

Global Recognition of Halal Certification: A Fundamental, Innovative, and International Paradigm for Ensuring Integrity and Enhancing Competitiveness in the Global Halal Industry

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DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v15-i9/26470>

Published Date: 11 September 2025

Abstract

This study offers a conceptual exploration of the global recognition of halal certification as a fundamental, innovative, and international paradigm for ensuring integrity and enhancing competitiveness in the global halal industry. It examines the extent to which halal certification is acknowledged across jurisdictions and identifies the principal determinants of mutual recognition. Employing a qualitative, conceptual methodology grounded in Shariah legal principles, ethical economic reasoning, and comparative policy analysis, the research critically investigates challenges of standardisation, consumer confidence, and technological integration within the certification landscape. The findings reveal that global recognition remains constrained by divergent Shariah interpretations, fragmented regulatory structures, and the absence of a universal accreditation mechanism. Inconsistencies in halal standards, questions of credibility, and limited deployment of digital infrastructure further impede the establishment of a cohesive international framework. To address these gaps, the study advances strategic recommendations, including the creation of a unified Shariah-based certification architecture, legal harmonisation through mutual recognition agreements (MRAs), and the adoption of blockchain-enabled traceability systems. These proposals aim to strengthen interoperability, transparency, and credibility, thereby reinforcing the global halal industry's role as a competitive and ethically governed sector. By synthesising normative Islamic jurisprudence with contemporary regulatory and technological imperatives, this study contributes to advancing both scholarly discourse and policy development in the governance of halal certification.

Keywords: Halal Certification, Mutual Recognition, Shariah Governance, Global Competitiveness, Blockchain Traceability

Introduction and Background of Study

The global halal industry has rapidly evolved into one of the most dynamic and influential sectors within the contemporary world economy, propelled by the growing demand for faith-compliant products and services among nearly two billion Muslims worldwide (Pew Research Center, 2017). With projections valuing the halal economy at approximately USD 7.7 trillion by 2025 (DinarStandard, 2020), halal certification has assumed a pivotal role in safeguarding consumer confidence, strengthening regulatory enforcement, and facilitating international market access. Yet, despite its increasing significance, the international recognition of halal certification remains a persistent and multifaceted challenge that undermines both economic efficiency and ethical integrity.

Central to this challenge is the absence of standardisation and mutual recognition across more than 400 halal certifying bodies (HCBs) operating worldwide (HDC, 2021). While national regulatory frameworks govern certification within specific jurisdictions, the lack of a universally binding framework has generated systemic inefficiencies, including duplicative certification requirements, regulatory overlaps, and trade disputes. Equally concerning is the rise of consumer scepticism, particularly in non-Muslim majority markets where halal regulation is often inconsistent, superficial, or subordinated to commercial interests (Riaz & Chaudry, 2004; Alserhan, 2020).

The implications of this fragmented landscape are profound. From an economic perspective, businesses are encumbered with heightened compliance costs, reduced competitiveness, and barriers to cross-border expansion. From a regulatory perspective, states face difficulties in ensuring legal certainty, enforcing standards, and maintaining cross-jurisdictional coherence. From a religious and ethical perspective, the very essence of halal certification, anchored in Shariah principles, is jeopardised when inconsistencies, weak governance, or commercial exploitation erode consumer trust (Othman et al., 2020).

Although multilateral organisations such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) have undertaken initiatives to establish unified global halal standards, progress has been constrained by political contestations and divergent theological interpretations. This underscores the inherent difficulty of reconciling diverse schools of Islamic jurisprudence within the framework of an international trade regime. Against this backdrop, Malaysia, through the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) and the Halal Development Corporation (HDC), has emerged as a leading authority, strategically positioned to influence global halal governance and contribute to the development of a coherent international certification system.

This study, therefore, critically examines the implications of global recognition, or the lack thereof, of halal certification for the integrity and competitiveness of the global halal industry. It seeks to analyse the interplay of legal, regulatory, and theological dimensions in shaping certification frameworks across jurisdictions and to propose innovative strategies for harmonisation, mutual recognition, and institutional trust-building within the global halal ecosystem.

Problem Statement

Despite the exponential expansion of the global halal industry, projected to attain a valuation of USD 7.7 trillion by 2025 (DinarStandard, 2020), the absence of a unified and universally recognised halal certification framework continues to erode the industry's credibility, operational efficiency, and global competitiveness. The coexistence of divergent certification systems, heterogeneous national standards, and fragmented recognition mechanisms has resulted in systemic challenges, including cross-border trade barriers, consumer uncertainty, and persistent regulatory disputes in both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim jurisdictions (Alserhan, 2020; Riaz & Chaudry, 2004).

At present, more than 400 halal certification bodies (HCBs) operate worldwide, yet their approvals are not consistently recognised across jurisdictions. This lack of interoperability generates costly duplications in compliance, delays in international trade, and diminished consumer trust in the authenticity of halal claims (Halal Development Corporation [HDC], 2021). Such fragmentation undermines not only the religious integrity of halal certification but also its potential to be positioned as a universal benchmark for quality, safety, and ethical consumption.

Compounding this issue, institutional actors such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) have struggled to advance a binding global halal standard, constrained by political contestations, legal pluralism, and divergent theological interpretations (Othman et al., 2020). In the absence of internationally harmonised recognition mechanisms, halal certification risks degenerating into a fragmented, commercially exploited label, detached from its Shariah-based foundations, rather than evolving as a holistic, value-driven framework capable of commanding universal trust, legitimacy, and international recognition.

Research Questions

1. How is halal certification recognised across selected countries, and what are the key factors influencing mutual recognition?
2. What are the major challenges faced in the global halal certification system, particularly in relation to standardisation, consumer trust, and technological integration?
3. What conceptual strategies can be proposed to enhance the global recognition of halal certification through Shariah-based principles, legal harmonisation, and cross-border cooperation?

Objectives

1. To explore how halal certification is recognised across selected countries and the factors influencing mutual recognition.
2. To identify key challenges related to standardisation, consumer trust, and technological integration in the global halal certification landscape.
3. To propose conceptual strategies for strengthening the global recognition of halal certification based on Shariah principles, legal harmonisation, and cross-border cooperation.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative-conceptual methodology, which is particularly suitable for research that aims to explore legal, ethical, and policy-oriented dimensions without relying

on field data (Chowdhury, 2014; Snyder, 2019). The method focuses on theoretical synthesis, normative reasoning, and critical discourse analysis to examine the dynamics of global halal certification, its recognition, and standardisation challenges.

The research employs several interrelated methods:

1. **Document and Literature Analysis.** A comprehensive review of peer-reviewed articles, halal certification standards (e.g., JAKIM, MUIS, ESMA, GSO), regulatory frameworks, and international guidelines is conducted. This review aims to synthesise current knowledge on the mechanisms and limitations of mutual recognition across jurisdictions (Zamzamin et al., 2021; Bonne & Verbeke, 2008). Islamic legal texts and contemporary fatwas related to halal are also analysed to ensure alignment with Shariah principles.
2. **Comparative Legal and Policy Analysis.** The study examines the halal certification systems of selected countries through a comparative lens, assessing their legislative underpinnings, institutional arrangements, and bilateral or multilateral recognition agreements (Fischer, 2011; Riaz & Chaudry, 2004). This approach highlights both convergences and divergences in regulatory practices, providing insight into the challenges of harmonisation.
3. **Thematic Content Analysis.** Thematic analysis is employed to identify and categorise recurring themes such as standardisation gaps, consumer trust issues, and technological integration in certification processes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method facilitates structured analysis of conceptual patterns drawn from textual data, enhancing the interpretive depth of the study.
4. **Normative and Theoretical Reasoning.** The study draws upon Islamic jurisprudential principles including *fiqh al-mu'amalat* (Islamic commercial transactions), *fiqh al-adat* (customary practices), and the maqasid al-Shariah (objectives of Islamic law) to propose normative strategies for global recognition (Kamali, 2008). Legal harmonisation theory and cross-border governance frameworks are also used to conceptualise cooperative mechanisms that are both Shariah-compliant and internationally acceptable (Shaikh & Talib, 2017).

This methodology allows for a theoretically grounded and policy-relevant analysis, providing holistic strategies to enhance the recognition, credibility, and interoperability of halal certification systems worldwide.

Literature Review

The literature on halal certification increasingly frames it not merely as a compliance mechanism but as a strategic instrument of global trade and governance. A review of scholarship demonstrates five dominant themes: (i) halal certification as a trade instrument, (ii) global demand beyond Muslim consumers, (iii) challenges of standardisation and mutual recognition, (iv) technological innovation and regulatory gaps, and (v) geopolitical and institutional fragmentation.

Halal Certification as a Strategic Trade Instrument.

Certification has evolved into a critical determinant of market access, particularly in export-oriented economies. Ahmad et al. (2023) and Riaz and Chaudry (2004) conceptualise halal certificates as “trade passports” that not only facilitate entry into Muslim-majority markets but also enhance competitiveness in non-Muslim jurisdictions. The Halal Development Corporation (HDC, 2021) highlights the economic weight of halal exports from Brazil, Australia, and the United Kingdom, where halal-compliant commodities contribute billions to annual trade balances. This underscores the increasingly international function of halal certification as a form of regulatory currency, transforming it into a fundamental pillar of global supply chains. However, despite recognition of its strategic value, comparative analyses across regions remain scarce, particularly regarding differential trade impacts and competitiveness outcomes.

Global Demand Beyond Muslim Consumers.

Another recurrent theme concerns the shifting consumer demographics of halal-certified products. Alserhan (2020) and Thomson Reuters (2023) report that halal’s appeal has expanded significantly among non-Muslim consumers, driven by perceptions of hygiene, ethical sourcing, and transparency in supply chains. In this sense, halal is repositioned as a marker of universal integrity rather than a purely religious designation. The literature highlights halal’s innovative rebranding into a lifestyle quality standard that transcends cultural boundaries, thereby strengthening its international relevance. Nevertheless, empirical evidence on the long-term sustainability of non-Muslim demand, particularly in Western markets, remains underdeveloped.

Challenges of Standardisation and Mutual Recognition

Despite exponential growth, the halal industry remains structurally fragmented. Othman et al. (2020) and Rokhman and Yusof (2022) emphasise that over 400 halal certification bodies operate globally, many of which lack mutual recognition. This has resulted in duplication of audits, escalating compliance costs, and delays in cross-border trade. Malaysia’s JAKIM, for instance, applies rigorous theological criteria that differ substantially from European or North American certification frameworks, leading to disputes in product acceptance. This divergence reveals an enduring tension between fiqh pluralism and regulatory harmonisation. The gap in the literature lies in the absence of comparative, cross-country legal studies that propose governance models capable of balancing theological authenticity with international recognition.

Technological Innovation and Regulatory Gaps

Technological intervention has emerged as a potential solution to certification inconsistencies. Zahidi et al. (2021) propose blockchain and digital traceability systems as mechanisms to enhance transparency, prevent fraud, and strengthen consumer trust. Case studies from the United Arab Emirates demonstrate early adoption of blockchain in halal supply chains, signalling an innovative pathway towards global interoperability. Yet, technological adoption remains uneven: many jurisdictions continue to rely on paper-based systems, constrained by infrastructure, regulatory inertia, and limited interoperability. Current scholarship remains predominantly conceptual, with few empirical studies on the scalability and global feasibility of such technologies in diverse socio-political contexts.

Geopolitical and Institutional Fragmentation

Finally, geopolitical dynamics shape the trajectory of global halal recognition. Institutions such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC) have attempted to formulate harmonised halal standards, but progress has been limited. As Othman et al. (2020) and HDC (2021) observe, national interests, political sensitivities, and theological divergences impede the creation of binding supranational frameworks. This results in unilateral recognition policies that fragment the industry, undermine consumer confidence, and weaken the industry's competitiveness on the international stage. The literature underscores the urgent need for multilateral governance models capable of transcending political divides while safeguarding Shariah integrity.

Synthesis of Literature and Identified Gaps

The reviewed literature collectively affirms that halal certification has transitioned into a fundamental, international mechanism of trade, consumer trust, and ethical governance. Yet, the sector's expansion is undermined by persistent structural weaknesses: theological diversity without harmonisation, technological solutions without global adoption, and institutional initiatives without binding enforcement. Importantly, few studies integrate these dimensions into a holistic framework. Most works examine certification in isolation, either as a trade tool, a consumer trust mechanism, or a regulatory challenge, without capturing their interdependence. This study seeks to fill that gap by evaluating recognition mechanisms across multiple jurisdictions, integrating legal, technological, and governance perspectives, and proposing an innovative, globally oriented framework for halal integrity and competitiveness.

Findings and Analysis*Recognition of Halal Certification Across Jurisdictions and Influencing Determinants*

The recognition of halal certification remains highly uneven across jurisdictions, shaped by theological interpretations, legal frameworks, and geopolitical considerations. Leading regulatory authorities such as Malaysia's Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM), Singapore's Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS), and the United Arab Emirates' Emirates Authority for Standardization and Metrology (ESMA) command significant international recognition due to their structured frameworks and rigorous compliance systems (Zamzamin, Yusoff, & Abdullah, 2021). Nonetheless, the absence of universally binding standards and the lack of formalised cross-border agreements have led to fragmented acceptance.

A major determinant of this divergence lies in the plurality of Shariah interpretations. Variations in fiqh rulings, particularly among the Shafi'i, Hanafi, and Hanbali schools, generate inconsistencies in rulings on critical issues such as stunning methods, alcohol derivatives, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). This diversity, while reflective of the richness of Islamic jurisprudence, complicates the pursuit of mutual recognition (Riaz & Chaudry, 2004; Kamali, 2008). National protectionism further exacerbates the issue, with governments prioritising domestic certification bodies as instruments of economic strategy and religious sovereignty (Fischer, 2011; Bonne & Verbeke, 2008).

Equally significant is the absence of a universally recognised accreditation mechanism. Despite efforts by the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC) under the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), its influence remains limited. Many states

continue to operate independently, leading to regulatory pluralism and institutional fragmentation (Shaikh & Talib, 2017). Consequently, despite surging global demand for halal-certified products, mutual recognition is persistently hindered by theological divergences, regulatory sovereignty, and fragmented institutional governance.

Persistent Challenges in Standardisation, Consumer Trust, and Technological Integration

a) Lack of Standardisation

The proliferation of halal certification bodies, particularly in non-Muslim majority countries such as the United States, Australia, and Japan, has produced a patchwork of standards. Many of these frameworks lack alignment with Shariah principles or are not recognised by major importing countries (Fischer, 2011; Zamzamin et al., 2021). Inconsistent terminologies, varying audit mechanisms, and weak regulatory oversight contribute to systemic ambiguity, undermining global uniformity.

b) Erosion of Consumer Trust

Consumer confidence is increasingly compromised by inconsistent halal logos, opaque certification procedures, and cases of fraudulent certification (Bonne & Verbeke, 2008). In both Western and Asian markets, Muslim consumers express scepticism towards lesser-known or foreign certification bodies, particularly where transparency and enforcement mechanisms are weak (Shaikh & Talib, 2017). Scandals involving products falsely labelled halal or contaminated with non-halal substances have further eroded trust, raising both religious and ethical alarm.

c) Technological Gaps

The deployment of advanced digital technologies, such as blockchain, QR-based traceability, and halal logistics platforms, remains at a nascent stage. Although pioneering initiatives have emerged in Brunei and the UAE, implementation is constrained by high costs, limited digital infrastructure, and lack of interoperability (Ali et al., 2020). Without robust digital integration, monitoring halal integrity across globalised and complex supply chains remains highly challenging.

Collectively, these challenges underscore the urgent need for systemic reform and institutional innovation to safeguard the integrity of halal certification while enabling it to meet global market and technological demands.

Conceptual Strategies to Strengthen Global Recognition

The findings suggest several conceptual strategies that can harmonise global recognition while ensuring fidelity to Shariah principles:

a) Shariah-Based Global Halal Framework. A holistic, Shariah-based framework grounded in maqasid al-Shariah should form the foundation for global certification. Such a framework must embrace jurisprudential diversity while unifying core halal requirements through *fiqh al-mu'amalat* and *fiqh al-'adat*, thereby ensuring contextual relevance without compromising integrity (Kamali, 2008).

b) Regional Harmonisation and Bilateral Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs). Regional blocs such as ASEAN and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) can act as platforms for structured harmonisation. Bilateral and multilateral MRAs, supported by shared audit

procedures, transparent legal instruments, and enforceable monitoring mechanisms, can enhance mutual recognition (Fischer, 2011).

c) Digital Halal Governance. Digitalisation through blockchain, halal registries, and AI-enabled monitoring tools should be mainstreamed to restore trust, enhance traceability, and eliminate fraud. A global halal blockchain registry, administered by a neutral international consortium under OIC or UN auspices, could ensure interoperability and reliability (Ali et al., 2020; Shaikh & Talib, 2017).

d) Establishment of an International Halal Accreditation Authority. The creation of a centralised accreditation authority, under the auspices of the OIC, UNCTAD, or a newly mandated multilateral organisation, could standardise accreditation, audit certifiers, and monitor cross-border compliance. Such an entity would provide both legal harmonisation and institutional legitimacy (Zamzamin et al., 2021).

Significance of the Study

This study makes four major contributions to the discourse on global halal governance:

First, it addresses a critical gap by advancing the debate from national and regional perspectives to a transnational framework for halal certification recognition. It integrates Islamic jurisprudence (maqasid al-Shariah, fiqh al-mu'amalat) with principles of international legal harmonisation.

Second, it enhances policy relevance by identifying systemic impediments, standardisation deficits, consumer trust erosion, and technological fragmentation, and proposing forward-looking strategies such as blockchain-enabled traceability and centralised accreditation.

Third, it contributes to academic scholarship by providing a conceptual framework that links halal governance to contemporary debates in Islamic law, global trade regulation, and digital supply chain innovation. The findings offer a foundation for curriculum development, postgraduate research, and scholarly debate in halal studies and Islamic economics.

Finally, it contributes to industry transformation by encouraging stakeholders, exporters, food manufacturers, certifiers, and logistics providers, to embrace digital innovation, ethical governance, and regulatory convergence. In doing so, it positions halal not merely as a religious marker but as a global benchmark of quality, safety, and integrity, aligned with international competitiveness.

Mapping: Significance Linked to Research Objectives and Stakeholders

Research Objective	Significance	Target Beneficiaries
1. To explore how halal certification is recognised across selected countries and the factors influencing mutual recognition	Provides comparative insights into recognition practices, enhancing understanding of regulatory diversity and theological nuances	Policymakers, researchers, international certifying bodies
2. To identify key challenges related to standardisation, consumer trust, and technological integration	Informs strategic decision-making to address structural weaknesses in global halal governance	Halal industry stakeholders, food exporters, digital developers
3. To propose conceptual strategies for strengthening global recognition based on Shariah principles, legal harmonisation, and cross-border cooperation	Offers actionable, Shariah-aligned models for reforming the halal certification landscape	OIC bodies, accreditation authorities, academic institutions

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the critical necessity of constructing a coherent, Shariah-based, and internationally recognised halal certification framework. Despite the exponential growth of global halal markets, the absence of mutual recognition among certification bodies continues to restrict trade efficiency, weaken consumer trust, and impede the competitiveness of the industry (Zamzamin et al., 2021). These challenges are deeply entrenched in jurisprudential pluralism, national protectionist agendas, and fragmented regulatory mechanisms (Riaz & Chaudry, 2004; Fischer, 2011).

The analysis confirms that gaps in standardisation, deficiencies in consumer trust, and uneven technological adoption remain the most formidable barriers to interoperability within the halal certification system. Regional organisations such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC) have advanced valuable initiatives, yet their frameworks remain largely aspirational due to the absence of binding enforcement and institutional accountability (Shaikh & Talib, 2017). The erosion of consumer trust, further undermined by certification fraud, counterfeit logos, and lack of transparency, poses not only a reputational risk but also threatens the ethical foundations upon which the halal economy is built (Bonne & Verbeke, 2008).

Crucially, this study's proposed strategies are anchored in both contemporary trade realities and classical Islamic jurisprudence. The call for a Shariah-based global halal standard, strengthened through Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs), is aligned with the principles of *fiqh al-mu'āmalāt* and *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* (Kamali, 2008). Equally, the integration of blockchain and artificial intelligence within halal traceability reflects an innovative alignment between Islamic ethical systems and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Ali et al., 2020). This dual emphasis on authenticity and innovation positions halal certification not only as a religious obligation but also as a driver of ethical governance, transparency, and global trade resilience.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the following policy-oriented and governance-driven recommendations are advanced:

1. **Develop a Globally Endorsed Shariah-Based Halal Standard**

A unified framework, accommodating jurisprudential diversity across madhāhib, should be formulated under the auspices of the OIC or an international halal authority. Such a standard must balance religious authenticity with operational flexibility to ensure international legitimacy.

2. **Institutionalise Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs)**

Bilateral and multilateral MRAs should be formalised between countries with advanced halal ecosystems. These must include transparent auditing processes, enforceable dispute-resolution mechanisms, and mutual accountability clauses to reduce redundancy and trade frictions.

3. **Establish an International Halal Accreditation Board**

A neutral, multilateral accreditation body should be empowered to certify and monitor halal certification bodies (HCBs) globally. This board would enhance compliance, reduce fraudulent practices, and strengthen the credibility of halal claims across jurisdictions.

4. **Promote Blockchain-Based Digital Halal Registries**

Governments and industry actors should invest in blockchain- and AI-driven traceability platforms to ensure integrity across the halal supply chain. This will enhance consumer trust, reduce the risk of fraud, and improve cross-border interoperability.

5. **Strengthen Capacity Building and Legal Harmonisation**

Collaborative training, legal harmonisation workshops, and cross-border scholarly engagement should be prioritised to build a shared epistemic and regulatory understanding among scholars, regulators, and industry players.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive exploration of the recognition challenges, regulatory fragmentation, and strategic pathways necessary to advance a globally coherent halal certification ecosystem. By integrating Shariah principles with contemporary trade law and digital governance innovations, it articulates a framework that is both normatively grounded and practically implementable.

The findings reaffirm that while theological diversity must be respected, the sustainability and credibility of the global halal industry demand a harmonised approach that ensures trust, legitimacy, and efficiency across markets. Moving forward, collaborative leadership, technological innovation, and legal harmonisation will be decisive in transforming halal certification from a fragmented compliance tool into a universally recognised paradigm of ethical, safe, and competitive trade.

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