

Article

# Islamic Revivalism and Muslim Consumer Ethics

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**Abstract:** Although scholars have examined the link between religiosity and consumer ethics, the idea of Muslim consumer ethics has not received much traction within academia. The idea of Muslim consumer ethics is a manifestation of religious revivalism. Yet, its discussion must consider the critical roles played by Muslim youth and their consumption of new media because the latter has a profound effect on shaping and directing popular Muslim youth cultures. Muslim consumer ethics encompass the moral and humanistic dimension of living in a globalized world as an extension of an individual's religious practice. This phenomenon of ethical consumption has also been commoditized in a lucrative halal industry that fosters a Muslim identity market.

**Keywords:** Muslim consumer ethics; youth; media; digital age

## 1. Introduction

A growing number of Muslims live in urban cities the world over, either as majority or minority populations—the latter owing to intense migrations that are both forced and by choice. This increase in the population densities of Muslims in urban cities, coupled with its rising middle class observed in many parts of the world (Nasr 2009; Jones 2012; Morris 2020), as well as a rather youthful demography who are the most connected generation to date having borne to a digitalized era, has ushered a new phase in Muslim consumption patterns. Within this context, the study of Muslim consumer culture is integral because “consumer culture represents one of the primary arenas in which elements of social change are played out in everyday life” (Miles 2015). For Muslims the world over, and especially for its youth, these changes have been more pronounced since the turn of the millennium. The patterns of Muslim consumption that have emerged have either been met with opposition due to perceptions of threat, or with opportunistic overtures that are eager to capitalize on a youthful, affluent market. However, beyond these polarized responses, how does one systematically make sense of the emerging behaviors in Muslim consumption?

The idea of Muslim consumer ethics needs to be deliberated in scholarly terms. Cesari (2004, p. 47) puts forth the concept of *ethical Islam*, an amalgamation that maximizes “individual autonomy with belief in a higher power” and “an adherence to the moral and humanistic values that underlie religious practice—without, however, adhering to the practice itself”. Following Cesari, this paper argues that we should closely examine the intimate relationship between values and practices. Muslim consumer ethics encompass the moral and humanistic dimensions of living in a globalized world as an extension of an individual's religious practice. These refer to a set of considerations that Muslim consumers apply when making their decisions. As Muslims are not a monolithic group, the application of Muslim consumer ethics would necessarily lead to differential outcomes.

The link between piety and consumer ethics (Vitell and Paolillo 2003; Vitell et al. 2005; Vitell 2009) has gained currency in academia of late but the idea of a “Muslim consumer ethics”, while having a long tradition in Islamic literature, has not been adequately discussed in Western academia (Hamzah et al. 2018). The practical reason for this lacuna is probably due to the diversity of opinions within the Muslim community, which inevitably prevents any homogenous “Muslim” approach to consumption. In this paper, I outline



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some of the influencing factors and considerations in conceptualizing Muslim consumer ethics. Before going further, however, we would need to look at the relationship between consumption and Islam.

## 2. Consumption and Islam

The basis of what is *halal* (permissible) is revealed in the *Qur'an* (the divine book) from God (the Creator) to Muhammad (the Prophet) for all people. In turn, these laws are brought to life through the *Sunnah* (the life, actions and teachings of Muhammad) as recorded in the *Hadith* (the compilation of the traditions of Muhammad). As a rule, everything is sanctioned for the benefit of mankind, and nothing is forbidden save for what is categorically proscribed either by a *Qur'anic* verse or an authentic *Sunnah* of the Prophet. Understood sociologically, Islamic law necessitates social action for a believing and practicing Muslim. After all, religiosity is derived from the term *Religare*, which refers to the “daily disciplines” (Turner 2008). Hence, to be a Muslim is to navigate one’s life in a generally *halal* manner. It is only logical then, when it comes to consumption, that the Muslim is obligated to only engage with *halal* products (Fischer 2016a).

Although the term *halal* has become somewhat synonymous with *halal* cuisines, food is just one of the objects of consumption. Conventional notions of *halal* consumption of food have also evolved. In principle, cuisines and beverages deemed as *halal* must not only be permissible, but they should also be ‘pure,’ free from any contamination of any *haram* (prohibited) elements. For Muslims living as minorities, ensuring a steady supply of *halal* food sources often becomes a consideration that affects major life decisions such as one’s choice of dwelling. Many places have implemented systems of *halal* certification and accreditation to aid Muslim consumption. Although the primary focus has been on food, the Muslim consumer market and “*halal product*” businesses have grown drastically—particularly with the extension of the “*halal requirement*” to include products like non-alcoholic toiletries and *halal* cosmetics, for example. Fischer argues that against the backdrop of Islamic revivalism, *halal* markets have thrived on the international scene, with global cities such as Kuala Lumpur and London emerging as key players in the production and trade of *halal* products—even as the notion of what is *halal* is being questioned and shaped. Going further, he contends that events such as the Halal Exhibition, which are now common in both majority and minority Muslim countries, demonstrate “how the proliferation of *halal* sits uneasily between Islamic revivalism, commercialization and secularism as political doctrine and ‘the secular’ as an epistemic category in everyday life” (Fischer 2016b, p. 143).

Beyond individual products, a *halal* consciousness and assertion for a *shari'ah*-compliant lifestyle have led to the aspiration and evolution of Islamic-based systems. For example, Islamic financial institutions and banking instruments institutionalized theological principles around usury, fair trade and equitable transactions. This paper is not the place to discuss these issues as they warrant highly specialized attention.

The larger issue that I would like to examine is how there have been various attempts to discuss and promulgate a consolidated notion of consumption ethics based on Islamic tenets. For example, Mustafar and Borhan (2013) argue that six variables need to be considered when we broach the issue of ethical consumption in Islam, especially within the context of a developed country. These are the priority of needs, the preservation of the *maqasid al-shari'ah* (objectives of *shari'ah*), abiding by the regulations of *halal* and *haram*, quality consumption, an appreciation of individual and social *maslahah* (interest) and the practice of moderation. The first category of the priority of needs is deconstructed into three categories, *daruriyyat*, *hajiyyat* and *tahsiniyyat*, depending on their relation to the concept of need. *Daruriyyat* refers to the necessities and is critical for survivability. Its deprivation will cause harm to an individual’s life. The second order, *hajiyyat*, is not a basic human need but life might be harder without it. The last, *tahsiniyyat*, refers to the luxuries, and complements life on this earth, leading to its so-called perfection.

Islam is often described as an orthopraxy, where the right actions are as important as religious faith. For example, considering social *maslahah* or public interest is a call for social

action. It allows for sociological analyses and theorizing as it calls for an inquiry beyond individual concerns of *halal* and *haram*. It is a dynamic concept dependent on factors that are both internal and external to conventional theological debates.

When we turn our gaze upon the young, urban, middle-class Muslims who have overcome the first order of needs and for whom the consumption of *halal* options is readily available, issues of quality consumption and considerations of what might be the social and public interest become increasingly important. As a result, what might begin with the more traditional concern for purity that revolves around the permissibility of ingredients and the manufacturing processes has transcended to a more sophisticated conception of *halal*-ness in contemporary times, which in turn, is intricately woven in the formation of a unique Muslim identity.

Undeniably, the Muslim identity market is a lucrative industry. The State of the Global Islamic Economy Report by Thomson Reuters and DinarStandard projects that the global halal economy will pass USD 3 trillion by 2023. The “*halal* industry” now includes Islamic finance, pitched as a more ethical alternative to mainstream financial institutions (Rudnycky 2019), which is estimated at between USD 1 trillion, with a healthy annual growth rate forecast for the next 10 years. Halal food forms the largest market, with consumer spending in the realm of USD 1.3 trillion and comprises a significant portion of the world’s food industry. All these have ensured more nuanced debates on what constitutes *halal*-ness, which include discussions on who is funding these products and where the profits are channeled. Part of these conversations has spawned a series of “Islamic” products targeted at influencing the consumerist culture of young Muslims and the new Muslim middle class. The Internet hence becomes the space where the Muslim identity market aimed at the youth is often flouted.

In our attempts to understand the governing principles of consumption of Muslims today, we need to realize that its manifestations cannot be static. Despite being grounded on precepts of ‘Islamic’ ethics in consumption, Muslim consumer ethics are necessarily evolving. In the following sections, I outline some of the influencing factors and considerations.

### 3. Islamic Revivalism and Ethical Consumption

Much scholarly work on Islamic revivalism has focused on the study of social movements. Books have been written on Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood (Wickham 2013; Mellor 2018), Nadhlatul Ulama (Bush 2009), Muhammadiyah (Nakamura 2012), Gulen (Yavuz 2013; Hendrick 2013; El-Banna 2014), Tablighi Jamaat (Ali 2012; Siddiqi 2018) and so on, charting their impacts on the national, regional and global scene. These social movements are often portrayed as subversive and contrary to the modern and secular way of life by insisting on a re/introduction of Islam into the public sphere. As a corollary to this, and as an offshoot of this emphasis on a social movement perspective, academics have also charted the jostling for power among different schools of thought within and across these social movements.

In depicting Islamic social movements as confrontational to the ruling regime, these works tend to miss portraying the alignment of many of these movements with modern nation-state bureaucracies. Aljunied (2016), in examining the largest Muslim youth movement in Malaysia called the Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), demonstrates how members of the Islamic movement have worked within the ambits of the state apparatus to uphold the developmentalist visions of the modern regime. What is even less studied is the link between religious revivalism and a form of Muslim consciousness that cuts across social movements and national boundaries. This paper broaches the topic of Muslim ethical consumption—a form of religious revivalism that influences the collective consciousness of the *ummah* that does not subscribe to rigid social outfits or theological classifications but is more tied to the sensitivities and proclivities of the relatively young, urban middle-class.

#### 4. A Youth-Driven Muslim Identity Market

An understanding of the consumption practices of Muslims cannot ignore the dispositions of the youth. In studies of religious identities and Islamic revivalism, there is a burgeoning interest to understand “how youth cultures intersect with global processes such as commodification and consumerism, media use, cultural politics, and identity” (Williams and Mohamed Nasir 2017, p. 200). There are several trends from which we can discern and abstract, which impact the demography and influence their practices. Some of these social and global processes are not exclusive to the young Muslim demography while others are more specific to the social group. As Hasan (2016, p. 167) puts it,

Youth are important transmitters of the Islamic revival's ideas, and they creatively translate those messages into lifestyles, fashion, art, music, novels, institutions, and organizations. The messages, in turn, influence multiple social and political fields and encourage a collective identity.

Ostensibly, not unlike that of other youth, the consumption practices of young Muslim youth are a manifestation of global cultural flows. Media observers have portrayed young people as mere vassals that can be manipulated to fit current trends and shifts in the market. This sentiment is even more prominent in the capitalist industry where the “cult of the youth” is promoted. Backed by a plethora of consumer products, society is taught that the focus is not only on being young but on learning to be one. This narrative, which is backed by the media machinery with its persistent emphasis on acting and looking young, has made youth and youthfulness the order of the day. Globally, companies have tailored their marketing campaigns to explicitly focus on the youth demography and tap into their increasing spending power. However, research has shown that beyond the influences of the mass media, these choices that are made by the youth are often more complex than one might think (Chan 2010; Gbadamosi 2018).

Youth consumption patterns are influenced by several factors such as social class, cultural differences, as well as gender. There have been reports that show that although young people tend to splurge across a whole range of products, they are not just concerned with the consumption of leisure activities. This representation of the carefree youth can be deceiving as young people also strive to augment the family's household income by making steady contributions to their parents, settling personal and familial loans, and saving up for their present and future education (Shanahan et al. 1996). As a case in point, millennials make up almost a quarter of the population in Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country in the world. The 2019 Millennial Indonesia report, which surveys young people across twelve of the countries' major cities, found that the top three aspirations of the young are to please their parents, own a house and be good parents.

Trends in youth consumption also often reflect the symbols and predicament of their generation. “Islamic” streetwear fronted by Muslim hip-hop artists, sodas like the *Mecca Cola* and *Zam Zam Cola*, and other “accessories for the fans” enable young people to flaunt their Muslim and western identities simultaneously. Urban middle-class Muslim youth embracing this New Awakening and partaking in this conspicuous consumption and identity politics are not only “good for business”. Mushaben (2008) and Mueller (2014) point to the development of *Pop-Islam* over the last few decades, citing as evidence, the growing prominence of charismatic *imams* and the impact of popular culture in creating entertainment celebrities and icons for the Muslim community. As a result, in Europe, a ‘young, chic and cool’ Islam has emerged among marginalized second-generation Muslim youth who are denied their fundamental rights of citizenship and access to social goods in their countries of birth. Mushaben noted that these trends were exacerbated especially in the aftermath of September 11 although tensions owing to generational gaps within the Muslim community were already evident way before that.

Seen in another way, this capitalistic trend is an example of the commodification of Islam. Skeptics are quick to point out, where is “Islam” in all this consumption? For example, Shirazi (2016) argues in her illuminative book, *Brand Islam: The Marketing and*

*Commodification of Piety*, that many of the products marketed as *halal* or Islamic have got nothing to do with religious practice or theology. Instead, it serves as a clever marketing strategy that exploits the overt piety of the middle class and a generation of Muslim minorities that yearns for a sense of belonging to a larger Islamic laity.

### 5. From Critical Consumers to Active Producers of Media

There have been many studies that demonstrate the necessary relationship between an ethical consumer and a critical consumer (Schifani and Migliore 2011; Gjerris et al. 2016). Being an ethical consumer compels one to be critical one. McGregor (2008, pp. 273–74), for example, argues that being an ethical or critical consumer is a sign of a good citizenship, for “the true objective of being a citizen is to strive to make decisions that err on the side of moral and ethical consumption as the dominant way of life”. One prevalent aspect of contemporary ethical consumption in the digital age, especially in the era of what has been characterized as a post-truth society, has been the desire for content producers, not just individuals and groups on social media but also traditional mainstream media giants, to act ethically.

Muslim consumption patterns must be appreciated against the backdrop of the youth’s ability to sustain a heavy dose of apprehension towards the mainstream media. Established literature on youth culture and consumerism often neglects the role of youth as conscientious consumers. Yet, they often form the social group that is generally dissatisfied and critical of mainstream media for its depictions of Islam and Muslims in general, and its portrayals of young Muslims in particular (Richardson 2004; Ahmed 2012; Alizai 2021; Jiwan and Al-Rawi 2021; Weng and Mansouri 2021). Scholars have also captured the pervasive view of Muslims who feel that the mainstream media’s caricaturing of their identities is rendering them voiceless, and how the moral panic that is engineered by the mainstream media has sensationalized and demonized the young Muslim subject (Richardson 2004; Kabir 2010, 2013).

This growing discontent heightened in the aftermath of September 11 and the global war on terrorism as the securitization of Muslims was felt across the world. Pejorative depictions of their community and faith in mainstream media drove Muslims to seek alternatives through the Internet. They then appropriated the Internet as a platform to create social networks with other Muslims and express their opinions in online forums and chat groups. Undoubtedly, the Internet offers an important platform to examine identity formation for any social group, but it is even more significant for a generation of Muslims who largely feel misrepresented by mainstream media.

One recurring point of contention is the characterization of a “Muslim crime” in the mainstream media when other acts of criminality are hardly depicted as “Christian” or “Buddhist”. This has made many young Muslims feel particularly targeted for their identity (Mohamed Nasir 2016a, p. 171). There are also reports (Bayrakli and Hafez 2021) that link a culture of fear with sustained unfavorable depictions in the public arena. To be sure, these portrayals affect not only how non-Muslims view the Muslim community but also how Muslims view other Muslims as well. The negative portrayal of Muslims in the media has also colored the judgment of Muslims, leading some of them to shun other Muslims.

The pejorative representation of Muslims is also evidenced in movies, advertisements and other forms of popular content. This has been the subject of scholarly discussion for some time now. Jack Shaheen’s book, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (Shaheen 2001), is perhaps the most celebrated. Of late, Muslim artists have been taking a strong stance against this trend. Beyond rejecting offers to play stereotypical “Muslim roles”, such as that of a terrorist, they are taking matters into their own hands by producing content to represent Muslim life on their terms. Hip-hop music is one of the most compelling examples here. Harnessing the potency of the most dominant popular culture of this age, hip-hop presents a powerful platform for Muslims, especially its youth, to offer their interpretation of social reality and engage in a dynamic form of identity formation (Abdul Khabeer 2016; Mohamed Nasir 2020). Furthermore, in Hollywood and especially

within the independent productions industry, Muslim artistes have churned out a corpus of work ranging from films to stand-up comedies, depicting a more nuanced view of Muslim life.

The youth's critical consumption of the media is also set against an unprecedented time where social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter and Tik Tok enable them not only to be selective consumers but more significantly, content creators. This is where the younger generation has been most successful in stamping their viewpoints, with scholars of social movements documenting the role of social media in mobilizing social revolutions like the Arab Spring (Howard and Hussain 2013; Bunt 2019). Granted that there is much of what Shirazi will call *Brand Islam* produced in the new media. However, a study of Muslim consumer ethics cannot neglect these attempts by Muslims to speak truth to power.

## 6. Autonomy versus Authority

These attempts at critical consumption have been aided by a crisis in institutionalized authority and their conventional platforms for legitimacy building. As ideological battles are increasingly fought on the Internet, the digital world has enfeebled the effectiveness of the state to control the dissemination of information, which it has traditionally enjoyed during the era of television and printed media. This volatility of the Internet, combined with its potentially widespread influence, makes the state vulnerable to challenges to its authority and legitimacy. This has convinced many ruling regimes to attempt at regulating the Internet. Nonetheless, any attempt at curtailing the autonomy of their citizens is even more problematic as the Internet traverse national boundaries.

The discourse of *Islamic radicalization* in the post-September 11 era has caused a struggle for autonomy amongst Muslims—both where they live as minorities and in Muslim majority countries where ruling regimes use the Islamic radicalization narrative as a pretext to entrench their hegemony. For the former, Muslims utilize social media platforms to rally support for issues of concern like the *hijab* and whistle-blow against discriminatory or oppressive practices against Muslims. For the latter, we have seen similar activism against reigning regimes that culminated in the sequence of events we know as the Arab Spring.

The democratization and liberalization of knowledge, which have been a marker of the digital age, have inevitably brought about a crisis of religious authority (Turner 2011). The diversification of Muslim consumption of information and knowledge ultimately poses a challenge to conventional institutions. Multiple sources of authority function and jostle for influence in a competitive environment. As a case in point, in Sydney, the *Australia Federation of Islamic Councils*, *Halal Certification Authority Australia*, *Halal Australia*, *Australian Halal Food Services* and *Islamic Co-ordinating Council of Australia Inc.* are some of the stakeholders in Australia's huge *halal* market, which also includes exports of its products across the region. Inadvertently, such a rich tapestry of industrial players ensures a more dynamic discourse on what constitutes *halal*.

This critical consumption and Islamic revivalism among young Muslims, is intertwined with the twin phenomena of *online religion* and *religion online*, that I have discussed extensively in my book, *Digital Culture and Religion in Asia* (Han and Mohamed Nasir 2016). The exceptional levels at which young Muslims are seeking religious direction on the Internet are in line with Bunt's observation of the generation of *iMuslims* and the digital *ummah* who gravitate to cyberspace where "Important new issues, with no immediate basis in traditional sources can be discussed. Opinions can be disseminated rapidly, but are not necessarily observed or followed by readers, who may visit another site to solicit an opinion more in line with their personal requirements" (Bunt 2009, p. 136). They are then able to adjust the consumption of religious content according to what Bunt has called "personal requirements", which "include anything from which branch of Islam s/he identifies with, to language, geographic location, level of education, social class, gender, personality, and previous life experiences" (Akou 2010, pp. 336–37). In the same vein, Mahmood's (2004) seminal study of Egyptian society shows that Islamic revivalism has taken a more personalized mode focusing on values of agency and freedom, instead of being centered

on the policies of the state. This very much aligns with Hirschkind (2001) who argues that, although a contingent component, the concerns and practices of Islamic revivalism have peripheralized the nation-state as an integral component determining religious piety.

Beyond seeking personal autonomy, contemporary Muslim consumption choices also transcend a “*halal* consciousness” (Mohamed Nasir et al. 2010) paradigm to include a global geopolitical mapping of events affecting the Muslim *ummah*. The following section on boycotts demonstrates this particularly well. In countries where Muslims live as minorities, this opportunity to connect with a wider Muslim fraternity reflects the global cultural flows that are accentuated in the digital age. The digital revolution also brings fresh ideas or old ideas packaged in new ways to the attention of religious adherents. Muslim consumption trends are equally affected by contemporary causes and global social movements such as environmental awareness, which has in turn spawned off into what has been termed *Green Islam* (Ibrahim 2010; Gade 2019).

The decision to purchase a particular product is very much a rational choice that prompts Muslims to reconcile their piety with popular consumption trends. The factors mentioned above relating to identity, autonomy, authority and a growing aspiration to be producers and not mere consumers that I have outlined above, cannot be more veraciously played out than in the case of Muslim boycotts.

## 7. Boycotts as Moral Protest

A powerful example of contemporary Muslim consumer ethics would be to examine the boycott movements over the last few decades. Although these protest movements are essentially global, they manifest themselves differently based on local socio-political conditions (Mohamed Nasir 2016b). Even among soft authoritarian Southeast Asian neighbors like Malaysia and Singapore, endorsements and participation of these movements depend on many variables such as ethnic majority-minority dynamics and state-society relations.

Assertions of Muslim identity have given rise to the practice of boycotts in consumption choices. Many websites were established for this purpose and the lively discourse within the Muslim community about boycotting is a testament to this. The protest culture of a particular locality profoundly affects the dispositions of Muslim resistance. Boycotting and protest culture are not foreign to mainstream Western societies. Groups and events that support “Muslim causes” such as the Palestinian issue and public campaigns against Islamophobia are also well-represented by non-Muslim individuals (Barghouti 2011). Besides boycotting national products, one of the most popular forms of boycotts is those extended to local franchises of global corporations which are perceived to be contributing to the oppression of Muslims overseas.

Consumer boycotts can also display a local element. In some instances, besides making the case for boycotts, Muslims have also promoted buying local products as a substitute and a strategy to aid the local economy. Thus, boycotts afford a chance for second-generation migrants, for example, to flaunt their “national pride” by supporting local produce and initiatives. Back’s conceptualization of a “neighborhood nationalism”, which simultaneously engages both local and national discourses on race and nation, would be instructive here. This concept of an ethnically inclusive localism or “neighborhood nationalism” in the community is reminiscent of discourses among Muslims who, in their choice to consume indigenous goods, regard the nation as a multicultural space where a sense of belonging is not confined to race or religion, but by a commitment to a particular area (Back 1996, p. 239). To this end, buying local produce can alleviate the moral dilemma in at least a couple of ways. Firstly, Muslims would have fulfilled their obligations to the global *ummah* by partaking in the boycott movements that they feel strongly for. Secondly, they would contribute to the coffers of the local economy and be perceived as patriotic countrymen by buying indigenous products. The act of supporting local products can be seen as a practice of their cultural citizenship.

Muslim boycotts are also sometimes promulgated at national levels and even supported by international Muslim bodies. For example, Muslim countries boycotted Danish

products in 2005 to protest the publication of unflattering cartoons of the Prophet that was released along with an article called *The Face of Muhammed* (Veninga 2014). A particular image of the Prophet with a bomb lodged in his turban proved emblematic of the resistance movement. When the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) convened in Mecca later that year, the representatives roundly condemned what they felt was the “desecration of the Holy Prophet Mohammad in the media of certain countries” calling on “all governments to ensure full respect of all religions and religious symbols” (Tiryakian 2009, p. 240).

My book *Globalized Muslim Youth in the Asia Pacific* (Mohamed Nasir 2016a) discussed how young Muslims in the global cities of Sydney and Singapore are also wary as to whether they are directly or inadvertently contributing to the finances of other religious movements in their country. In this aspect, it can be argued that the plurality of the “religious marketplace” leads to a form of competitiveness among faith communities. The reason for this hesitance comes from their discomfort in making financial contributions to the evangelical efforts of other religious groups. Therefore, economic boycotts are not solely triggered when the makers of the products are seen to be outrightly discriminating against Muslims but also when they are identified as advancing religious causes. Whether living in Muslim majority countries or as minorities in multicultural societies, Muslim communities do not possess any means to exact punitive measures to discipline those who do not conform. Instead, the “punishment” often manifests itself in the form of stigma and social pressure may it be from close-knit groups such as the family and friendship circles, or larger society.

Inescapably, the boycott movement has also influenced popular youth culture. This can be exemplified by a trend that Campbell (2010) calls Islamogaming. For instance, a British software company called *Innovative Minds* campaigns for the boycott of Israel. This initiative is operationalized through the production of multimedia and video games, which the company contends is “the best way to attract the youth to Islam”. One of the games, called *The Resistance*, however, has attracted some controversy. Among the features of the game is that a player can take on the role of a farmer in the south of Lebanon who has to protect his family and land from the colonizing Zionist forces (Campbell 2010, p. 65). The series of Islamically themed games on its *Islamic Fun CD* include *Happy Hijab*, where a player helps a Muslim character locate her missing hijab, and *Building Blocks*, where players answer questions to earn blocks for the construction of a mosque.

Be that as it may, there are ongoing ethical debates within the Muslim youth fraternity on the practicality and justification for embracing boycotting as a form of resistance. Even among those who eventually decide not to partake in the boycotting movement, a large proportion of young Muslims have either entertained the idea or debated the concept of boycotting with others or within themselves. A segment of the community believes that the boycotting will end up hurting the smaller businesses more than the actual target, which is the huge multinational corporations. Therefore, in order not to affect “innocent bystanders”, some Muslims have refrained from deploying boycotting as a strategy of resistance. Some even go further and dismiss the claims of piety among those who advocate for Muslim boycotts. Among other reasons, they allege that these boycotts can be abused and instead used as a ploy to destabilize business competitors. Compounding these debates on whether one should participate in boycott activities, is the efficacy and sustainability of boycotts as a disciplining tool. Detractors allude to the reactive nature of consumer boycotts and point to how sentiments tend to wane with time as a particular emotive event fade from social memory, leading to similar boycotting efforts being short-lived in the past. Nonetheless, Muslims are cognizant of the past successes of such collective action as a peaceful way of resistance. Among the oft-cited examples were the successes of the boycotting of British goods during the Indian struggle for independence, and the South African struggle against apartheid rule. In 2002, angered by the Israeli military offensive in the West Bank, millions of Arab consumers boycotted US-branded goods causing some companies to suffer up to 50 per cent losses in sales (Suhaimi 2009).

As is evident in this paper, although the Muslim approach to boycotting is not monolithic, the debates persist in the consciousness of Muslim consumers as its cyber presence develops over time. Several significant strands about boycotting can be gleaned from these observations. The first is cultural. Undeniably, contemporary boycotting movements are heavily intertwined with global popular youth culture. The second takes a more economic perspective, recognizing the minority status of Muslims both in numerical terms, and sociologically, in terms of power relationships. Given the small percentage of Muslims in minority countries and the weak economies of Muslim majority ones, some remain skeptical that their efforts would have any significant impact even if each one of them were to participate in the movement. The third argument takes a more social perspective given how boycotting may produce the unintended impact of harming those who are not the subjected targets of the movement. The final strand takes a theological perspective asking the fundamental question of whether boycotting is even permitted in Islam. Of this, some think that the Prophet does not endorse utilizing economic boycotting as a form of resistance.

An investigation of Muslim consumer ethics also must contend with the inherent tension between the concepts of the *ummah* and the state. The tension exists between the particular and the universal. The state is an inherently limiting concept, one that pivots on the concept of sovereignty. It imposes the idea of difference to make itself distinctive from the Other. On the contrary, the *ummah* is a concept that spans national boundaries, binding the Muslims of the world into an unbreakable chain. It is *sui generis*, an external that a Muslim is born into. It is a global fraternity of brotherhood that ignites social action and, occasionally, social change. The *ummah* traverses borders and requires a transcendentization of the individual consciousness.

## 8. Conclusions

Muslim consumer ethics offer the lens through which contemporary pious Muslims navigate moral and humanistic quandaries in a globalized, interconnected world. Factors such as identity, autonomy, authority, as well as a growing aspiration to be producers and not mere consumers, collectively shape the consumption practices of Muslims who are driven not only by theological considerations but by national and global affairs. This paper demonstrates that these concerns might not be mutually exclusive, as Islam also promotes a wider conception of ethical consumption that is governed beyond *halal* concerns. The variegated ways that piety plays out in Muslim consumption patterns are, in large part, driven by the rise of Muslim religious consciousness.

Muslim ethical consumption is a manifestation of religious revivalism. Just as any study on the subject has necessitated scrutiny of the youth, this paper also highlights the unique practices of young, urban middle-class Muslims who are the main drivers of this resurgence. This revivalism is aided by the information revolution in the digital age that creates networked societies among urban Muslim youth, paving their way to access alternative sources and views, even where religious guidance and knowledge are concerned while providing a space to reconcile their religiosity with their consumption behaviours. As seen in the case of boycotting campaigns, although these movements are characterized by intense mobilization at the communal level, they are also marked by dynamic and complex debates within the Muslim community.

This paper has placed into sharp relief the phenomenon of Muslim consumer ethics through the blending of insights from various scholarly fields, such as Islamic studies, globalization, popular culture and studies on consumer culture. It has resisted looking at Muslims from a sectarian perspective in favor of placing a finger on larger trends that transcend geographies and intra-religious orientations. Such a reflection would hopefully provide a basis for the development of new methodologies and serve as an invitation for future scholars to indulge in the study of Muslim consumer behavior.

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