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Halal brand in Kyrgyzstan: strengthening of religiosity or commercial project?

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Abstract

Today we live in a world of commodities; consumer society has replaced the socialistic way of life, where almost each human activity has become commodified. The relationship between belief and economic dimensions of human activity has been investigated among many scholars; however there are cases which stay still unexplored. One of these cases is the development of Halal brand. In worldwide practice, there is a limited research articles, however, it is interesting to look at this case as it has two dimensions itself: religion and economic-marketing. In particular, this paper is focused on the Halal brand development in Kyrgyzstan and taking into consideration the Baudrillard's theory on Simulacra and Simulation, the study attempted to explore the socio-economic factors underlying the use of Halal brand among producers and bring the light into the discourses underlying this practice.

INTRODUCTION

Commercialization has been taking a deep root not only in education, but also in many other areas of the society. After the collapse of the Soviet Union commercialization and capitalization of each human activity became more and more popular, and Kyrgyzstan is not the exception. Beginning from the 19th century a capitalist economy has been focused on the creation of new production techniques in order to speed up the production on the market. When this was accomplished, there emerged a need to increase the consuming volumes of people. Under this condition, the concept of brand was created. A product with a brand name had become something more than just a product, and increased willingness to buy them among the consumers. As Slavoj Zizek stated: “Our experiences have become commodified: what we buy on the market is less a product we want to own and more a life experience – an experience of sex, eating, communicating, cultural consumption or participating in a lifestyle” (n.d.). By consuming certain brands people also buy a certain lifestyle. For instance, when we buy an organic food, we buy the willingness to attach ourselves to the healthy and ecological lifestyle (Zizek, n.d.). The same with other commodities, especially with clothes in fashion area: millions of young girls save their money in order to buy at least the replica of popular Micheal Kors watches in order to be part of modern glamorous lifestyle. The brand of Michael Kors has become a representation of the fashionable look, and no matter whether these watches on your hand original or just a precise copy, it is more significant that you are wearing this watches. Such kinds of cases were developed in the work of French sociologist Jean Baudrillard. In his book “Simulacra and Precession” (1994) he argues that the lines between reality and artificial in today’s post-modern world are blurred; we are living in the world of copies, imitations, which became as truth for ourselves, that of a world of “simulacra”.

Taking into consideration Baudrillard’s theory of simulation, this paper is attempted to look at the case of Halal brand, which has been more and more popular in Islamic world.

Growing each year by 1.8%, the market is valued at about US\$560 billion a year (Min, 2011). There are millions of people buying the Halal and not only the Muslims (Min, 2011). Today, Halal goods had become a representation not only as religious permissible goods, but also as healthy and ecological way of lifestyle (Alabsy, n.d.) The increasing Halal industry attracted many worldwide scholars to explore the structure of Halal market and academic research on the subject its increasing gradually. Almost all of them were focused on Halal logistics, consumer preferences and business relations, however there are limited research articles describing the social side of this issue. To fill this gap, this research is focused on the development of the Halal brand in Kyrgyzstan, the country with majority of Muslims - 86,3% (Pew Research Center, 2009) and the rapid increasing of Halal brand production in local markets. Today we have different goods and services starting from meat and ending with water and even taxi with the brand of "Halal". However, in Islamic sacred books the Halal was mentioned only towards food, which according to the Islamic Law of Shariat, should not consist of pork and alcohol and particular insects (Alabsy, n.d.). Additionally, the Halal goods should pass a certain certification process, with all included checks and controls. And despite this certification process is not fully established yet in Kyrgyzstan, the production of Halal goods increase rapidly each month during the last year (24.kg news agency [24.kg], 2012).

These and other facts need to be explored and the main aims of this research are to investigate the case of commodification of Muslim culture in Kyrgyzstan; find out what are the relationships between producers and religion; how entrepreneurs use the brand of Halal; whether it is for religious or commercial purposes? To investigate these aims in detail there were two main research questions posed:

- 1) What are the factors of decision making for an individual to become a Halal producer?
- 2) What are the discourses underlying the practice of using the Halal brand for entrepreneurs?

The answers to these research questions were achieved through analyses of discourses derived from in-depth interviewing with two groups of people: religious leaders of Kyrgyzstan and Halal producers. The analyses under theoretical framework of Baudrillard's scheme of Simulacra shows that Halal brand products in Kyrgyzstan have nothing real with the established norms of Halal products in the view of Islamic Law. Main conclusion of this study is that Halal products in Kyrgyzstan are no more than simulacra – a copy with no relation to the origin.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Islam is considered to be as the world's second fast growing monotheistic religion (PBS, n.d.). Founded by the Holy Prophet Hazrat Mohammad in the 7th century in Arabic Caliphate it has spread up to all other countries in the world, from Asia and Africa and later to Europe and America (Lewis & Churchill, 2011). However, from the times of its establishment of Prophet Muhammad it faced various changes under historical obstacles which in some ways produced the religious disagreements and debates on what is pure Islam (Kayani, 2011). Here, new movement came to the Islamic world – Wahabism with the aim to purify Islam from cultural and ethnical changes and to return their religion to the look as it was in Prophet Muhammad's times and his followers (Kayani, 2011). However, all those Wahhabi movements failed under the pressure of European Renaissance at that time and wave of modernization (Kayani, 2011). With this wave of modernization and capitalization of almost each part of human life the Islamic world changed and shaped into different side, now Muslims “became familiar with the modern emerging trends in politics, economy, security and the working of the international system” (Kayani, 2011). Here, analyses of different historical resources showed us the integrity of Islam not only into the social life and international politics, but also to the level of economy where Islamic goods and services are raised up with the brand of “Halal” (Nooh et al., 2011; Hanzae & Ramezani, 2011; Riaz & Chaudry, 2003).

For Muslims, Halal means “permissible”, or in other words lawful or permitted. The opposite of that is Haraam which means unlawful or prohibited (Alserhan, 2011). Today, these terms are commonly used in different spheres of human life, such as food/meat products, cosmetics, personal care products, food ingredients and food contact materials and even pharmaceuticals (Alserhan, 2011) However, In Koran this term was stated only towards food and drinks:

“Prohibited to you are dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah , and [those animals] killed by strangling or by a violent blow or by a head-long fall or by the goring of horns, and those from which a wild animal has eaten, except what you [are able to] slaughter [before its death], and those which are sacrificed on stone altars, and [prohibited is] that you seek decision through divining arrows. That is grave disobedience.” (5:3, surah Al-Maiat).

These categories have the implications over the company’s decision making on the compound of Halal production. And although these rules seem very strict and difficult to follow, today the market of Halal industry is enormously developing (Alserhan, 2011). In the worldwide practice, we even have Halal hubs – core countries which specialize on producing and exporting Halal goods. Scholars allocate Malaysia and Brunei as the main competitors in Halal industry; these countries have the highest levels of exporting Halal goods and they even established their own Halal certification standards which are admitted to be as international (Temporal, 2011; Borzooei and Asgari, 2013). Such an increase of Halal production is not surprising, as Muslims consists 23% of worldwide population, where almost each of them has a constant demand for Halal goods (Temporal, 2011).

The increasing Halal industry attracted many worldwide scholars to explore the structure of Halal market and make a research on the issue of its increasing in the world. Almost all of them focused on Halal logistics, consumer preferences and business relations, but there are limited research articles describing the social side of this issue. For instance, questions like is there any changes in identity of Halal producers, social impact of Halal producers in the society and other ones are skipped.

Halal in Kyrgyzstan

Halal intervened into the local markets recently, in 2011s when the first Halal restaurants have been emerged (Vechernyi Bishkek, 2012). Such a late coming to the market can be explained through the historical analyses of Islam in Kyrgyzstan. Today Muslims contain the majority of religious population in the country (Pew Research Center, 2009) despite the fact that Kyrgyzstan as a part of Soviet Union was forced to atheistic way of thinking during more than six decades (Heyat, 2004). Alongside with the gradual construction of mosques and religious institutions in the country the culture of religiosity has been raised which played a role in creation and spreading of Halal brand products (Heyat, 2004). If in the beginning the reason of Halal brand producing had no doubts it came from the religious purposes, today many news portals and mass media resources are involved in disputing the religious factor as a main one in creation of Halal brand products. Such an emergence of products and services as Taxi Halal, Hotel Halal and even water Halal make a sensation in the country; how they can be considered as Halal? (Vechernyi Bishkek, 2012). Also, mass media articles concerning the Halal certification process in Kyrgyzstan indicate that the rapid changes are happening not only in the local markets, but also in the Halal certificates issuing organizations. One source was indicating that “Kyrgyzstan recently has admitted the Malaysian standard on Halal certification process” (KyrgyzKabar, 2013) while others argued that we have no standards at all (Vecherniy Bishkek, 201; Akipress, 2013).

THEORETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

We used to think of brands as the main tool of representation of a product, or company. It creates an image of something with assumed high quality and uniqueness. However, if we look closer to the construction of brands, we can find out that these products have nothing different with other “no named” ones. Brands shape our behavior, create new systems of values and make us to buy a particular group of products, which we used to see in advertisements, TV or Internet. Today, brands are the focus of interest not only for economists; there are lots of contemporary social scientists who investigate the meaning of brand and its affect to the human psych and social behavior. So, Slavoj Zizek, Slovenian philosopher and sociologist had brought some different sight to the understanding of the concept of brand. In his article “What is a Brand” (n.d.) he articulates that “what we buy on the market is less than a product we want to own, and more a life experience of sex, eating, communicating, cultural consumption or participating in a life style” (Zizek, n.d.). We are buying the copies of PRADA bags in Dordoi not because they are really stylish or beautiful; we are buying first of all the willingness to belong to the elite community, which represents the brand PRADA. More deeply it was researched by Jean Baudrillard, a French sociologist who dedicated several works on investigating the consumer society and introduced new terms to the social sciences – simulacra and simulation.

In his work “Simulacra and Precession” he argues that the reality we are living in is blurred and it is hard to distinguish what is real and what is not, instead, it created a new real which he called “simulacra”, the reality of artificial signs and symbols. For example, if we look at the map – any one, the map of a ship for example. If anyone will create and construct the map of ship, with all details included: colors, shapes, figures of what it maps, it will be difficult to determine the difference between the real ship and mapped one. But the time changes and it affects to any object which we create. His further argue here is that, if the real ship is changed under natural conditions, we start to substitute the reality with that mapped one, and then the

symbol became as reality to us (Baudrillard, 1994). He claims, that “therefore, pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the "true" and the "false," the "real" and the "imaginary." (Baudrillard, 1994) Such an imaginary he called “simulacra”. This word was derived from Latin word “simulacrum,” which means “likeness” or “similarity.” Although this term became popular after Baudrillard’s work, the roots of its origin lie on Ancient Greek philosophy. Simulacra was firstly used in Plato’s works, when he argued that we live in a world of Ideas, when we copy precisely the origin and then distort it in the way to look as correct to viewers (Deleuze and Krauss, 2012). This idea was perfectly explained through the example of painting art in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Rosalind Krauss “Plato and the Simulacrum”. They showed a parallelism between simulacrum and painting art. Artists pretend to reproduce the nature, but in reality they don’t need nature in order to represent. The capsule (image itself) indicating the subject is more important than the object itself. Writer and critic Alexander Genis gives the following example: "So, on one of the earliest paintings of Andy Warhol's "Peaches" there was shown not a fruit itself, but the can of fruit. This difference shows the pathos in all directions, found that in today's world it is not the product is important, but the packaging, not the essence, but the image" (Deleuze and Krauss, 2012). Plato, per se gives the example of Greek statuary, which was crafted differently: the top part of that was larger, than on the bottom, in order viewers see the whole monument correctly from the ground. But if they could look at this statuary closer, in a scale, they would realize that it was deformed (Tell, 2011). This case is one more exemplified the shaping reality and distorting the truth, unless we will see it from the proper angle.

The idea of simulacrum was also used by philosophers like Nietzsche, Jorge Luis Borges and other ones, but the deep improvement it got under the analyses of Jean Baudrillard. Arguing the classical political economy of Karl Marx, Baudrillard claims that commodity in

contemporary times are characterized not only by use and exchange values rather, they are more about the sign-value - “the expression and mark of style, prestige, luxury, and power” (Kellner 1994, p. 4). This means that nowadays, due to changes in social construct the sign-value of a commodity became more important than its use value. What we purchase on the market have no more just a strict satisfaction of needs meaning, rather our consuming experiences have become more social significant (Baudrillard, 1994) According to Kellner (1994), the mass production of contemporary times have shifted the utility’s meaning from their use-value, in order to make people buy a particular product there was a need to make a product unique (p. 9). Consequently, these accomplished to the mass practice of people of copying and feigning, when the origin of a product cannot be obtained (due to its high price or limited volume of production). Under these conditions, it became hard to distinguish the lines between copy and origin, moreover such conditions play a role in creating of simulation – copying with no relation to the origin. (Baudrillard, 1994). In the work “Simulacrum and Precession” (1994) Baudrillard gives the following definition of the simulacra: “the simulacrum is never that which conceals truth – it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true” (p. 1). By claiming this, he meant that there is not an imitation of reality, it becomes as true itself. A copy can be seen as true with no relation to the origin, the replica of the origin stays higher and plays dominant role in behavior of humans (Baudrillard, 1994) Today, he claimed, in a postmodern world of capitalism, the era of mass media, advertisement, and television it is difficult to identify what is real what is not. (Baudrillard, 1994) However, it is crucial to note that simulating does not mean just feigning. The difference is that if a person is feigning or dissimulating something, there is clear difference between the truths and false, however, in simulation these boundaries are blurred (Baudrillard, 1994).

METHODOLOGY

The empirical study was supported with qualitative research methods including in-depth interviewing. The qualitative research method was chosen for this project as the topic and research questions require descriptive answers and individual personal information. That is why the in-depth interviewing with open-ended questions is put as the main tool for data gathering. As it was stated in the book of David Silverman *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook* (2013): “Open-ended questions have the ability to evoke responses that are meaningful and culturally salient to the participant, unanticipated by the researcher and rich and explanatory in nature”.

Additionally, as the research question of this paper concerns the discursive analyses and requires looking at the language the respondents use in their answers, the typed interviews with open-ended questions give the best opportunities to do that.

Data Collection

There are two groups of people were interviewed – representatives of religious organizations of the country and entrepreneurs of Halal brand; for each group there was a separate questionnaire prepared. The first one, related to entrepreneurs consists of four sections. The first section contained standard demographic and personal background questions about age, gender and educational background. The second section relates to the respondents’ relation to the religion; third, how do they become entrepreneurs in this field and what does Halal mean for them, and the last section consists of questions regarding their economic well-being.

As for the religious figures there were another questions prepared, mostly concerning their attitudes towards the increasing number of Halal brand products and services and consequences of such an experience in the society. The respondents for these interviews were

selected by purposive sampling as it is the most appropriate selection tool in a limited target group (Suter, 2012).

All of the respondents were interviewed face to face and language was chosen by interviewee, in whom he/she would like to speak: Kyrgyz or Russian. Before the interview, each person from both of these groups received Informed consent form where they could get background information about the researcher and the purpose of the study. It also verifies the anonymity and confidentiality of their participation in the research project. After they receive the consent the interview has been typed on digital Dictaphone in order to give the researcher a possibility to transcribe and better analyze the data.

Validity of measurement

The most difficult part of the questionnaire was the section of person's relation to the religion. In previous studies there are 5 constructs have been used to measure a person's religiosity which are based on the 5 pillars of Islam: Oneness of God and Mohammad is his last prophet, Salah (praying 5 times per day), Fasting in the holy month of Ramadan, Zakat (giving a part of your money for poor) and pilgrimage to Holy Mecca. So in order to check the religiosity of an entrepreneur the questions were based according to these constructs.

FINDINGS

CHAPTER I. THE REGULATION OF HALAL CERTIFICATION PROCESS IN KYRGYZSTAN

First of all it was important to bring the light into the current situation of Halal certification in Kyrgyzstan the first step in data collection was talking with the religious representatives of our country. There were 3 people interviewed: from Mosque, from Muftiyat and from Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Kyrgyzstan.

The data collection indicated that there are a lot of Halal certification standards worldwide, we have Turkish, Malaysian, Brunei, Arabian and other ones. All of them differ from each other by their preference to membership to a particular mazhab, Islamic juridical law. There are 4 mazhabs in Islam: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi and Hanbali. Although all of them are based on the Koran, there are some disagreements and differences among them. These disagreements came from various interpretations and misunderstandings of hadith (report on deeds and sayings of Prophet Muhammad), the second source of Islamic law. That is why there is a variety of Halal certification standards in the world. In Kyrgyzstan we use two standards: Malaysian Halal certification standard and Eurasian one, though religious figures prefer the later one, due to its cultural suitability to our country. As of the representatives in local religion institutes stated:

“The only difference between the Malaysian Halal certification standard and Eurasian one is that Malaysians do not include horse meat and horse milk to their products. In that case it is much applicable for us to use Eurasian Halal certification standard”. (Interviewee #1, personal communication, February 23, 2014).

Malaysian Halal certification standard (hereinafter - Malaysian standard) firstly appeared in the territory of Kyrgyz Republic in 2008 as a guideline for the production, manufacture, processing and storage of Halal products with some modifications, in accordance with the

legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic. But later, according to Ministry of economy in Kyrgyzstan (n.d.) it was cancelled by the Decree of President in January 2009. The religious figures of Kyrgyzstan stated that the Malaysian standard has some disagreements with the local cultural preferences on food. For example, it does not accept the horsemeat and horse milk in its food and products, that's why the Islamic Administration of the country decided to shift the Halal certification standard from Malaysian to Eurasian one, which is more applicable to Kyrgyzstan. However, till this year, there were disputes among religious rulers in the country on which standard should be applied. Additionally, the Law of Kyrgyz Republic provides with limited mentioning on the Halal goods in the 21st article of Technical Regulations "on labeling Foodstuffs", where it was stated:

1. A food product comprising a trademark Adal "Halal" (Halal), must meet the essential requirements of articles of this Act and shall comply with the mandatory requirements set out in the regulatory acts of technological processes of production, storage, transportation, product realization of Adal "Halal" (Halal).
2. In accordance with the regulations of the processes of production, storage, transportation, selling product Adal "Halal" (Halal) and products containing the trademark Adal "Halal" (Halal) should not raise doubts about the safety of similar food or contain statements that foods Adal "Halal" (Halal) nutritional properties superior to other products and are more useful for human health. (Kyrgyz Republic Law, derived from ajyke.kg).

These conditions played a role in self-creation of different committees, independent from the state but who proclaimed themselves as eligible to certificate the Halal products. According to religious figures today, there are about 15 organizations who work on Halal certification issue. The most popular among them are the Committee on certification under Islamic Centre, which worked on Malaysian principles of certification and Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Kyrgyzstan, whose certificates were based on Eurasian standard.

But today, according to the words of religious figures in Kyrgyzstan the Eurasian standard of Halal certification is admitted as the main one in the country. The interesting point here is that Eurasian standard is young in its appearance itself and has a limited history of

practice. Firstly, it was created in April 2012 by the collaboration of Kazakhstani and Russian religious leaders, after that Kyrgyzstan and Belorussia have been associated. Together they created one universal system of regulations and rules of issuing the Halal certificates. According to religious figures I have interviewed, this standard stays on 5 pillars:

- 1) Koran – the sacred book of Muslims.
- 2) Hadis – the knowledge, based on the sayings and deeds of Holy Prophet Muhammad
- 3) Knowledge of international Islamic scientists. The Muslim world has its own International Islamic Scholar Union, which works for the sake and prevention of Koran from incorrect interpretations of contemporary times.
- 4) Fatwa - can be defined as the legal source of Islamic law, acts as inferences of Islamic scientists, having authority, in particular it is the issues initiated by Islamic judges (kadiyami). It should be based on a scripture, but it cannot be universal or the final word, it is more about the appropriate interpretation of scripture on decision making in a particular situation.
- 5) The Law of a particular country where this standard is used as each country has its own regulations on sanitarian and labeling issues. In this case it is the Law of Kyrgyz Republic.

These basements are borrowed from different Islamic sources in order to fully cover the principles of Koran and Islamic regulations. But if, for example the enterprise follows all these requirements except sanitary process requirements stated the Law of Kyrgyzstan, the organization cannot give a Halal certificate to such firms.

Further, the expert from the SAMK (Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Kyrgyzstan) where provided with the brief information on the process of certification, how actually the companies get the certification. In the very beginning of the interview he indicated that they are not a governmental organization and companies and firms who issue Halal products are not

obligated to get the official certificate. Producers choose by their own, whether they work together with SAMK and get official certificate or not:

“First of all it is important to note, that we do not obligate the companies and producers to get our certificates. As there is no statement on that in Law regulation of our country we have not such a right. We are just offering our services as advisors in their business, how to follow the Shariat and produce Halal goods. And only after we got the agreement from the company we start to research the ingredients of a product and work on the official certification of the firm”(Interviewee #1, personal communication, February 23, 2014).

In other words, it means that any person can open the company/firm and produce/sell the products under the brand of Halal. *“It is one of the main problems of the Halal issuing in Kyrgyzstan. Now we are writing to the Governmental organizations in order to fully legalize the regulation of Halal goods”*, said interviewee. Next, he shared with me how actually their organization works. From his words the following schema of Halal certification is found out:

Schema №1. The process of Halal certification

Seeking the new enterprise emerged in the market with the brand of Halal —→ They connect with that place and offer to get official certificate. —→ After getting the agreement from the company, they provide trainings to the firm’s workers on Halal issuing and distribution (usually lasts from 1-6 months) —→ Examination of the workers —→ precisely researches the process of the production in that firm: from which place they took meat, which ingredients are included to the food, how they distribute these goods to the shops. —→ Signing official certificate for 1 year. After expiring the date, the company should again apply for prolonging of the certificate.

Under this schema, there were some interesting peculiarities indicated. For instance, if the company rejects the suggestion of SAMK to get official certificate SAMK left them with no penalty, so the organization keeps producing products under the brand of Halal even if its products do not represent any features of Halal.

“One of the main problems there is that almost everyone today who considers themselves as Muslims, can attach to their enterprise the logo “Halal”, just download the logo from

Internet and attach it. Only one distinction here is that we have a particular patented logo, and people can by that recognize whether this company's logo official or not" (Interviewee #1, personal communication, February 23, 2014).

Also, it is important, said interviewee, to these products be separated from "unhalal" goods on the market. It is obligatory for example for the Halal sausage to be separated from "unHalal" ones in the shop board in order not to mix up the compound of the sausages.

Despite the peculiarities and requirements of getting Halal certificate the company which got official certificate has some benefits from it. For instance, SAMK provides with advertisement for those companies including their products in the free booklet of "true" Halal goods they are issuing twice in a month. Next, they also provide with advertisement via message mailing to the consumers who registered in their database so these Muslims can be sure that the products they purchase in a particular firm/shop/café is Halal and got the official certificate.

Concerning the opinion of religious figures on those producers who issue Halal products without the verification of any religious organization they answered that due to limited law regulations on this issue such a practice will still have been occurred in Kyrgyzstan. And no religious institute can punish them because they are not supervisory jurisdiction.

"The only one way here I see that the consumers by themselves could come and ask the producers and sellers the official documents on their products. It is the consumers who should be aware of that and always ask questions. But usually they prefer to be silent and just trust with closed eyes to the products they are purchasing"(Interviewee #2, personal communication, February 27, 2014).

We see that Kyrgyzstan suffers not only from the limits on law regulations, but also the limited awareness of Muslim consumers who purchase these products. The lack of culture both among producers and consumers leave the religious leaders of Bishkek pessimistic towards the future of spreading real Halal products in the country.

CHAPTER II. DECISION MAKING FACTORS TO BECOME A HALAL PRODUCER

The next step in data collection was to investigate what are the factors of becoming Halal producer among Kyrgyzstani Muslims. There were 6 people interviewed; all of them work in different sectors of Halal market:

- Food production (semi-finished food, restaurant and meat production)
- Services: Halal Taxi
- A small selling shop of cosmetics (perfume, varnishes, lipsticks)
- Drinks: Halal water

The interview started with the story of their business, how do they actually decide to start such business. The data shows that the most of producers came to this area 2-3 years ago, after they (or their relatives) have been abroad in Muslim countries where almost each product is Halal. Inspired by their experiences they start to think to open their own enterprises as there were lack of Halal products in local market. The following extracts from interviews show the variety of decision making factors:

“We saw the lack of Halal products in Bishkek and we have decided to switch our café to Halal. I just give people an opportunity to eat in Halal restaurant. We succeed in the market because our food is tasty. People trust to the brand of Halal as it represents the healthy and clean food”. (Interviewee #6, Personal Communication, March 12, 2014)

“Before coming to this business we were working on the same market, providing people by ready to cook food but after we have decided to shift its brand under Halal one, there was a big change happened in the profit of our organization, we started to get more orders from clients and now we are thinking to enlarge our production. I think that this was happened because Allah has blessed us when we have decided to produce only Halal products” (Interviewee #9, Personal communication, March 29, 2014).

“It is important for every religious Muslim not to break the rules of Shariat. According to Shariat, it is not allowed for unmarried man and woman to sit near each other without accompanying persons. Taxi Halal foreseen this rule and provide with screen in auto salon, which separate Muslims of different sexes and allows them to ride in one car. Next, our drivers do not allow to drunken people or prostitutes come in to the car, so we keep the car

clean not only in terms of material cleanness, but save the Muslim purity”. (Interviewee #8, Personal Communication, March 25, 2014).

These findings show that strategies of establishing the enterprise can come from religious purposes but at the same time respondents do not hide that the practice of making business in Halal sphere is much more profitable. Another interesting case comes from the interview with one of the managers of Halal water firm:

“To tell the truth there is no statement in Koran that water can be Halal or Haram, but now, there are big changes of the water, because the science has intervened in the structure of the water, the molecular consistence of the water. And if a man/woman drinks such water during his life he will get old earlier. Instead, we are providing people with the water without any intervention to its structure. The aim of our company is to sell natural and clean water. We are extracting the water from 200 m of chink, we are extracting artesian water. The World Health Organization has proven that up to 150 m the water can be associated as ground water, and only the water obtained from chink deeper than 150 m can be considered as Artesian water, which is the most healthy for humans. It was proven by scientists. Now we are working to get the International standard of product quality (ISO), so we can further export our products to other countries”. (Interviewee#4, Personal Communication, 14.04.2014)

Here, we see how profit makes some people to broaden the spheres of Halal market, where they can produce the goods under the brand of Halal, even though it contradicts to the religious fundamental meaning of Halal related towards only food.

In addition, according to the data collected from interview with executive from the SAMK organization there were cases found out when people put the label of Halal into their products from a strictly uncovered economic interest:

“In our practice we have different cases where people put the brand of Halal because their business was not going on successfully and their friends advised them to put the label Halal and after that their business starts to go on because there is a big demand among people for the Halal products and I think that it is not good for entrepreneurs to make money on that. We don't have law regulations eligible to control such practices, unfortunately” (Interviewee #1, personal communication, February 23, 2014).

The expert also indicated the changes in the producers' behavior:

“Once given a certificate we are not leaving the company alone, for sure we go to the producing place with a revision and check their production chain in a certain period of time. Such revisions allow us to look whether a company is following the rules they signed to follow when we were certifying them or not. So, recently we detected the Halal meat organization which sold their products in the market together with pork. Of course we turned back our certificate from this organization, but no one can be sure that they will stop practicing such an entrepreneurship by violating rules. It was... really it has shocked us. In the beginning of our collaboration he seemed so religious and promise us that he will follow all the stuff written in our requirements.”

This interview shows the uncertain position of Halal producers. Economic construct of their business domains the religious one, though experts from religious organizations try to track this issue. This finding was supported by the next expert from religious institute:

“We don’t have a culture... Some people think that if they have a beard is enough to produce Halal goods” (Interviewee #2, Personal Communication, February 17, 2014).

Then, he showed a video, where his colleagues went with revision to one meat firm and indicated with a hidden camera several rough violations such as both non-compliance the rules of Shariat and also the sanitarian requirements in production chain of the Law of Kyrgyz Republic. The video showed how animals, particularly cows were slaughtering in one big dirty room by a rude torturing of cows, without pronunciation a prayer to the God. Further, the respondent concluded:

“It is a big pity that we have such practices, because we could export Halal meat to the other countries. Recently we had guests from Emirates who were interested in our meat because it is really tasty due to our nature, animals are eating pure grass without any chemical additives and this is what foreigner’s appreciate mostly. But when they see in which conditions slaughters our local firms, they become scared and go to neighbor countries such as Kazakhstan. Today Kazakhstan is a leader in exporting a big amount of Halal meat; however we could be on their place as well”. (Interviewee #2, February 17, 2014).

Such a pessimistic attitude of religious figures and the absolute lack of religious knowledge among Halal producers may one to conclude that the future of Halal production in Kyrgyzstan is blurred. People do not have the appropriate asset of knowledge in Halal production chain; some of them even claim that having a beard is enough in order to produce Halal products. The data indicated that economic profit makes those people to broaden the spheres of Halal market, where they can produce the goods under the brand of Halal, even

though it contradicts to the religious fundamental meaning of Halal related towards only food. Consequently, producers can create their own rules in this particular field of production and justify their practices through the myth telling: water can be Halal as they produce pure natural water as was initially created by God; taxi is Halal as they provide the clients with safe cars and religious drivers. These and other facts may one to conclude that the decision making factors for an individual to become a Halal producer come from economic interest first, rather than religious constituent.

CHAPTER III. DISCOURSES UNDERLYING THE PRACTICE OF HALAL PRODUCING AMONG ENTREPRENEURS

The next step, there was an aim to investigate do the producers follow the rules and regulations of the SAMK after they got the certificate. In order to fill this gap, there were different questions put in interview such as: what means Halal for them, on which sources their knowledge about Halal production are based, how they regulate the production chain in order to be as Halal, do they think that a non-Muslim person can be entrepreneur in this field or not. The data collected from the producers indicted the following discourses underlying the practice of Halal producing. Results of gathered data show the following discourses

a) Discourses of discrepancy when producers' and sellers' perception of Halal are not complied with the religious leaders' ones.

The data investigated that the religious figures' view of Halal products and producers' ones are differentiated. One side thinks that all the Halal producers have to examine first the religious scriptures and the regulations they provide before they start to produce such goods:

“We are not approving the practice of those “self-creators” of Halal good. They do not understand the sacredness of such a practice. They do not understand why Halal meat for example differs from the usual one” (Interviewee #2, personal communication, February 27, 2014).

“Breaking the rules of any standard including Eurasian one under which our country is now working out means breaking the religious belief. You cannot be Muslim if you produce Halal product which have been done from the meat slaughtered without the pronunciation of the name of Allah”(Interviewee #1, personal communication, February 23, 2014).

However, the side of producers truly believes their products are Halal:

“We are providing people with pure water”

“Our prepared food does not contain pork, that's why it is Halal”

“We sell cosmetics made of natural ingredients”

The discourses of discrepancy are a lot, following table represents the summary of the concept of Halal in entrepreneurs’ perception, and how it differs from the view of religious figures’ ones.

Table №1. The gaps and compliances between the perception of Halal in religious figures’ and producers’ ones.

| Religious figures’ perception of Halal | Producers’ perception of Halal |
|---|--|
| Any food, which does not contain pork. | |
| It is prohibited to smoke and drink in Halal restaurants and cafes | |
| The meal should be slaughtered with the name of Allah. Also, there are a certain rules in the process of slaughtering. The animal should be slaughtered separately from other ones with quick motion of knife so it cannot feel the fear. It also should not be tortured. If they feel anxiety they allocate a big portion of adrenalin to the meal which is not healthy to eat for human beings. | The meal should be slaughtered with the name of Allah. The animal must be slit on the throat with quick action, but there are cases of torturing the big animals (cows) before slaughtering. |
| Only natural products, as was created by God | The permissible from God, natural, but in some cases it admits the concentration of genetically modified products. |
| Should not consist of prohibited food additives and coloring agents (mostly they are made by insects or have some percentages of pork material) | Most of producers don’t know about it. |

This table one more time shows that differences of Halal norms between religious entities’ and producers’ ones are more than compliances. The compliances are in the points of prohibited pork content in meals and following the rules in managing of cafeterias and restaurants. It is the basic norms well known for almost each Muslim, but there are also the

nuances which should know each producer in order their products to issue as pure Halal. For instance, the interviewee from SAMK organization stated that there is a list of food additives prohibited to use in Halal products:

“We have a list of E-numbered additives not allowed to use in the production of any food, usually they are made of insects. The same with fatty acids and gelatin, most of them contain pork, however, they are popular in the practice of producers, especially cake producers, as they are cheap and easy to get”. (Interviewee #1, personal communication, February 23, 2014)

However, the data indicates cases where producers miss this point even though they know that there is a list of prohibited food additives exist:

“For sure we have heard about the prohibited food additives prohibited to use in producing of Halal food and we are aware of not using the ones which contains pork. But I think that in our contemporary world it is hard to make business in food area excluding all additives. I think that Halal regulations on food production are too strict.” (Interviewee #9, personal communication, March 29, 2014).

Additionally, in most of local restaurants it is prohibited to smoke and drink alcohol, but also, ideally, according to the words of religious representatives, there should be a separation of dinner rooms for woman and man; they should eat separately. On reality, I saw only one cafeteria in Bishkek following this rule; it was located near Central Mosque. Unfortunately, the director of this place did not agree to give me the interview, but when I asked other owners of Halal cafeterias how do they look to this issue they said:

“It is of course welcomed, but in our local community with low level of religiosity we have no such an opportunity to follow this rule. It would be inefficient to divide the rooms in terms of economic profit.” (Interviewee #6, personal communication, March 12, 2014)

In this case we see that Halal is shifted more to business rather than wish to strengthening the religion in the society they live in. That is why we see further differences in views of Halal goods in religious figures' perception and entrepreneurs' one. For instance, both of them know that the animal should be slaughtered with the name of Allah, but there are also some nuances

which producers do not follow even if they know about it. For example, the animal should be slaughtered in separate room from other animals, so they will not feel the anxiety by seeing each other. In addition, they should not be tortured; it is highly prohibited, as in the process of panic and anxiety animal starts to allocate big sorts of adrenalin to the blood which further affects to the meal which we are going to eat. In interview with the director of Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Kyrgyzstan he gave several examples when they indicated with hidden camera the total violation of these rules.

“We saw how people slaughter cows in one big room, in front of each other, where the worker beat the animal to its head by big hatchet so it could faint away from the pain. It is easier and faster to slaughter the big animal rather than to keep it with 3-4 man. And it happened after three months we gave them certificate of Halal brand. In such a cases we usually give them warming, that if they will continue further this practice we will take the certificate away” (Interviewee from SAMK organization, 23.02.2014).

In addition, some entrepreneurs deny the importance of passing the official certification process:

“I would like to get the official one of course, but I think that it will not help. Additional, I don't want to pay 10 000 soms each month for this certificate, why I should pay if I can produce food without their verification?” (Interviewee #6, Personal Communication, March 12, 2014).

So we see that there is no punishment or fines towards Halal producers, the issuing office give only notices and recommendations on how to correctly follow the Islamic principles of Halal. The director of Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Kyrgyzstan said that they don't have any rights to punish them, as there is no statement of such cases in the Law of Kyrgyz Republic. Such conditions became the platform for self-creating and self-regulation of Halal production.

2) Discourses of justification; how producers see their products as Halal despite they are not related to these ones according to the Islamic sources.

According to the director of SAMK, there are more than 100 enterprises in Kyrgyzstan which passed the Halal certification process in their agency and work under the brand of Halal. We can meet among them not only the Halal food, but also some services, such as Taxi Halal, Halal Cosmetics and even water Halal. When I asked the Interview from this Committee about the practice of such spread of Halal to almost each sphere of human life he said that it can exist, in terms of chaotically developing world, where you want to get not only the Halal food but also “pure” Halal services. However, in the beginning of interview he indicated that according Koran Halal is mentioned only towards food.

Nevertheless, we have the examples of using Halal brand in various ares of human activity. For example, the emergence and quick disappearance of Halal Taxi in Bishkek last year raised up a lot of questions and critics among journalists and other Taxi suppliers. I had a chance to get interview from one of the workers of this enterprise and get the answers for my questions. He briefly explained me what were the key factors in putting the brand “Halal” to the Taxi:

“It is important for every religious Muslim not to break the rules of Shariat. According to Shariat, it is not allowed for unmarried man and woman to sit near each other without accompanying persons. Taxi Halal foreseen this rule and provide with screen in auto salon, which separate Muslims of different sexes and allows them to ride in one car. Next, our drivers do not allow to drunken people or prostitutes come in to the car, so we keep the car clean not only in terms of material cleanness, but save the Muslim purity”. (Interviewee #8, Personal Communication, March 25, 2014).

When there was a question regarding how they do recognize or measure if a woman has stopped the taxi is not a prostitute, they said that they usually picked up only covered women.

“After 3 months of working in this field we start to get complaints from the other taxi services, they were afraid to lose their clients in terms that there would be a perception among people that there can be an “unHalal” Taxi”

CHAPTER IV. ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION

The explanation of findings comes from the theoretical framework of Baudrillard's work "Simulacra and precession" (1994). In this work he gives the following explanation of the simulacra: "the simulacrum is never that which conceals truth – it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true". (1994). By claiming this, he meant that there is not any imitation of reality, it becomes as true itself. A copy can be seen as true with no relation with the origin; the replica of the origin plays dominant role and rules the people's mind. Can we, based on this theory claim that Halal brand products in Kyrgyzstan has no relation with the true Halal as it should be on reality? Let us look at careful examination of this issue and try to explain through the framework Baudrillard offers.

One of the main characteristics of the simulation is the diminishing the boundaries of real (origin) and unreal (copy) so that a person cannot distinguish the lines between them. The profound reality in our case is the Halal standard – the code of regulations on issuing Halal products. It is the Halal, in that meaning as it was initially stated in Koran, the food (and only food, there are no other products were stated there) which is permitted to eat for Muslims. Pure, meaning it does not consist of pork and alcohol, the food which was initially prepared under the name of Allah with the appropriate orison to the God. What we have now in the case of Halal brand products in Kyrgyzstan is the shaped representation of that meaning: the findings came from religious figures' interviews and from producers' ones showed that though there is a lot of work is doing in Kyrgyzstan on Halal issuing, "purity" of such products stay still unclear due to several reasons:

- 1) The lack of juridical regulations on Halal producing:

"There is no law regulation on Halal products, we cannot just simply close up the enterprise or complain to the producer, even after we have seen certain violations in distribution and process of preparing of that product. Today, everyone can open the

Halal enterprise and just put the downloaded picture of Halal to their product and sell it". (Interviewee #2, personal communication, February 27, 2014).

- 2) This sector of market is based more on the trust and belief system, rather on critical system of checks and controls:

"We buy our meat from one permanent provider. He is Turkish, and as you know they are very religious and additionally I always ask him precisely is his meat Halal or not, so he starts to laugh and answer "yes, yes of course Halal". (Interviewee #6, personal communication, March 12, 2014).

We see that in this case, Halal producer trusts to national identity of the distributor of meat, it creates an image of religious people who provide with Halal meat. But on reality the national identity not necessarily identify the quality of product he provided.

"I personally believe that Halal producing people are afraid of Allah that is why they cannot produce unHalal goods. We should trust to each other, I am just a distributor of cosmetics, I am not a producer, but I believe that the product I am selling is Halal because I buy them from trust-worthy people who are Muslims." (Interviewee #7, personal communication, March 14, 2014).

- 3) Limited awareness of the regulations and certification of product as Halal. For example, are there the ingredients included in "Halal" semi-prepared food are permitted; maybe they are made of insects which itself then excludes the positioning of such a product as Halal.

"For sure we have heard about the prohibited food additives prohibited to use in producing of Halal food and we are aware of not using the ones which contains pork. But I think that in our contemporary world it is hard to make business in food area excluding all additives. I think that Halal regulations on food production are too strict. If there is a possibility to use food additives which allow keeping the food more fresh and tasteful why we cannot use them? They are not harmful, a lot of scholars worldwide proved it!" (Interviewee #9, personal communication, March 29, 2014).

There were even cases when a producer has negatively responded on the Halal certification organizations of our country:

"When I opened this enterprise I met with people from Halal issuing organization. They called me and asked whether I want to get official certification or not. I would like to get

the official one of course, but I think that it will not help. Additional, I don't want to pay 10 000 soms each month for this certificate, why I should pay if I can produce food without their verification?" (Interviewee #6, Personal Communication, March 12, 2014).

One of the key features of simulacra is that it is not just a copy or feigning. The difference is that if a person is feigning or dissimulating something, there is clear distinction between the truths and false, however, in simulation these boundaries are blurred, where the whole system including producers/sellers and consumers believe in the product reality. (Baudrillard, 1994). What we see here is the big demand and trust of consumers to such goods: they are buying them because the image (Halal brand) is a good appearance – appearance of allowed, pure, “Muslim” product. As the respondents from religious organizations indicated:

“The only controlling organ in this body is the consumers, Muslims who buy these products. Each of them according to the law of our country has a right to request the test of the sausage they are buying for example. They can even complain to the upper organizations of our country, but as we see the consumers usually keep buying without any verification” (Interviewee #1, February 23, 2014).

“We are suffering from the lack of consuming culture in Kyrgyzstan. Muslims per se do not understand that there is a problems happening with Halal producing in our country. Despite they see in TV and news portals that we have a lot of companies violating the rules of Halal issuing they don't want to check the products out. They are simply trust with the closed eyes”. (Interviewee #2, personal communication , February 27, 2014).

This assumption leads us to the next feature of simulacra: “When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality - a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity” (Baudrillard, 1994) In other words, the upcoming simulation of an object creates the willingness of people to believe that this simulacrum is true. Here we come to the initial quote in Baudrillard's work: “The simulacrum is never that which conceals truth – it is the truth which conceals that there is none”.

The essential aim of marketing is to clarify what to produce and how to distribute and sell all what was produced. The marketing is crucial especially in today's world of globalization, where almost each producer fights against each other and not in the fields of market, but in the consciousness of consumers, electors, adherents of particular religious beliefs. Today's world with its media culture, exchange value, multinational capitalism, language and ideology (Baudrillard, 1994) created new simulacra in marketing spheres: people as brands (it is easier for us to tell about the private life of Angelina Jolie than about what is happening in Ukraine now) and brands, created by people. If one will look closer to the word of Halal per se and deconstructs its meaning we will find out that it has nothing with what it was stated in Koran, rather it was created by humans in order to unify the goods which they are producing and make them recognizable. The findings of these study showed that there is a big gap between the religious figures perception of Halal and the producers' one. In other words, most of entrepreneurs in Halal sphere do not know about the nuances on Halal producing and distribution such as the list of prohibited food additives which consist of insects, or gelatin. In order to be the product as "pure Halal" there should be another composition of additives, made up by natural and organic goods. According to the words of religious figures I have interviewed usually this violating occurs because of the price of such additives. They are higher than the food agents' and additives' we used to apply usually. Here we come to the assumption of Deleuze and Krauss (2012): it is important not the essential product itself, but the packaging, the image which it creates. Consumers buy the "Halal" goods because they believe that this purchasing will somehow show their religiosity, in other words, they are buying the identification that they are "true" Muslims. This willingness to be a part of that "true" religious society is automatically domains the willingness to critically check out the Halal products.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study shows that brands are not only economically constructed concepts; they also have social meanings. A product with a brand name became more than a mere commodity; instead it created the system of social values – both cultural and religious.

This research focused on the case of rapidly increasing Halal brand products and services in Kyrgyzstan. The research shows that the practice of using of the Halal brand is built upon prevailing economic reasons rather than religious ones. This happened due to several factors that this study found out by answering the following research questions.

The first question, what are the factors of decision making for an individual to become a Halal producer was answered through in-depth interviews with Halal brand producers from different spheres of market: food production (meat, restaurant and semi-finished food), services (Taxi Halal), drinks production (water Halal) and distribution at shop (cosmetics). The analyses show that economic reasons for an individual to become Halal producer prevail over religious ones. The cases of entrepreneurs who produce not only food but also water, services – not indicated in Koran show that there can be an additional product placement emerges, even if it contradicts to the main source of their religious scripture.

This practice is explained by answering to the next research question – what are the discourses underlying the practice of using Halal brand for entrepreneurs? The study found out three main discourses from interviews with the religious figures of Kyrgyzstan and Halal producers:

- Discourses of justification in the case of producing the products and services not stated in Islamic sources that they can be as Halal:

“We are producing Halal water despite it was not stated in Koran that water can be Halal or unHalal... We are providing healthy and natural water, as it was created by God initially”

“How do I verify that food I am preparing in restaurant is Halal? Well, we buy our meat from one permanent provider. He is Turkish, and as you know they are very religious”

“According to Shariat, it is not allowed for unmarried man and woman to sit near each other without accompanying persons. Taxi Halal foreseen this rule and provide with screen in auto salon, which separate Muslims of different sexes and allows them to ride in one car. Next, our drivers do not allow to drunken people or prostitutes come in to the car”

These discourses demonstrate the justification strategy of producers in their conscious deviation from the norms of standard.

- Discourses of discrepancy when producers’ and sellers’ perception of Halal are not complied with the religious leaders’ ones:

“We saw how people slaughter cows in one big room, in front of each other, where the worker beat the animal to its head by big hatchet so it could faint away from the pain. It is easier and faster to slaughter the big animal rather than to keep it with 3-4 man. And it happened after three months we gave them certificate of Halal brand. In such a cases we usually give them warning, that if they will continue further this practice we will take the certificate away”

“We have a list of E-numbered additives not allowed to use in the production of any food, usually they are made of insects. The same with fatty acids and gelatin, most of them contain pork, however, they are popular in the practice of producers, especially cake producers, as they are cheap and easy to get”.

It shows that producers are free to change and create their own regulations on Halal issuing despite it contradicts to the standard of certification. The limited juridical regulations unexpectedly have become a platform for self-creation and self-regulation of Halal brand producers in Kyrgyzstan which further makes their products doubtful.

Furthermore, Baudrillard’s theory of Simulacra and Simulation was applied in order to bring the light into the analyses of these findings. The analyses were based on both religious figures and producers’ in-depth interviews and showed that Halal brand products in Kyrgyzstan are not just copies with any origin; they are simulacra. In this case Halal production has diminished the boundaries between real Halal and imitated one. This happened due to several factors which were found out during the data collection: lack of awareness and interiorized knowledge in Halal producers, limited regulations on Halal producing from Government and lack of uniform standard of Halal certification.

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