

PRESS RELEASE

Research Shows that #Halal is Now a Lifestyle Definition on Instagram

Doha, November 27, 2017 – In partnership with the École Nationale Supérieure d'Informatique in Algeria and The University of Indonesia, a researcher from the Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI), one of Hamad Bin Khalifa University's (HBKU) three national research institutes, conducted a recent study into mentions of the word *halal* on social media. By analyzing more than 1.3 million recent posts on Instagram, the study found that the term is no longer exclusively defined in a religious context, but has transformed into a lifestyle term associated with worldwide health and fashion industries.

Dr. Yelena Mejova, lead author at QCRI, focused her analysis on English, Arabic and Indonesian-speaking populations. She found that, in English, mentions of *halal* were often associated with food and health concepts; in Indonesian, they focused more on cosmetics and health, while Arabic references included subtopics around fashion and technology.

The data follows a global conversation surrounding the concept of *halal*, particularly by 'Generation M'. The term was coined in 2016 by author Shelina Jannmohamed, describing young Muslims that embrace modernity as well as faith. The research found that young people are now embracing *halal* products, with style-conscious and health-conscious Muslims, and even non-Muslims, closely associating the word with concepts such as vegan, vegetarian and organic.

Traditionally, *halal* defines Islamically permissible items, and applies to products including foods, drinks and food additives. Dr. Mejova notes: "*Halal* is becoming a cool, lifestyle definition amongst social media users." She adds, "The data highlights Instagram posts that received thousands of likes for promoting *halal* fashion shows, *halal* fitness culture, *halal* movies and other lifestyle posts depicting clothes and stylish surroundings. What is also surprising is that posts mentioning some *halal* certification are likely to get fewer likes than those that don't."

Dr. Mejova noticed the number of posts mentioning the word *halal* was not strictly correlated with the population demographics of Muslims living in different countries, including the UK and the US: "When we are seeing *halal* used alongside local culture and habits, we know that the understanding of *halal* is changing in all of these places. On social media, it appears to have broadened to incorporate lifestyle elements."

The findings - recently published in the journal *Frontiers in Digital Humanities* - is useful to policy makers, producers of *halal* products, health professionals and religious scholars on how to effectively market *halal* goods. Dr. Mejova intends to build on her research by exploring how culture interacts with health-related behaviors, such as eating a healthy diet and going to the gym - to help devise better health campaigns. To read more about the research, follow this link: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fdigh.2017.00021/full>.

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Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development (QF), was founded in 2010 as a research-intensive university that acts as a catalyst for transformative change in Qatar and the region while having global impact. Located in Education City, HBKU is committed to building and cultivating human capacity through an enriching academic experience, innovative ecosystem, and unique partnerships. HBKU delivers multidisciplinary undergraduate and graduate programs through its colleges, and provides opportunities for research and scholarship through its institutes and centers. For more information about HBKU, visit www.hbku.edu.qa.