

THE PRICING OF HALAL MEAT AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PERCEPTION OF
RELIGIOUS IDENTITY IN MUSLIMS CONSUMERS PARTICIPATING IN MUSLIM
STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS ACROSS COLLEGES IN NEW YORK

**The Pricing of Halal Meat and its Impact on the Perception of Religious Identity in Muslim
Consumers**

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ABSTRACT

The Halal food industry has taken the world by storm as more and more people continue to take an interest in different cuisines and partake in different cultures. Contrary to popular belief, Halal food is not just Mediterranean cuisine, it is food that contains Halal products such as Halal meat. Muslims are required to consume Halal meat and Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia, Dubai, and Pakistan only sell Halal meat to their citizens. However, Muslims who live in non-Muslim countries have to rely on Halal meat certifications to ensure the meat they are consuming is Halal. Due to the fact that so many regulations are required, certifications are expensive and in turn businesses choose to sell their Halal meat at higher prices.

By branching off of this idea, the question of high prices and Halal meat began to arise and so my research question, how does the pricing of Halal meat impact the perception of religious identity in Muslims?, was formed. In order to answer this question, a survey with open-ended questions was emailed to Muslim Student Associations across colleges in NY. Thematic coding was done to analyze participants' results. It was concluded that Halal meat does not have an impact on the perception of religious identity in Muslims, but it does show a disparity between the Halal meat and regular meat market.

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INTRODUCTION

The word “Halal” means permissible or lawful in Arabic. The opposite of Halal is Haram, which pertains to things that are unlawful and cannot be done. In the Quran, (the holy book of Islam), rules are listed on what foods and actions are considered Halal and haram, such as “He only prohibits for you the eating of animals that die of themselves, blood, the meat of pigs...”(Quran 2:173). These strict guidelines, along with Muslim populations rapidly growing around the world, caused the need for a global Halal market to arise. However, even though the Halal meat market has expanded significantly, conflicts over proper certification continue to occur since it is so costly. According to the journal “Halal Certification for Financial Products: A Transaction Cost Perspective”, Halal meat certification can range from “...USD 122,000 per annum for the first year and USD 34,000 per annum in the following years.” (Hayat et. al.). Due to the fact that certification is so expensive, Halal meat retailers choose to sell their meat at higher prices to balance their costs out.

This idea can also be proved in restaurants that use Halal meat. In the study “Religion, Markets, and Digital Media: Seeking Halal Food in the U.S.”, the authors found that social media reviews showed “...the most common sacrifice made for access to Halal food is the price:...My only complaint is that it's just a little bit expensive but definitely worth it since you don't find places like this every other day...” (Yusniza). This detail furthermore supports that Halal meat is expensive but since a consumer considers it as “Halal” they are willing to pay the extra costs. In my research, I aim to show how the prices of Halal meat can ultimately lead to an impact on the perception of religious identity in Muslim consumers. Through the use of qualitative data

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collection consisting of a survey, I am introducing the gap of price on the perception of religious identity specifically the Muslim population. By conducting my research, insight will be given to people's thoughts and opinions when it comes to purchasing items in relation to religion and show how taking these things into account will lead to a more diverse and accepting society. Additionally, very little research has looked upon Halal meat and thus another gap is being filled. I hypothesize that participants will assume Halal meat is overpriced due to the differences in markets and will have a positive perception of Islam due to its guidelines for cleanliness and other factors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Certification and the Growth of the Halal Meat Industry

In this literature review, many studies support the idea that Halal meat is expensive due to its certifications. In order for Halal meat to be deemed as Halal, the animal needs to be one of the permitted animals written in the Quran, must be alive at the time of the slaughtering, they must be butchered by hand while saying Bismillah Allahu Akbar (a prayer to lessen the pain), and all blood must be drained out (Quran). Because there are so many guidelines, certification bodies must be made to guarantee the authenticity of meat. One example of a certification body is the Islamic Services of America (ISA). They are globally recognized and accredited by the World Halal Food Council and other regulatory bodies. However, as seen in the journal article "Halal Certification for Financial Products: A Transaction Cost Perspective" written by Raphie Hayat, Frank Den Butter and Udo Kock, the authors discuss how Halal certification costs are replaced by the high costs of Halal meat. For instance, it takes "...considerable time (2-3 months) and money (USD 122.000) to obtain a Halal certification..." (Hayat et. al.). Not only is this true in the United States, but this also occurs globally. In the United Kingdom, E.H.Z (European Halal

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Certification Institute) costs approximately 3000 to 4000 pounds per annum (Lever et al.). Due to these costly certifications, businesses choose to sell their Halal meat at higher amounts to gain profit after spending large sums of money.

As previous studies show, not only are certifications expensive, but laborers required to slaughter meat are also too. Since Halal meat has to be hand-slaughtered and a prayer needs to be said for each animal, mass-production for businesses is impossible. As a result, not only are businesses spending money on pricey certifications, they are also hiring more laborers and paying their salaries, along with other factors such as “market demand, SME producers, and clean operation” (Dali et. al). Consequently, all of these components result in Halal meat being expensive for Muslim consumers.

Religion and Consumption

It is proven that religion can have an effect on the consumption of an individual. As concluded in the study, “Impact of Religion on Halal Meat Consumption Decision Making in Belgium”, Muslims who had higher self-identity chose to eat Halal meat due to its health benefits while ones with a lower self-identity were influenced by their religious peers, together with their personal health attitude and availability concerns (Bonne et al.). Although this paper is valuable because it shows a correlation between religion and consumption, it does not address the gap of prices and Halal meat which I hope to aim for in my study. In another paper titled, “Muslim and non-Muslim Consumer Perceptions of Halal at Supermarkets in a Non- Muslim Country” written by Riaz Fathima Omar Farouk, research was used to determine if New Zealand non-muslims were willing to accept the segregation of halal produce in supermarkets, as well as explore their knowledge and tolerance towards Halal produce (Farouk). An online questionnaire was given to both non-Muslims and Muslims and it confirmed that their faiths led them to their consumption

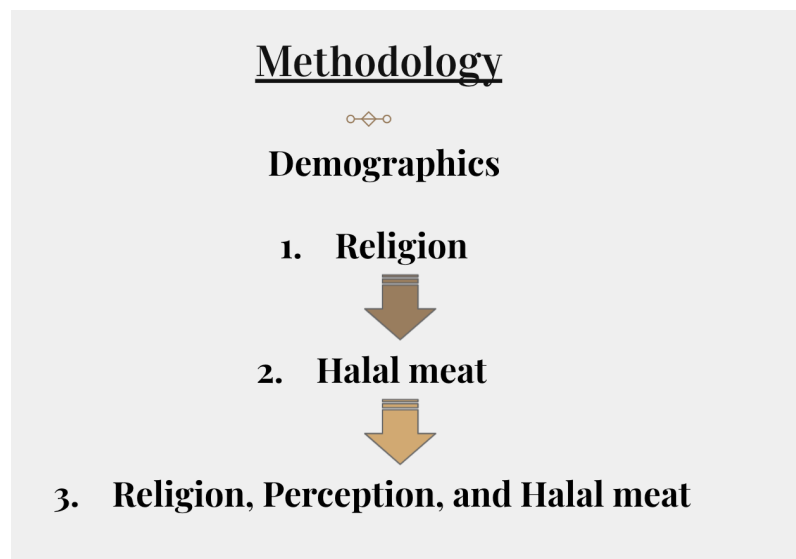
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choices. This study finds that a segregated system for Muslims helps them trust the product more and that a clearly identifiable display counter for the halal produce for them to shop without fear of contamination to the meat they are about to buy. Just as how individuals may dress a certain way to express their identity to others and themselves, consumption choices do the same as they allow people to accommodate themselves in society. Based on these findings, my research will be able to focus on the prices of Halal meat which the paper did not address and target a specific religious group.

INITIAL ASSUMPTIONS

I initially assumed that participants would have a negative perception of their religious identity due to the overpricing of Halal meat. Since I believed that they were not aware that Halal meat was overpriced, hypothesized this because I thought that participants would say they felt bound by Islam to consume these overly priced goods such as Halal meat. For instance, I supposed that they would state that if not for Islam, they could be able to consume more foods that are more accessible and cheaply priced when compared to Halal meat.

METHODOLOGY



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This study explores how prices of Halal meat can have an impact on the religious identity of Muslims. The goal is to bring awareness to the Halal meat market and highlight how prices can impact an individual's religious identity when purchasing items with a religious motive. As stated before, this is important to explore as very few research has been done relating to the Halal meat markets and the Muslim community in general.⁰

Participants

Snowball sampling was done to gain responses as quickly and more credible as possible. Initially, a sample of convenience was to be used by contacting friends and family who fulfilled the requirements of being adults and being Muslim, but because there was too much bias and it was not a feasible method, this became the pilot survey. This change was crucial as the challenges presented by the participant sampling were avoided earlier on and research could be done as truthfully and accurately as possible. Individuals who were contacted via email were presidents of Muslim Student Associations who helped inform members of the survey by holding meetings and sharing the links on their social media.

Data Collection Instruments

A two-part qualitative study was conducted using a survey via Google Forms and then thematic coding was done through Google Docs. A qualitative study was chosen because responses would refer to people's thoughts, opinions, and their experiences which would be valuable to answer my research question as it would address their religious identity and their perceptions. Thematic coding is a form of qualitative analysis that identifies common key words and sorts answers into categories that reflect themes. This would be helpful in my research as themes would be able to explain the reasons why respondents chose certain answers and the meaning behind quantitative data given. Gmail was used to send out Participant Inquiry emails to

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presidents of Muslim Student Associations. The email format followed a similar template provided by Central Michigan University. After it was written, the email was approved by my teachers and then sent out. Google Spreadsheets was also used to analyze my quantitative data and create smart charts to see how many individuals choose certain answers and options.

Procedure

As stated before, a two-part quantitative analysis was done. Additionally, the survey was divided into three sections that were able to build upon each other and address different parts of the research question. These sections were Religion, Halal meat, and Religion, Perception, and Religious Identity. It was important to format the survey this way in order for participants to have a solid background on their own religious identity and see what prior knowledge they had of Halal meat such as its pricing and where it can be purchased. The last section helped to answer my research question as religious identity and Halal meat were combined with perception. By using this method, it was assumed that respondents would answer questions truthfully and to the best of their ability. Additionally, by separating the survey into three parts, it was able to be presented in a simple and concise way to participants. Similar questions were taken from the study “Muslim and non-Muslim Consumer Perceptions of Halal at Supermarkets in a Non- Muslim Country”, by Fatima Omar, such as “My choice of supermarket, grocery store and or butcher is influenced by my religious and or spiritual beliefs’s” method of data collection was used but specifically focused on Muslim Student Associations in NY for the research and questions were altered to address the research question with the assistance of John Lever from the University of Huddersfield. Mr. Lever’s help was important as he has done countless on the topics of Religious Food Markets, Sustainable Food Systems, and Migrants and Refugees. He advised me throughout my research and helped me format a research question and clear

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methodology along with developing the questions needed for the survey. The last question was

“Are there any comments you would like to make to furthermore assist me with understanding your perspective?”. This was important as this was a qualitative study and more comments from participants would help me understand their perception and opinions more.

Ethics

The first part of the informed respondents of what the research entailed and ensured their responses would be kept confidential. It also reminded individuals that they must be 18 or above to answer the questions. This was a requirement as adults are more familiar with purchasing Halal meat and are more aware of their religious identity rather than adolescents (**Figure 1**).

Thus no consent forms were needed or used in the survey, however participants were told that their answers remained confidential. Contact information was also provided in case they had any concerns or questions regarding the research. Even though Google Forms requested respondents email addresses, this helped to ensure that they would only answer the questions in the survey once. This feature assisted immensely in making sure the responses were deemed as credible.

Results

The second part of the survey included demographics. Age, ethnicity, and immigrant generation were asked as shown by **Figures 2, 3, and 4**. Since people from a variety of ages and ethnicities answered, results showed there was a diverse participant pool and thus a broader range of perspectives could be given. The question on immigration generation was optional due to the fact that I thought it would be interesting to see if future research could be done on immigrant generations and their religious identity.

As said before, the first section focused on religion. To begin, individuals were asked how much of a role Islam plays in their life. Then they were given a picture of the 5 pillars of

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Islam (**Figure 6**) and asked how often they followed them (**Figure 7**). By using this method, it could be clear if someone had a strong or weak religious identity. As **Figure 5 shows**, most of the respondents believed that Islam played a great role in their life indicating that they valued their religion and most likely had a greater religious identity than the people who believed Islam played a moderate role in their life. The next two questions focused on an image provided that showed the 5 pillars of Islam. These include believing in one God and his prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H), giving charity, going on pilgrimage, praying 5 times a day, and fasting. Since these are directly stated in the Quran and Muslims are required to follow them, answers pertaining to following most of them often would show that they had a strong understanding of their religious identity. Results ended up showing that not only did a majority of the participants follow all of the pillars, but they did so often. The next question was, “How likely are you to tell someone that you are a Muslim and that you follow Islam when asked?” and “How would you perceive your religious identity and why?”. The first question is essential because communication is key in one expressing themselves to others and if people are willing to tell others about their religion, it can indicate they feel strongly about their faith and have a greater religious identity. As shown by **Figure 8**, 77.8% of respondents stated they are highly likely to tell someone about Islam when asked. Note: people who chose “depends on the situation...” were asked to provide an explanation and the responses were coded into Hijab and Communication. However, the focus was directed more towards participants who answered likely and more likely since a great number of people chose those 2 options as their answer.

Thematic Coding

The final question in the section “Religion” was, “How would you perceive your religious identity and why?”. This was one of the most important questions in my research as it

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directly stated how respondents felt about their religious identity. As shown by the chart in

Figure 9, 83.3% of individuals said they identified with their religion and tried to follow most of its guidelines, 11.1% they were very religious, and the rest said they identified with their religion and tried to follow most of its guidelines. To find out why they chose their answers, thematic coding was done in two iterations, one with an initial code and then a final code. The final code showed that the themes given by Islam such as, benefits, regulations, passion, and identity impacted how religious respondents were.

Section 2 was titled “Halal meat” and looked to see if people had any background info on Halal meat and its price. To start off, the first question asked was, “What are your most important reasons for buying Halal meat?”, which as stated before, was adapted from 's study. A majority of respondents chose that they purchased meat for religious reasons which was expected but their responses were then coded to see why they specifically chose their answers. The themes showed that the way of slaughtering and healthiness such as cleanliness mattered when participants purchased meat and Halal meat filled those requirements. Additionally, it was seen that because Halal meat was accessible and related to their faith, they had no conflict when purchasing Halal meat. The next question was “Have you ever purchased Halal meat?”. Although this question was general it was essential due to the fact that if people had purchased Halal meat, they would be more familiar with its pricing and this could affect their answers in the end. 100% of the individuals said that they had purchased Halal meat before, showing that they were familiar with its pricing and how Muslims have to go to specific locations to purchase meat. The last question in the section was, “Do you think Halal meat is overpriced, underpriced, I don’t know, and fairly priced?” and the results were extremely interesting as 50% stated that they thought it was fairly priced. Thematic coding showed that participants believed the quality

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and the supply and demand mattered and resulted in Halal meat being accurately priced and thus they were willing to purchase the product. Individuals who believed that Halal meat was overpriced stated that there was a disparity in regular and Halal meat markets and so they knew it was expensive. Participants who chose underpriced said that shortcuts were taken by purchasing meat in bulk quantities from places such as Restaurant Depot and Jetto **FIGURE SOMETHING** and people who chose I don't know stated that their parents still purchase a majority of their household's Halal meat and thus they would not know what the pricing was **FIGURE SOMETHING**.

By combining the two previous sections together, section 3 labeled "Religious Identity, Perception, and Halal meat" was created and it started off by branching off of the previous question. This time a piece of text from the study done by Dali et. al., which was mentioned before in the lit review, was given to participants and they were asked, "According to several studies conducted around the world such as "Are halal products more expensive as perceived by the consumers? Muslimpreneuers (Muslim entrepreneurs) challenges and opportunities in establishing a blue ocean playing field" the factors that go into producing halal meat are very expensive, so halal meat prices are raised to balance out the costs of goods and manufacturing. Now knowing or having been proved that halal meat is expensive, how does that impact your view on your religious identity?". The results of this question were shocking as **Figure something** showed that 66.7% of the respondents stated that they felt the same and 33.3% said they have a more positive perception of Islam. Thematic coding was done once again in order to see how and why these responses were chosen. The results of the coding proved my initial hypothesis to be false as it was concluded that production costs and supply and demand justified the expensiveness of Halal meat and thus a majority of the participants who chose that Halal

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meat was fairly priced, felt the same in the end. To add on, people who felt the same also believed that Islam was not at fault and thus it had no correlation with the Halal meat prices therefore not affecting their religion and so instead of blaming Islam, businesses should be at fault. People who chose that they had a positive perception of Islam said they are glad more steps are being taken to ensure that Halal meat is in fact Halal.

Discussion

To conclude, the pricing of Halal meat does not impact the perception of religious identity in Muslims. This can be seen through data collection done through thematic coding via a survey. Results showed that a majority of participants who stated they believed Halal meat was overpriced, continued to feel the same even after learning that Halal meat was expensive. Even though there was no effect on the overpricing of Halal meat on Muslim religious identities, many things can be taken into account through my research. My research implies that there is a distinction between the Halal meat market and the regular market and that more should be done in order for it to be more conclusive for Muslims. Clearly there is a disparity in the religious markets, specifically the Halal meat market. As one of the respondents answered for the last question, "I think that the manipulation of costs related to halal meat is purely individuals doing what they can to earn a profit in their business. I understand that many Indo/Pak grocers don't even list prices on items and it has been my personal experience that they pick and choose who to charge what price but that has never impacted my faith or belief in Islam. It definitely makes me think what kind of muslims are these people that they can cheat hard working individuals." As said by the participant, for the future, methods for lessening the cost of certifications and setting set standards for the prices of Halal meat should be taken into account by people who sell

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and distribute halal meat. To add on, it is important to address these not-so-obvious differences in society, and make sure that others are aware of different cultures and religions and choose to accept them so that Muslims can show their consumption choices and feel proud of their religious identity. I hope this research also helped to represent the Muslim Community more as they continue to be a minority.

Limitations

There were many limitations presented, but they helped to further strengthen my research. Co-vid 19 has impacted people all over the world and clubs and activities have been difficult to partake in. Since a majority of the data collection came from Muslim Student Associations in colleges, it was important to consider the people my responses were coming from. It was difficult to gain data at first due to the hectic schedules of college students and the liabilities Co-vid 19 presented. A president from a Muslim Student Association even reached out to me personally and stated that the club was not meeting as often due to strict Co-vid guidelines. As a result, snowball sampling was the key research method used to gain as much data as possible. To get maximum results, over 30 schools were contacted via email and social media to gain participants. A qualitative study can take months or even years to complete and analyze a specific topic or phenomenon and so time restrictions in a school setting were an important factor as well. This is why a small sample size was used and coded for. Many important changes were made in the methodology as well. As stated before, my initial method was going to include responses from friends and family whole were 18 and Muslim. I soon realized that this method was not feasible and acquired too much bias and so I decided to use that as a pilot survey and create another data collection method. It is helpful that a pilot study was done however, because

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it informed me on what options I can add to my questions and which questions could be omitted.

As shown, these limitations did not have an impact on the results as a broad range of perspectives were given and an accurate conclusion was drawn.

Future Directions

Many people are not aware of the challenges Muslims have to face to consume a bare necessity for life. They have to travel to specific areas to buy Halal certified meat and not only do they waste money on expensive meat, they also lose money on gas. Even though their religious perception is not affected by material things such as the cost of buying goods, the problem of there being a disparity in the Halal meat and regular meat market still remains. Future research can look upon how incorporating Halal meat in regular meat markets or even grocery stores can help lessen the price gap. Additionally, making Halal meat more accessible will not only lead to more consumers, but it will help decrease the prejudice against Muslims in society. Research on including Halal school lunches can indebitbly be helpful for the Muslim community and later on for other religious groups. Through research on these topics, vegetarians and vegans can also be taken into account to assist individuals with following their diet and not being judged for their way of eating. By researching these topics for the future, results can help lead to a more diverse and accepting society. As one of my participants suggested, in order to learn more about Halal meat and Islam please visit www.hmsusa.org.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Beginning of survey/ Consent form for participants

Note: My personal info is hidden

Pricing of Halal Meat and Perception of Religious Identity

Disclaimer: Please only complete this survey if you are a Muslim, meaning that you follow the Islamic religion. You MUST be 18 years of age or older. All information will be kept confidential and if you have any further inquiries I would be glad to assist you through email:

[REDACTED] My research is on the pricing of halal meat and how it can impact a Muslim individual's perception on their religious identity. The results of this survey will be used for my research paper, so please be honest as possible. Thank you!

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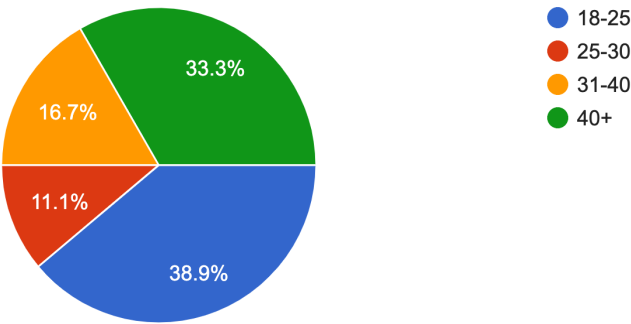
Appendix B:

Demographics

What is your age?

18 responses

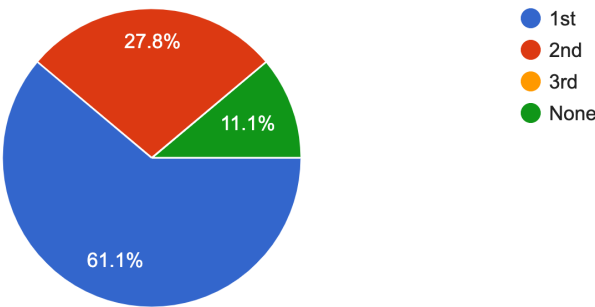
Figure 1



Optional: Are you a 1st, 2nd, or 3rd generation Immigrant?

18 responses

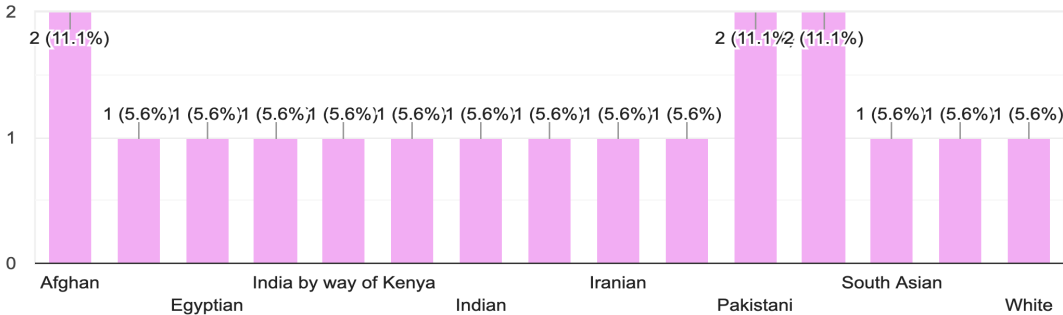
Figure 2



What is your ethnicity?

18 responses

Figure 3



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Appendix B: Section 1 “Religion”

How much does Islam play a role in your life?

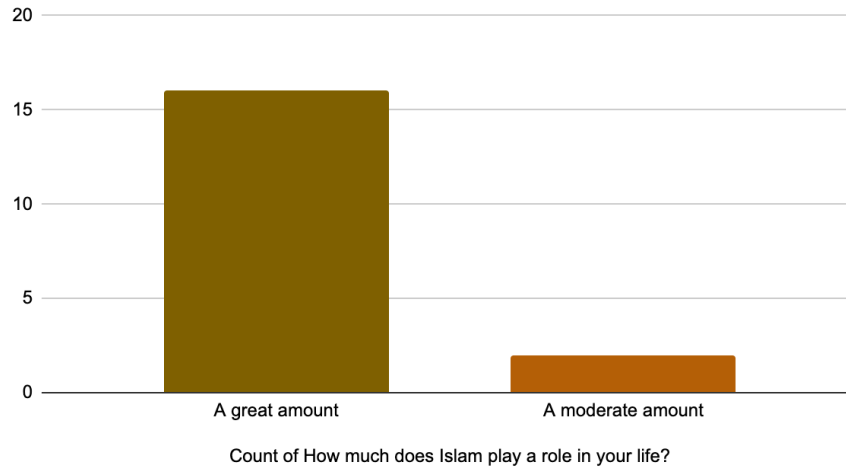


Figure 4

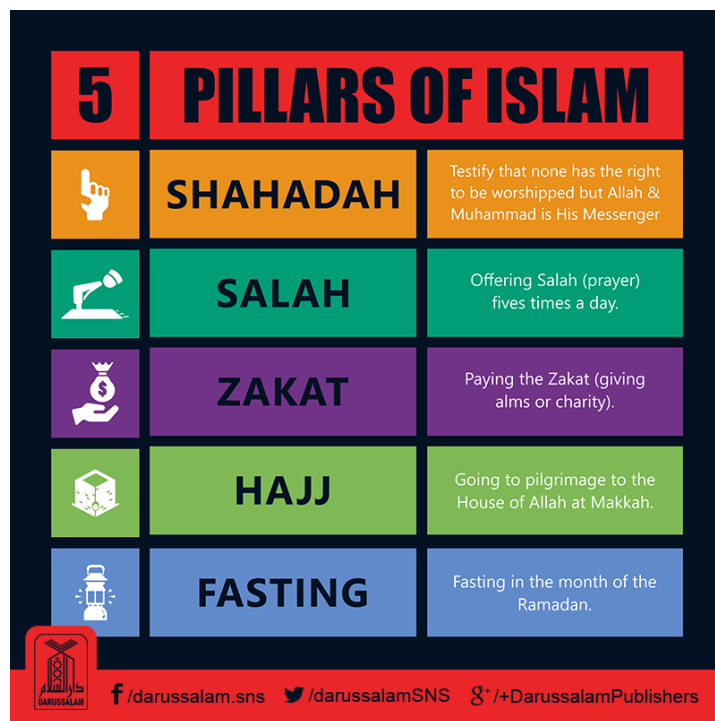


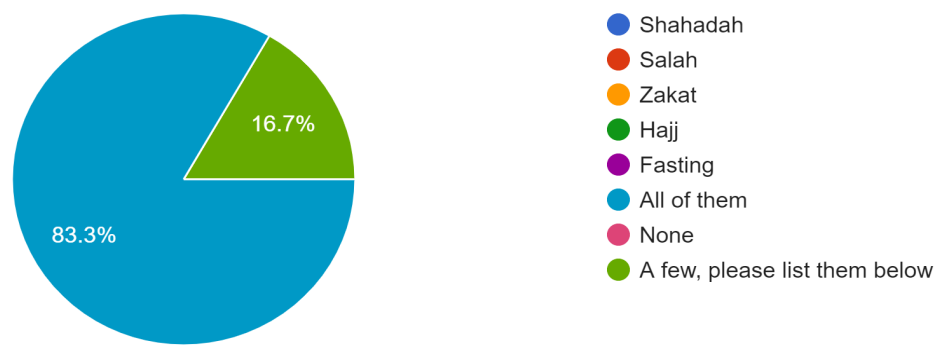
Figure 5

This picture was provided to participants

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The 5 pillars of Islam are shown below. What pillars do you follow?

18 responses



How often would you say you follow the pillars?

