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Unveiling Compensatory Mechanisms of Muslim Minority Groups in Hungary

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ABSTRACT

The growing population of Muslim consumers and their increasing economic influence have driven the expansion of Islamic goods and services across Europe. However, it is essential to examine how the scarcity of Islamic products and services—or the lack of an Islam-friendly environment, particularly for those living abroad—shapes the behaviors and preferences of Muslim minority groups. In an era of increasing secularization, understanding the complexities of religious practices is crucial, especially for business practitioners seeking to meet the diverse needs of Muslim consumers. This phenomenological study explores the underlying motivations behind compensatory mechanisms among Muslim minorities. Using a qualitative approach, 20 participants from Muslim communities in Hungary took part in in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observational studies to examine their compensatory behaviors while living abroad. The analysis identified ten key themes, offering valuable insights into the diverse dimensions of compensatory mechanisms in the Islamic context and their implications for businesses and policymakers in evolving societies.

KEYWORDS

compensatory mechanism, Islam, Muslim consumers, minority group, halal

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Introduction

Islamic consumerism has attracted significant scholarly attention in recent years. Sandıkcı (2018) posits that the past few decades have been marked by a global religious revival, particularly in Islamic revivalism and the commercialization of Islamic symbols. Gauthier (2018, p. 382) highlighted "the marketization of religion," in which religious goods, services, and experiences are produced and sold to specific market segments primarily for profit. Rinallo and Alemany Oliver (2019) argued that gaining deeper insight into religious consumption practices could shed light on little-understood phenomena in an increasingly secularized society. Furthermore, it is essential to examine how the scarcity of Islamic products and services—or the lack of an Islam-friendly environment, particularly for those living abroad—shapes the behaviors and preferences of Muslim minority groups.

In order to contextualize the present study, the distinctive characteristics of the Muslim community in Hungary need to be presented. Although Muslims represent less than 1% of Hungary's population (Aytar & Bodor, 2019; Pap & Glied, 2018; Račius, 2021), the community exhibits considerable heterogeneity. It comprises long-established groups, such as Turks and Balkan Muslims (Pap & Glied, 2018), as well as more recent immigrants from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and various Middle Eastern nations (Apipudin & Alatas, 2024; Rózsa, 2011). Predominantly, the community adheres to Sunni Islam (Aytar & Bodor, 2019); however, smaller contingents of Shia followers (e.g., Iranian immigrants) underscore the diversity of denominational practices. The long history of tensions between Hungarians and Muslims (see Lederer, 1992), combined with recent sociopolitical factors (Apipudin & Alatas, 2024; Rózsa, 2011; Syahrivar, 2021), contribute to the challenges facing the Islamic ecosystem in Hungary, making it harder for Muslims to practice their faith freely and sustainably. Drawing on three years of field observations in Hungary, we found that halal-certified products and services are predominantly available in Budapest (Where Can I Find Halal Food in Hungary?, 2016), the nation's capital, where they are offered through a limited network of outlets and typically priced at a premium relative to conventional alternatives. Only a handful of certification companies operate in the country, including SGS Hungária,[1] a branch of industry-leading multinational company SGS (formerly Société Générale de Surveillance) headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. Moreover, the scarcity of dedicated Islamic institutions and community centers outside the capital compounds these difficulties, impeding the consistent fulfillment of religious obligations. Such constraints not only underscore the cultural and economic isolation of this minority but also illuminate the adaptive, compensatory behaviors observed among its members.

Compensatory behaviors in a religious context, especially within minority groups, have been relatively underexplored (Syahrivar, 2021). In brief, compensatory behavior refers to actions or strategies individuals employ to make up for perceived deficiencies or shortcomings in one aspect of their lives (Kang & Johnson, 2011; Koles et al., 2018; Mandel et al., 2017; Woodruffe, 1997). Despite the expanding literature on compensatory

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[1] www.sgs.hu

behaviors, few researchers have attempted to connect this concept with specific religious practices, such as Islamic consumption (Syahrivar, 2021; Syahrivar et al., 2022). Generally speaking, Islamic (or halal) consumption is perceived as consumption activities driven solely by religious ideals (Usman et al., 2024), with other socio-psychological factors underlying such consumption activities largely unaddressed.

This study seeks to examine the underlying motivations that drive religious compensatory mechanisms among Muslim minority groups, particularly in response to the limited availability of Islamic products and services. The central research question is: What compels Muslims living in non-Muslim majority countries to adopt compensatory behaviors? Existing literature on religious consumption has consistently demonstrated a correlation between religiosity and consumer behavior (El-Bassiouny, 2017; Mukhtar & Butt, 2012; Syahrivar et al., 2022; Syahrivar & Pratiwi, 2018; Usman et al., 2024; Widyanto & Sitohang, 2021). Furthermore, previous research has explored the challenges faced by Muslims in non-Muslim majority societies and the potential conflicts that arise due to their religious practices (Andreassen, 2019; Leiliyanti et al., 2022; Richardson, 2019; Syahrivar, 2021). However, the deeper psychological and sociocultural mechanisms influencing compensatory behaviors in religious contexts remain insufficiently examined (Kurt et al., 2018; Syahrivar, 2021; Syahrivar et al., 2022).

Numerous investigations underscore the adverse ramifications experienced by individuals belonging to minority groups, including instances of discrimination, disparities in status (Ryff et al., 2003), and the imposition of acculturation (Syahrivar, 2021). The persistent sense of marginalization within society can yield divergent outcomes. On the one hand, individuals from minority backgrounds may succumb to the pressures of assimilation, while on the other hand, it may foster stronger solidarity among them. In both Muslim-majority and minority contexts, there is compelling evidence suggesting that the consumption of Islamic products and services is not solely driven by religious adherence but also serves as a means to address socio-psychological challenges through consumer activities (El-Bassiouny, 2017; Syahrivar, 2021; Syahrivar et al., 2022; Syahrivar & Pratiwi, 2018).

This study represents a pioneering endeavor to understand how Muslim minorities in Hungary adapt their religious practices in response to the scarcity of Islamic goods and services. Recent demographic trends indicate a steady rise in the Muslim population across both the European Union and Hungary (Hackett et al., 2017). This growth necessitates a closer examination of how Muslim minorities negotiate their religious identities and consumption practices in non-Muslim majority settings. While existing studies have shed light on religious consumption within predominantly Muslim contexts (e.g., Syahrivar et al., 2022; Syahrivar & Pratiwi, 2018; Usman et al., 2024), there remains a significant gap regarding the compensatory behaviors that emerge in environments where Islamic products and services are scarce. To be precise, our study delves into the subtle, multifaceted strategies employed by Muslims navigating a predominantly secular European environment (Apipudin & Alatas, 2024; Aytar & Bodor, 2019; Pap & Glied, 2018; Rózsa, 2011; Syahrivar, 2021). Through an integrative phenomenological approach (Groenewald, 2004; see also Constantinou et al., 2017) that combines in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and field

observations, the research uncovers how limited access to halal-certified products, cultural dissonance, and social pressures coalesce to shape both religious and consumption behaviors. This nuanced exploration not only refines our understanding of compensatory consumption processes and strategies within religious contexts (Syahrivar, 2021; Syahrivar et al., 2022) but also offers fresh insights into how Muslim minorities negotiate their religious identity amid conditions of institutional scarcity and social isolation. This study is warranted as it not only extends the current literature by exploring these underexamined mechanisms but also provides valuable insights for policymakers and business practitioners seeking to address the evolving needs of this influential community.

Literature Review

Compensatory Behavior

Compensatory behavior refers to actions or strategies individuals employ to counterbalance perceived deficiencies or shortcomings in one aspect of their lives (Kang & Johnson, 2011; Koles et al., 2018; Mandel et al., 2017; Woodruffe, 1997). These behaviors often arise in response to negative psychological states stemming from self-discrepancy, particularly when individuals perceive a gap between their actual and ideal selves (Jaiswal & Gupta, 2015). To mitigate uncertainties and maintain self-concept, individuals engage in compensatory behaviors, which serve as psychological coping mechanisms (Koles et al., 2018; Mandel et al., 2017).

In consumer behavior research, compensatory behaviors encompass various consumption patterns, some of which are chronic and maladaptive, such as conspicuous consumption, compulsive buying, addictive consumption, self-gift-giving, and compensatory eating (Kang & Johnson, 2011; Koles et al., 2018; Syahrivar, 2021; Syahrivar et al., 2022; Woodruffe, 1997). Mandel et al. (2017) identified several strategies through which individuals engage in compensatory behaviors, including directly addressing the source of self-discrepancy, symbolically signaling mastery in the perceived area of deficiency, dissociating from the source of discrepancy, distracting oneself from the discrepancy, or compensating in an unrelated domain.

The concept of compensatory behavior extends beyond general consumer behavior into the realm of religious consumption. Religious compensatory behaviors are driven by the idea that religious products function as supernatural compensators, providing existential coherence, meaning, and emotional well-being (Ellison, 1995). Historical precedents illustrate this phenomenon, such as the medieval church offering religious indulgences to compensate for transgressions (Wollschleger & Beach, 2011). Within Islam, Mittermaier (2013) explored the concept of "trading with God," wherein Muslims contribute financially to Islamic causes to atone for sins and attain spiritual rewards. Not only do Muslims feel the need to materialize their piety, but they also seek to reinforce their faith and redeem themselves through religious consumption activities (Jones, 2010).

Recent studies have highlighted specific forms of religious compensatory behaviors among Muslims. For instance, Syahrivar (2021) provided insights into

Islamic product dissociation among Muslim women in the West, interpreting it as a compensatory strategy. Furthermore, Syahrivar et al. (2022) identified factors such as religious discrepancy, religious guilt, and religious social control as key influences on religious compensatory consumption among Muslims in Indonesia. These findings suggest that religious compensatory behaviors are shaped by internal psychological conflicts and external social pressures, reinforcing the need to further explore how religious identity and consumption intersect.

Muslims as a Minority Group

Muslims are not a homogeneous group, as variations in religious practice and belief are shaped by geographical location, cultural context, education, and socioeconomic status (Aytar & Bodor, 2019; Pap & Glied, 2018; Rózsa, 2011). Although Islamic tenets provide a common foundation, the interpretation and enactment of these beliefs differ widely. Scholars have documented how these differences become particularly pronounced when Muslims live as minorities in non-Muslim majority societies. In Hungary, for example, the challenges associated with being a religious minority are compounded by cultural misunderstandings, limited access to halal-certified products, and insufficient infrastructure for fulfilling religious obligations (Hazim & Musdholifah, 2021).

For many Muslim minorities, the immediate challenge is accessing halal-certified foods (Mumuni et al., 2018). In countries where the Muslim population is sparse, mainstream markets often do not carry halal-certified products. As a result, individuals may have to rely on specialized stores or even compromise on dietary observance out of necessity. Similarly, the difficulty of observing daily prayers is heightened by inflexible work schedules and the scarcity of dedicated prayer spaces, prompting many to develop adaptive strategies such as praying at home or in less conspicuous locations (Fadil, 2013).

Moreover, the experience of living as a minority often extends beyond dietary or ritual practices to include broader challenges of social and cultural identity (Duderija, 2007). The need to preserve religious identity while navigating the pressures of integration into a predominantly secular society may lead to feelings of isolation or alienation. Some Muslims, for instance, choose to practice their faith more discreetly to avoid potential discrimination, while others seek solidarity within local Muslim communities to reinforce a sense of belonging (Syahrivar, 2021). Such adaptive responses underscore the diversity of experiences within the community and caution against simplistic portrayals of Muslims as a monolithic group.

In addition, foundational research on social identity (see, e.g., Hogg, 2016) underscores that minority groups construct their identities through processes of social categorization and intergroup comparison, which in turn influence both intergroup dynamics and the ability of minority groups to negotiate their place in society. Norris and Inglehart (2012) further argue that Muslim migrants tend to develop a hybrid set of cultural values—one that lies between the traditions of their countries of origin and the norms of their host societies—reflecting an ongoing process of adaptation rather than rigid assimilation. Together, these studies

highlight that the integration process is not simply about conformity but involves negotiating complex, layered identities that influence both consumer behavior and broader social participation.

Methodology

Adopting a phenomenological approach (Groenewald, 2004), this study set specific eligibility criteria for participation: participants had to identify as Muslim and have resided in Hungary for an extended period. Their involvement was strictly voluntary, with no monetary incentives or gifts offered. In addition to drawing from existing literature on compensatory behaviors, the study employed various data collection methods, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and memos. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, semi-structured interviews were conducted, with conversations noted and audiotaped. The interviews were performed using the English language.

For the interviews, several key questions were formulated basing on the past research in religious and consumer behavior studies (El-Bassiouny, 2017; Jones, 2010; Kurt et al., 2018; Mittermaier, 2013; Negrea-Busuioc et al., 2015; Sandıkcı, 2020; Shah, 2019; Syahrivar, 2021) and expert opinions:

1. Perceptions of Minority Status: How do you, as a Muslim, perceive living in a non-Muslim majority country? The question explores participants' general experiences, feelings, and perceptions regarding their religious identity in a predominantly non-Muslim environment.
2. Coping With Socio-Psychological Challenges: How do you, as a Muslim, cope with socio-psychological challenges in such environments? This question examines the strategies used by Muslim minorities to manage psychological, emotional, and social pressures in non-Muslim societies.
3. Religious Practice and Adaptation: How do you, as a Muslim, fulfill your religious obligations while residing in a non-Muslim majority country? The question investigates how participants maintain their religious practices, such as prayer, fasting, and other religious commitments, in a secular or non-Islamic setting.
4. Challenges in Religious Adherence: What challenges do you encounter in fulfilling these obligations, and how did you overcome them? This question helps to identify specific obstacles Muslims face in practicing their faith and explores the ways they navigate these difficulties.
5. Consumption of Islamic Products: What are your experiences with using or consuming Islamic or halal-certified products? The question explores access, availability, and attitudes toward halal products, as well as potential compensatory behaviors when such products are scarce.

Interviews were conducted in settings convenient to participants, such as restaurants, shopping areas, or mosques, allowing them to behave naturally. To enhance validity, we triangulated our interview data with direct observations during halal shopping and consumption occasions and consultations with experts in Islam, consumer behavior, and psychology. Additionally, a focus group discussion (FGD)

was held in which all participants received identical interview questions. The FGD aimed to capture both shared and differing experiences, revealing similarities and contrasts that might not surface in individual interviews due to the sensitivity of the information, personal biases, or memory constraints (Kitzinger, 1995). Sampling for the qualitative research followed a "common sense" approach, engaging informants capable of providing rich early insights (Goulding, 2005). In total, the study involved 20 Muslim informants (Table 1), selected for their diverse life experiences illustrating compensatory consumption in the Islamic context.

Table 1

Respondent Profile

Alias	Gender	Age	Origin	Marriage Status	Occupation	Academic Qualification
Participant 1	Female	24	Indonesia	Single	Student	Master's degree
Participant 2	Female	26	Indonesia	Married	Employee	Master's degree
Participant 3	Male	26	Indonesia	Single	Student	Master's degree
Participant 4	Male	18	Indonesia	Single	Student	Bachelor's degree
Participant 5	Male	26	Egypt	Single	Employee	Bachelor's degree
Participant 6	Male	25	Pakistan	Single	Employee	Bachelor's degree
Participant 7	Male	24	Indonesia	Single	Student	Master's degree
Participant 8	Male	30	Türkiye	Married	Educator	Doctoral Degree
Participant 9	Female	29	Tunisia	Married	Student	Doctoral Degree
Participant 10	Female	30	Azerbaijan	Married	Employee	Doctoral Degree
Participant 11	Male	35	Iran	Married	Entrepreneur	Bachelor's degree
Participant 12	Female	26	Tunisia	Single	Student	Doctoral Degree
Participant 13	Female	22	Indonesia	Single	Student	Bachelor's degree
Participant 14	Female	25	Pakistan	Single	Employee	Master's degree
Participant 15	Male	43	Iran	Married	Entrepreneur	Master's degree
Participant 16	Male	28	Iran	Married	Student	Master's degree
Participant 17	Female	23	Egypt	Single	Freelancer	Master's degree
Participant 18	Male	28	Azerbaijan	Single	Student	Doctoral Degree
Participant 19	Female	32	Iran	Married	Educator	Doctoral Degree
Participant 20	Female	20	Türkiye	Single	Student	Bachelor's degree

Data saturation guided the sampling process, and we determined that the inclusion of additional participants would have yielded redundant information. In qualitative research, saturation is reached when no new themes or insights emerge from successive interviews—a criterion that was met with our sample of 20 participants. This number aligns with established methodological guidelines (e.g., Constantinou et al., 2017; Guest et al., 2006), which suggest that smaller, well-targeted samples may suffice when prioritizing depth over breadth. In our study, the diversity in age, national origin, and religious practice among the participants provided a rich, multifaceted view of compensatory mechanisms among Muslim minority groups in Hungary. Once iterative analysis revealed recurring narratives and consistent thematic patterns, it was determined that additional data collection would not enhance the understanding of the phenomenon, thereby justifying the decision to conclude data collection at 20 participants.

The Comparative Method for Themes Saturation, or CoMeTS, was employed to organize and analyze interview data, ensuring a thorough exploration of identified themes (Constantinou et al., 2017). Validation of findings with participants further enhanced the study's credibility (Goulding, 2005). A visual representation of the research framework was provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Research Framework
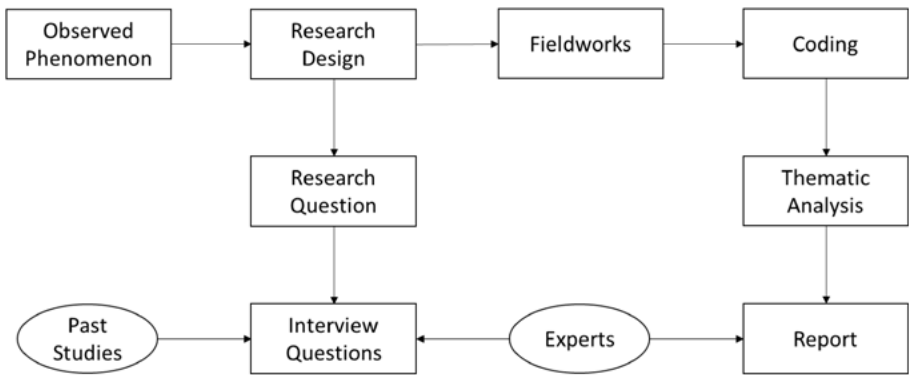
Note. Source: developed by the authors.

Findings

Religious Transgression
Muslims who live in secular non-Muslim majority countries, such as Hungary, found various inhibitors that prevented them from fully committing to their religious duties:

> *Participant 5:* I think Hungarians are somewhat more religious compared to other Europeans that I know. But, you know, they've had some rough patches with Muslims in the past. So, like, I don't think they're super welcoming to Muslims. If

you're thinking about coming here to study or work, just be ready for the fact that practicing your Islam might not be as easy as you'd like.

Participant 6: There is a social environment that influences religious commitment. When I'm in my country, an Islamic country with strict Islamic laws, I will follow religious practices more often than when I'm abroad. But in Europe, you cannot practice your religion to the fullest because it's a different social environment. For instance, the mosque is few and if there is any, it's very far. Some places in Europe won't allow you to wear religious attire or else it will influence your relationship with others. In my opinion, in this kind of social environment, you're bound to limit your affection or link towards your religion.

Religious transgression occurs when Muslims deviate from Islamic duties. Failing to perform the five daily prayers and not adhering to a halal diet can be considered religious transgressions:

Participant 2: You know … as Muslims we need to pray five times a day. However, when I'm in Hungary, it's difficult for me to fulfill this obligation because of conflicting schedules … When the praying time came, I was still in the class listening to my professor … My senior told me to just ask permission to leave and pray and come back to the class afterward … but I could not possibly do it every time. I don't have the confidence to explain to him that I'm leaving for praying … I also noticed that students would normally sit down in the class until it finished. I don't want to be the only one leaving the class. I also heard that other Muslims would just pray three times or even one time a day here.

Hypocrisy

Religious hypocrisy refers to the inconsistency between an individual's professed beliefs and their actual behavior, as well as the disparity between their moral assertions and their conduct in practice (Laurent & Clark, 2019; Syahrivar et al., 2022; Yousaf & Gobet, 2013). Through a series of observations, particularly during grocery shopping or dining experiences, it became evident that while some individuals emphasized the importance of consuming halal-certified foods or supporting Muslim-owned restaurants, this emphasis was not consistently reflected in their actual behavior.

Participant 7: My other option is to eat at a Chinese restaurant. Honestly, I like the menu and the taste better. I know it's not halal but it's chicken … And they don't serve pork. I would only be worried if the restaurant served pork. So, when I go to a Chinese restaurant, I would observe if they serve pork or not.

Participant 15: When I hang out with my Muslim buddies, it's important to stick to certain Islamic customs, like praying or sticking to halal eats. But when I'm with others outside our circle, I make an effort to blend in and respect their ways, including drinking Pálinka (alcoholic drink) if I have to.

Hypocrisy occurs not only in matters of halal consumption but also in other Islamic practices:

> *Participant 9*: To me, it's pretty straightforward. If you're chilling with your Muslim friends and you see them doing their five-time prayers, it's only respectful to join in. But if you're by yourself or with non-Muslim pals, there's no need to stress about practicing your Islam.

Guilt

Feelings of guilt may arise not only from failing to adhere to a halal diet but also from a broader sense of falling short in fulfilling religious obligations:

> *Participant 3*: Apart from eating halal foods, as a Muslim, I'm also concerned with Friday prayer. I've been told that if I missed Friday prayer twice in a row, I was no longer a Muslim. So, when I picked courses, I tried my best to avoid courses on Friday. If I have no choice but to pick the one on Friday … I think I would alternate between participating in the course on Friday and participating in Friday prayer the week after so long as I do not miss the prayer two times in a row. Thank God that it has never happened to me so far … but it did happen to my [Muslim] friends. If it were me, I think I would feel guilty about it.

Feelings of guilt may also stem from a sense of falling short in upholding the family legacy:

> *Participant 14*: For me, Islam is what keeps me connected to my parents. But living in Hungary, sticking to strict religious practices can feel overwhelming, so I do my best to be flexible around my non-Muslim friends. Still, I can't shake off the guilt I feel when I'm on the phone with my mother.

Faith Reinforcement

The enduring experience of guilt often necessitates a compensatory mechanism, wherein Muslims may strive to reaffirm their Muslim identity and faith, while also fostering stronger bonds with fellow Muslims through the consumption of halal food:

> *Participant 6*: Because it's something that you eat and become a part of you. You're a Muslim because of what you practice and that includes what you eat [halal food].

> *Participant 8*: I think it is not just about eating what is lawful as mandated by Allah but I would find that cooking and eating halal foods strengthen our faith and relationships … especially since there aren't many of us here. You can say that no matter where we come from, we're united in halal foods.

According to Sandıkcı (2018, p. 464), Muslims yearn for the "Islamic versions of mainstream pleasures," aspiring to indulge in their preferred fast foods while still

adhering to their religious values, thereby avoiding feelings of guilt. Participating in halal consumption is viewed as a method to address any perceived hypocrisy or to reconcile their secular lifestyles with their religious beliefs:

> *Participant 6*: Halal foods must be processed in certain ways so that they are clean and blessed by Allah hence I believe eating halal foods helps purify your body and soul.
>
> *Participant 7*: I feel liberated in body and spirit after I eat halal [foods].

Social Control

Muslims engage in a form of mutual observation regarding religious practices, which serves as a manifestation of social control, defined as an effort to deter deviant behavior and influence significant others (Craddock et al., 2015; Gibbs, 1977). Their relatively small population size facilitates the monitoring of each other's conduct (Wollschleger & Beach, 2011). For instance, it is customary for Muslims to inquire about adherence to rituals like the five daily prayers, attendance at Friday mass prayer, or dietary habits on specific occasions. While social control serves to minimize deviant actions, it also creates tension for those with less fervent adherence. Consequently, Muslims may engage in symbolic actions, such as donning religious garments like the hijab or sharing meals of halal food with fellow Muslims, as a means of signaling their religious commitment to others.

> *Participant 13:* When I'm with other Muslims, I always feel like I've to be on my best behavior. It's just the norm for them to ask if you want to pray together or if you've prayed at all during the day. And when it's fasting month, they're always reminding each other about it.

Escapism

Halal consumption is influenced not only by religious motivations but also by various non-religious factors. For Muslims residing abroad, feelings of homesickness, boredom, or loneliness are common, prompting them to seek solace through halal consumption. Engaging in halal consumption serves as a form of escapism, offering respite from overthinking current challenges and providing a temporary reprieve from distressing emotions.

> *Participant 19:* Whenever I feel lonely, I would find my comfort in [halal] foods. I cannot eat random foods outside so I have to buy the ingredients from the halal meat shop and cook it myself. When I eat halal foods of my making, I feel like being transported to my hometown … and it feels heart-warming.
>
> *Participant 4:* Although I'm not very strict in what I eat, it does feel nice to be able to eat halal foods. When I eat halal foods, it reminds me of my mom who used to cook for me in Indonesia … I feel at home. It does bring a pleasant memory for

me. I like eating and I think that eating [halal foods] would help me forget for a while about my piling homework and [low] grades … I failed in one subject last semester and the grades for other courses are not that good. I don't think my parents would be happy to know about this.

Participant 18: Whenever I feel bored or lonely, I think it would help me eat halal food from the Turkish restaurant nearby.

Dissociation

Another recurring theme is "dissociation," often stemming from a confluence of factors including identity confusion and marginalization. Our observations suggest that Muslims may distance themselves from products or symbols associated with Islam due to feelings of incongruence, conflicting identities, or external pressures (Syahrivar, 2021). For example, some Muslim women accustomed to wearing a hijab in their countries of origin may opt to forego it while residing abroad. The hijab is widely regarded by Muslims as emblematic of identity, belonging, religious commitment, and personal growth (Negrea-Busuioc et al., 2015). However, Muslims residing in secular, non-Muslim majority nations may encounter social alienation if they openly display religious practices or affirm their faith. Consequently, the suppression of Muslim identity is commonplace among Muslim minorities:

Participant 1: I started wearing hijab about a year before coming to Hungary. Here I would find myself among very few Muslim women who wear hijab. I started to realize that there were Muslim women who took off their hijabs so that they did not stand out too much in public. So here I am wondering if I should do the same.

Participant 2: So, I had this lab project a few months ago … and we all [students] gathered in the laboratory … At that time, the lab was overcapacity. Suddenly, this lab assistant approached me and gave me a look … and then he asked me to leave the lab. I was the only one leaving the lab. I think I was picked because I'm the only one wearing a hijab. I cried in my heart and started wondering if I should just take off my hijab.

Male Muslims may also feel the need to alter their appearance so that they are more accepted by the local people:

Participant 6: I used to grow a beard in Pakistan as it is considered Sunnah [the conduct of Prophet Muhammad]. However, ever since I arrived in Hungary, I wanted to look clean and smart to my new friends … I don't want to appear like some bad Muslim stereotype.

Participant 16: Back home, Islam's a big deal, and we take it seriously. But what's the point of being strict in Hungary? It's better to just roll with the locals and fit in. You can even copy their style of dressing.

One Muslim restaurant owner hesitated to put the "halal" logo sign and other Islamic symbols for fear of a negative response from his local customers:

Participant 11: Most of my customers are local people. If I were to put a "halal" sign, I fear that my restaurant would be unpopular among the local people.

In this study, a group of Muslim women (Participants 1, 2, 9, 10, 17, 19) participated in a focus group discussion (FGD). Notably, some respondents (Participants 1, 2, and 17) wore hijabs during the session, which they paired with long-sleeved shirts and tight jeans—an attire choice that appears to reflect a negotiation between religious expectations and secular fashion influences (Syahrivar, 2021). As mentioned earlier, the FGD was structured to elicit both shared and distinct experiences, thereby revealing commonalities and differences that might not surface in one-on-one interviews due to the sensitivity of the information, personal biases, or memory constraints (Kitzinger, 1995). During the FGD, all participants were presented with an identical set of interview questions and encouraged to share brief narratives about their experiences as members of Muslim minority groups. Following these initial responses, each participant was further queried about whether they had encountered similar experiences, allowing for a deeper exploration of their individual and collective challenges. All participants reported struggles in maintaining their Muslim identity. Moreover, those who wore hijabs during the discussion noted that they had adopted this practice before moving abroad, as they had previously lived in environments where hijab-wearing was the norm. This continuity suggests a bandwagon effect among Muslim women, whereby individuals adopt specific behaviors or consumption patterns to conform with the prevailing practices of their social group (Beta, 2021; Negrea-Busuioc et al., 2015; Syahrivar, 2021).

Incomplete Information

During the purchase activities, compensatory reasoning may occur when customers are confronted with incomplete information. Customers would voluntarily insert their narratives or stories to justify their purchase (Chemev & Hamilton, 2009). In the absence of halal clues (e.g., halal logo), Muslims may also use Muslim jargon to confirm the chef's or the restaurant owner's identity:

Participant 7: Of course, asking their religion directly would be awkward so when I entered a [Turkish] restaurant for the first time, I said "Assalamu Alaikum" [Islamic greetings]. When they replied with "Wa alaikum salaam" then I was certain they were Muslims.

Limited availability of halal ingredients characterizes the Hungarian market, with a notable concentration observed predominantly in Budapest, the nation's capital. Within this urban setting, adherents to the halal diet, particularly the Muslim minority community, typically patronize a select few halal establishments for their meat and other dietary essentials. This exclusivity is underscored by the relative scarcity of such

outlets, contributing to a marginally higher pricing scheme compared to mainstream retailers (Mumuni et al., 2018). It is worth noting that for Muslims, assurance of halal authenticity extends beyond mere certification logos, often discernible through the shop's nomenclature, such as a Turkish name, further enhancing trust and adherence to dietary principles.

Devoted Muslims often find themselves needing to make adjustments when living abroad. In instances where halal certification is not readily accessible, Muslim minorities resort to alternative indicators, such as the product's country of origin or the religious affiliation of the sellers. These cues serve as their justification in the absence of formal halal certification or a recognizable logo:

> *Participant 20:* After a few months, I realized that finding halal-certified foods is difficult. If any, it usually comes with extra costs. Usually, I buy food from Turkish since I believe most of them are Muslims … so they must know how to serve halal foods.

There are always some doubts among Muslims:

> *Participant 7:* But once on Friday, I asked this Turkish owner if he would go to the mosque together for Friday prayer. He said, "No." So I thought at that time that there was no evidence that just because someone was a Muslim, their cooking had to be halal.
>
> *Participant 10:* The only stuff that's truly halal around here is what you whip up in your own kitchen.
>
> *Participant 11:* I import my [chicken] meat from Türkiye because I don't believe that the meat that they [Muslims] sell here is halal. They might claim that it was halal.

Consumption of halal foods is not the sole mechanism through which Muslims reinforce their faith or offset their irreligious lifestyles while residing overseas. Muslims may also purchase Islamic products such as the Qur'an, hijabs, prayer beads, and Islamic art:

> *Participant 12:* I have bought three Qur'ans for myself. I keep the smallest one with me all the time. I feel safe when I keep it in my pocket. It makes me remember about God. When I lack patience, the Qur'an reminds me to be patient. There are passages about patience in the Qur'an. When I'm not thankful, looking at the Qur'an reminds me to be thankful. I also bought Islamic products such as tasbeeh [prayer beads] for my mother.

Well-Being

Measuring the well-being of informants after engaging in compensatory behaviors is challenging. From our interviews, it became evident that most informants emphasized the beneficial aspects of the Islamic products they consumed, including their

ability to evoke happy memories, foster peace, impart a sense of cleanliness (both physically and spiritually), nurture warmth, and enhance togetherness. However, our observations suggest that negative experiences may also manifest, particularly in the form of cognitive dissonance.

According to Festinger (1962), cognitive dissonance occurs when an individual's actions contradict their beliefs or knowledge. For example, a Muslim woman wearing a hijab in public may face criticism from peers who deem it unsuitable for her personality or level of religious commitment, leading to cognitive dissonance (as observed with Participants 1 and 2). Similarly, a Muslim minority member encountering halal food in a Christian-majority society like Hungary—only to later learn of doubts surrounding its authenticity—may also experience cognitive dissonance (as exemplified by Participants 3, 11, and 17). Festinger (1962) posited that individuals strive to reduce such dissonance and attain consonance. This study argues that positive experiences reinforce compensatory consumption as a learned behavior, while negative experiences may sustain the cycle.

Moral Disengagement

Muslims residing in secular, non-Muslim majority countries, like Hungary, often find themselves in a continuous process of rationalizing their behaviors, particularly those that diverge from Islamic laws. For instance, they may underscore the necessity of survival abroad, thereby justifying deviations from religious obligations:

> *Participant 4:* I don't consider myself as religious as some of my friends … I do what I have to do to survive. Sometimes buying halal meats is not an option for me since they're slightly more expensive and [the shop] was located far from my apartment. My [academic] schedule is quite hectic so I cannot bother myself thinking if it's halal or not every day.

According to Bandura's theory of moral disengagement (2007), individuals often attempt to mitigate feelings of moral guilt and justify their transgressions by highlighting the noble or worthy motives underlying their actions. In our study, the endeavor for survival in an unfamiliar environment resonates with this noble theme. Moreover, individuals may lean on their faith in God's mercy as a mechanism to alleviate their guilt:

> *Participant 17:* You see … finding a mosque in Hungary is already difficult. What is the likelihood that what you eat here is truly halal? But I believe Allah is Merciful and now I'm in a survival mode so I believe He would understand.

Charzyńska et al. (2020) found that individuals dealing with alcoholism highlight the significance of a merciful deity and self-forgiveness in mitigating negative emotions like guilt and shame. Furthermore, it is suggested that the burden of sin or culpability for failing to adhere to religious precepts can be transferred onto Muslim producers:

Participant 3: Allah knows that I'm trying my best to find halal foods whenever I can so if it turned out that what I ate at this Turkish restaurant was not halal, I believe the sin goes to the owner of the restaurant … not me.

Muslim minorities attempt to rationalize their shortcomings in fulfilling Islamic obligations by attributing these failures to external factors or agents, thereby pacifying their conscience. This aligns with the "displacement and diffusion of responsibility" mechanism delineated in Bandura's theory of moral disengagement (2007), wherein individuals may seek to transfer personal accountability to accomplices involved in an immoral act.

Not all Muslim women choose to wear the hijab when residing abroad. For some, originating from regions where the hijab is perceived as restrictive or regressive, they actively distance themselves from it. In a group interview, two of our female Muslim informants appeared without hijab, opting instead for casual attire akin to that of local women. Both expressed a belief that Islam has undergone an evolution over time to accommodate contemporary circumstances, a perspective considered progressive among their peers. In a separate interview, another Muslim informant elucidated her choice to refrain from wearing the hijab:

Participant 12: In Tunisia, we [Muslim women] mostly wear hijab if we want to pray. I believe a Muslim's righteous actions are more important than what she wears. To God, what is important is your heart and your actions. I cannot express my love for God simply by wearing a hijab while doing something wrong or evil. I feel that religion in action is more important such as helping someone in trouble or giving money to the poor … Heaven or hell is not about what you wear, it's about what you practice.

We posit that engaging in pro-social endeavors, such as charitable acts or donations, might serve as a means to offset perceived moral deficiencies or shortcomings, particularly in matters of religious practice. This form of compensation appears to be prevalent across various religions. For example, research conducted by Nica (2020) among Christians in the USA demonstrates that individuals who disengage from Christianity seek to redefine their non-religious identities through volunteerism and philanthropic activities. Through these endeavors, they aim to alleviate feelings of guilt, shame, and apprehension by asserting their inherent goodness despite their lack of religious faith.

Discussion

The study reveals themes concerning the reinforcement of one's faith and the quest for absolution from past acts of irreligiosity or religious transgressions. Among Muslim minority communities, there is a belief that engaging in Islamic (halal) consumption not only strengthens their faith but also serves as a form of penance for their transgressions. Conversely, some individuals view dedicated Islamic consumption as a pathway to attaining heavenly rewards.

One specific issue within the domain of religiosity concerns religious hypocrisy, which denotes a disparity between an individual's religious attitudes or beliefs and their religious practices (Yousaf & Gobet, 2013). Laurent and Clark (2019) argued that the essence of hypocrisy lies in inconsistency, particularly between one's attitude and behavior, and in the imposition of one's views, either directly, by instructing others on how to act, or indirectly, by asserting that certain actions are wrong (direct/indirect). Religious hypocrisy manifests when moral claims surpass moral actions (Matthews & Mazzocco, 2017). According to costly signaling theory, individuals feel compelled to demonstrate their religious commitment to others for social acceptance, even though this behavior may be perceived as costly (especially by outsiders) and contradictory to their beliefs or attitudes (Henrich, 2009). Religious hypocrisy also occurs when a person fails to practice what they preach; while they may strongly believe in religious doctrines, their religious practices are often deficient due to worldly affairs. However, since most religions demand honesty from believers, dishonesty and cheating—as in the case of religious hypocrisy—can evoke psychological distress and self-devaluation (Wollschleger & Beach, 2011). Furthermore, individuals who engage in religious hypocrisy are typically aware of their duplicity (Statman, 1997). Hypocrites may deceive both others and themselves in pursuit of social benefits. Hence, hypocrites, in a sense, apply economic principles to religion by maximizing benefits and reducing costs (e.g., prayer, attendance at places of worship, donations).

Another issue is religious dissonance, which refers to the tension that arises from the discrepancy between one's personal beliefs or attitudes towards religion and those held by their environment (Hathcoat et al., 2013). Religious dissonance, particularly in the context of religious minorities, may lead to lower self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1962). When an individual adopts a religious viewpoint that differs from that of their significant others (such as parents, friends, or colleagues), it may result in internal conflict, leading to emotional distress and a negative self-evaluation.

Instances of religious transgression, hypocrisy, and cognitive dissonance often lead to moral dilemmas or feelings of guilt, necessitating the adoption of coping mechanisms or compensatory responses (Syahrivar et al., 2022; Wollschleger & Beach, 2011; Yousaf & Gobet, 2013). Muslims may engage in religious consumption as a means of demonstrating their commitment to Islam within their social circles. Despite not necessarily holding a positive attitude toward Islamic products, the misalignment between their sentiments and the expectations of family and peers may influence their preferences for such products (Mukhtar & Butt, 2012).

Navigating life as a religious minority in non-Muslim countries presents numerous challenges, often requiring Muslims to adapt their religious beliefs and practices to assimilate into their new surroundings. Consequently, many Muslim minorities grapple with internal conflicts and discrepancies, prompting them to seek compensatory measures to reconcile their convictions. As elucidated in this study, Muslim individuals faced significant struggles in upholding their religious principles, leading them to turn to religious products, such as halal-certified foods, as a means of preserving their identities. Essentially, food serves as a significant emblem of identity (Chairy & Syahrivar, 2019; Syahrivar et al., 2022). However, it is essential to acknowledge that not

all religious consumption originates solely from religious ideals; some instances stem from responses to various emotional challenges like loneliness or boredom. Additionally, certain forms of religious consumption aim to foster solidarity among Muslims. Muslim participants reported experiencing feelings of pleasure, solace, heightened motivation, and other positive emotions following the consumption of halal-certified foods.

An intriguing aspect of religious products is their role as an escape mechanism from life's harsh realities. For example, binge eating can serve as a coping mechanism to distract from distressing events and the resulting negative emotions or discomfort (Bennett et al., 2013). Religious minorities are especially drawn to religious products as they offer temporary relief from the challenges and anxieties encountered in unfamiliar environments. This study suggests that religious products provide therapeutic benefits to religious minorities, allowing them to temporarily alleviate their burdens and find solace amidst adversity.

Being a minority often entails heightened religious scrutiny. Within Muslim communities, individuals frequently monitor each other's adherence to religious duties. Consequently, Muslim minorities also feel compelled symbolically (or ostentatiously) to display their religiosity to fellow Muslims through religious consumption. They believe that consumption choices reflect one's identity, with true Muslims being identifiable through their adherence to halal practices. However, during fieldwork and observations, instances were noted where Muslims distanced themselves from religious products because of negative perceptions held by the local populace. In such cases, religious consumption can inadvertently project a negative image, making it unwelcome among those minorities seeking to preserve their positive image and newfound identities (Syahrivar, 2021).

Religious minority groups that engage in compensatory behaviors may turn to either religious or non-religious products. In the case of Muslims, religious products extend beyond halal-certified foods to include items that help preserve Islamic faith and identity—such as hijabs, Islamic attire and accessories, and literature—which are typically distributed among community members in Hungary. Conversely, some religious minorities may choose to abstain from religious consumption altogether. Regardless of whether individuals opt for religious or non-religious products, they tend to rationalize their consumption behaviors. Furthermore, Muslim minorities may resort to moral disengagement (Bandura, 2007) as a means of suppressing their inclination to compensate for perceived shortcomings.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications of this study are multifaceted. Firstly, it extends the existing framework of compensatory consumption (Kang & Johnson, 2011; Koles et al., 2018; Mandel et al., 2017; Woodruffe, 1997) by incorporating religious dimensions, illustrating how the scarcity of Islamic products and services in non-Muslim majority contexts can trigger compensatory behaviors among Muslim minorities. This extension highlights that compensatory consumption is not solely a response to personal self-discrepancies but also a strategic adaptation to structural and cultural constraints.

Secondly, the study deepens our understanding of religious identity formation and reinforcement by demonstrating that the consumption of Islamic products, ranging from halal foods to symbolic items like hijabs, Islamic accessories, and literature, serves as a mechanism to mitigate feelings of marginalization and maintain faith amid societal pressures (Syahrivar, 2021). Thirdly, the findings reveal the role of moral disengagement (Bandura, 2007) in the process of integrating into a non-Muslim majority society, suggesting that individuals may rationalize deviations from religious norms as a coping strategy under conditions of scarcity and social isolation. Overall, the study contributes to theoretical discourse by bridging gaps between consumer behavior theories and religious studies, offering a fresh perspective on how cultural, economic, and institutional factors interact to shape the compensatory behaviors of religious minorities.

Managerial and Policy Implications

The study's findings offer important implications for both business practitioners and policymakers. For managers in the religious products sector, the data underscore the need to develop offerings that address the moral tensions experienced by religious minorities. Businesses should emphasize the intrinsic benefits of Islamic products, such as reinforcing faith, facilitating redemption, and enhancing well-being, while also investing in innovative marketing strategies that effectively communicate these advantages.

A key finding is that halal foods in Hungary are typically priced at a premium compared to conventional alternatives, primarily due to reliance on imported ingredients. In response, managers are encouraged to explore partnerships with local suppliers and invest in more efficient supply chain management to mitigate these cost disparities. Additionally, firms targeting Muslim consumers should consider adopting alternative Islamic symbols or cues beyond the conventional "halal" logo, which may carry negative connotations among non-Muslim consumers. Such alternative markers could reliably signal product authenticity, enhancing brand appeal across diverse consumer segments.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that regulatory intervention is needed to create a more accessible and cost-effective halal food market. Policymakers should consider establishing independent halal certification authorities to reduce dependence on imports and promote local production, thereby potentially lowering prices for Muslim consumers. Furthermore, fostering collaboration between governmental agencies and private-sector stakeholders could streamline the supply chain, ultimately better serving the growing Muslim minority in Hungary and across Europe.

Study Limitations

We wish to acknowledge the limitations of our study. Firstly, this research involved 20 Muslims living in Hungary, ranging in age from 18 to 43, including students,

entrepreneurs, educators, and early-career professionals. While we balanced gender representation, financial situations varied widely; for instance, students and early-career individuals often operated on tight budgets, whereas entrepreneurs and educators enjoyed more stability. This financial divide influenced daily life—students reported difficulties finding affordable halal groceries, while those with steady incomes navigated these challenges more easily. Secondly, gender differences emerged: women discussed societal judgments related to wearing the hijab, whereas men focused on the challenge of locating halal-certified foods. Thirdly, the study places significant emphasis on halal-certified foods, reflecting the limited availability of other Islamic products and services in the country. Fourthly, most participants were highly educated, which may mean their reflections on balancing faith with practicality differ from those with less formal schooling. Additionally, sampling bias may be present, as the overrepresentation of highly engaged Muslims might overlook the perspectives of less observant individuals. Future studies should incorporate greater socioeconomic diversity to fully capture Hungary's broader Muslim minority experience.

Conclusion

Building on qualitative insights from Muslim minorities in Hungary, this research reveals that the limited availability of halal products and supportive Islamic ecosystem prompts adaptive behaviors that reconcile religious ideals with everyday sociocultural constraints. The findings indicate that compensatory behaviors in the context of Muslim minorities function both as mechanisms for identity preservation and moral reconciliation, enabling individuals to manage tensions in a predominantly secular environment. These observations suggest that business practitioners and policymakers should reconsider tailored support and innovative supply-chain approaches to better address Muslim consumers' distinctive needs. Ultimately, by extending the compensatory consumption theory to encompass religious practices, the study lays a solid foundation for future investigations that capture the breadth and diversity of experiences among religious minority groups.

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