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Halal Technocracy and Certification Governing: Social Media as Platform for Knowledge Dissemination

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ABSTRACT

In pursuit of efficient governance, the Brunei Government adopted e-government systems in the early 2000s, later formalising its digital transformation through the Brunei Darussalam Digital Economy Blueprint 2020. This shift coincided with increased internet accessibility and the emergence of a smartphone-equipped generation that integrates digital media into everyday life. Against this backdrop, this study explores the role of social media in disseminating halal knowledge and governance, applying an Islamised Foucauldian governmentality theoretical framework. We analysed the typologies of halal information shared by Brunei's Halal Food Control Division (HFCD) across social media platforms between 2011 and 2018, targeting diverse audience segments. Our findings reveal a nuanced spectrum: significant knowledge asymmetries emerged from the dissemination of impractical or irrelevant information, prompting critical reflection on the nature of "good" information. However, only limited evidence of halal knowledge co-creation and codifiable knowledge transfer was observed. We conclude that the effective deployment of social media for halal governance hinges on the distribution of contextually appropriate information, yet this remains constrained by the limited social and digital reflexivity of governing certification bodies.

Keywords: halal knowledge, social media, Islamic governmentality, halalisation, food industry

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Introduction

In 2005, Brunei Darussalam officially established the Halal Certificate and Halal Label Order, 2005, thereby instituting formal standards for halal certification and food labelling (Government of Brunei Darussalam, 2005). This followed the enactment of the Halal Meat Act in 1999, which addressed concerns over the authenticity of imported meat (Government of Brunei Darussalam, 1999a). During the late 1990s, Brunei experienced a marked increase in halal imports from various countries, including Australia, Brazil and Argentina. This surge raised significant concerns regarding the authenticity of halal labelling, particularly in relation to meat products produced by non-Muslim entities.

In response, the Halal Meat Rules (S 20/1999) were enacted to regulate halal meat imports and ensure compliance with Islamic dietary laws (Government of Brunei Darussalam, 1999b). Additionally, notable health crises, such as outbreaks of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy and avian influenza, further exacerbated apprehensions surrounding food imports.

Despite such challenges, the value of food imports significantly escalated during this period, increasing from B$360.1 million in 2005 to B$707.8 million by 2020 (Department of Economic Planning and Statistics, 2021).In 2006, the Brunei Halal Premium Brand was launched with the objective of promoting local halal standards pertaining to cattle and processed meat (Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources, 2009). In 2007, a pivotal fatwa was issued to delineate guidelines for halal food production and marketing (State Mufti's Office, 2007), complemented by the introduction of four certification guidelines designed to support local agri-food enterprises. Subsequently, in 2009, the Brunei Halal Brand was officially established under the aegis of Brunei Wafirah Holdings, aimed at enhancing the export potential of local halal products and positioning Brunei as a halal hub within the ASEAN region. This initiative also fostered the growth of its Islamic economy (Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources, 2009).

While there have been studies investigating Brunei's capacity and capability to develop itself as a halal hub by leveraging regional production networks based on firm-level analyses (see Azalie & Samad, 2022; Azalie & Kamarulzaman, 2022), only a limited number of scholars have explored the governance of halal certification. Most studies have focused on industrial management and standard convention perspectives (see Raffi et al., 2019; Sulaiman & Hashim, 2021), as well as Brunei's halal logistics sector (Talib, 2019; Talib et al., 2020).

This paper aims to examine the phenomenon of halal certification in Brunei by analysing the role of digital spaces as knowledge intermediaries in its implementation. The focus of the study is centred on the principal governing agency, the Brunei Halal Food Control Division (HFCD) of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA), due to its multiple roles as governor, regulator, auditor and secretariat of the Brunei Islamic Religious Council (BIRC). The role of expert knowledge in shaping the conduct of the governed has been extensively studied within Foucauldian research. However, specific studies on the use of halal knowledge and social media as religious governing technologies, and in shaping a halal conduct of conduct, remain scarce. Hence, to unpack the nuances surrounding the governance of Brunei's halal certification programme, the following research question was formulated: What type of halal knowledge did HFCD use and share as part of the governmentalities of halal certification?

Before delving deeper into this topic, it is important to first contextualise the study within the framework of Brunei's past e-government initiatives, which formed part of broader efforts to build capacity and capability.

Background

According to Kifle and Cheng (2009), the Brunei government's vision of transforming its overly bureaucratic governing institutions into a more efficient and effective e-government system was first declared in 2000. However, actual planning only began in 2003. Issues such as poor leadership, lack of competencies, limited capacity, and inadequate technological capabilities were identified as the main culprits for the weak initial implementation (Kifle & Cheng, 2009).

Between 2007 and 2015, personal observations by the author while studying e-government strategic initiatives in nurturing creativity and innovation among students under the New 21st Century Education System (SPN21) revealed a recurrence of these challenges, particularly in the form of limited capacity development. Educators struggled to upgrade their competencies and knowledge due to insufficient technological support and a lack of training opportunities. A doctoral study by Jait (2013) also found that e-service delivery in Brunei was hindered by low levels of citizen awareness.

Interestingly, these persistent issues created new grounds for re-strategising policy tools and mechanisms to ensure more meaningful development. Low and Ang (2011), along with Rahman et al. (2012), called for a reformulation of e-government strategies through learning from international experiences. With the rise of smartphones and the growing awareness and digital engagement of citizens, particularly in response to emerging cyber threats (see Anshari & Lim, 2017; Bhirowo et al., 2018), momentum increased. The urgency was further amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which catalysed what was described as a five-year leap in Brunei's ICT infrastructure development.

In response, a digital economy master plan for 2025 was introduced in 2020. Among its initiatives was the proposal to establish a national Halal Certification System by 2022, with the Halal Food Control Division (HFCD) designated as the lead agency overseeing its implementation.

In light of this development, how does HFCD, in line with current digital technological development, govern halal certification as part of developing the food industry while raising businesses' and civilians' knowledge and awareness of its importance? To address this question, it is imperative to examine the governing processes, ranging from halal certification procedures to halal production and consumption-related knowledge. This necessitates an understanding of the central role of digital media, particularly social media, as a tool towards halal industrial development. Understanding this synergistic relationship between the governor and the governed as they interact via digital spaces provides insights into how halal knowledge is being disseminated and co-created through such interactions.

Literature Review

The proliferation of ICT, brought about by globalisation and the rise of the Internet, influences how society functions and operates. While most of the impact of globalisation has been examined in greater detail within the socio-economic and cultural realms, as seen in both Friedmann's World City and Sassen's Global City hypotheses, the political implications of ICT use in governance require further scholarly attention. This is particularly true when approached through the lens of governmentality, as the concept of e-government has expanded with the increasing use of social media platforms not only as tools for disseminating information but also as mechanisms for engaging in real-time governance.

Reflecting on the early days of the web, its functionality was largely confined to static information sharing, with passive interactions between the user and the web interface. In an article summarising the dynamic evolution from Web 1.0 to Web 4.0, Choudhury (2014) outlined the shift in which today's Web 4.0 extends beyond content provision to enable transactional interactions, both within communities and between the government and its citizens. The rise of social media, occurring in parallel with advancements in the ICT sector, particularly in smartphones, has allowed deeper integration into daily life. With Web 4.0, the web has evolved into a participatory outlet, enabling user-generated content and civil engagement, and has contributed to the growth of socio-political activism (Choudhury, 2014).

Simultaneously, within the industrial domain, consumers have assumed a vital role in creating value (Almeida, 2017). The emergence of the Internet of Things (IoT) has opened new channels for civic participation while enabling governments to monitor, manage and engage citizens more effectively. With the adoption of cloud technologies and artificial intelligence (AI), authorities can now process and analyse large datasets to identify trends and exert governance (Almeida, 2017; Kavanaugh et al., 2012; Okano, 2017). Social media platforms empower governments to visualise and track civic behaviours through geotagging and hashtags (Kavanaugh et al., 2012), operating in a more transparent and responsive manner via live or archived content streams (Bertot et al., 2010). These platforms also aim to foster various forms of trust, including fiduciary, mutual and social trust, rooted in power relations and information exchange (Thomas, 1998).

As a result, e-government has progressed from merely legitimising a digital presence (Chun et al., 2010) to strategically engaging with the public in an effort to mobilise collective intelligence and achieve governance objectives (Dadashzadeh, 2010). Within this broader trajectory, Brunei's Halal Food Control Division (HFCD) plays a critical role in extending digital transformation to the religious and regulatory spheres, particularly in halal certification.

The democratisation of knowledge, facilitated by ICT and Web 4.0, has profoundly shifted the terrain of halal governance. Previously characterised by a state-centric, expert-driven model, it is now increasingly shaped by participatory publics and networked actors. Traditional halal governance mechanisms, grounded in legislation, inspection and standardisation (Government of Brunei Darussalam, 2005; Hudaefi & Jaswir, 2019; The Religious Council, 2007) have evolved to accommodate broader stakeholder involvement. Social media platforms have enabled citizens, entrepreneurs and influencers to co-create, challenge and disseminate halal knowledge.

This development reflects core principles of Maqasid al-Shariah, particularly the preservation of intellect and knowledge, which Mohd Zain and Zakaria (2022) identify as foundational to sustainable halal governance. Empirical studies from Brunei demonstrate that halal knowledge is increasingly reaching aspiring halalpreneurs and youth via digital and informal platforms (Idris et al., 2025). In multicultural contexts such as the Netherlands, governance failures such as lack of transparency and adaptability have led to public distrust (Kurth & Glasbergen, 2016), underscoring the need for inclusive and responsive certification systems.

In this context, ICT tools such as social media serve not only reformative functions but also enable resistance, acting as platforms for feedback, activism and discourse. The HFCD's digital engagement, therefore, is not merely communicative but constitutes a techno-political interface through which both the state and its citizens collaboratively shape halal governance.

Social media functions as a space for civil rights expression and as a site for the social democratisation of knowledge (Holbrook, 2019; Raza et al., 2007). For such democratisation to be effective, it must promote inclusivity (Arocena & Sutz, 2017) and resist the monopolisation of knowledge by elite or expert groups, instead supporting co-production and the decentralisation of power (Dvoskin, 2022; Pratesi et al., 2019). The rise of online personas or 'influencers'—individuals whose legitimacy may rival that of elected officials—further illustrates this decentralised digital authority (Gibson et al., 2023).

To what extent does this democratisation of halal knowledge foster inclusivity and decentralise power from governing bodies? The HFCD's strategic use of social media as a platform for knowledge dissemination and co-creation reveals the convergence of governance and civil engagement in promoting sustainable development. By examining Brunei's online halal certification practices, this study aims to shed light on the complexities and nuances involved in using digital technologies as instruments of governance.

Theoretical Framework

Since this study aims to understand the dynamism between state actors and economic agents involved in the halal food industry, three main theoretical perspectives are employed to construct the analytical framework. The first draws from the classical structuralist structure-and-agency theory, with specific reference to urban regime theory. This is followed by Habermas's theory of Communicative Rationality. Both of these frameworks view knowledge dissemination from a governance-oriented perspective. The third, which combines Foucauldian governmentality with Islamic governance, informs the final applied theoretical framework used in this study under the conceptualisation of Islamic governmentality.

The Structure and Agency Nexus through Urban Regime Theory

Urban regime theory provides a critical lens for examining the interplay between state and market forces, challenging the traditional dichotomy between the two. Central to this theory is the role of networks and informal coalitions in coordinating activities across public and private sectors, with power relations acting as a mediating force. Reflexivity and adaptability are emphasised in understanding these interactions.

Stone (1993) argued that public regulators and economic agents operate within different configurations of power, or "regimes," which are crucial to fostering development. Giddens (1979) supported this perspective by emphasising that agents are not merely subject to structural constraints but actively reshape them. This is particularly relevant in liberal democratic settings where state-led economic aspirations frequently intersect with the private ownership of productive resources (Elkin, 1987; Stone, 1993). As business owners become more self-aware, they may exercise pre-emptive power that prompts the state to negotiate favourable conditions—fragmenting the economy in the process (Mossberger & Stoker, 2001; Stone, 2005). Mossberger (2009) later elaborated on how these interactions give rise to informal coordination and coalition-building across institutional boundaries.

Importantly, cooperation in urban regime theory is not necessarily grounded in shared values but is instead driven by strategic participation aimed at exploiting emergent opportunities (Mossberger & Stoker, 2001; Stone, 1993). Stone (2005) further argued that effective governance in fragmented economies requires purposive coordination and institutional linkages—conditions increasingly observable within civil society movements.

However, this strategic coordination is not without challenges. Globalisation and standardisation efforts, particularly in the food industry, may result in unintended consequences due to positive externalities. The governance dynamic can be further examined through the categories of actors outlined by regime theory (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). Within this context, Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) are instrumental in achieving objectives related to urban development, equity, and justice—despite earlier scepticism about their impact (Elkin, 1987; Stone, 1993).

Scholars such as Jessop (1997) have maintained that dynamic governance strategies, grounded in flexible regulatory frameworks, are required to ensure accountability and responsiveness. This includes facilitating extra-local and extra-economic conditions such as inclusive education policies and macroeconomic strategies aimed at safeguarding citizens' welfare while encouraging grassroots coordination (Jessop, 1997; Miraftab, 2004; Wijen & Ansari, 2006). To this end, incentives and institutional arrangements that build trust among stakeholders are vital (Wijen & Ansari, 2006), along with governance mechanisms like capacity-building programmes, participatory management, and information-sharing (Jessop, 1997). The use of public opinion surveys can also help identify emerging governance challenges (Haque, 2000). While achieving transparency remains a persistent issue, evaluating the societal implications of such governance mechanisms is crucial.

How does this connect to the governance of knowledge? Firstly, information dissemination plays a foundational role in societal empowerment by enabling the transfer of knowledge across populations. This leads to further empowerment and enrichment, especially when combined with democratised access to knowledge. Examples can be drawn from global conventions, such as climate change discussions, where critical dialogue has illuminated both the benefits and limitations of different knowledge-sharing strategies.

Market liberalisation also contributes to social enrichment by fostering innovation and enabling the application of new knowledge—key components of sustainable development. Critical debates around the conventions of knowledge dissemination provide insight into power asymmetries and potential pathways for more equitable access. By integrating new knowledge into developmental strategies, communities are better positioned to leverage economic and policy liberalisation for long-term societal benefit.This dimension is revisited towards the end of the literature review, where the interplay between knowledge, empowerment, and development is contextualised.

Despite the utility of the structure-and-agency framework, several underexplored dimensions remain. Notably, while the idea of capillary power (Jessop, 1998) opens up new avenues for effective governance, there is still insufficient attention given to the power-knowledge nexus of standard-setters. Questions remain as to how these actors, often embedded within governing institutions define not only physical and economic outcomes but also the social and biopolitical landscape. This gap has led to the adoption of the Foucauldian governmentality framework later in this study, particularly in relation to how governing is operationalised over the governed through discursive and institutional means.

Habermas Communicative Rationality

Habermas's (1985) Communicative Rationality (CR) theory offers significant insights into the complexities of policy planning, formulation, implementation, and development, mainly through the lens of the spatial dynamics associated with public and private spaces. Public spaces are typically governed by state institutions and shaped by mainstream cultural values, whereas private spaces often reflect grassroots governance and individual rights. This dichotomy suggests that policy planning can oscillate between centralized decision making by the state and decentralized input from individuals. The proposed way forward would be to be involved in highly engaging stakeholder consultation and

coordination with communication as the key mechanism to implement any project and as a way to reduce uncertainties and anxieties brought about by both top-down and bottom-up governance.

However, the challenges inherent to this approach are multifaceted. Prolonged conflicts and growing distrust between parties may hinder the search for common ground, while the universalistic tendencies of CR risk overlook contextual factors influencing policy development. Terminologies such as governance, empowerment, and social policy can hold varied meanings across different geographical contexts, necessitating adaptability in policy formulation, particularly for small economies, such as Brunei Darussalam. The country's food industry, composed mainly of Micro-Small Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), often operates informally, highlighting the inadequacy of grand theoretical frameworks that fail to consider local realities.

In light of these considerations, halal knowledge dissemination and policy formulation in Brunei should be reconceptualized by examining its impact on the industrial and business environment. Effective knowledge transfer, both tacit and codifiable, must occur at the meso level, where macro- and micro-perspectives converge, rather than being confined to state structures or individual domains. This approach recognizes businesses as integral components of society and the Ummah, advocating their welfare and alignment with broader policy and industrial objectives. (I. A. Azalie, 2023) discusses the details of this framework.

The summation of these two theories highlights the structure-agency dichotomy based on conventional stakeholder and stewardship theories, emphasizing the neutrality of these spaces to elucidate the relationships among non-state actors, such as businesses and consumers, along with regulatory bodies and governments. Governance theories, including the urban regime theory and Habermas's Communicative Rationality, explore the potential of negotiation, consultation, and coordination spaces to promote empowerment, equality, and justice. However, these theories have limitations, particularly regarding their effectiveness, as evidenced in various contexts of conventional food standard producers and the lack of understanding of how these processes operate in practice.

Governmentality and Digital Technologies: Redefining State Functions in Islamic and Industrial Governance

Foucault's concept of governmentality goes beyond documenting how governing processes unfold in time and space; it calls for critical reflection on the rationalities that shape governance and the technologies deployed to achieve the state's objectives, or *raison d'État* (Yu, 2009). Governmentalities are legitimized through appeals to absolute truths—religious doctrine, neoliberal logics, state discipline, and sovereignty (Fletcher, 2017; Fletcher & Cortes-Vazquez, 2020). Understanding these dynamics reveals how governmentality operates and extends its effects within communities, an area still underexplored in the literature.

Later scholarship expanded Foucault's work to include the analytics of government (Dean, 2010) and biopolitics (Bröckling et al., 2011; Rose et al., 2009). Burchell et al. (1991) introduced *The Foucauldian Effect*, shifting focus from state-centric analysis to broader applications, including industrial management and public policy. This evolution illustrates the adaptability of governmentality theory while retaining its core emphasis on rationalities and techniques of governance.

Over the last decade, scholars have explored how digital technologies reshape governance. The web's evolution from static information sharing (Web 1.0) to interactive, transactional networks (Web 4.0) has transformed relationships between governments and citizens (Choudhury, 2014). Social media, smartphones, IoT, and AI have enhanced citizen participation, activism, and co-creation of knowledge (Almeida, 2017; Kavanaugh et al., 2012; Okano, 2017). These technologies enable governments to monitor sentiment, manage big data, and foster transparency and trust (Bertot et al., 2010).

This study extends governmentality theory to digital and industrial governance, focusing on how information and technologies are used to shape conduct. It highlights complex, layered patterns of

control and decision-making in developmental contexts. Specifically, it examines "halal governmentality"—how halal certification processes employ digital media as governing tools to disseminate knowledge, establish norms, and embed desired halal codes of conduct.

However, the use of digital platforms has also fueled misinformation, driven partly by monetization incentives (Basinillo et al., 2024; Harff & Schmuck, 2023). Other research (Kholis et al., 2019; Salte, 2022) shows that nonprofit online participation can foster positive, sustainable growth (Cervi, 2023). This study therefore investigates the shifting role of halal governance bodies (HFCD) and communities within these digital transformations, analyzing the relationship between governors and the governed in the context of evolving governmentality theories (Dean's Analytics of Government).

A simplified version of this theoretical adaptation to Islamic governmentality is provided in Figure 1, with a full discussion in the author's forthcoming doctoral thesis (Azalie, forthcoming).

Figure 1

Theoretical and Analytical Framework on Islamic Halal Governmentality
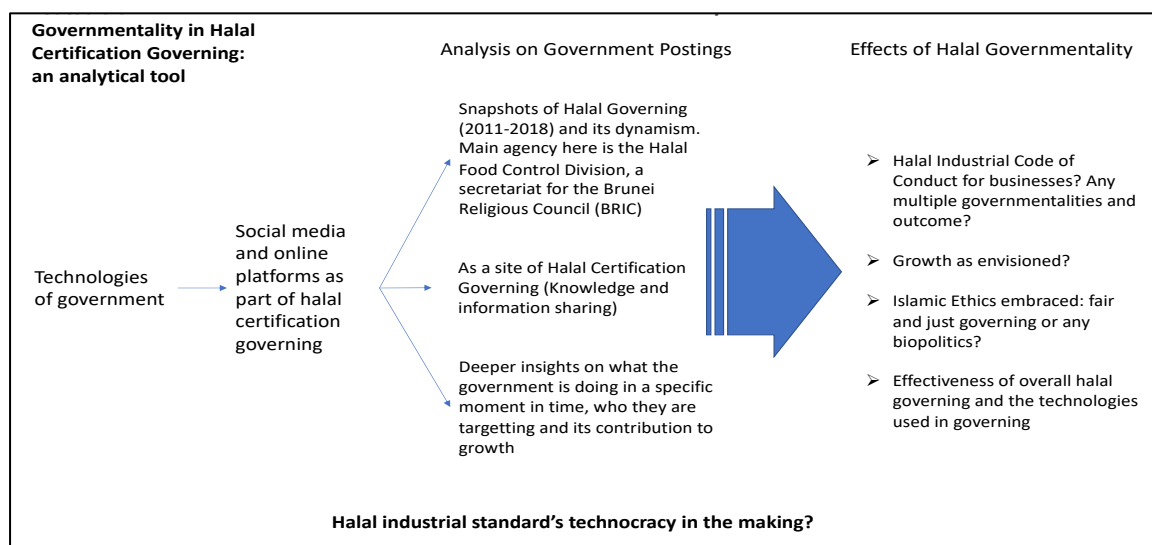
Islamic governance theory seeks to embed Islamic ethics and principles within the discourse of inclusive and just governance, offering a counter-narrative to the inadequacies of capitalism and the modern market economy. However, the realisation of an ideal Islamic governance model is complicated by colonial legacies and modernist projects within the Islamic world, necessitating a hybridised approach (Chapra & Khan, 2000; Hallaq, 2012, 2014). This study examines how such hybrid systems are operationalised and what their impacts are, an area that remains underexplored. As Foucauldian governmentality analytics emphasise the existence of multiple governmentalities within a nation-state, there is a need to investigate how these influence national political and economic projects and their outcomes. The governmentality framework enables both micro- and meso-level analysis of governing processes and their implications for those being governed.

Thus, social media should not be seen merely as a governing tool or mechanism. From a Foucauldian perspective, it also embodies technological components that reflect the political rationalities underpinning its formulation. These include its role in the problematisation of governance through technologies of risk, its contribution to identity formation via technologies of the self, its function as a disciplinary instrument that encourages compliance through internalised roles, and its use as a neoliberal tool that enables non-dominated political subjects to feel empowered, adaptive, and reflexive. This occurs in order to avoid being governed in a clumsy or disempowering manner by the state or other governing institutions. Central to these dynamics is the role of knowledge and its utilitarian function, particularly as exercised by standard-setters or authorities tasked with implementing governance,

despite the existence of dissonance, disjuncture, or internal contradictions within power structures such as the government. This framework will be employed to analyse the role of social media in the proliferation, creation, and co-creation of halal knowledge through the lens of Islamic halal governmentalities.

Methods

Using the social media platform as a point of entry allows for examining the governing technologies that the responsible agencies use to create a halal code of conduct necessary for the industry's growth. This research focuses on Brunei's Halal Food Control Division's (HFCD) social media pages, that is, the Bahagian Kawalan Makanan Halal FB page, and their halal.bn Instagram account, to analyse government practices in halal certification within the agri-food industry, examining data from 2011 to 2018. Analyses of the posts totalled 334 out of 427 to identify the types of knowledge mechanisms and trends used by the government over time. As this dataset is derived from original research, it does not require external citation; however, its use is clarified here as part of the methodological process. While it does not assess the broader effectiveness of new technologies outside social media, this study lays the groundwork for understanding halal industrial governmentality and the role of the Brunei Halal Food Control Division (HFCD) in managing halal food governance.

In this study, content analysis was used to extract halal knowledge typologies, moving away from conventional Foucauldian Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as the aim is to quantify and highlight the trends in halal knowledge shared. This is coupled with descriptive statistics and cross-sectional analysis to make sense of the complexities of the interlinked halal information and expertise used in Brunei's halal food control division (HFCD) halal governing.

Results

The analysis revealed key insights into trends in halal-related information and knowledge, particularly around food-related queries and broader themes of halal governance. The findings are presented in detail in the subsections that follow.

Halal Food Information Online: From General Knowledge to Technical Standards

In terms of specific halal food-related themes, the total coverage extracted from seventy-seven (77) posts under the halal food (HAL_FOOD) category for eight subthemes between 2011-2018 is at one hundred and ninety-seven (197). The breakdown of this theme is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Percentage of Halal Food-related Themes Shared Online Between 2011-2018 (Azalie, forthcoming)
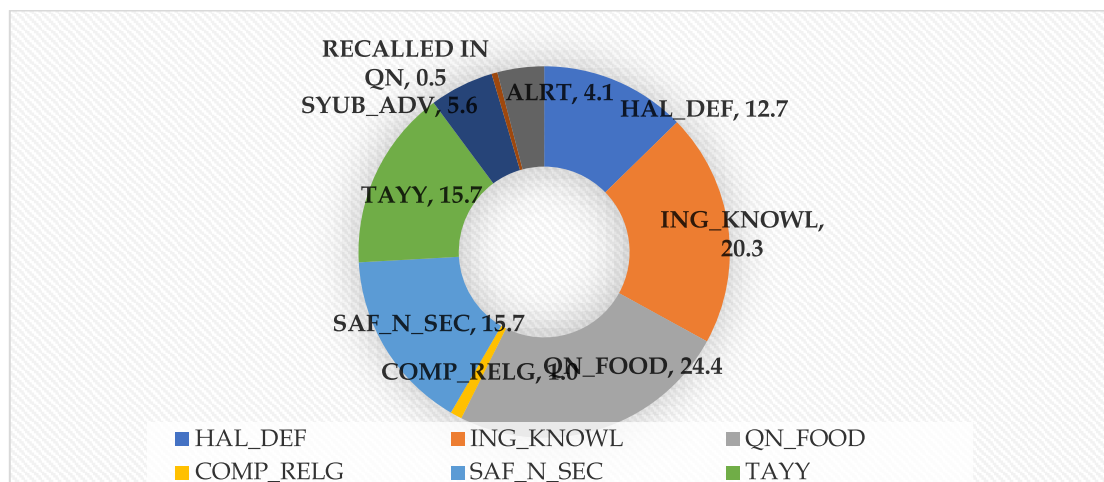
The three most frequently discussed topics were: (1) questions about food (QN_FOOD), which accounted for 24.4% of all posts, (2) information about ingredients at 20.3%, and (3) both halal food safety and security (SAF_N_SEC) and halal food hygiene and sanitation, or Tayyiban (TAYY), each at 15.7%. Posts on the definition of halal (HAL_DEF) followed at 12.7%, while halal advisories (SYUB_ADV) comprised 5.6%. The lowest frequencies were found in halal food alerts (ALRT) at 4.1%, posts on religious compliance (COMP_RELG) at 1%, and questions on product recalls (REC) at 0.5%. Figure 3 illustrates the changing patterns of halal food-related discussions over time, showing year-to-year fluctuations in the themes covered between 2011 and 2018.

Figure 3

Patterns on halal food-related themes shared between 2011-2018 (Azalie, forthcoming)
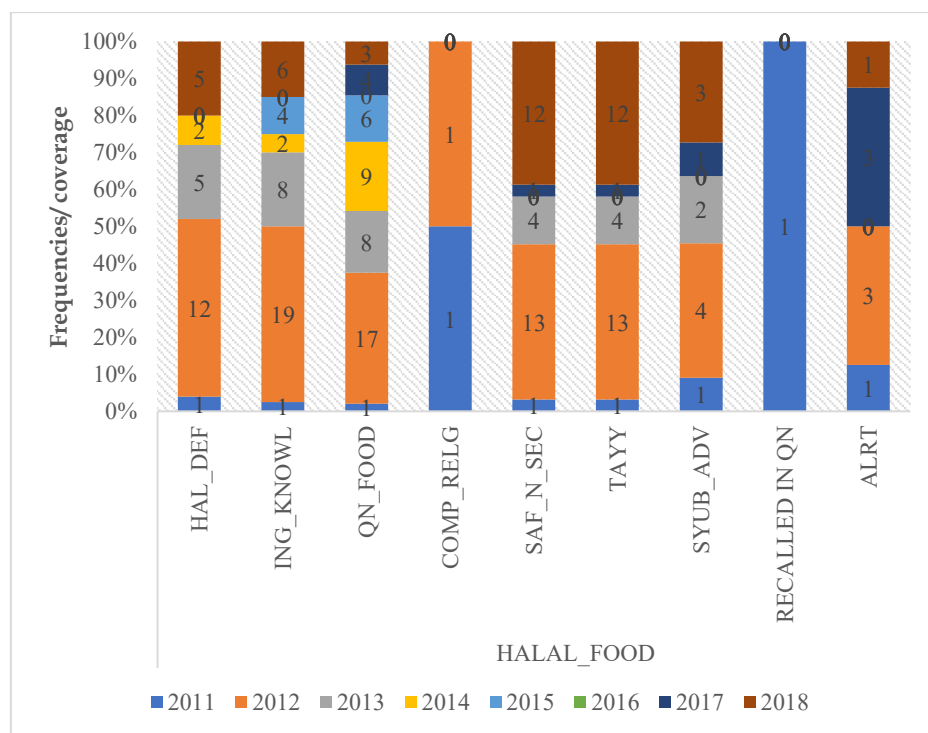
Halal Food Theme Distribution (2011–2018): Yearly Trends in Halal Food Subthemes

2011: Initial Emergence of Themes

In 2011, the discourse surrounding halal food was minimal, with limited thematic coverage. The themes HAL_DEF and SYUBH_ADV appeared marginally, each registering only one instance of coded frequency. No other subthemes were significantly represented during this year.

2012: Peak Thematic Activity

The year 2012 marked the highest overall engagement with halal food topics, registering substantial frequencies across nearly all subthemes. ING_KNOWL was particularly prominent with 12 coded instances, alongside notable peaks in HAL_DEF (9), COMP_RELG at 13, and SAF_N_SEC with 12. Other subthemes such as QN_FOOD, TAYY, and RECALLED IN QN also demonstrated high visibility, indicating heightened public interest and discourse in this period.

2013: Sustained Engagement

In 2013, while overall thematic density slightly declined from the previous year, substantial engagement continued. TAYY remained a dominant theme with 13 instances, suggesting continued concern for the wholesome or ethical dimension of halal. HAL_DEF (6) and QN_FOOD (5) also retained visibility. Meanwhile, SAF_N_SEC (4) and ING_KNOWL (2) experienced moderate coverage.

2014: Diversification of Concerns

The year 2014 reflected a broadening of thematic focus, particularly evident in the increased coverage of QN_FOOD, which peaked at 9 coded instances. Other themes such as ING_KNOWL (4) and COMP_RELG (1) continued to feature, albeit to a lesser extent. However, HAL_DEF, TAYY, and SAF_N_SEC recorded minimal activity, suggesting a thematic shift towards more consumer-driven inquiries.

2015: Moderate Thematic Continuity

In 2015, there was a noticeable reduction in overall thematic intensity, with moderate engagement concentrated around QN_FOOD (6) and SYUBH_ADV (3). Other themes such as HAL_DEF, SAF_N_SEC, and TAYY featured only minimally. This period reflects a partial decline in halal-related discourse, albeit with continuing relevance in areas of practical concern.

2016: Sustained but Diminished Focus

Thematic engagement continued to decline in 2016, although select subthemes retained modest presence. COMP_RELG (4), TAYY (4), and ING_KNOWL (2) were the most frequently addressed. Other themes showed minimal to no presence, indicating a phase of reduced public discourse intensity surrounding halal-related matters.

2017: Further Decline in Coverage

By 2017, overall frequency across themes continued to decrease. Notable activity was observed only in SYUBH_ADV (4) and SAF_N_SEC (2), while most other subthemes recorded little or no representation. This suggests waning attention to halal food discourse in the public domain during this period.

2018: Slight Resurgence and Thematic Shift

In 2018, a modest resurgence in thematic engagement was observed. SAF_N_SEC (3) re-emerged with some visibility, and HAL_DEF and ALRT each registered a single coded instance. The introduction of ALRT (Alerts) suggests a potential shift toward regulatory and risk communication themes within the halal discourse.

Subthemes Development Trends and Patterns

Halal Definition (HAL_DEF) Codes

The subtheme HAL_DEF was most prominently featured in the early phase, particularly in 2012 (9 instances) and 2013 (6), reflecting foundational concerns over the definitional clarity of halal standards. Coverage declined significantly after 2014, with only isolated appearances in 2015 and 2018. There are 25 of these codes identified in total throughout the study period.

Ingredient Knowledge (ING_KNOWL) Codes

In the case of ING_KNOWL, the total number of codes identified was 40 within the period of study. ING_KNOWL peaked in 2012 with 12 coded instances, highlighting early public interest in understanding the permissibility of specific ingredients. Subsequent years saw a reduction in frequency, with moderate levels in 2014 (4) and minimal levels in 2013 (2) and 2016 (2), indicating a declining trend in detailed ingredient-based inquiries over time.

Food Halalness Queries (QN_FOOD) Codes

The theme of QN_FOOD gained traction particularly in 2014 (9 instances), pointing to heightened consumer uncertainties about the halal status of food products. Notable frequencies were also observed in 2012 (6), 2013 (5), and 2015 (6), suggesting sustained relevance of product-specific questioning during the mid-period. The total number of instances on the questions over halal food during the study period stands at 48.

Safety and Security (SAF_N_SEC) and Tayyiban (TAYY) Codes

The SAF_N_SEC subtheme featured consistently across multiple years, peaking in 2012 with 12 instances. It continued to appear in 2013 (4 instances), 2016 (4), and experienced a modest resurgence in 2018 (3), underscoring ongoing public concern about the physical and regulatory safety of halal-certified food products. A similar pattern was observed for the TAYY subtheme, which also recorded the same frequencies across the respective years, reflecting a parallel concern for the ethical, wholesome, and hygienic standards in halal food production.

Cross-sectional Analyses of Specific Halal Food-Related Posts

In-depth analysis of these subthemes led to the identification of multiple linked codes, which reveal correlations between general themes and more specific subthemes within the content. The more diverse or content-rich a post, the more connections it exhibited across different thematic areas. Appendix A presents the distribution of these linked codes across six (6) main categories. As indicated, the main codes appeared a total of seventy-nine (79) times, with detailed distributions discussed in the previous subsection.

However, as far as this research is concerned, whether it is effective in assisting or developing the halal industrial code of conduct depends on two key aspects. First, the theme or content of the posts shared (discussed in the next subsection) and understanding the dynamics between HFCD as the information supplier and regulator with the information user at the end of the spectrum, that is, the public. Effective knowledge dissemination is vital for knowledge capture, enrichment, and enhancement, which are key components towards knowledgeable economic actors, as well as communities.

Patterns, linkages, and co-relations between the six main codes: examination of the information shared

HAL-DEF linked codes

The theme of halal food, in comparison to other major themes, comprised 17.6% of the total posts shared on both FB and IG. Analysis of this 3rd largest theme showed that there are thirty-one (31) dimensions that the government touched upon as part of inculcating halal knowledge and halal industrial code of conduct towards food businesses, the industry, and the public in general. One of the ways is via provisions of the halal definition as defined by both the Islamic religion and the industrial definition bounded by the Halal Certificate and Food Label Order of 2005. Under the HAL-DEF category, there are 10 linked codes generated that cover the main focus of the post on defining halal plus what is agreed upon and other subsidiary combinations linked to, for example, QN_FOOD, ING_KNOWL, and SAF_N_SEC, among others. Similar linkages were also found for the other main categories. For HAL-DEF, posts related to the definition of halal in relation to ING_KNOWL/ QN_FOOD/ SAF_N_SEC/ TAYY were circulated six (6) times, twice in 2012, three times in 2013, and once in 2018. The second highest-ranked combination relating to ING_KNOWL/ QN_FOOD was circulated five (5) times, twice in 2012, once in 2013, and twice in 2014. This was followed by four (4) posts on halal definition (HAL-DEF), twice in 2012, once in 2013, and finally in 2018. QN_FOOD (HAL-DEF/QN_FOOD) and SAF_N_SEC/ TAYY were circulated three (3) times respectively. All other four secondary linkages linking HAL-DEF to QN_FOOD (HAL-DEF/QN_FOOD), ING ING-KNOWL plus i) COMPL_RELG ii) QN_FOOD iii) SYUB_ADV, and iv) SAF_SEC, were mentioned once in 2011 and four times in 2012.

ING_KNOWL linked codes

The government shared 22 posts on the theme of knowledge and information on halal ingredients, the government shared twenty-two (22) posts on it. Information on ingredients is vital, as it is one of the key components constantly scrutinized during field audits and site inspections of food premises. Based on the linked codes, the breakdown of the 22 main posts on ingredients is as follows: Seven (7) of the postings on ingredients also touched on the aspects of the questions about the halalness of certain foods (ING_KNOWL/ QN_FOOD), of which two (2) were mentioned in 2012, one (1) in 2013 and four (4) in 2015. This was followed by ingredients used for safety, security, and cleanliness (SAF_N_SEC/ TAYY) at four (4), both circulated twice (2) in 2012 and 2018, respectively. Two ingredient categories, one linked under the QN_FOOD/ SAF_N_SEC/ TAYY and another solely on ingredients (ING_KNOWL), have two (2) information circulated. For the sole post on knowledge of ingredients, two of the postings were made in 2012, while the latter were made once in 2012 and 2013. The remaining five (5) posts of the linked groupings, whose main components were combinations of ING_KNOWL/QN_FOOD and aspects of food alerts, doubt advisory, cleanliness, safety, and security, had one posting each of which four were made in 2012 and one in 2018. This pattern of how the information distribution is governed followed the same patterns as that of the HAL-DEF category in which the year 2012 had the most significant number of posts relating to ING_KNOWL (11), followed by 2013 with four (4) total postings, four (4) in 2015, and three (3) in 2018. Details of the content are discussed in the discussion subsection.

QN_FOOD linked codes

For the category relating to question on food (QN_FOOD), fourteen (14) out of the nineteen (19) posts specifically asked about the degree of halalness of certain food products, its status based on HFCD's judgement, as well as questions over halalness of businesses and premises in Brunei at that moment in time. The distribution of the 14 questions on food single codes was as follows: two in 2012, seven in 2014, three in 2015, and two in 2017. Whilst the remaining five touched upon the linkage between QN_FOOD component about i) SYUB_ADV, ii) SAF_N_SEC/ TAYY both addressed in 2012, iii) halal roadshow (HAL_RDS) and iv) SAF_N_SEC/ TAYY/ SYUB_ADV addressed in 2017 and v) SAF_N_SEC/ TAYY/ SYUB_ADV/ ALRT in 2018, each mentioned once respectively.

SAF_N_SEC linked codes

As for the Safety and Security (SAF_N_SEC) linked code, there are nine (9) posts that touch on the food safety and security aspects of halal food, of which six (6) touch specifically on the tayyiban (TAYY) principles, two (2) of which occurred in 2012, while the remaining four (4) occur throughout 2018. Single codes in this category were mentioned twice, once in 2012 and once in 2018. SAF_N_SEC in relation to SYUB_ADV was mentioned only in 2018.

Analytical Discussions on Social Media, Halal Knowledge and Governing

Analyses of the findings throughout this paper reveal that religious and technical knowledge were employed not only to rationalise and direct governance activities but also to inform them through a fusion of conventional and religious modes of information sharing. A constructed sense of near identity with the 'governed', such as through terms like Ummah, citizens or subjects in official postings, and a strong emphasis on halalisation as a shared responsibility, underscore the political rationalities underlying this governance approach. These rationalities provided the Halal Food Control Division (HFCD) with perceived legitimacy to enforce halalisation in response to sovereign directives, while also designing halal standards aligned with Brunei's specific contextual conventions of halal knowledge.

Although these complex and multi-layered dynamics help explain the rationale behind the state's governing practices, a persistent gap remains between these governing visions and their concrete implementation. The disjuncture between intended strategies and actual governance practices, along with their tangible and intangible impacts on the governed, remains insufficiently understood and largely unexamined.

Halal Technocracy

The analysis of the apparatus related to halalisation, particularly the use of Facebook in the earlier years, revealed a primary focus on information dissemination. It also showed some function as a platform for coordination, consultations, and discussions with individuals directly and indirectly affected by certification. The sharing of information regarding the procedures for applying halal standards and the technical halal criteria towards the end of the study period, along with topics such as food-related queries, reflected attempts to ensure comprehensive topic coverage necessary for effective governance. Over time, however, the Facebook page evolved into a one-way information-sharing medium with limited two-way interaction.

For an industry to develop, input and feedback from relevant sectors are essential to determine whether formulated policies specifically halal standards in this context have had a positive developmental impact. Previous discussions on social media use suggested that government initiatives were in place to disseminate information on halal standards. However, further analysis revealed the presence of information asymmetries. These ranged from specialised halal knowledge involving technical and religious aspects to broader food safety information and general industrial best practices. Evaluating the effect of this mixture of general and specialised halal industrial knowledge on food businesses would be a worthwhile area of further research.

The Facebook posts also highlighted the use of the Quran and the Prophet's narrations as part of the strategy to shape halal conduct. These elements complemented the use of authoritative tools such as royal decrees and national regulatory frameworks covering food and public health. These combined instruments carry significant implications for government, businesses, and the broader direction of the halal industry.

A critical reflective review of existing initiatives is necessary to address emerging issues effectively. The HFCD functions as an authoritative body within a monarchical polity, possessing a degree of autonomy while concurrently aligning with broader governmental goals, namely the establishment of a halal code of conduct and the advancement of the halal food industry as part of an industrial transformation initiative (Evans, 1995; as cited in Siyambapaliya et al., 2018). While intergovernmental coordination and consultation (G2G) has demonstrated some level of collaboration, this cooperation has primarily been encapsulated within reports disseminated via social media platforms such as FB. An assessment of the efficacy of these initiatives was mentioned in another study [see Azalie (forthcoming)].

Halal Knowledge as Governmental Technologies of Risks and the Self

The analyses of the findings also suggested the existence of more profound governmentalized initiatives with a degree of automation that transcends the traditional functions of social media as a platform for knowledge dissemination, evolving into a significant tool for identifying various halal governance strategies within the physical realm. However, several pertinent issues require further investigation. It is crucial to assess whether the public adequately understands the technical requirements surrounding halal, particularly by the business communities that are directly impacted. Furthermore, it is essential to evaluate whether the halal certification process has unintended consequences beyond the anticipated outcomes. Such inquiries raise important questions about governmentality; ineffective governance may result from a lack of clarity or the absence of established mechanisms, leading to detrimental socioeconomic growth or development due to insufficient reflexivity regarding the effects of social engineering on communities.

Insights into halal knowledge disseminated via both Facebook and Instagram revealed that the sharing of information about ingredients classified as halal or non-halal was part of an effort to establish a

shared identity among Muslims and non-Muslims regarding the associated risks of consumption. This reflects a form of governmentality in which, as Foucault described, individuals internalise their roles and develop a 'conduct of conduct', a form of self-regulation without direct coercion from state actors.

This strategic application of the technologies of risk and the self-enabled the construction of halal governmentality. The Halal Food Control Division (HFCD)'s use of syubhah advisories (SYUB_ADV) as part of its halal knowledge dissemination further reinforced awareness of both known and inherent risks. These advisories contributed, often in subtle and unanticipated ways, to disciplining Bruneian communities.

Additional layers of discipline emerged from religious interpretations of halal definitions (HAL-DEF), which in some cases included the divine words of Allah as revealed in the Qur'an and through the prophetic narrations (hadith). The invocation of sacred texts and the sunnah significantly influenced the religiosity of target groups. Any transgressions or failure to adhere to divine commandments were portrayed as resulting in spiritual consequences, particularly in the hereafter.

In relation to neoliberal governmentality, halal governance also demonstrated the use of market-driven incentives to influence behaviour. This involved the socialisation of knowledge on food safety and security (SAF_N_SEC), the concept of *tayyib* (pure and wholesome), and ingredient awareness (ING_KNOWL). These were presented as essential for food operators and producers seeking market access and consumer trust, underscoring the value of the Brunei halal certification.

Thus, the findings illustrate the employment of comprehensive state mechanisms and apparatuses in halal governmentalities co-existing and co-operationalizing within halal certification governance despite varying governing logics. The integration of the Quran and Hadith, coupled with the dissemination of knowledge through social media and physical venues, as well as the establishment of halal guidelines and laws, reflects the proactive efforts of governors and standard-setters, thereby indicating a constructive application of power. These findings provide the interlinkages between knowledge sharing, creation, and co-creation, which are pivotal in halalisation. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that these findings apply primarily to the nascent stages of halal certification governance.

Halal Consultation and Coordination: Dynamics of the Government and the Governed Subjects

While the use of Facebook has yielded intriguing insights, it also presents opportunities for innovative data collection and analyses, thereby enriching the dataset involved in this study. However, its application in halal governance research remains restricted to examining publicly reported and visible activities, thus providing only a partial narrative of broader occurrences. Consequently, an investigation into the effects on the governed and the overall effectiveness of these initiatives is imperative for an evaluative understanding of the present halal governmental practices. This research ultimately extends the discourse on governmentality by moving beyond merely political rationalities and government apparatus and analysing the actual effects of halal governance, which allows for stronger institutionalization. However, this requires reducing or abolishing the individually centralised power. The role of civil institutions and civil societies is also fundamental to such an autopoietic system, borrowing from Luhmann's (1988) applications of this biological origin theory towards social organizations concerning communication, is required to work effectively and efficiently where it works based on the positive and negative feedback generated from the Government-to-Citizen (G2C) and Citizen-to-Government (C2G) frameworks. Decision-making, expertise, and specialization are positioned within the governing agency and its structures. In the case of Halal, the HFCD's role as an enforcer, regulator, manager, administrator, and secretariat of the Brunei Islamic Religious Council (BIRD) is to evaluate the effectiveness of its current strategies.

Insights on Questions on Food (QN_FOOD), Safety and Security (SAF_N_SEC), and Syubhah advisories (SYUB_ADV) showed the existence of mutually dynamic feedback interactions between HFCD and the public, particularly between 2012 and 2013 as well as from 2018 onwards. The justification for such unevenness in interactions stems from the need to construct and include public opinion, as halalization took root within communities in the earlier years. Insights include requests for public opinion or polls on questions surrounding some technical guidelines on halal, which can also be

translated as an attempt to gauge halal knowledge among the public. There are also questions on the degree of halalness of certain food products or eateries between 2012 and 2013, prompting HFCD to engage in field audits and monitor the suspected premises. The hiatus or absence of information between 2014 and 2017 was attributed to the lack of personnel to manage the social media page simultaneously owing to the significant changes and revisions that the HCHLO of 2008 had prior to the 2017 HCHLO amendments. Dynamics from post-2017 onwards, as analysed from the posting, showed the governor's rationale that the governing of halal certification is no longer about religious justification. However, it is also about managing and governing the entire industrial due process. Such a change in the governance outlook affects the halal governmentality process by altering the tone and type of information shared with the public.

Analysing the HFCD's consultative efforts reveals feedback mechanisms that facilitate public engagement in halal certification. Drawing on Foucault's (2008) ideas on governmentality, this study highlights the importance of reflexivity and critique in reducing dependency on centralized power by fostering a networked form of authority. Although the HFCD operates within a governmental framework, there is evidence of religious consultation and socialization concerning halal practices, which helps build a collective identity among the Muslim community. This interaction supports adherence to religious obligations based on Islamic jurisprudence, which the Quran and Hadith inform. However, implementing halal standards, such as the Brunei halal industrial standard, involves technical and social elements that must align with the divine guidelines. This combination of human factors in halal governance carries the risk of mismanagement, which can negatively impact the community. Allah has reminded this in the verse below to remind humans of their responsibilities and the existence of retributions for any misdeeds they committed, be it now or in life after death:

"Whatever good comes to you, it is from Allah, but whatever evil comes to you, it is from yourself'" (Qur'an 4:79, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2004).

Conclusion

This research underscores the significant role that social media plays beyond simple information dissemination; it serves as a vital instrument for identifying and advancing halal governance strategies. This is illustrated through the implementation of halal workshops and clinics, which reflect the Halal Food Control Division's (HFCD) commitment to its mandate. However, concerns remain regarding public awareness of halal certification requirements, particularly within business communities affected by these regulations, as well as the potential unintended consequences arising from certification processes. These issues pose critical questions about the efficacy of current governance mechanisms and the social engineering implications for the communities involved.

As an authoritative body operating within a monarchical governance framework, the HFCD aligns its objectives with broader national aspirations to develop a robust halal food industry and establish a coherent halal code of conduct. While there is some level of inter-agency collaboration, much of this coordination is communicated primarily through social media platforms such as Facebook. An in-depth investigation into the effectiveness of these initiatives is therefore essential for a comprehensive understanding of their impact.

The integration of references from the Qur'an and Hadith, along with knowledge dissemination via various media, highlights governing bodies' efforts to promote the halalisation process. Nevertheless, current findings reveal significant limitations in the early stages of halal certification governance. Although social media content provides useful data for analysis, it is largely restricted to reported events, limiting broader insights into ongoing developments. A particularly critical gap in the online discourse concerns the economic implications of adopting Brunei's halal food certification. Despite intermittent mentions of certification and compliance costs, there is a conspicuous lack of concrete estimates regarding the financial burden businesses may incur during the certification and audit process. Existing literature suggests that such costs can serve as barriers to compliance, especially for small-scale enterprises and emerging industry players in developing countries. This study raises essential questions about the extent to which Brunei's halal standard similarly affects these businesses, the

implications for halal auditors and certification managers, and whether a genuine transformation is occurring within the industry.

Given that the dissemination of accurate and effective knowledge lies at the heart of halal technocracy, there is a pressing need to explore mechanisms beyond social media—particularly physical socialisation and educational enrichment initiatives. This dimension has been explored further in a separate study.

Analysing social media as a melting pot of halal governmentalities reveals a complex interplay of competing and complementary rationalities, including neoliberal logics, Islamic principles, raison d'état, and disciplinary mechanisms. This multifaceted landscape supports the dissemination of halal-related information, which is crucial for building a halal technocracy aligned with contemporary values while addressing the diverse needs of local communities. The value of halal knowledge lies in its capacity to inform consumer choices, shape market dynamics, and promote adherence to ethical standards across sectors.

From a Foucauldian perspective, the role of standard-setters becomes especially significant. These actors wield power in defining appropriate halal practices, potentially creating asymmetries that marginalise alternative voices or practices. As the landscape evolves, increased collaboration between technological innovations and traditional religious frameworks may offer more inclusive and culturally nuanced understandings of halal governance.

To render this vision plausible, standard-setters must also foster a form of ethical self-regulation. This entails a conscious remembrance of their role not merely as administrators but as *khalifah*—servants of Allah tasked with upholding justice and moral conduct. By embracing Islamic principles such as *'Adl* (justice), *Husnuzon* (giving the benefit of the doubt), and *Istiqamah* (steadfastness), those involved in halal governance can support the development of a truly ethical and effective halal technocracy. In turn, this approach promotes the proliferation of halal knowledge as a form of *da'wah* (preaching) and facilitates the positive co-creation of knowledge through interactive, community-driven engagement.

Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest are disclosed throughout the research process, leading to the publication of this paper.

Author Contribution

This research contributes to halal industrial governance and development policy in general, with special attention paid to the use of new digital technologies as part of effective governance.

Ethics Statement

This research did not require IRB approval because it used publicly available secondary data with no identifying personal information. The data were obtained from the official, publicly accessible social media pages of the Brunei Halal Food Control Division (HFCD), which do not require special permission to view or use. No human participants were directly involved in the research, and no identifiable personal data were collected. Where the possibility of indirect identification existed, appropriate ethical procedures were followed to maintain confidentiality and prevent disclosure of sensitive information. All data handling complied with the UK Data Protection Act and the terms of use of the relevant third-party platforms.

Data Access Statement

Research data supporting this publication are available upon request to the corresponding author.

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Dr. Izni Azrein is a lecturer in the Geography, Environment and Development Programme at Universiti Brunei Darussalam. His primary research areas focus on the urban economy and development, as well as industrial governance, aligning with current sustainability principles. His current research revolves around culture and heritage industrial conservation as well as blue urban economic development.

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Appendix A

Cross-sectional analyses of specific halal food-related posts based on main and linked codes and its frequencies of occurrences

Main Codes	Frequencies	Linked Codes	Frequencies
HAL-DEF	26	HAL-DEF	4
		HAL-DEF/ QN_FOOD	1
		HAL-DEF/ ING_KNOWL	3
		HAL-DEF/ ING_KNOWL/ COMPL_RELG	1
		HAL-DEF/ ING_KNOWL/ QN_FOOD/ COMPL_RELG/ TAYY	1
		HAL-DEF/ ING_KNOWL/ QN_FOOD/ SAF_N_SEC/ TAYY	6
		HAL-DEF/ ING_KNOWL/ QN_FOOD	5
		HAL-DEF/ ING_KNOWL/ QN_FOOD/ SYUB_ADV	1
		HAL-DEF/ ING_KNOWL/ SAF_N_SEC	1
		HAL-DEF/ SAF_N_SEC/ TAYY/	3
ING_KNOWL	22	ING_KNOWL/ QN_FOOD	7
		ING_KNOWL/ QN_FOOD/ ALRT	1
		ING_KNOWL/ QN_FOOD/ SAF_N_SEC/ TAYY	2
		ING_KNOWL/ QN_FOOD/ SAF_N_SEC/ TAYY/ SYUB_ADV	1
		ING_KNOWL/ QN_FOOD/ SYUB_ADV	2
		ING_KNOWL/ QN_FOOD/ SYUB_ADV/ ALRT	1
		ING_KNOWL/ QN_FOOD/ TAYY/ ALRT	1
		ING_KNOWL/ SAF_N_SEC	1
		ING_KNOWL/ SAF_N_SEC/ TAYY	4
		ING_KNOWL	2
QN_FOOD	19	QN_FOOD	14
		QN_FOOD/ HAL_RDS	1
		QN_FOOD/ SYUB_ADV	1
		QN_FOOD/ SAF_N_SEC/ TAYY	1
		QN_FOOD/ SAF_N_SEC/ TAYY/ SYUB_ADV	1
		QN_FOOD/ SAF_N_SEC/ TAYY/ SYUB_ADV/ ALRT	1
SAF_N_SEC	9	SAF_N_SEC	2
		SAF_N_SEC/ TAYY	6
		SAF_N_SEC/ TAYY/ SYUB_ADV	1
TAYY	2		
SYUB_ADV	1		
TOTAL	79		