

Marketing Communications in the Islamic Perspective: Communicating the Halal Branding

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ABSTRACT

Because the Muslim market is so large, its potential has become a focus of many studies. However, few companies have managed to crack into this huge and lucrative market. This chapter attempts to define the problems and obstacles faced by companies attempting to cover this market and understand where they have failed. Furthermore, the chapter then provides guidelines towards avoiding and overcoming these obstacles while simultaneously turning them into opportunities. In this chapter, it was found that the mistakes commonly made are due to the coding of the messages, the lack of trust of companies as well as an overuse and degrading of the Halal brand. It also finds that by establishing trust and relationship with the Muslim consumers, as well as by spreading awareness of the Muslim needs and culture among the employees of the company, these issues can be successfully tackled.

INTRODUCTION

In a world becoming increasingly globalized, and every market niche being targeted and covered, a population of over one billion people cannot simply be ignored from a business perspective. However, this is exactly what has been happening. The difficulty of understanding Islam, the fragmentation of the Muslim community across the world, inaccurate stereotypes and generalizations of Muslims that just won't go away, and many other factors have prevented companies from truly understanding the Muslim consumer. As Marketing is a very culturally dependent science, this lack of understanding of such a large segment has led to disjointed, unfocused, inconsistent and even culturally insensitive marketing efforts which badly damage the hopes of companies wishing to benefit from such a large and growing segment. The aim of this chapter is to separate Muslim consumers into different segments to focus the method of communication; then to create the framework for an effective Marketing effort by any organization whether it be local company in a Muslim country, a company targeting Muslims in a non-Muslim country, or even a global company operating in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries. This will be done by understanding the characteristics of the Muslim consumer, realizing how to advertise in an Islamic context, defining the Halal product, understanding Halal from the consumers' perspective, and finally creating and communicating a Halal portfolio.

BACKGROUND

Of all the different countries, cultures, ethnicities, norms and religions, perhaps the one most often misunderstood (and thus communicated with poorly) is Islam. Islam, as with most other major religions,

is not merely a religion; it is in fact an entire culture that pervades across the different countries and unifies an otherwise completely diverse and unrelated group of people. This unity despite political, linguistic and social barriers is further strengthened by the prevalence of only one major branch of Islam (Sunni) with approximately 75% of the world's Muslim population adhering to it. Then why is it that communication with them is often so difficult? One reason is the dual nature of the unity of the Muslim religion and of Muslims themselves; for it can be said that Muslims can have the same *and* different views about the same words, teachings, and scriptures (Jafari, 2012).

These issues have created large hurdles to overcome, and overcome them we must because the size of the potential market of the Muslim community is huge — it is comprised of over 1.5 billion people world-wide with an incredible \$2.1 trillion global market (J. a. J. Wilson & Liu, 2010). This untapped market has increased the demand for expertise and knowledge on Islamic Branding (IB) and has generated entirely new fields of study (Alserhan, 2010). In order to understand this field and to capitalize on the market, the key ideas and beliefs of Muslims must be understood. Many Muslims follow a strict interpretation banning any product that has to do with alcohol, pork, gambling and other harmful business practices; this stems from the Muslims' concept of "Haram" and "Halal". Something that is Haram is forbidden in the Muslim religion and Muslims thusly fear punishment for engaging in such activities. Halal, on the other hand is anything that is permitted or permissible to do in Islam.

To demonstrate the impact of religion on sales, religion can have major role with regards something as common and everyday as food. The behaviors of entire populations and societies with regards to food consumption can be dictated by religion (Bonne & Verbeke, 2008). In addendum, Muslims are traditionally heavy meat eaters, which further increases the potential size of the market much further than mere population and demographic statistics might infer. Now add, if you will, the underdeveloped state of the food and meat market for Muslims and you can see not only the disproportion between supply and demand for just this specific case. While meat is one of the more famous examples, this situation is highly analogous to the market for Islamic goods around the world.

Certain products have thus popped up in order to sell to Muslims weary of buying or consuming products opposed to their beliefs; this brought about the rise of the Halal products. Halal products could range from the meat being prepared in the Islamic way, banks not using Usury in their lending practices, stock indices that deal only in companies that don't work with Haram products, and many others. Though these products and offerings can go a long way in bridging the gap between supply and demand, just designing a Halal product is not nearly enough; one must consider that the concerns of Muslims depend greatly on context. The most obvious and influential context is whether the Muslim lives in a Muslim or non-Muslim country. In a Muslim country, it is considered to be the norm for restaurants to avoid using any kind of alcohol in their food, and for all meat to be done in the Islamic way — whereas these products are almost a luxury in non-Muslim countries. However, more subtle differences apply between the Muslim countries themselves and how their markets react to the different methods and offerings.

No matter one's understanding of the culture or the context in which the product is being marketed is useless without the knowledge to use it. A method of utilizing this information is through the use of Brands as they are the results and product of culture. Religion has long influenced the use of brands and the Muslim religion is no exception. This is not as easy as it may sound as the nuances of an Islamic brand are many and mistaking one concept for another could lead to disastrous results; there are even differences (J. A. J. Wilson & Liu, 2011) between Halal brands and Islamic brands! While we will not discuss these small (albeit important) nuances, the book will focus on the major aspects of the Halal and Islamic brands and will guide the reader through common mistakes, pitfalls, and overlooked opportunities that needn't happen. The first section of this chapter will discuss the different methods of advertising to Muslims in any context.

SUCCESSFULLY COMMUNICATING WITH THE MUSLIM

Problems and Pitfalls of Advertising to Muslims

Any communication made, whether by people or corporations, must pass by a system of coding, transfer, and decoding; at each step, certain interferences and distortions can occur. When dealing with the Muslim consumer, we are concerned mostly with the coding and decoding of the message. Encoding is the message that is placed within the audio and visuals that the sender wishes to convey to the receiver. If the message is incorrectly encoded, then the consumer could receive the wrong message creating confusion, inconsistency and, perhaps, a cultural clash. The decoding process is the message that the receiver *understands* from the audio or visuals sent. If the sender doesn't fully understand the culture and background of the intended audience — or if that culture isn't altogether taken into account — then said message could easily be decoded in an unintended manner with very negative outcomes. In either situation, if the message is encoded with the wrong message or if the consumer decodes the message in a way not originally intended, the consumer might not respond to the messaging (at best) or might react negatively to the messaging (at worst). These mistakes that the marketer, or communicator, can fall into are true for any culture, subculture, community, etc... but remain especially relevant for Muslims. This is mostly due to the cultural barriers and common misunderstandings that companies (from both the West and the East) eventually come up against.

“Sex appeal” is a phrase commonly associated with marketing and advertising, yet this could not be further from the truth from an Islamic perspective. Whether by a liberal, or conservative interpretations of Islam, it is commonly agreed that modesty in clothes is a virtue, and that extra-marital relationships are looked down upon — of course the degree to which this is considered varies greatly between the different interpretations. Since these ads could cause a clash with religious beliefs and cause controversy, it will not be able to convince people of the product (Haque, Ahmed, & Jahan, 2010) rendering the ad useless. Consider this advertisement: *A young couple enjoying each other's company and sharing tender touches and kisses. A problem is about to occur when a product is shown, this product then fixes the problem makes the moment even more intimate and young couple are happy once more.* Consider what the marketer is communicating, and how. What is being encoded in the advertisement? The marketer is trying to convey that their product promotes intimacy appealing the emotional side of the consumer. The ad conveys something touching and romantic and creates positive feelings towards the product, as well as connecting it to something highly valued—love, affection, intimacy, desire, and so on. These Affective concepts shown in the ad are common in many others around the world. Now one must consider, are these messages that the marketer is trying convey at odds with Islam and the Muslim culture? The answer (in most cases) is a resounding *No*. Leaving out the most extreme takes on Islam, the general Muslim population values these concepts as much as any other culture; the problem in this case is the way the message is conveyed — or, in other words, the coding and decoding of the message.

To further illustrate this point, let us take the example of something rarely (if ever) specifically marketed to Muslims — Perfume. Many perfume commercials place no effort into localizing their advertisements for the Middle-East or other Islamic areas, yet somehow a market exists for such products in these very areas. This market is not made up solely of non-Muslims and secularists; Muslims buy perfume, but for slightly different reasons than those in other (more familiar) cultures. Muslim men wear perfume partly because it is Sunnah (part of the teachings of the Muslim religion), thus making it a part of their personal values. Women, on the other hand, wear it for her personal enjoyment, as well as for the increased attraction her husband which is also encouraged by Islam. Notice that the reason for buying perfume for women (whether bought by the woman or her husband) is very closely related to the messaging and coding of most perfume commercials. The difference in this case is not *why* it is used, but *for whom*. When coding the perfume advertisement, it is common to have a beautiful woman surrounded by many handsome men (occasionally only one) and is often in public. This is meant to convey how attractive the perfume makes the woman, as

well as how amazing it will make her feel. This would fail in the Islamic perspective because that is not what is expected of the product; this in addition to the visuals of “sexy” women in skimpy, immodest outfits causing the expected clash of cultures.

When this type of advertisement fails to bring in the expected numbers of Muslim consumers, it is easy to reach the idea that it is the message that Muslims rejected. This is a major misconception that many companies are guilty of. The rejection of this product (due to the advertisement’s creative brief) by the Muslim community can lead marketers and companies to believe that a certain product, or a certain category of products, cannot be successfully marketed to Muslims. This can either result in an abandoning of the market, or minimal effort being put into localization (such as with the perfume). The true problem lies simply with how the message is developed and encoded. In the case of the perfume, the Muslim customer would decode it as something immoral, un-Islamic, and, thereby, a product that should be avoided—this product, however, could (with minor changes to the advertisement) be received positively.

Change the Coding, Keep the Message

The most important idea to note is that the messaging is rarely the issue when communicating with the Muslim, but how it is presented; this point cannot be stressed enough. By formulating the ad creative brief in a way that clearly shows the couple being happily married — perhaps with a few children on the side — and with each being respectable and modestly dressed (note: this does not mean that the couple must be unattractive), the results can change drastically. If done in an appropriate way, the ad can be viewed and decoded as intended without compromising the core message. It is important to note, though, that the degree of intimacy and the type of dress considered appropriate can vary greatly from one country to another; it is thus essential to make a comprehensive study of the country in which the targeted Muslims live before making such an ad. As long as the ad highlights the benefits to the customers and is very closely tied with their personal values, the leverage point becomes more appealing thereby improving the customers’ perception of the product.

Thus, the encoded ad must be consistent with the society that is being targeted (Haque et al., 2010); generalization is a dangerous convenience that must be avoided. As a result, Halal branding should be associated with the appropriate consumer cognitive mapping. Cognitive mapping represents beliefs, feelings, and facts about the brand being promoted. So, when a brand is being advertised, consumers automatically refer to their personal cognitive map as their own self benchmark for the brand and its position in their mind. The decoding process starts based on consumers’ previous knowledge and their cognitive map is the main platform for consumer perception. Marketers should encode the message to fit with the Muslim consumers’ cognitive map, thus facilitating the decoding process which will be taken from consumers’ side. The cognitive map is the consumer’s brain structure for different brands and services offered. In this context, marketers must find a way to disseminate and understand the common cognitive maps which they are dealing with. In this case, Muslims must be studied in an almost individual setting with the common factors being noted and acted upon. When done using a rigorous, scientific process, the encoding and decoding process can occur with minimal interference and misinterpretations.

But it is not enough to deal with just the traditional methods of advertising. Significant effort must be put into making a connection and into communicating on a more personal level. Priority should be placed on enhancing a two-way communications model. By having a professional and locally experienced staff, well-trained in customer encounterments, versed in Islamic culture, and equipped with all of the information necessary to accommodate business needs and answer relevant business questions regarding the product or service, great value and appeal will be perceived from the Muslim’s perspective. Through this communication, another benefit also appears; the company can learn about other matters concerning this market segment that make a difference in how they perceive value in the firm. By listening to the customers,

it could become apparent the need for both male and female representatives to interact with their respective genders, or perhaps the establishment of separate facilities and areas split between men and women in gyms, salons, pools and any other public gatherings that would normally gather the two. An added benefit to this approach is that Muslims societies appreciate receiving exceptions; providing these supplementary features, especially in the service sector, could contribute to building a friendly collectivistic brand character admired by the Muslim customers. This is not to downplay the traditional methods of advertisement and marketing. A deadly mistake could be not explicitly stating that which is implicitly known; for example, if a restaurant only deals in Halal food (for whatever reason), but it is not communicated that is a significant missed opportunity to build a loyal customer base.

One must note, however, that properly advertising to Muslims, and creating a Halal brand are two very separate matters. While the first concerns itself with just adapting the messaging and advertisements of the firm towards Muslim consumers, the second focuses on adapting the core *products themselves* to the Islamic perspective. This is a much more segmented and specialized focus of marketing that cannot be done halfheartedly. If the firm wishes to get involved in Halal (or Islamic) branding, it must do so as a part of its strategic plan and give it the resources and attention due. The first step in creating this new brand, in tapping in this massive market, is to truly understand and internalize the idea of “Halal”, which the next section will discuss in detail.

UNDERSTANDING THE HALAL BRAND

“Halal” Misconceptions

What is easier than to say that your product is “Halal” or your Bank “Islamic”? In truth, the actual implementation and adherence to Islamic principles far outstrips the purported supply. The reason for this could be two-fold. The first being that there is a lack of awareness of what *truly* constitutes a Halal product, and the second is intentional misdirection. To the companies that wish to mislead the Muslim consumers, the potential price of doing so is detailed later in this chapter. This section will focus on the first problem; understanding the meaning of Halal. While this section will give some insight about what Halal means, its significance lies in that it teaches *how* to understand what it means from the different segments of the Muslim societies. Failures to create a successful Halal brand can usually be attributed to either a poor understanding of the religion, a poor understanding of the target customer, or a failure to appreciate the cultural differences between the different Muslims from around the world.

The concept of Halal can take on several different forms and interpretations. One of the easiest takes on the concept is that idea that is that everything in the world is Halal, except that which is forbidden (J. a. J. Wilson & Liu, 2010). This means that an Islamic range of products is one that includes all products that are not pork, alcohol, or any other famously unIslamic (or Haram) product. The problem with this understanding is that it doesn’t take into account the cultural, religious or spiritual context in which products are chosen, disseminated and consumed. This brings us to the issue that simply taking the idea academically — in a couch philosopher sort of way — can remove any significance, or “soul” (Alserhan, 2010) it might have had.

Branding experts usually have a problem understanding or creating a Halal brand, simply because they believe it is a brand to be marketed, not a lifestyle to be experienced. Thus, even *experts* or companies that place a large effort into understanding the Muslim consumer usually fall short of deep, meaningful insights and end with some basic, shallow ideas (Alserhan, 2010). Without truly appreciating the culture, without giving it the respect, time, and feeling it is due, most marketing and branding efforts will fall flat; not that they will fail, but that it will never pack the punch intended. And so, the matter of exploring the Muslim culture must start at the very beginning.

Conceptualizing “Halal”

According to (Alserhan, 2010), it can be perceived that Islamic Branding combines both the concepts of religion and products; it is about considering worldly objects and aspirations of faith and heaven to be connected. Through this concept, Muslims then attempts to combine purchasing habits with their belief, faith, ideas, intentions, and their Halal cognitive map. This is due to the idea that Muslims believe that they are always watched, that their actions are being recorded and that they must follow their religion closely and keep their intentions pure. Halal, as a concept, has this understanding and its own cognitive mapping theme. Accordingly, the simplest way for doing so is to reject a Haram product and accept the Halal one. However, the idea goes much deeper than that. It is not simply about what is forbidden and what is allowed, but it is of maximizing good deeds and intention while minimizing bad ones. In this context, one must consider all of the different concepts of Muslims about what is good, alongside what is bad. For example, the Muslim considers taking care of one's health to be a good deeds from a spiritualistic and religious perspective, but also from the perspective of personal values of traditional consumer benefits. In that case, a healthy product would be doubly rewarding, while a harmful product would be thrice damned (without even considering those that are explicitly stated as Haram such as alcohol).

The previous was just one example of how Halal and Haram could be understood. To go in-depth into such a topic would require a book unto itself (and as chance may have it, countless have been written on the subject). The problems therein lies in the various perspectives in which these matters can be understood by the different segments. Thus, despite Islam being founded upon the concept of "*Tawhid*" or "*oneness*" (Arham, 2010), the Muslim population cannot just be lumped into one giant segment without further research into their nuances and differences. While the previous understandings and concepts of Halal and Haram can give important insights into Muslims as a whole, the Muslim population is far more fragmented than most people believe. Thus, the company wishing to target these consumers must understand their habits and methods of living. The successes and failures of communicating with the Muslim consumer could easily be linked to the hierarchy the effects model. The sequence of this hierarchy must be based upon the Muslim religion and culture.

(Clow & Baack, 2007) state that Hierarchy of effects model is composed of six, non-sequential components they are: awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction, and purchase. This means that consumers are most likely to refer to their own cognitive map in order to move from one stage to another. When it comes to Halal products, some features of the hierarchy are expected to be attached to the product by default, namely "liking" and "preference". In this case, it is up to the marketer to increase awareness and knowledge of the product as well as increasing the customer's conviction in the Halal certificate. With these elements in hand — in other words, when the Muslim consumers find out about a product and perceive it to fit within their Halal cognitive map — the expected course of action of the customer will be purchasing it. If it consistently meets their expectations, then the matter of "liking" and "preference" will automatically be enhanced; a key takeaway from this section is for marketers to avoid wasting resources on advertising aimed at increasing the preference part of the hierarchy when those resources could be much more efficiently allocated elsewhere.

CREATING DIALOGUE AND ESTABLISHING TRUST

Misled and Mistreated...Mistrust

Not making mistakes and avoiding common pitfalls is the beginning of establishing a strong presence among this segment; however, creating a message which the Muslim can react to positively is essential in establishing a cohesive marketing strategy. To understand how to create this positive messaging, we must first understand the Muslim's current perception of companies. Muslims treat companies (both foreign and local) with a significant degree of mistrust. Over the years, Muslims (especially those in developing countries) have become accustomed to being lied to and mistreated by large corporations. Rotten frozen meat being sold in the local market, the first Islamic banks in Egypt being no more than Ponzi schemes,

lower quality products being dumped in the country, and many more issues that have plagued developing countries in general really hit the Muslim community hard. To add insult to injury, most Arab Muslim countries are ranked high in the power distance index. This is a result of inequality and authoritarian regimes that have ruled Muslim nations for decades. Whether the Arab spring will have an impact on this has yet to be seen, though it could point to a major shift in the Arab Muslims personality and perceptions.

On the other hand, Muslims in developed countries face very different hardships due to companies. Seeing as how Muslims have a specific set of requirements for products that they buy, wear, and eat, they either have difficulty discerning Halal products or they find Halal products but are unsure of the company's sincerity. There are very few organizations or systems of assuring that a product is Halal or not, thus making the process of convincing a Muslim that a product is truly Halal based solely on trust. This problem can be exasperated if front-line employees and customer representatives have no idea what a Halal product is.

This mistrust can then then spill out into the previously mentioned concept of coding and decoding. By relying primarily on one-way communication methods, the mistrust of Muslim consumers can then result in them refusing, or wrongly decoding, the messages placed within the advert. Billboards, T.V. advertisements, Web ads, and others all will suffer from that negative perception and stigma held by Muslims. All of these matters represent a significant barrier to enter the Halal market, but it is also a tremendous opportunity for the few companies that can capitalize on it.

Establish Trust, Build a Brand

In this context, the type of communication plays a large role in reaching the Muslim consumer in a positive manner and eliminating these negative perceptions — as they say, the first step towards trust is having a conversation. According to (Guenzi, Johnson, & Castaldo, 2009), Communication is a pillar of building customer relationship and trust in a brand. Thus, the first step is by establishing open channels of two-way communication with the customers. The importance of doing so cannot be overstated as it can allow for a transformation of how Muslims and companies interact. When a product says that it is Halal, it is only natural that the consumer will ask how it is Halal.

Without open channels of communication, the Muslim consumer is left wondering how the authenticity of this claim can be verified; and without extensive research, they will not be able to find the answer. By utilizing the different types of social media, and by actively and quickly answering all inquiries from consumers, three benefits will materialize. The first is that the Muslim consumer's concerns can be put to rest (allowing them to buy without any reservations), non-Muslims can better understand what makes a Halal product different (and thus can be attracted as a customer) and, finally, overall trust in the product and the organization will increase. This can be very positive as it has been shown that increased trust, satisfaction and loyalty in an organization directly impacts and increases sales, customer satisfaction and financial performance (Korzeniowski, 2013; Marzouk, 2011).

For example, in Muslim countries (or with Muslim communities in general) there is usually significant doubt concerning the authenticity of Islamic Banks. The commonly held beliefs are that there is no such thing as an Islamic Bank, and that the current Islamic Banks are not truly Islamic. This is mostly a matter of marketing and branding. In order to remove this negative stigma, these banks must make an effort not only to advertise their benefits, but also to communicate with their customer base in order to assure them of the concept and methods of applying Islamic Financing. To this end, everyone working in the bank should understand what truly constitutes an Islamic Financial institution. ALL the companies listed in their stock indices should be listed clearly along with reports and audits about their sources of business and dealings. Transparency here is the key word, all dealings, transactions, and agreements should be held to public scrutiny in order to alleviate any lingering doubt. There should even be seminars and efforts to

educate the consumers. By inviting local communities to discuss and learn about Islamic banking would be a very fruitful way of increasing the knowledge and appreciation of the bank that does this, as well as increasing your potential customer base by showing the relative advantages and perks of dealing with an Islamic bank.

Muslims in non-Muslim countries, on the other hand, face a very different set of problems. While banking and finance can (for some) be considered a once in a lifetime matter, food is something dealt with every day and can cause stress and anguish for those unable to align their religious beliefs with their everyday actions. The most common problem Muslims must face is the issue of eating meat that is not Halal. The Definition of Halal meat is meat that comes from an animal that has been slaughtered following the steps and procedures set out by the Muslim religion. While there is some debate as whether Muslims are allowed to eat non-Halal meat in non-Muslim countries, Muslims would feel more comfortable eating in the way prescribed by Islam.

Since the word “Halal” can just be slapped on to the front of the package, similar to the usage of “Organic”, no one is quite sure as to whether the product is conforming to the Muslim doctrine. To remove such doubt is to put huge effort towards directly engaging the consumer and by directly tackling the issue of *convincing* the Muslim that your product is Halal. For this to be done, the simplest methods are also the most effective, they are: Honesty and transparency. Online marketing and informative advertising is one of the most powerful weapons to handle this concern. The whole process of creating the Halal product must be open and available for the consumer to see and this can be achieved in many different ways. By allowing for tours of the production facility, by welcome external auditors, by creating an environment of open communication, and by allowing anyone and everyone to review the process as many times as it takes to convince them of its legitimacy. Companies should take the initiative to explain the meaning of Halal and how Halal is embedded in their production blue printing steps. This will allow skeptics to view everything for themselves until they are wholly convinced without the slightest reservations or doubts. For those that still have issues with the process, a feedback system should be in place in order to take such issues into account to better comply with Islamic practices. Through doing so, an entirely new Quality Assurance system can be put into place which is an Islamic Assurance system to provide a wholly compliant product.

Consider for a moment the brands and companies built on a certain limitation of accommodation. Some of the first to come to mind would be “Kosher” and “Vegan”. Each has a strict set of requirements which needs to be catered to in order to become a viable product for the target customer. Yet each have found their ways into the different parts of life, even in countries with the Jewish community making only a tiny portion of the overall market, Kosher has become an important brand. It has even reached to the point where Muslims will purposely seek out Kosher products because of the overlap in religious requirements. By establishing an entire line of products or services based on these principles, assured by internal and (if possible) external systems, and with a clear differentiation in everything from how it is communicated to the way it is presented and sold, a premium can be placed and a new customer base found.

(J. A. J. Wilson & Liu, 2011) provide a very vivid example as to how Muslims perceive a Halal brand (and is a must read for anyone interested in Islamic Branding). Their model states that the Muslim view products through a “*consumer cultural lens*”. Through this lens, the rational and emotional side of the Muslim leads them to believe (or to not believe) the Contextual evidence, the Cognitive message, the Affective message, and the Textual evidence. Thus, the case is put that the different approaches to reaching and convincing the consumer are interconnected and are an integral part of sending the message. This is in-line with what was stated as not one single approach will fully reach the Muslim community. The consumer must be reassured as Muslims are traditionally risk averse (or high uncertainty avoidance if you will) and require a multi-pronged approach in overcoming this risk aversion.

But the process of reassuring the customer is not merely about the number or variety of methods used. In the end, convincing a customer on the spot as whether a product is compliant with Islam will probably be a common issue and will completely depend on the front-line employees. Those in customer relations, food serving, phone operators and any employee that has direct contact must be fully trained on the requirements and specifications of the Islamic product. As we've previously discussed, said employees must be equipped with the knowledge and training to answer any question, eliminate any doubt, and dispel any reservations about the Islamic products offered. This imbues a sense of confidence within the whole organization as to the legitimacy of their claim which is passed on positively to the consumer. This can also come with a price. Mislead the consumer, have one false product and it could undermine the entire goal of the company and destroy its reputation among Muslims. The attention to detail (which should be undertaken by the previously mentioned Islamic Assurance system) must be exact. In the case of Halal meat, everything down to the way the meat is handled, what words were said when the cow was slaughtered, and even ensuring that the meat is put through a different grinder as pork must be taken seriously, and followed meticulously.

THE ISLAMIC PORTFOLIO

The Abuse of the Halal Brand

Halal is in danger of becoming meaningless, yet this is an opportunity in and of itself. The name halal is being overused and, frankly, abused. In many Western countries, products are labeled as Halal, but without a set of criteria or transparency in order to assure its compliance. In certain African countries, a slew of products are labeled as Halal without rhyme or reason. Halal clothes, fruits, games, and many other random products prey on the ignorance of the target market. Even in Muslim countries, the Halal brand is overly (and liberally) used and applied. While many products in these countries — such as the ever referred to Halal meat — already are produced following the Islamic method, institutions such as Islamic banks get by with little oversight and even less trust by its client base. Each country and region has its own example of trust issues from using a certain brand (whether it be Halal or Islamic or any derivatives thereof) and thus has become difficult to become trusted. By establishing a well-trusted brand of Halal products, a company can enter a market with a high barrier to entry and enjoy a period of unrivalled success *if that company manages to tap that market in the first place*. But, naturally, the same barriers that apply to other companies will still apply here.

This problem is by no means unique to the Halal brand; over the years, different fads and movements have been commercially exploited. The problem lies not in the commercialization of such matters, but in the abuse of these concepts and the falsehoods used by companies to cash in on them. One of the most recent examples of such is the Organic brand. Once considered a necessity in a healthy and environmental lifestyle, now anything with the Organic brand is looked at with a degree of mistrust and questioning. This is because companies overplayed their hands and began applying a very liberal definition of Organic to their products. While certain consumer protection laws in various countries might regulate and prevent such behavior, it is certainly not applicable in every country and situation. However, some companies manage to avoid this stigma by truly applying organic production methods in their products as well as building relationships with their customers. By studying how companies like Organic Valley and Earth's Best have succeeded in establishing the kind of trust among its customer base, we get a glimpse into how the Halal brand can be managed.

Turning Halal into a Portfolio

It would be difficult to expect a well-known brand or company successfully expanding into the Muslim segment without major hurdles. For example, Banque Misr (one of Egypt's leading banks) dedicates entire branches to Islamic Banking and dealings, yet it has never reached the levels of success that dedicated Islamic Banks have reached such as the Faisal Islamic Bank or Baraka Bank. This is despite excellent customer service and satisfaction for Banque Misr clients all across the country. The point is thus, in order to create a viable, believable Islamic or Halal product line, it is important to either create a new brand for

it, or to divest a new company dedicated to those dealings. Without this, the different messages from the company could clash creating confusion regarding the different products it provides. Furthermore, the words Islam and Halal still hold negative connotations for people around the world (including even secular Muslims) which could drive off one customer group in favor of another, achieving nothing. By differentiating the brands and/or companies, one can cater to the Muslim segment and tap into this massive market without risking one's existing customer base.

The Halal segment can be entered through two different ways, either by retail or by the production. In the case of a retailer, a benefit is added in that an entire new section or brand does not need to be established; a dedicated section is enough to do it. The retailer can then create a set of criteria for what constitutes the different Halal products and make said requirements very clear to both its suppliers and its customers. Through collaborating with its suppliers, the retailer can then assure both itself and its consumers of the validity of their claims thereby creating trust among its customers as well as widening its customer base. By following these concepts in addition to all of the previously mentioned strategies, the retailer will be in a strong position to establish itself in this market. In the case of production (whether of a product or a service), the matter becomes a little more complicated. Seeing as how the Halal brand has a significant measure of ambiguity surrounding it, solid measures of compliance should be set in accordance with major Muslim religious authorities as well as the companies that partake in these industries. Through these standards and by applying an oversight authority, customer trust can be established and new markets can be created. Finally, we must consider an important matter, issues such as creating an entirely new brand, establishing it in the target consumers' minds, positioning it correctly and all of the other issues of traditional marketing apply to this market. Whether it be the 4Ps, or the 7Ps, or leveraging, or proper segmentation, or alignment to the company's vision, or, or, or... The truth is, we already have most of the tools and theories to apply Islamic Marketing; *use them*.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

Islamic Marketing is becoming more important both as a science and as business opportunities. Journals have begun appearing dedicated to Islamic Marketing and Halal is increasing in importance as a brand. Researchers have begun to look at marketing from a religious standpoint and discuss the kind of values and life-styles Muslims attach to certain products and services. As this chapter was merely an outline, setting the framework for how one could go about studying the Islamic market, future studies could look into the specifics of each case and concept. By taking those already establishing concepts and applying them within the Islamic concepts, great strides could be made in enhancing the current market as well as the existing literature. The foundations exist; build on them.

CONCLUSION

While the market for Islamic products is growing rapidly, companies still cannot successfully reach the Muslim consumer. Mistakes in the method of advertising, the messages used, the images portrayed and an overall misunderstandings of Muslims are partly to blame. Other environmental factor increase the scope and difficulty of reaching out to these potential customers, but also increases the pay-off for those who successfully penetrate this market. To do so, one must understand the market well and delve deeply into the philosophy and life-style that Islam and Halal suggest. After obtaining an understanding of these customers one can find ways to establish a working two-way relationship and communication model. This model will provide a competitive advantage within this segment that can't be easily replicated. Also, through this model, the needs and concerns of this segment can be understood and internalized on a more advanced level allowing the organization to better understand and cater to their needs. This will allow for the company to expand its customer base as well as enhance customer satisfaction of an important segment.

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KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Decoding: The process people undertaken when they receive communication. Through decoding, people disseminate the information in their own way from their own cultural and social perspective.

Encoding: The process of infusing a method of communication with a message that is to be conveyed to the consumer.

Halal: An Arabic term meaning permissible or allowed in the Muslim religion.

Haram: An Arabic term meaning forbidden or refused in the Muslim Religion

Hierarchy of Effects Model: The model refers to the different thought processes that go through a customer's mind and how that customer creates a mind map of the product.

Kosher: A Hebrew term for products and actions that comply with the Jewish religion

Organic: A term referring to certain products being more natural, made without using pesticides or artificial chemicals, which has become very popular with increased environmental and health awareness

Leverage Points: The points that the customer is looking for in a product; it represents the benefits that will be received by buying or consuming it and is a major consideration for how to advertise a product.

Sunnah: The words, teachings and saying of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) which forms the backbone of Muslims' understandings of the Muslim religion