

## The Halal Value Chain in Sri Lanka: Economic Contribution Amidst Institutional and Legal Controversies

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**Abstract:** This conceptual study addresses the complex and often contested issue of halal certification in Sri Lanka, a country where the certification process plays a significant role in the national export economy, particularly in the food and beverage sector. The article is aimed at analyzing the halal certification value chain by examining its legal, institutional, and socio-political dimensions, as well as its economic and social impacts. Employing a qualitative, conceptual approach, the study drew on secondary data and policy analysis to map the structure and challenges of the halal certification system. The findings revealed that despite contributing an estimated USD 1.7 billion in 2023 to Sri Lanka's exports, the halal certification process remains legally ambiguous and institutionally fragmented, with the Halal Assessment Council (HAC) operating as a private entity without formal state oversight. The study concluded that a cohesive, legally grounded framework is urgently needed to ensure the stability, ethical integrity, and long-term development of the halal sector in Sri Lanka. However, the study is limited by the absence of empirical field data and comparative analysis with other national models; future research should incorporate stakeholder perspectives and international benchmarking to inform more inclusive and effective policy recommendations.

**Keywords:** Consumer Protection; Economic Impact; Halal Assessment Council (HAC); Halal Certification; Social Controversy; Sri Lanka; Value Chain

### Introduction

*H*alal is an Arabic term referring to anything permissible under Islamic law (Aziz & Chok, 2013; Hasan et al., 2024). Its application spans multiple sectors, including food, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals (Aziz & Ahmad, 2018; Husin et al., 2021; Mohd Amin et al., 2020). The halal certification industry is expanding rapidly, driven by the growing global Muslim population and increasing demand for ethically sourced products (Cholil et al., 2025; Randeree, 2020). With the halal food market projected to reach USD 2.1 trillion by 2024 (Muhibah & Muin, 2025), certification serves both religious and commercial functions—ensuring Islamic compliance while guaranteeing hygiene and safety standards. This dual role elevates halal certification beyond religious observance, positioning it as a global benchmark for quality and ethical production, attracting even non-Muslim consumers.

The economic importance of halal certification is evident in its direct contribution to national economies. In Sri Lanka, halal-certified exports were estimated at USD 1.7 billion in 2023, accounting for 61% of the country's total food and beverage exports and 14% of its overall exports (Daily Mirror, 2025; Almine, 2023). This demonstrates that halal certification is not merely a spiritual compliance mechanism but a strategic enabler of international trade and economic development (Muazu & Sjahrir, 2023). However, its implementation in religiously diverse societies like Sri Lanka is complex, often shaped by differing interpretations of religious standards, varying levels of institutional support, and the politicization of halal practices. These factors influence public perception and regulatory frameworks, creating tensions between religious identity and national policy.

This article is aimed at conducting a conceptual and literature-based examination of the halal certification value chain in Sri Lanka, focusing on the tensions between pragmatic economic interests and socio-cultural sensitivities. This study investigated how these tensions shape the legal and institutional frameworks governing halal certification. By analyzing constitutional provisions, environmental policies, implementation challenges, and system efficiency, the study sought to offer a deeper understanding of the social, economic, and legal dynamics surrounding halal practices in a minority-Muslim context. The article also highlights the role of institutional actors—including government agencies, religious authorities, and private certifiers—in shaping the halal ecosystem and contributing to broader discussions on religious pluralism and economic integration.

The central assumption of this study is that halal certification in countries with a minority Muslim population, such as Sri Lanka, generates dual tensions: economic benefits for export-oriented businesses and domestic conflict due to sociopolitical sensitivities (Hewege & Perera, 2020; Punchihewa, 2015). The proposed hypothesis suggests that the interplay between economic pragmatism and socio-cultural awareness significantly affects the stability and effectiveness of the halal value chain, influencing public perceptions of legitimacy and sustainability. Legal and institutional responses to these tensions vary depending on political climate and societal attitudes toward religious minorities. The absence of official state support, as seen in the controversies surrounding the Halal Assessment Council (HAC) and the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU), undermines regulatory clarity and creates unequal burdens for businesses—particularly SMEs—while threatening both economic growth and social cohesion.

## Literature Review

The following in-depth legal review requires knowledge of the halal certification process in the context of a value chain. The value chain is a concept introduced in 1985 by a business theorist, Michael Porter (Jichao, 2025; Ruan, 2020), covering an array of activities linked to one another in an organization for the purpose of generating market competitiveness in an organization (Awan et al., 2022). This model divides the functions of an organization to include such primary activities as inbound logistics, operations, outbound logistics, sales and marketing, and service, and support activities such as procurement, technology development, human resources, and infrastructure. The main aim of the value chain analysis is to discover and develop unique value in the customers, which also has the end result of cutting through the competition of price and developing an individual position in the market (Ivanov et al., 2022; Jabbar et al., 2021).

The value chain concept extends beyond the traditional understanding of a supply chain (Ricciotti, 2020). While a supply chain primarily focuses on the systematic flow of products or services from suppliers to customers, the value chain builds upon this by explicitly considering how value is added at each stage of the process (Amir et al., 2023; Dubey et al., 2020). This broader perspective is particularly pertinent for halal products, where value is not solely economic but also encompasses religious compliance, high standards of hygiene, safety, ethical sourcing, and animal welfare (Tieman, 2011). Consequently, halal is not merely a regulatory hurdle or an external add-on but an intrinsic value-adding layer that permeates every stage of the value chain, from procurement to operations and marketing.

Halal value chain is an integrated structure which incorporates Islamic teachings (Harsanto et al., 2025) or the sharia in the prevailing logistical and supply-chain management activities thus guaranteeing the “halalness” of a product at all levels starting at the acquisition of raw material to the ultimate consumption process (Hashom et al., 2020; Nugroho et al., 2024). Such integrated approach requires co-working arrangements between various stakeholders—the logistics service providers, the halal authorities, and the relevant government agencies so that the integrity of the halal status is provided all through the procedure. Specifically, the concept of a value chain directly includes the notion of the control (the governance) of various actors (Ahlqvist et al., 2020). Such governance structure is abstract in the halal sense in that it involves various stakeholders including religious scholars in the interpretation of the Islamic law, the various privately run bodies that enforce the standards of the market, businesses that adopt halal practices, and government agencies that guide trade and consumer safety (Aafi et al., 2024). Every critical

lawful examination should thus investigate the manner in which these players of resources and power have a hold and influence in the direction of the course of knowledge and professionalism, which includes sharia concepts and materials, and in addition, the accessibility to the input output structure, which is associated to material flows. In a non-Muslim majority nation like the country of Sri Lanka, availability of such multi-stakeholder type of governance poses special issues on matters of authority, enforceability, and accountability in the context of scandals relating to the strength of such entities in the past.

## Method

This study used a qualitative research design with a normative juridical approach, which is aimed at analyzing the halal certification value chain in Sri Lanka through legal, institutional, and socio-political dimensions. This study did not use empirical field data, but relied on secondary data sources, such as academic literature, policy documents, legislation, and official reports from certification bodies such as the Halal Assessment Council (HAC) and All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU). This conceptual approach allowed the authors to conduct a critical review of the structure and regulatory framework governing halal certification practices in the context of a Muslim minority society. The analytical method used in this article is descriptive-analytical, focusing on the interpretation of legal texts, institutional arrangements, and socio-political dynamics. This study mapped out the halal value chain by identifying upstream, core, and downstream activities, as well as evaluating governance mechanisms and legal ambiguities surrounding certification practices. Special attention was given to the interactions between de facto and de jure authorities, the role of private certification bodies, and the implications of regulatory vacuums for consumer protection and international trade. This approach allowed the authors to build a comprehensive understanding of the halal ecosystem in Sri Lanka and propose more inclusive and coherent law-based policy recommendations.

## Results and Discussion

### Legal and Institutional Landscape of Halal Certification in Sri Lanka

The legal and institutional framework governing halal certification in Sri Lanka presents a distinctive and frequently contested landscape. The primary entity responsible for halal certification in the country is the Halal Assessment Council (HAC) (Hewege & Perera, 2020; Yuanitasari et al., 2023). HAC is known as the sole Indian representative that maintains a method of conducting professional and internationally guaranteed compliance checks of halal standards in Sri Lanka. HAC is a privately-owned company that was incorporated under the Companies Act No. 7 of 2007 (*Halal Assessment Council*, n.d.). Being part of the legal status and being an independent, legal entity is a major factor in Sri Lanka's functioning environment (Hewege & Perera, 2020).

Since Sri Lankan enterprises involved in international trade are unable to engage in business activities without the Halal Assessment Centre (HAC) (Daily Mirror, 2025), it has achieved enormous international recognition. The HAC is also certified for ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System (QMS) by the Sri Lanka Standards Institution (SLSI) also the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Accreditation Centre (GAC) (*About HAC: Accreditation and Recognitions*, n.d.). It is acknowledged by leading halal certification authorities such as JAKIM (Malaysia), MUI (Indonesia), ESMA (UAE), and MUIS (Singapore) (*Halal Quality Control Group*, n.d.). Such diverse international recognition is the best way to demonstrate the effectiveness of operations conducted by HAC in fostering trade, in spite of the legal grey areas that have always trailed halal certification in Sri Lanka.

Halal certification in Sri Lanka has a history indicating that it has faced a lot of controversies. Before HAC's emergence to the forefront, the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU), which is a Muslim religious organization established under Parliamentary Act No. 51 of 2000, was engaged in issuing halal certifications (Haniffa, 2021). Nevertheless, a big court and societal debate ensued in 2013, where sharp doubts were raised by some members of the dominant Buddhist population protesting against ACJU's legal power to provide such certificates (Hussain, 2013; Yusoff & Sarjoon, 2017). This disagreement reached

a climax when a cabinet sub-committee established that ACJU had no right to certify that food items are halal (Aliff, 2015).

Consequently, ACJU announced that the issuance of halal certification would be optional thereafter. This episode highlighted the absence of a clear, unified, and state-backed legal framework for halal certification in Sri Lanka, which contrasted with some other nations where such frameworks are more established. The Sri Lanka Standards Institution (SLSI), the national body responsible for standards, has not developed a specific standard for halal certification (Azam & Abdullah, 2021; Hewege & Perera, 2020), further indicating this regulatory gap within the state apparatus.

The boundary between *de facto* and *de jure* power is a necessary tool to analyze (Hayo & Voigt, 2023; Metelska-Szaniawska & Lewczuk, 2022). Although the halal certification issued under the Halal Assessment Council (HAC) remains globally recognized, HAC's status as a national regulatory institution authorized by laws of Sri Lanka to prescribe or enforce the halal standards is vague or legally non-existent (Hewege & Perera, 2020). Thus, the domestic validity of the certification can also be challenged, despite its commercial value and international recognition. The lack of an official halal standard issued by the Sri Lanka Standards Institution (SLSI), along with the government's unfavorable attitude to institutionalize the role of ACJU in the past, demonstrates a significant regulatory gap in terms of halal governance in the national legal regime. Such dynamics explain the urgent economic benefit for exporters to gain HAC certification, which is, in fact, accepted throughout the world, and thus achieve a market-driven regulatory ecosystem where, instead of the state, the individual entities play the role of policymakers. Such arrangement, on the one hand, supports the essence of international trade. While on the other hand, this legal and social dispute about halal certification in Sri Lanka is further dramatized as there is an impression that the commercial, uncontrolled interests are imposed by the allegedly religious demands unilaterally and without any evident state control and national legislation project. As a result, there have been continued pleas for government intervention, to come up with a new mechanism that is considered legitimate and acceptable.

The broader legal framework for food and export regulation in Sri Lanka includes the Food Act No. 26 (1980) and the Import and Export Control Act No. 1 (1969) (Ponnampерuma et al., 2022; Aheeyar et al., 2020), which govern general food safety and trade. The Food Control Administration Unit (FCAU) is responsible for issuing export certificates for food consignments (UN.ESCAP & ARTNeT, 2023), based on factory inspections to ensure compliance with food hygiene regulations (Aheeyar et al., 2020). While these acts ensure general food safety and quality, they do not specifically mandate or regulate halal certification for domestic consumption or exports, unless such a requirement is imposed by an importing country (*About HAC: Accreditation and Recognitions*, n.d.). This creates a situation where halal certification, though commercially indispensable for exports, operates largely outside a direct, specific, and comprehensive national legal mandate within Sri Lanka (Muneeza & Mustapha, 2021).

The following table provides a concise overview of the key halal certifying bodies in Sri Lanka and their legal standing:

**Table 1. Halal Certifying Bodies and Their Legal Basis in Sri Lanka**

Certifying Body	Legal Status/ Incorporation	Scope of Certification	Recognitions/ Accreditations	Current Status
Halal Assessment Council (HAC)	Incorporated under Companies' Act No. 7 of 2007	Food, Cosmetic, Pharmaceutical, Poultry, Abattoir, Food Premise, Endorsement	ISO 9001:2015 (SLSI), GCC Accreditation Centre (GAC), JAKIM, MUI, ESMA, MUIS	Only entity for internationally accepted compliance audits; crucial for exports
	Incorporated by Parliamentary	Historically provided certifications	None explicitly mentioned as	Ruled to have no legal right to issue halal

All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU)	Act No. 51 in 2000	across various sectors	international accreditation for certification.	certification for food items in 2013; certification became optional.
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## Dynamics of the Halal Certification Value Chain in Sri Lanka

Halal certification value chain in Sri Lanka is an interconnected chain of operations whereby the chain promotes and links together various activities, such as: the sourcing of raw materials, manufacturing of final products, and the delivery of the final products to the consumer (Kristanto & Kurniawati, 2025; Priyashantha & Vidanarachchi, 2024). Each phase is explicated by specific halal standards and comes with specific legal implications all of which have been examined in the subsequent subsections.

### *Upstream Activities: Sourcing and Production Compliance*

The initial stages of the halal value chain, particularly concerning raw material sourcing and the early phases of production, are critical to maintaining a product's halal integrity. Legally, compliance with halal principles requires that all ingredients are permissible and free from contamination by prohibited or impure substances (Bukhari, 2023). This includes strict prohibitions on components such as pork and its derivatives, alcohol, and blood. For products involving meat, the legal and religious requirements for animal slaughter are especially rigorous (Farouk et al., 2016). Animals must be alive and healthy at the time of slaughter, which must be conducted by a Muslim in accordance with Islamic law, involving the recitation of Allah's name and a single, swift cut (Akbar et al., 2023; Saujan et al., 2025).

In the field of Islamic jurisprudence, the duty of preserving halal integrity lies not only in the last point of production, but also in the mainstream producers and secondary suppliers, and might demand management across national boundaries (Khan et al., 2022). In its certification process, the Halal Assessment Council (HAC) specifically ensures that the production and its raw commodities have traceability by demanding that such is to be done by carrying out a strict audit of the supply chain of a manufacturer. Such a stipulation assumes the existence of a halal supply chain management system, one that integrates the teachings of sharia in a flawless manner into perpetuating the spirit of halalness beyond the point of procurement. The certified enterprises, therefore, will have to prove that they conform to definite halal requirements as well as with the general food hygiene and safety regulations since halal practices also concern the importance of cleanliness and hygienic ways of food preparation (Md Dahhal et al., 2024). The legal issue at this point lies in making sure that all the suppliers, particularly the suppliers in international supply chains, adhere to the acceptable halal guidelines. Just one non-complying input may result in a final product becoming non-halal, consequently presenting both legal and commercial risks to the certifying company. This creates a heavy obligation of due diligence on the certified enterprises to ensure halal compliance in their entire upstream network, and which can prove particularly burdensome to small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Halal making certain compliance in sourcing entails the careful execution of religious laws, namely the Islamic law or sharia in this case. These religious considerations need to be accurately converted to commercial contracts and procurement agreements when businesses deal with the suppliers. When the suppliers are global players, then the challenges of international trade law, recognition and legality of non-domestic halal products certification dominate (Ramli & Kasih, 2023). The advent of religious law, private commercial law, and international trade law to the arena of international trade and business presents a complex legal field. This has the possibility of causing conflicts especially in situations involving lack of compliance, misrepresentation or fraudulent practices. These contractual and international legal requirements are already complicated by issues faced all around the world (Suud Sarim Karimullah & Rozi, 2023), concerning the different country jurisdiction-based requirements and standards of halal that may result in the business being exposed to greater legal and commercial risks, in cases where the recognition given by their certification body is not accepted internationally or is interpreted in different domains in a divergent manner.

### Core Operations: Certification and Quality Assurance

The certification process and the ensuing quality assurance system constituted on grounds of preserving the halal integrity are the main bases of the halal value chain (Hidayati et al., 2024). This certification is issued by the Halal Assessment Council (HAC), which conducts this process in a strictly structured and intensive manner (Hewege & Perera, 2020). The process normally starts with an optional pre-audit, followed by an in-depth certification audit, and ends with annual audits and re-certification after every three years (*About HAC: Accreditation and Recognitions*, n.d.). The scheme is elaborate and includes the submission of a letter of intent, raw materials carefully checked, manufacturing supply chain audited thoroughly, constant checks through surveillance audits and tests carried out by technical specialists. The certification regimes maintained by HAC, the HAC General Scheme and the GSO Scheme, respectively, are clearly associated with certain international norms, to name a few: the general norm of halal food requirements, GSO 2055-1, as well as the norm of animal slaughtering, GSO 993 (Abdallah et al., 2021).

From a legal standpoint, the certification process functions as a contractual agreement between the certifying body, i.e., HAC, and the applicant business. In this agreement, the compliance requirements that the business should meet in order to acquire and retain its halal certification are defined. The further auditing and follow up program are the essential method of applying these terms of the contract and monitoring its continuous compliance with the mentioned halal standards. The Sri Lanka Standards Institution (SLSI) certification of ISO 9001: 2015 means that HAC strives to ensure strong quality management systems. Although ISO certification does not directly touch any specific religious requirements pertaining to halal (Hewege & Perera, 2020), it can play a great role in influencing overall credibility and reliability of the certification systems performed by HAC, making it the best practice to ensure that the operations are excellent and consistent. The legal issue at this stage mainly involves the enforcement against non-compliance. Although HAC has the mandate to suspend or revoke certificates, the wider law and legal implications in Sri Lanka's national law in cases of fraudulent or non-compliant halal products, especially in a solid period with the certification program by a private organization is a very important section of law to be enforced. The *halalan tayyiban* provision, which focuses on wholesomeness, purity and cleanliness (Anuar Musaddad et al., 2024), is not limited to a product's ingredients, but it extends to business conduct in the workplace, which requires creation of fair terms and good personal hygiene shown by the employees, which are indirectly covered in the audit certification process.

Although the Halal Assessment Commission (HAC) is a private incorporation under Companies Act, it performs functions that are usually fulfilled by governmental or statutory regulatory bodies. It establishes and enforces industry standards, conducts severe audit, monitors ongoing audit, and is equipped with the option of granting certifications or otherwise. In effect, this authority provides HAC a certain form of regulatory status vis-a-vis the sphere of the halal industry in Sri Lanka. The legal consideration here is that an element of considerable power over commercial activities with public interest aspects, such as religious adherence and food safety, is vested in business by a privately-owned entity. Such an arrangement, especially in cases where it is not specifically delegated by the state, and no coherent national laws regulate the relationship, leads to inherent questions of accountability, transparency, and division of conflict of interest or potential abuse, already made stronger by previous scandals involving certification authority.

The main aim of halal certification is to protect Muslim consumers, meaning that he or she is guaranteed that his or her religious ideals have been marketed, and also that there is a high level of product safety and hygiene. This is meant to help and maintain consumers' trust. The Halal Assessment Council (HAC) is a non-governmental group, which holds a significant consumer protection responsibility when it issues such certification. When the halal product officials on a certain commodity are found to be non-compliant with the halal standards at later date, perhaps on account of cross contamination or even fraud, the legal redress available to consumers in Sri Lanka comes to the fore in terms of criticality. Another pertinent question is that in cases where the general law, like the Food Act, is in place to deal with the occurrence of breaches of halal specific standards, how do such breaches occur as the halal standard itself is not a formally codified standard of national law as the case in Sri Lanka as enshrined by the Sri Lanka Standards Institution (SLSI). This situation raises significant questions regarding the adequacy of current

consumer protection laws in addressing the distinctive aspects of halal certification, especially given the potential for fraudulent and dubious accreditation, which can lead to serious unrest and distress among halal consumers.

The following table provides a detailed overview of the halal certification requirements and applicable standards in Sri Lanka:

**Table 2. Halal Certification Requirements and Applicable Standards in Sri Lanka**

Aspect	Requirements/Standards	Source/Applicability
General Principles	Compliance with Islamic Law, no forbidden components (pork, alcohol, blood, improperly slaughtered meat), no contact with impure substances	Universal halal principles, applied by HAC
Hygiene & Safety	Application of good hygiene practices; adoption of appropriate risk assessment and management system; " <i>Halalan Tayyiban</i> " (wholesomeness, pure, clean)	HAC certification requirements
Slaughtering	Animals must be alive and healthy; slaughtered by a Muslim reciting Allah's name; single cut; no contact with non-halal meat/sowbelly	Specific to meat/poultry sectors; GSO 993
Ingredients & Sourcing	All ingredients must be halal (lawful/permisable); traceability of raw materials; screening ingredients for haram material	HAC certification process; general halal principles
Production & Processing	Facilities must comply with halal requirements; no cross-contamination with non-halal substances; clean/hygienic production environment; good personal hygiene for workers; no smoking in production areas; adequate training	HAC audit and inspection; " <i>Halalan Tayyiban</i> " principle
Certification Process	Inquiry, Letter of Intent, HAT induction, implementation of prerequisites, application, technical evaluation, certification audit, review/approval, payment, certificate issuance, periodic announced/unannounced audits, renewal every three years	HAC certification procedure
Applicable Standards	HAC General Scheme; GSO Scheme (GSO 2055-1: General Requirements for Halal Food, GSO 993: Animal Slaughtering Requirements); General Guidelines for Handling and Processing of Halal Food (HAC/STD/03)	HAC's operational standards

### Downstream Activities: Market Access and Consumer Trust

Market access, branding, and consumer trust building are the last phases in the halal value chain, which, in its turn, are highly affected by halal certification (Nusran et al., 2023). This certification acts as an effective marketing tool that will allow businesses to better attract the attention of halal-conscious customers in both worldwide and Sri Lanka markets. The prominent size of halal-certified exports in Sri Lanka, which reached USD 1.7 billion in 2023 (Daily Mirror, 2025), demonstrates the importance of certification as an instrument for reaching profitable foreign markets (Hashim et al., 2022). Such markets encompass Muslim dominant countries and even other non-Muslim countries like Thailand, Japan, Korea, which are strategically utilizing the halal certification to promote tourist attractions and trade (Marlinda et al., 2022; Mohd Nawawi et al., 2020). The involvement of leading international brands present in Sri Lanka's market such as Nestle and KFC in receiving the HAC certification confirms the commercial importance of certification and its overall popularity among market participants (Siriwardhana et al., 2025).

From a legal perspective, halal certification can function as a non-tariff barrier in international trade (Surrahman, 2025). This occurs when importing countries require halal certification as a prerequisite for market entry. This global trend necessitates that Sri Lankan exporters comply with these foreign halal requirements, making the recognition of HAC's certification by international authorities crucial for their market access. This implies that for Sri Lankan exporters targeting key Muslim-majority or halal-conscious international markets (Hewege & Perera, 2020), halal certification transitions from a discretionary business choice to an essential, commercially and legally mandated export prerequisite. While Sri Lanka may not have a domestic law mandating halal certification for exports (Muneeza & Mustapha, 2021), the laws and market demands of importing countries effectively impose this requirement, rendering compliance a commercial and legal necessity for international trade.

The halal logo, in domestic trade, may be defined as an apperceptive label that builds consumer confidence hence establishing a sense of trust and confidence in whether products are authentic and comparable to market regulations (Ramlan et al., 2025). Before Muslim consumers, this credibility is a sacred necessity and certification confirms the observation of religious principles (Noordin et al., 2014). Further, the percentage of non-Muslim shoppers who choose halal products is high too (Billah et al., 2020), driven by the belief in perceived benefits of quality products, microbial safety and ethical supply chain—a factor that shows the increased market reach of the brand. The state of law in such a downstream area is related to enforcing legal rights to intellectual property right on the halal logo and the risk of the non-legal use of or fake logos. This abuse may cause major grounds for consumer mistrust and damage of the brand image of legitimate halal-certified businesses. This means that the law should be able to define where there are mechanisms to protect consumers confidence and also to protect the halal mark in the market.

Muslims produce halal food with the permission of halal logo, which is not just a simple label but a construction of trust given by Muslim customers and an uncomplicated but easy method of attracting business people (Al-Kwfi et al., 2021; Usman et al., 2022). It acts as a strong brand indicator to show religious conformity and quality guarantee (Usman et al., 2022). The reason for defending this unique mark under the legal system of the prevailing secular commercial laws is put in context by the proliferation of controversies it has faced in respect of the socio-religious spheres in the country of Sri Lanka. The legal system will have to deal with the two-fold halal marketing issue as a sacred religious mark combined with a quality commercial differentiator and maintain the integrity of the issue while avoiding deception of the consumer through cultural and religious sensitivities. This needs to be well considered how intellectual property, i.e., trademark law, may be successfully utilized over a symbol that has such touching religious connotations.

### Challenges of Sri Lanka's Halal Certification Value Chain

There is a long history of numerous issues, including controversies, that severely disrupt the value-chain of halal certification in Sri Lanka, and some could be referred to as peculiar to the legal and the socio-political environment of the country (Hewege & Perera, 2020; Muneeza & Mustapha, 2021). The first one is the lack of a nationwide and all-inclusive national system of laws relating to halal certification. The Sri Lanka Standards Institution (SLSI) is the officially designated national standards organization and it has not promulgated a single halal standard to date, thus creating a serious didactic gap in regulation. In addition, other initiatives by the government, which were taken on account of the national debate that spawned the revocation of a number of halal certificates in 2013, have never seen the light of day. Accordingly, the regulatory context currently has no definite, state-controlled requirement to obtain halal certification and provides room to leave the certification practice to the private sector, and in particular to its discretionary unwilling actors like the Halal Assessment Council (HAC). While the international recognition of the HAC forms an important component in the process of facilitating exports, this lack of a clear definition leaves the system open to weaknesses, such as the possibility of what may be termed as fraudulent and dubious accreditation, which may go a long way to destabilizing the faith of consumers, besides weakening the halal mark.

The most notable controversy surrounding halal certification in Sri Lanka occurred in 2013. During this period, there were strong objections from certain segments of the majority Buddhist community,

notably the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), who vehemently challenged the necessity and legality of halal certification by a non-profit, private religious organization, the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU) (Sarjoon et al., 2016; Yusoff & Sarjoon, 2017). Key legal and ethical arguments raised during this period included questioning the legal authority of a non-profit organization to issue such certificates, concerns over the disclosure of intellectual property rights (such as product ingredients) to a private religious entity, and the perceived imposition of a minority religious practice on the majority population. Critics also argued about the impracticality of a religious entity attempting to dictate the eating patterns of a non-Muslim majority nation and effectively control its entire food chain. These campaigns were found to be part of broader anti-Muslim sentiments, which threatened ethno-religious harmony and aimed to undermine the economic pride of the Muslim community (Sarjoon et al., 2016). The outcome of this significant controversy was ACJU's decision to make its halal certification optional, coupled with a government promise to formulate a new legal mechanism, a promise that has yet to fully materialize in a comprehensive public law.

The halal politicization is one of the aspects in the current issue in Sri Lanka. Originally perceived as a religious condition of food practice, the issue of halal certification has quenched a furious debate that has been part of the big-time debate that is both publicly and politically charged. That kind of discourse shows that the problem is beyond its commercial or strictly religious scope, serving rather as a proxy to other tensions in society. It is therefore quite predictable that any future legislative or regulatory initiative that could be fought to make halal certification official in Sri Lanka is likeliest to attract maximum social-political opposition, which subsequently makes the passing of a consistent and widely extended legal framework highly embarrassing. This is actually the outcome of such politicization because what would then have been a harmonious commercial norm has now become nationalistic and religiously-biography founded such that it is problematic to undertake rational policy making processes in the public.

This is made to be even more demanding due to the existence of different sets of halal demands and grade in diverse international jurisdictions. This gap poses quite a challenge and cost burden to the Slovakian halal operators who wish to expand to the international market because they are forced to work around a highly complicated set of varying standards. Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) experience specific challenges related to the need to understand these diverse local and international halal requirements as well as to handle a high level of certification costs. It has been documented that up to 72% of SMEs said they experienced difficulties in reading local halal requirements, which is only 40% of the total big enterprise (Thashmila viraj k pathirana & Shashini Sandeepani Kumari Ekanayaka, 2025). This gap will cause possible legal and regulatory barriers that might limit SMEs to enter into the profitable global halal market.

Additionally, the lack of coordination among halal product guarantee institutions and inadequate oversight contribute to ongoing implementation issues within the value chain. These include the controversy in 2013, and the ensuing lack of a well-defined, coherent state-supported legal apparatus or framework governing halal certification: a state of regulatory ambiguity grows pervasive. This leads to legal and economic implications, as it forces companies to seek private certifications that although international, are not explicitly domestically authoritative, leaving them vulnerable to facing prosecution, or in the worse circumstance facing mistrust. This also causes an uneven playing field, where bigger businesses may have the means to be able to work out complex and fragmented requirements better than SMEs. Moreover, such ambivalence is hampering Sri Lanka's potential in the emerging global halal marketplace by discouraging foreign direct investment and making local producers' compliance more difficult. The legal ambiguity is also quite important because it instigates a social division, as the absence of precise state guidelines eventually gives way to further debate and public protests on non-legal (or ethno-religious) terms. The inability of the legal system to offer certainty, thus, has a negative and concrete effect on the country's social and economic development.

### **Economic and Social Implications of Halal Certification in Sri Lanka**

The halal certification in Sri Lanka has far reaching economic and social implications which have been able to alter the nature of trade and consumer behavior while enhancing societal cohesion. An

analysis of these implications suggests that there are great opportunities yet challenges still exist. Economically, halal certification is a critical driver of export revenue for Sri Lanka. In 2023, halal-certified product exports were estimated at USD 1.7 billion, representing a substantial 61% of total food and beverage exports and 14% of the country's overall exports. This underscores the crucial role of halal certification in enabling access to lucrative global markets, including those in Muslim-majority countries and non-Muslim countries like Japan, Thailand, and Korea, which strategically recognize halal for tourism and trade purposes. The economic impact figures provided are overwhelmingly export-driven, indicating that the primary economic value of halal certification for Sri Lanka lies in its ability to facilitate international trade. This suggests that the economic benefits are largely realized through foreign exchange earnings and market expansion beyond domestic consumption.

Another body of literature reveals that halal certification has the potential of boosting organizational excellence thus improving operational performance, financial performance, market share growth and creating innovations. The certification also allows non-Muslim companies to easily reach out to the growing segments of halal-conscious consumers hence extending market coverage and profitability. Such international companies include Nestle and Kraft-Heinz (Unilever), along with transnational food-service franchises like KFC and McDonalds, actively pursue council certification by the Halal Assessment Council (HAC) in Sri Lanka, which demonstrates the commercial value of the scheme and its broad applicability across market conditions. In the local halal food industry, small farmers or food producers affiliate with larger scales by means of nucleus farmer-outgrower schemes to cut on economic pressures and pursue niche markets including, most notably ethnic populations in North America, Europe and Australia, as well as health-food areas. This kind of agility and joint working ethics indicates that the industry can be economically stable even when faced with adverse situations.

The following table illustrates the significant economic contribution of halal-certified exports from Sri Lanka:

**Table 3. Economic Contributions of Halal Certified Exports from Sri Lanka (2016-2023)**

Year	Total Food & Beverage Exports (USD Billion)	Halal-Certified Exports (USD Billion)	Percentage of F&B Exports that are Halal-Certified	Percentage of Total National Exports that are Halal-Certified
2016-2020 (Average)	2.56 (Average Annual Receipts)	Unspecified, but 65% of F&B exports were halal-certified	65%	Unspecified
2023	Unspecified	1.7	61%	14%

*Note: Data points are sourced from the provided research material. Specific total F&B export figures for 2023 were not available, but the percentage of halal-certified F&B exports and total national exports for 2023 were provided.*

Socially, halal certification primarily serves to assure Muslim consumers that products adhere to their religious precepts, fostering trust and confidence in their purchasing decisions. Beyond religious observance, halal practices inherently emphasize cleanliness, animal welfare, and hygienic preparation methods. These attributes appeal to a broader consumer base, including non-Muslims who seek quality, ethically sourced, and safe products, contributing to a general perception of halal products as healthier and safer.

However, the social landscape in Sri Lanka is complex and has been marked by significant controversies. The attitude of the population toward halal certification is ambivalent, since, according to a sentiment analysis, 41.8 percent of people saw a positive understanding, while 30.8 percent of the population maintained a neutral understanding, and 27.4 percent had a negative one. Such a variety of sentiments reflects continued debate and division in the society on the issue. It was clear how anti-halal

campaigns may pose a threat to ethno-religious harmony in 2013 and damage the economic pride of Muslim community as shown by the controversies in 2013 that were spurred by anti-Muslim sentiments. The current state of the legal framework does not provide an optimal coverage of legal certainty and cohesive approach, which inevitably, might contribute to these social tensions. Lack of a proper, government endorsed legal guideline leaves a gap that may lead to the problem becoming politicized, thus deterring interactions between all classes. As a matter of fact, although the halal certification has potentially high economic benefits both domestically and export-wise, its full prospect is limited due to unaddressed domestic socio-legal issues. The capacity of Sri Lankan legal system to present clarity, consistency, and common regulation in the context of the halal certification is not only vital to economic advantage, but effective in developing a higher level of social integrity and safeguarding the rights and emotions of the country's populace.

## Conclusion

A tripartite analysis of the Halal certification value chain in Sri Lanka reveals significant economic potential, a complex institutional structure, and long-term socio-legal challenges. Halal certification plays a central role in Sri Lanka's export sector, particularly in food and beverage products, offering lucrative market access and substantial revenue generation. The Halal Assessment Council (HAC) has emerged as a strategic actor, equipping local institutions to meet international halal standards and earning global recognition. This finding underscores that halal certification is not merely a religious concern but a strategic instrument in Sri Lanka's economic diplomacy. Therefore, halal certification serves as a key driver in enhancing Sri Lanka's competitiveness in the global export market.

However, the absence of a clear national legal framework for halal certification has created regulatory uncertainty and opened the door to politicization of what should be a commercial and religious standard. Domestic debates and the disproportionate compliance burden on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) highlight the urgent need for institutional and legal reforms. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in mapping the relationship between institutional legitimacy, social trust, and economic access within the context of halal certification as a tool of economic and social diplomacy. This article, thus, expands the understanding of how religious standards interact with state and market structures in developing countries. This reinforces the importance of a cross-sectoral approach in designing inclusive and sustainable halal certification policies.

The main limitation of this study is the lack of in-depth empirical data on public perceptions across religious communities regarding halal certification, as well as the absence of comparative analysis with countries that have implemented state-based halal systems. Furthermore, the study did not fully explore the dynamics between religious institutions and the state in the certification process, which could be crucial for designing inclusive public policies. Future research using participatory approaches and cross-country case studies is recommended to enrich the understanding and effectiveness of policy recommendations. This study should therefore be viewed as a preliminary step toward building a more equitable and sustainable halal certification system in Sri Lanka. Strengthening the methodology and expanding the scope of analysis will be essential to ensure the relevance and impact of future policy outcomes.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. All opinions expressed are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the views of any affiliated institutions.

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