Judge John Hodgman* is a comedy show in which a comedian, John Hodgman, acts as a “judge” in a real-life dispute. In the episode “Halal in the Family” Hodgman works out a dispute between a girlfriend, Stephanie, who wants her boyfriend, Dan, to follow halal in their shared house, and Dan, who does not want to do so. The show is funny and lighthearted, and the dispute was solved in favor of Dan. The *Judge John Hodgman* podcast is unique because there is no interest in religion or halal food; rather the focus is on the relationship and dispute. This means that there is less concern placed on the religious obligation of following halal than there is on what would work best for the couple’s relationship.

Conversely, other podcasts, such as *The Mad Mamluks* are directly concerned with religion. As *The Mad Mamluks* say, “We are a Podcast that discusses today's issues while working towards solutions for the modern Muslim.” *The Mad Mamluks* view halal as a function of life, so when they discuss halal they focus on things like interviewing halal food bloggers (such as Yvonne Maffei) or speaking to halal certifiers. Their podcast is therefore geared toward a Muslim audience, whereas podcasts like *Judge John Hodgman* appeal to a wider, more general audience. Since the audience is targeted toward Muslims, *The Mad Mamluks* focus their content on topics that appeal to that audience. Nevertheless, non-Muslims can access *The Mad Mamluks* podcast since it is published free of charge to the public. Another interesting aspect of *The Mad Mamluks* is that they are “individuals whose objective is to promote a balanced intellectual and spiritual understanding of Islam. Among our
concerns is to address the struggles of young Muslims in modern society and provide
them with the tools necessary to move forward in their relationship with Islam.”

Therefore, *The Mad Mamluks* have a target audience and objective within the Muslim
community. This means they provide a variety of content that they feel is engaging for
Muslim youth. So, inviting popular halal food bloggers is a way to draw the attention
of millennials, who are very connected on the internet, as the Pew Research Center
suggests.

Moreover, there are many foodie podcasts, and several that address the topic of
halal food. One podcast that had an interesting episode about halal is *Chewing the Fat*
(*CTF*). *CTF* ended in 2016, but the episodes are still available on iTunes and
Soundcloud. *CTF*’s episode on halal discussed a variety of food topics connected to
halal. It went over the basic guidelines of halal, talked to the popular Muslim blogger
Mariam Sobh, who runs *Hijab Trendz*, discussed halal food trends and Muslim
holidays, went to a Pakistani-Indian restaurant, and tried camel’s milk cheese. Clearly,
the *CTF* episode was broad in scope and highlighted the diversity of halal food by
talking with Muslims about their perspectives about halal, as well as emphasizing an
array of halal foods. Non-Muslim foodie media thus does not always try to divorce the
religious aspect of halal to connect with a non-Muslim audience. Instead, *CTF*
addresses the issue of religion head-on to educate their non-Muslim audience about
the religious basis for promoting delicious halal food.

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Another example of a foodie podcast about halal is *The Sporkful*. *The Sporkful* had an episode specifically dedicated to halal, called “A Very Halal Valentine’s Day with Taz Ahmed.” In the episode halal has a double association – permissible (halal) food and permissible (halal) relationships. Since the podcast is a food show the host, Dan, immediately addressed halal in the context of food. Interestingly, the interviewee Taz, who is the host of the podcast *Good Muslim Bad Muslim*, does not strictly follow halal. However, when Taz describes her eating habits they mirror halal. For instance, she chooses not eat pork or drink alcohol. It is hard to say why Taz does not consider herself halal, maybe she does not eat halal, ritually slaughtered meat, but this is just a guess because Taz never clarifies this point. This ambiguity in Taz’s relationship to halal though is what makes her unique. Instead of proclaiming herself halal because she avoids pork and alcohol, Taz embraces the fact that she can interpret Islam as it suits her. Taz also notes that she was raised Muslim (of Bangladeshi heritage) but as she grew older discarded some of the aspects of the religion that did not suit her. The case of Taz highlights the fact that not every Muslim necessarily abides by every rule and regulation of halal. Thus, *The Sporkful* presents a distinctive image of halal by focusing on the perspective and personal experience of one Muslim, Taz, who adapts halal guidelines to suit her lifestyle.
Online magazines or news publications

Numerous news publications have run stories about halal.
Halal Meat

Halal the Young Dudes: Serious Skateboarders Make Meat in Taipei
Founded by two friends who are in Taipei’s vibrant skateboarding scene, No Type skateboards culture with Islam while satisfying some truly killer hooks.

Celebrating Eid on Britain's First Organic Halal Farm
"Muslims and non-Muslims, we're all ignorant of reality in how our food is produced," says Irfan Rashid, co-founder of Willowbrook Farm in Oxfordshire.

Some Swedish Lunic Thinks Eating Halal Meat Magnificently Makes You Muslim
"You become a Muslim if you eat halal meat," said Michael Olsson, a leading member of the nationalist Sweden Democrats party in a local newspaper this week. Yes, with a straight face.

This Halal Meat Scandal Is Served with a Side of Gun Smuggling
In the continuing saga of an Asian-based halal meat supplier that has been accused of mislabeling meat, a new chapter has emerged. Prosecutors now say that the company is connected to a recent seizure of smuggled weapons that were possibly bound for...
These publications range from cable or network news stations, such as ABC and NBC News, to culture and foodie magazines like *Munchies* and *Eater*. As the screenshots display, the media coverage on halal is varied. Some articles like “Halal industry takes off in Brunei” have clear headlines, while others have exciting titles such as “This Halal Meat Scandal Is Served with a Side of Gun Smuggling.” Though the coverage is varied, most of it is positive. There are some headlines that raise questions about Islam and halal, such as “New book claims halal is ‘invented tradition’, not a pillar of Islam” reported by *France24* and “2 accused of making immigrants work in halal slaughterhouse” published by *Fox News*. The titles of these articles are unflattering, however only the content of the *France24* article directly questions halal food. In the article, a new book written by anthropologist Florence Bergeaud-Blackler is presented. The article remains neutral in its reporting, but the book’s author, Bergeaud-Blackler, questions the value of halal. Bergeaud-Blackler says, “Eating exclusively halal not only runs the risk of cutting consumers off from public spaces, but also other forms of social interaction.” More simply put, Bergeaud-Blackler is concerned that halal causes more difficulties than abiding by it is worth. By raising this idea, Bergeaud-Blackler also questions Muslims who choose to follow halal food standards. Although, the article does not rebuke halal food it does raise a question

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34 More halal/halal food article searches on news and magazine publications found in the appendix.

about the ideas of the Muslim community. Looking at it from a scholarly perspective, there is no harm in raising these questions about halal, however with the current Islamophobic sentiments in the world today, posing these questions to a public audience can be detrimental for the Muslim community. Hence, this article is unflattering because it questions the beliefs (i.e. following halal) of Muslims, though not in a directly negative way. Even if the textual support for halal is lacking, halal food does not cause any real inconvenience for non-Muslims because halal food still represents a niche market in most western, non-Muslim countries.

A range of other content pertaining to halal also appears in online foodie magazines such as Munchies. Munchies is a sub-division of Vice, which is a mass media magazine and news source. Vice is known for their avant-garde stories and ability to provide in-depth analysis about thought-provoking topics concerning culture. As a sub-section of Vice, the content produced by Munchies is focused on food. Several articles appeared when I searched the word “halal.” Following the Vice approach, Munchies publishes in-depth profiles from angles not typically addressed in standard media. In addition to the article, “This Halal Meat Scandal Is Served with a Side of Gun Smuggling,” Munchies has published articles titled, “Celebrating Eid on Britain's First Organic Halal Farm,” “Halal Slaughter Is More Complicated Than You Realize,” “Cadbury Accused of Anti-Christian Conspiracy Over Rumors of 'Halal' Creme Eggs,” and “Halal the Young Dudes: Serious Skateboarders Make Meat in Taipei,” among many other interestingly-titled halal related articles. Beyond articles, Munchies creates video content, which it uploads to its website and YouTube. They
produced a video specifically about halal, called “Soul Food: Halal.” They describe the video by saying, “Dawn [the host] sets out to uncover what’s so hot about Halal. She finds delectable delicacies at The Halal Guys food cart and an intimate family dinner, learns about the relationship between food and religion, and visits a Halal slaughterhouse.” The video is a fun and educational introduction into halal food for the non-Muslim foodie. Dawn is the perfect host for this, since she knows nothing about halal food and is excited to learn more. The slaughterhouse scene, which the video opens with, grabs the viewer’s fascination. At first Dawn freaks out over the fact that an animal will be murdered, however after the process she feels differently. Dawn realizes that animals must be killed for food, and she decides after witnessing a halal slaughter that it is an incredibly humane and gentle way of dispatching an animal. Dawn’s interactions with Muslims and subsequent positive reception of halal thus offers a positive image of Islam. More importantly, the primary objective of this video is to educate the non-Muslim public about the religious aspect of halal food. Consequently, this video does not divorce religion from food; rather it promotes the idea that food and Islam are inextricably linked together.

Similarly, the Munchies article, “Halal the Young Dudes: Serious Skateboarders Make Meat in Taipei,” provides an interesting perspective on halal by profiling Muhammad Namairage, a 21-year-old halal food stall (called “No Type”).

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owner and skateboarder of Nigerian descent. One of the most interesting facets of this story is the location in “predominantly Buddhist East Asia” and the way Muhammad and his co-owner and native Taiwanese friend, Mark Lai, blend skate culture and Islam.\(^37\) Adding further interest to the story is the fact that Muhammad uses family recipes, offers vegan options, and sources local food as much as possible. Clearly, this story of a Nigerian-Muslim, 21-year-old food stall owner in Taiwan is off the beaten path, but it also provides a one-of-a-kind narrative about halal. It makes halal seem trendy by highlighting the way Islam and skateboarding coexist alongside great, locally sourced food. Emphasizing the youthfulness of the owners and quality of the food, this story makes halal food approachable and exciting for a foodie audience. Like the video “Soul Food: Halal,” this article shows that despite the religious motivation to eat halal, halal can be cool and appealing to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In other words, foodies can enjoy halal, but they should not forget that halal is also part of a religion – Islam.

Furthermore, the online foodie magazine *Eater* has published ample content about halal food. Some examples of this content are, “Street Meat: The Rise of NYC's Halal Cart Culture,” “Spain's Jamón Iberico Gets a Halal Makeover,” and “NYC's The Halal Guys Plan to Open 100s of Locations Around the World.” Like *Munchies*, *Eater* also produces video content, and they have one video about halal titled, “What Makes a Burger Halal?” The “What Makes a Burger Halal?” video focuses on one New York

City halal butcher shop and restaurant called *Honest Chops*. Although sampling burgers is the primary objective of the video, it also provides definitions of halal slaughter terms like dhabihah (the method of slaughter, i.e. swift swoop of blade) and tayyib (meaning pure and clean). The video also addressed how *Honest Chops* created a community for Muslims, while at the same time appealing to non-Muslims. By providing information about the basic terms of halal and showing a successful halal business, this video connects and encourages a non-Muslim audience to engage with halal food. Additionally, this video shows how *Honest Chops* appeals to a Muslim and non-Muslim audience by advertising with religious terms like tayyib, while also creating a space that is modern and appealing to a generalized public. Therefore, the meaning of halal retains its religious connection but the marketing appeals to religious and secular sensibilities.

Likewise, the other *Eater* article, “Street Meat: The Rise of NYC’s Halal Cart Culture,” paints a different picture of halal. The first way this article does so is by defining halal as “a method of slaughter that rendered a meat acceptable for Muslims to eat.” Additionally, the article is only concerned about halal in the context of food carts, which are a distinctive feature of New York City. Danovich further explains what food carts are by writing, “Anecdotally, most carts seem to be run by Egyptian immigrants, but the menus bear little resemblance to Egyptian street food like kushari (a mixed plate of rice, lentil, spaghetti, and tomato) or ful

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medames (mashed fava beans). Instead, New York halal usually consists of some combination of rice, greens, and halal meat either in a shallow foil dish or in a sandwich, usually with a red and white sauce to top it all off.” Thus, the article focuses on how halal carts developed out of the Muslim immigrant community in New York City and have become extremely popular outside of the Muslim community. Therefore, this article shows how halal carts started off advertising to a Muslim audience, but gained attention from non-Muslims, as word spread that the food was delicious.

**Conclusion and Overall Media Perception of Halal**

Clearly, there are ample examples of halal media, but what does that mean for overall perceptions of halal? Are they positive? Is halal media more favorably perceived if presented by a Muslim or non-Muslim? How has halal traveled from Muslim bloggers and content creators to non-Muslims within the foodie subculture? Do non-Muslims view Muslims more favorably based on their understanding of halal, or less? Where in the world is halal media most popular or influential? How does non-Muslim foodie culture change or add to the meanings of halal? What happens to the meaning of the term as it travels into non-Muslim foodie culture? Does it mean the same thing as it does when invoked on sites that cater strictly to Muslims?

First, to address the questions of overall perceptions, they seem to be positive. Although there is some negative press on halal, such as the “Boycott halal” podcast, the media is generally positive. As mentioned above, most articles, videos, blogs, and
podcasts, etc., present halal in an educational or humorous tone. In contrast to other news about Islam and Muslims, which can often focus on terrorism or extremists, halal is a light-hearted and approachable topic for most people. Food is approachable because most people enjoy eating, and even if they do not care about eating, people tend to be indifferent about food.

The next question, “Is halal media more favorably perceived if presented by a Muslim or non-Muslim?” is more difficult to answer. This question is difficult to answer because it requires surveying as many people, both Muslims and non-Muslims, who are aware of halal media as possible. Therefore, there is no clear answer to this question. It is fair to say, however, that both Muslims and non-Muslims view halal food media. It is also acceptable to say that most halal bloggers, YouTubers, and Instagramers are Muslim, whereas non-Muslims, as well as Muslims create news and magazine articles on this topic of halal. This makes sense since not many non-Muslims are passionate about halal. On the other hand, Muslims who eat halal often view it enthusiastically as a lifestyle, and they want to share what they see as an exciting lifestyle with others. Non-Muslims, because they do not typically eat halal, are more prone to reporting about halal in the news and magazines because halal seems different and exotic. This does not mean that the meaning of halal changes from Muslim to non-Muslim. Rather, non-Muslims accept that halal is part of a religious practice, but they choose to ignore that in favor of exploring halal as a new and exotic food experiences.
The question about perceptions of halal connects to the next question: How has halal traveled from Muslim bloggers and content creators to non-Muslims within the foodie subculture? This question can be answered by looking at the popularity of Muslim bloggers, like Yvonne Maffei, and halal restaurants, such as the now famous Halal Guys. By becoming visible in non-Muslim society, these Muslim bloggers, content creators, and restaurateurs open a once little-known lifestyle to non-Muslims. The allure of new and exotic food appeals to foodies who seek out new food experiences. So, when halal food became clearly visible through the Internet (i.e. on Instagram, YouTube, or blogs) and restaurants, foodies were attracted by its mysterious allure. The history of the Halal Guys is a particularly notable example of this. Halal Guys began as a humble food cart on the streets of New York City, and expanded to include several food carts. But the expansion did not end there; the demand for their delicious food allowed them to open a restaurant and eventually several restaurants around the world.\textsuperscript{39} Halal Guys credit their initial success to an “influx of Muslim cab drivers” in New York City;\textsuperscript{40} however, their global expansion was due to the buzz within the Muslim and non-Muslim foodie communities. Halal Guys success parallels the way halal has traveled from Muslim bloggers and content creators to non-Muslims within the foodie subculture. Many Muslim bloggers began making content to connect with other Muslims, but because the Internet is accessible by all, non-Muslims could view halal, Muslim content. Thus, Muslim bloggers and

\textsuperscript{39} See note 33.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
content creators permeated non-Muslim society via the Internet and intrigued non-Muslim foodies seeking new food experiences. The Fung Brothers video published on YouTube, "Halal Cart (WE EAT THE WHOLE THING)," is a prime example of non-Muslim foodies being drawn to halal food because of the allure of a unique food experience. In the video, The Fung Brothers, two real-life brothers, sample the menu of a New York City halal food cart. Before eating the food, the brothers acknowledge that halal is a practice some Muslims follow, but after that their focus turns toward the food. They are excited to try this new food experience and their satisfaction speaks to the fascination many non-Muslims have with halal.

Related to the question of interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims is the question, “Do non-Muslims view Muslims more favorably based on their understanding of halal, or less?” To answer this question conclusively, we would need to undertake a large survey of non-Muslims who view halal media. However, by analyzing comments on YouTube and Instagram, as well as speaking to Muslim halal media content creators Sameer Sarmast and Yvonne Maffei, it seems that non-Muslims view Muslims favorably after viewing halal media. When I spoke to Sameer, he told me that he has non-Muslim viewers. He recounted one interaction with a man from Ireland who was a big fan of his videos. After interacting with him through YouTube, Sameer sent the man a shirt. Sameer also said his videos sometimes receive hateful, Islamophobic comments, though they are rare. Overall, people respond warmly toward his videos, which can be seen in the image below.
Even though Sameer receives positive comments, it is hard to determine if commenters are Muslim or non-Muslim, which again makes it difficult to give more than a generalized answer. Similarly, when I spoke to Yvonne, she told me she has interacted and received positive comments from non-Muslims. So, anecdotally it seems that non-Muslims view Muslims favorably when viewing halal media.

The final question that needs to be addressed is, “Where in the world is halal media most popular or influential?” The simple answer is everywhere. Halal media spans the globe, from Singapore to Dubai to the United States and everywhere in between. Many of my sources came from the United States, so it is safe to assume that halal media is popular in the United States. It is also fair to add that halal has been influential in the global foodie community, but especially the United States foodie
community. The U.S.-based foodie magazine *Eater* is a prominent example of the American foodie’s fascination with halal food. Their article on halal food carts in New York City, discussed above, shows how Muslims brought the initial demand for halal, but foodies made it a global craze. In addition to the U.S., halal media seems to be very popular in Singapore and London. On my search for halal bloggers and Instagramers, I encountered numerous Singaporean, Malaysian, and British content creators. Halal media is popular in nations where many Muslims live and in places where Muslims represent an established and large minority community. For example, halal media is popular in Dubai (where many Muslims live) but also in Thailand (where Muslims are an important minority, in the majority Buddhist nation).

Clearly, halal media is diverse. From Muslim halal bloggers to non-Muslim journalists, there is ample and varied coverage on halal. Many times, there is also an overlap in Muslim identity and foodie culture. One prime example is Yvonne Maffei, a Muslim blogger who also identifies as a foodie. I would argue many Muslim halal food bloggers would consider themselves foodies because, as I defined it earlier, a foodie is someone with a cultivated appreciation for food. Many Muslim halal content creators have a clear appreciation for food because they either search for unique food or restaurant experiences and/or they discuss the sourcing and quality of their food. *The Halal Guy* is an example of this because he sees halal food as exciting and seeks out new halal food experiences beyond Malaysian cuisine. Even in content created by non-Muslims about halal, Muslim identity plays a key role in describing the food. For instance, in the video, "Halal and the Flavors of Islam with Dawn O’Porter: Soul
Food,” created by the foodie news source *Munchies*, host Dawn O’Porter investigates how Islamic norms impact halal food. The crossover is particularly evident when she goes to a halal slaughterhouse and sees how Muslim values of animal ethics are present even during the death of an animal. Thus, there is ample crossover between foodie culture and Muslim identity. These overlaps along with the ample sources of halal media contribute to providing a more dynamic and complex depiction of Muslims than is available in the mainstream political coverage of Islam. Among foodies, at least, Islam represents a positive, creative cultural force.

**Appendix**

Expanded selection of quotes concerning food found in the Quran:

“Eat of that over which the name of Allah hath been mentioned, if ye are believers in His revelations.”

“How should ye not eat of that over which the name of Allah hath been mentioned, when He hath explained unto you that which is forbidden unto you unless ye are compelled thereto. But lo! many are led astray by their own lusts through ignorance. Lo! thy Lord, He is Best Aware of the transgressors.”

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42 Ibid., 006.119.
“And eat not of that whereon Allah's name hath not been mentioned, for lo! it is abomination. Lo! the devils do inspire their minions to dispute with you. But if ye obey them, ye will be in truth idolaters.”43

“And of the cattle (He produceth) some for burdens, some for food. Eat of that which Allah hath bestowed upon you, and follow not the footsteps of the devil, for lo! he is an open foe to you.”44

“Say: I find not in that which is revealed unto me aught prohibited to an eater that he eat thereof, except it be carrion, or blood poured forth, or swineflesh - for that verily is foul - or the abomination which was immolated to the name of other than Allah. But whoso is compelled (thereto), neither craving nor transgressing, (for him) lo! thy Lord is Forgiving, Merciful.”45

“Unto those who are Jews We forbade every animal with claws. And of the oxen and the sheep forbade We unto them the fat thereof save that upon the backs or the entrails, or that which is mixed with the bone. That we awarded them for their rebellion. And lo! we verily are truthful.”46

43 Ibid., 006.121.

44 Ibid., 006.142.


46 Ibid., 006.146.
“Allah it is Who hath appointed for you cattle, that ye may ride on some of them, and eat of some.”\(^{47}\)

“O ye who believe! Draw not near unto prayer when ye are drunken, till ye know that which ye utter, nor when ye are polluted, save when journeying upon the road, till ye have bathed. And if ye be ill, or on a journey, or one of you cometh from the closet, or ye have touched women, and ye find not water, then go to high clean soil and rub your faces and your hands (therewith). Lo! Allah is Benign, Forgiving.”\(^{48}\)

“And of the fruits of the date-palm, and grapes, whence ye derive strong drink and (also) good nourishment. Lo! therein is indeed a portent for people who have sense.”\(^{49}\)

“They question thee about strong drink and games of chance. Say: In both is great sin, and (some) utility for men; but the sin of them is greater than their usefulness. And they ask thee what they ought to spend. Say: that which is

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 040.079.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 004.043.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 016.067.
superfluous. Thus Allah maketh plain to you (His) revelations, that haply ye may reflect.”

“Satan seeketh only to cast among you enmity and hatred by means of strong drink and games of chance, and to turn you from remembrance of Allah and from (His) worship. Will ye then have done?”

Online news and magazine publications news headlines

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50 Ibid., 002.219.

51 Ibid., 005.091.
'Master of None' star Aziz Ansari takes aim at Trump and white America

TV star and other Muslim stand-up comedians are calling the Republican candidate and the undecided white American voters to task.

By Taly Kuplink

N.Y.C. Jews and Muslims push for kosher and halal food in school system

A lawmaker from Queens, among a quarter of students who have religious dietary restrictions, is sponsoring the bill that would require the state to provide alternatives.

By JTA

Search

Syrian refugees get a warm welcome in Scotland

... When Syrian arrived here, I wasn’t easy to find halal food, but it was something that was made into a big deal, when it’s not the case ...

Last Updated: 20 March 2017 10:04 GMT

The Muslims of Cuba

... Supermarkets have recently started importing halal chicken from Brazil, which is unaffordable for, ... Preval in difficult because everything's forbidden ...

Last Updated: 18 November 2016 15:04 GMT

Does Europe have an Inquisition problem?

... food, hygiene and more... Regulation limited broad public consumption of pork to demonstrate a drawback from keeping Kosher and Halal ...

Last Updated: 20 September 2016 09:30 GMT

French foundation to administer and build mosques

... Anwar Kheir, said on Monday that the foundation would be financed by fees paid by stors in the halal food sector to keep out “radical ...

Last Updated: 16 August 2016 16:09 GMT

Cuban Muslims celebrate Ramadan despite the obstacles

... The Saudi embassy supplies us with dates, traditional garments, halal meat ..., ... The man who distributes food is named Leonel Diaz, but he goes by ...

Last Updated: 30 July 2016 11:43 GMT
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