

HALAL PET FOOD IN THE LIGHT OF HADITH: ETHICAL, LEGAL AND SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines *halal* pet food through the lens of hadith, emphasising its ethical, legal, and spiritual dimensions as outlined within Islamic teachings. It underscores the significance of purity, lawful consumption, and animal welfare as foundational principles that guide Muslim pet owners and the *halal* product industry. The relevance of this study is heightened in light of recent developments in Brunei, where the Ministry of Religious Affairs, through the Department of Shariah Affairs, identified non-*halal* ingredients in a well-known pet food brand, sparking public concern and regulatory scrutiny. This incident highlights the challenges associated with ensuring *halal* integrity in the production and distribution of pet food, thereby emphasising the necessity for stringent *halal* certification and compliance. By synthesising classical hadith guidance with contemporary *halal* standards and market realities, this paper advocates for increased awareness and responsible practices to uphold *halal* principles in pet care, thereby reflecting religious obligations and promoting community welfare.

Keywords: “Ethical”, “Hadith”, “Halal”, “Pet Food”, “Legal”, “Spiritual”

INTRODUCTION

The *halal* industry has rapidly expanded beyond the conventional boundaries of food and beverage for human consumption. In other words, the concept of *halal* extends far beyond human consumption, encompassing all aspects of a Muslim's life, including the care and feeding of animals. It now comprises pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, logistics, and pet food. This development reflects the growing awareness and concern among Muslim consumers regarding compliance with Islamic ethical and legal principles in all areas of life. While *halal* pet food may initially seem marginal, it is rooted in deeply held religious beliefs, particularly in the areas of purity (*taharah*), *halalan thayyiban*, and animal welfare. According to Islamic Services of America (2023), *halal* pet food must be made from ingredients that are considered *halal*, meaning they come from sources that are allowed under Islamic law. For example, meat must come from animals that are *halal* and must be slaughtered in accordance with Islamic guidelines. The food should also not contain any *haram* (forbidden) ingredients like pork or products derived from pigs, alcohol, or any animal that was slaughtered according to Islamic standards, while the animals used in the production of the food are treated humanely.

In Islam, animals play a prominent role in theological, legal, and ethical discussions. The Prophet Muhammad *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* emphasised humane treatment and moral responsibility toward animals. Consequently, ensuring that pet food is *halal* aligns with the dietary restrictions imposed on Muslims and the broader ethical framework governing their relationship with animals. In contemporary Islamic society, the intersection of religious obligations and pet ownership has created a complex landscape where traditional Islamic teachings must be applied to modern practices.

In addition, the emergence of *halal* pet food as a distinct market segment reflects the growing awareness among Muslim pet owners regarding their religious obligations (Deuraseh & Asli, 2022). This concern has recently been brought to the fore in Brunei Darussalam (hereafter called Brunei), where the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), through the *Halal* Food Control Division (HFCDD), Department of Shariah Affairs (DSA), identified non-*halal* ingredients in a prominent international pet food brand (Junaidi, 2025; Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2025). This revelation triggered public concern and regulatory scrutiny, underscoring the need for stricter adherence to *halal* standards in the production and distribution of pet food products.

This paper examines the *halal* pet food industry through the lens of hadith and Islamic prophetic traditions, emphasising the ethical, legal, and spiritual implications. By combining classical Islamic teachings with contemporary *halal* certification practices, this study aims to establish a framework for responsible and religiously compliant pet ownership among Muslim communities. It will also address market challenges, regulatory gaps, and consumer awareness initiatives necessary to uphold *halal* integrity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foundations of Halal in Islamic Teachings

The concept of *halal*, meaning “permissible” or “lawful” in Islamic jurisprudence, is fundamentally rooted in the Qur’an and Hadith. The Qur’anic principle of *halal* and *thayyib* (wholesome) establishes the dual requirement that food must be both permissible under Islamic law and beneficial for both physical and spiritual well-being. This principle extends beyond human consumption to encompass all aspects of a Muslim’s interaction with food, including the feeding of animals under their care.

The determination of *halal* and *haram* (forbidden) is deeply rooted in the Qur’an, hadith, and scholarly consensus, with diverse interpretations regarding their extent (Gul & Begum, 2024). Some scholars assert that everything is *halal* unless explicitly prohibited by Shariah, while others hold the opposite view (Gul & Begum, 2024). Historically, the Qur’an explicitly identifies 13 items as *halal* and another 13 as *haram*, providing clear guidance for Islamic dietary laws (Gul & Begum, 2024).

The principles of *halal* and *thayyib* encompass the dimensions of legality, quality, cleanliness, and food safety (Nugroho et al., 2024). Verses such as Surah Al-Baqarah (2:172) and Surah Al-Maidah (5:88) emphasise the importance of consuming food that is *halalan thayyiban*. These principles serve as theoretical and practical guidelines that can address current food safety challenges and extend to considerations of pet food quality and safety.

Animal Welfare in Islamic Tradition

Islamic teachings place significant emphasis on animal welfare, with numerous hadiths documenting the Prophet Muhammad’s compassionate treatment of animals. The prophetic tradition declares that “*all creatures are the family of Allah*” (Sunan al-Baihaqi, 7460), establishing a fundamental principle of universal care and compassion. This teaching forms the basis for understanding Muslim obligations toward animals, including those kept as pets.

The hadith literature contains numerous examples of the Prophet’s mercy toward animals, including his directive to reunite a bird with its offspring and his establishment of protection for a female dog and her puppies during military campaigns. These accounts demonstrate the high regard Islam places on animal welfare and the expectation that Muslims will treat animals with kindness and compassion.

One of the most significant hadith regarding animal care states: "*A woman was punished because of a cat. She neither provided it with food nor drink, nor set it free so that it might eat the insects of the earth*" (Sahih al-Bukhari, 3318). This hadith establishes the principle that those who choose to keep animals bear the responsibility for their proper care, including adequate feeding. Conversely, the hadith about a man who was forgiven for giving water to a thirsty dog demonstrates that acts of kindness toward animals carry spiritual rewards.

Besides, the Islamic concept of stewardship (*khilafah*) encompasses the treatment of animals, establishing humans as trustees responsible for the welfare of all creatures. This stewardship includes providing appropriate food, water, shelter, and medical care when necessary (Muda & Omar, 2024). The failure to meet these obligations is considered a violation of Islamic ethical principles and can have consequences in the afterlife.

Halal Pet Food Market Development

The *halal* pet food market represents an emerging segment within the broader *halal* industry, driven by increasing pet ownership among Muslim communities and growing awareness of religious obligations (Deuraseh & Asli, 2022). Research indicates that more than half of Americans have a dog or a cat in their home, while 45% of households in Romania have a cat, and 92% of cats in Australia are kept as pets. This global trend toward pet ownership has extended to Muslim communities, creating demand for religiously compliant pet food products.

The market potential for *halal* pet food is significant, with estimates suggesting the global cat food market alone is worth over USD 27 billion (H.M.S., Zulkifli, Y, Muhamad, & Z., 2014). The world's Muslim population, estimated at around 1.6 billion people, represents a substantial market for *halal*-certified products (H.M.S., Zulkifli, Y, Muhamad, & Z., 2014). The purchasing power of Muslims has been growing, with GDP per capita for Muslims globally rising at a Cumulative Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 6.8% between 1990 and 2010, compared to the global GDP per capita CAGR of 5.0% (H.M.S., Zulkifli, Y, Muhamad, & Z., 2014).

Several companies have entered the *halal* pet food market, including Powercat, a Malaysian brand that claims to be the world's only *halal*-certified cat food (Buelva, 2019). The company has found receptive markets in Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam (Buelva, 2019). The product appeals not only to Muslim cat owners but also to non-Muslim consumers who want assurance that their cats' food is clean and wholesome (Buelva, 2019).

The development of *halal* pet food faces unique challenges related to the intersection of animal dietary needs and Islamic principles (Deuraseh & Asli, 2022). While Islamic law generally permits feeding animals food that would be *haram* for human consumption, many Muslim pet owners prefer *halal* alternatives to avoid handling non-*halal* substances and to maintain the spiritual purity of their households (Hurayra, n.d.). This preference has driven innovation in the *halal* pet food industry, with manufacturers developing products that meet both the nutritional requirements of pets and the religious requirements of their owners.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilising descriptive-analytical methods, to examine *halal* pet food through the lens of hadith teachings. The research methodology draws upon Islamic legal research principles, using both normative and jurisprudential approaches to analyse the intersection of traditional Islamic teachings with contemporary practices in the pet food industry. Then, the study applies thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes within the hadith literature. These themes are then synthesised into ethical, legal and spiritual insights.

The primary data sources for this study include six major hadith collections in Sunni Islam, commonly known as the "*Al-Kutub as-Sittah*" (The Six Books), focusing on Sahih Al Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Sunan Abu Dawood, Sunan at-Tirmidhi, Sunan an-Nasa'i and Sunan Ibn Majah. By following a

structured methodology, this research accurately engages with hadith literature, ensuring that interpretations and applications are based on a well-authenticated level, particularly *sahih* or *hasan*.

Furthermore, the incident in Brunei serves as a central case study for examining the practical implications of *halal* non-compliance in the pet food industry (Junaidi, 2025; Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2025). This case provides insight into the regulatory response, public concern regarding pet food integrity, and the challenges faced by both consumers and businesses in ensuring *halal* compliance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Hadith Foundations of Animal Care

The hadith literature provides extensive guidance on the proper treatment of animals, establishing fundamental principles that form the basis for contemporary discussions about *halal* pet food. The Prophet Muhammad's *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* teachings emphasise that kindness to animals is equivalent to kindness to human beings, while cruelty to animals is equally condemned. This principle establishes the moral framework within which Muslim pet owners must operate when caring for their animals.

The hadith "*A good deed done to an animal is like a good deed done to a human being, while an act of cruelty to an animal is as bad as cruelty to a human being*" demonstrates the equal moral status accorded to animal welfare in Islamic teachings. This teaching extends to all aspects of animal care, including the provision of suitable food and water. The spiritual significance of proper animal care is further emphasised by the hadith stating, "*There is a reward for serving any living being*" (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2363).

One of the most frequently cited hadith regarding animal feeding obligations tells the story of a man whom Allah forgave for giving water to a thirsty dog (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2363). This account illustrates that acts of compassion toward animals yield significant spiritual rewards and are highly valued in Islamic teachings. Conversely, the hadith about a woman who was punished for confining a cat without providing food or water serves as a warning about the consequences of neglecting animal welfare (Sahih al-Bukhari, 3318).

The Prophet's teachings also address the quality and appropriateness of animal care, with the hadith "*Fear Allah in your treatment of animals*" (Sunan Abi Dawud, 2549) establishing a general principle of God-consciousness in all interactions with animals. This principle extends to feeding practices, with the instruction to "*ride them when they are in good condition and feed them when they are in good condition*" (Musnad Ahmad, 17477), emphasising the importance of maintaining animal health through proper nutrition.

Islamic teachings establish clear obligations for those who choose to keep animals, particularly regarding their feeding and care responsibilities. The principle established in the hadith literature is that if one cannot properly care for an animal, it should be released to fend for itself in its natural environment. This teaching emphasises that animal ownership in Islam is not merely a right but a responsibility that comes with specific obligations.

The hadith "*Whoever has animals must treat them well or let them go*" (Sahih Muslim, 2242) establishes the fundamental principle that animal ownership requires active care and attention. This obligation includes providing adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care as needed. Failure to meet these obligations is considered a violation of Islamic principles and may have spiritual consequences. The Prophet's instruction that animals should not be overburdened or kept in poor conditions establishes standards for animal care that are still relevant to contemporary pet ownership practices. The hadith "*All creatures are the family of Allah, and those dearest to Allah are the ones who treat His family well*" (Sunan al-Baihaqi, 7460)—establishes the theological foundation for comprehensive animal care. The Prophet Muhammad *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* also trained dogs for the purpose of hunting, which highlights Islamic principles related to animal welfare in the context of hunting practices. The Messenger of Allah said: "*I release my trained dog and he catches (game).*"

(Sunan an-Nasa'i, 4265). This teaching places animal welfare within the broader context of worship and religious observance.

Moreover, caring for animals is considered an essential aspect of *ihsan* (compassionate) in Islam. The Prophet Muhammad *sallallahu alaihi wasallam*, in his teachings, emphasised the importance of compassion towards animals, prohibiting the act of killing them while they are restrained and advocating for the use of sharp blades during slaughter to minimise suffering. This illustrates a broader ethical framework within Islamic teachings that promotes humane treatment and respect for all living beings. Jabir bin 'Abdullah said: "*The Messenger of Allah forbade killing any animal when it is tied up (for use as a target)*" (Sunan Ibn Majah, 3188). The Messenger of Allah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* said: "*Allah has prescribed Al-Ihsan (proficiency) in all things. So, if you kill, then kill well, and if you slaughter, then slaughter well. Let one of you sharpen his blade and spare suffering to the animal he slaughters*" (Sunan Ibn Majah, 3170). The hadith highlights a principle of *Al-Ihsan*, which emphasises proficiency and excellence in all actions, including those involving the treatment of animals. When connecting this principle to industry practices, particularly in sectors like agriculture, food production, or even service-oriented industries, it draws parallels that emphasise ethical conduct and a commitment to quality.

The Brunei Pet Food Case Study

The incident in Brunei represents a significant case study in *halal* compliance challenges within the pet food industry (Junaidi, 2025). In March 2025, the Brunei MoRA, through the DSA, received complaints regarding one of the gastrointestinal cat food products. Following the investigation, authorities confirmed that the product contained pork by-products, as indicated on the product packaging itself.

The discovery was made through the HFCD's complaint mechanism, highlighting the importance of public vigilance and regulatory oversight in maintaining *halal* integrity. The fact that the non-*halal* ingredients were clearly labelled on the packaging highlights issues related to consumer awareness and the need for better education about *halal* requirements (Junaidi, 2025). This incident underscores the complexity of global supply chains and the challenges faced by consumers in Muslim-majority countries when purchasing imported products.

The case is particularly significant because it involves a well-known international brand with extensive distribution in Muslim markets. The product in question, a specialised gastrointestinal formula for cats, was being sold openly in retail outlets throughout Brunei, indicating a gap in the import and distribution oversight system (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2025). This situation demonstrates the vulnerability of Muslim consumers to inadvertent exposure to non-*halal* products, even in countries with established *halal* regulatory frameworks.

The incident sparked discussions on social media platforms about the importance of *halal* compliance in pet food, with some users questioning whether *halal* requirements should be applied to pet food at all. These discussions revealed varying levels of understanding among Muslim consumers regarding the religious implications of pet food choices and the practical considerations involved in maintaining a *halal* household.

The case highlighted the need for better consumer education about *halal* requirements and the importance of reading product labels carefully (Junaidi, 2025). Many consumers may not have been aware that pet food products could contain non-*halal* ingredients or may not have understood the implications for their religious observance. This incident serves as a catalyst for increased awareness and education about *halal* compliance in all aspects of Muslim lifestyle choices.

Ethical Dimensions of Halal Pet Food

The ethical foundation of *halal* pet food is grounded in the Islamic concept of *khalifah* (stewardship), where humans are seen as trustees of Allah's creation. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "*All creatures are Allah's dependents, and the most beloved to Allah are those who are kindest*

to His dependents” (Sunan Abu Dawud, 2858). This stewardship entails not only providing food and shelter but also ensuring that animals are treated with dignity and compassion.

The principle of *ihsan* (excellence) calls for going beyond minimum care — Muslim pet owners are encouraged to provide quality nutrition, clean water, and a safe environment. This is reflected in the hadith: “Fear Allah regarding these mute animals; ride them while they are healthy and slaughter them while they are healthy” (Sunan Abi Dawud, 2548), which underscores proper treatment and care.

Ethical responsibility also extends to the industry. Producers must avoid deception and harm, ensuring products are pure and wholesome, aligning with the Qur’anic injunction to consume what is *halal* and good (Qur’an 2:168). Thus, *halal* pet food becomes part of a larger movement toward ethical, transparent, and responsible consumption.

Legal Framework and Jurisprudential Analysis

From a jurisprudential perspective, the default Islamic ruling is that all things are permissible unless proven otherwise (*al-asl fi al-ashya’ al-ibahah*). Classical fiqh allows feeding animals non-halal food if it does not harm them. However, the Prophet advised: “Leave that which makes you doubt for that which does not make you doubt” (Sunan al-Tirmidhi, 2518), guiding Muslims toward avoiding doubtful matters (*mushtabihat*).

Modern halal certification applies these principles to contemporary supply chains. Legal frameworks ensure ingredient traceability and accurate labelling to avoid *gharar* (deceptive uncertainty). Mislabelled products may violate consumer rights and Shariah principles, necessitating enforceable penalties. The incident illustrates how regulatory gaps can lead to widespread exposure to non-*halal* goods, underscoring the need for systemic legal oversight.

The concept of *darurah* (necessity) permits *haram* in emergencies, but as *halal* options expand, the expectation shifts toward stricter compliance. This evolving fiqh position encourages Muslim consumers to choose *halal* pet food as a means of upholding higher standards of religious observance.

Spiritual Dimensions and Religious Obligations

Beyond legal and ethical considerations, *halal* pet food carries profound spiritual meaning. The Prophet stated: “In every living being there is a reward” (Sahih Bukhari, 2363), indicating that even simple acts of feeding animals bring divine reward. Choosing *halal* pet food with sincere *niyyah* (intention) transforms daily feeding into an act of *ibadah* (worship) and helps cultivate *taqwa* (God-consciousness).

Maintaining *taharah* (purity) in the household is also spiritually significant. The Prophet instructed: “Allah is pure and accepts only what is pure” (Sahih Muslim, 1015), encouraging believers to maintain purity in all aspects of life, including pet care. *Halal* pet food eliminates concerns of *najis* contamination, allowing believers to focus on prayer and worship without hesitation.

Moreover, *halal* choices attract *barakah* (blessing) and contribute to a spiritually harmonious home. Teaching children to prioritise *halal* even in pet care becomes a form of moral education, embedding Islamic values in daily practice and strengthening the family’s spiritual identity.

Contemporary Challenges, Market Realities and Industry Innovation

The *halal* pet food industry faces several pressing challenges in today’s global market. Complex and extended supply chains make ingredient verification difficult, particularly when products are sourced from multiple countries with varying regulations. Many Muslim pet owners remain unaware of hidden non-*halal* ingredients such as porcine by-products, creating a gap between consumer expectations and actual product content. Affordability also remains a barrier, as *halal*-certified products often cost more due to segregated production lines and certification fees. Furthermore, regulatory fragmentation means there is no globally harmonised *halal* pet food standard, which complicates international trade and creates inconsistency in compliance.

In response, industry players have begun innovating to meet both religious and market demands. Leading manufacturers are investing in blockchain-enabled traceability systems to provide transparent supply chain data. Dedicated *halal* production lines are being established to prevent cross-contamination, while more explicit *halal* labelling helps consumers make informed choices. Some companies collaborate with Islamic scholars and *halal* certification bodies to design products that meet both nutritional and Shariah requirements. Additionally, the rise of e-commerce has expanded access to *halal* pet food in regions where physical distribution is limited, while universities and research centres are developing cost-effective formulations to make *halal* pet food more affordable and widely available.

CONCLUSION

The *halal* pet food industry is a complex intersection of traditional Islamic teachings and modern market realities. The principles of animal welfare, compassion, and responsible stewardship are derived from the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad *sallallahu alaihi wasallam*. The incident in Brunei exemplifies the importance of *halal* compliance in the pet food industry. The ethical dimensions of *halal* pet food include compassion, stewardship, and excellence. While Islamic law permits feeding animals *haram* substances, the development of *halal* alternatives serves legitimate religious and practical needs.

The spiritual dimensions of *halal* pet food consumption contribute to *taqwa*, as well as to economic development, social cohesion, and the strengthening of Islamic institutions. The challenges faced by the industry include supply chain complexity, consumer education needs, and regulatory harmonisation requirements. The industry's response through innovation, certification development, and market expansion demonstrates its growth potential.

The *halal* pet food industry is experiencing significant growth, demonstrating the commercial viability of serving religious needs while maintaining product quality and competitive pricing. The success of companies like Powercat in Southeast Asian markets and the expansion of certification services by major *halal* certification bodies show strong market demand and industry commitment to serving Muslim consumers. The industry's future development should prioritise accessibility, affordability, and quality while maintaining strict adherence to Islamic principles. The interdisciplinary approach of integrating religious scholarship with business analysis, regulatory studies, and consumer research can guide scholars, industry practitioners, regulators, and consumers in this emerging field. The success of this industry serves as a model for other sectors seeking to serve authentic religious needs while contributing to global markets and community welfare.

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