

Concept of Halal and Stand of Alcohol in Islam

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ABSTRACT

Alcohol is *haram*. This is the concept that I knew right from the onset, until in a class where the instructor said “Alcoholic drink is haram but ethanol is not in some instances”. This is new knowledge and hence led to the writing of this article. As a science student, alcohol is a group of organic compounds of which ethanol is a member of such group. Owing to its extensive usage within several industries such as food and beverage processing, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, automobile and continues to be a source of contention due to the controversy surrounding their inclusion in *halal* foods in Malaysia.

Keywords: Halal, Alcohol, Islam

DEFINITIONS OF TERM

Halal is a term exclusively and universally used in Islam which means permitted, permissible, lawful, legal, or allowed.

Haram or non-halal is opposite to *halal* which means prohibited, forbidden, unlawful or illegal.

Khamr means any material that can cause intoxication and can lead individual who consumes it to lose their capacity to control their thoughts and behaviour. *Khamr* is an Arabic word that originates from the verb *khamara* means “to shroud or “to cloud”. *Khamr* is therefore an intoxicating drink produced from grapes, barley, wheat, honey, dates and raisins.

Alcohol is a group of organic compounds that contain at least one hydroxyl functional group (-OH). Examples of alcohol include methanol, ethanol, propanol, butanol etc.

Ethanol is a form of alcohol and the primary active compound of alcoholic drinks. It is also found in foods, fragrances, and pharmaceuticals.

Fatwa on alcohol in Malaysia

The Fatwa Committee of the National Council for Malaysian Islamic Religious Affairs on July 14 to 16, 2011 revised the Fatwa on the usage of alcohol in food, beverages, medicines and perfumes as follows:

- All *khamr* consists of alcohol. However, not all alcohol is considered Alcohol that is derived from *khamr* production is impure (najs) and prohibited (haram).
- Alcohol produced from the *non-Khamr* industry is clean (not najs), but it is not permitted to drink it in its original form due to its toxicity, which can kill.
- Soft drinks that are produced with the intention of not producing *khamr* and consist of alcohol less

than 1% (v/v) are permissible for consumption.

- Soft drinks that are produced in the same process and intention of *khamr* making, whether it consists of a little or more alcohol or distilled alcohol are unlawful (*haram*).
- Natural alcohol-containing food or drinks such as fruits, nuts, grains or their juices, or alcohol produced as a by-product during the processing of food and drinks is permissible for consumption and considered not najis.
- Foods and drinks consisting of flavouring or colouring substances, that contain alcohol for stabilization purposes are allowed for consumption if the alcohol is not derived from the *khamr* source and the amount of alcohol in the finished product is not intoxicating and the level of alcohol does not exceed 0.5%.
- Alcohol containing medicines and perfumes (not from *khamr* source) that are utilised as a solvent are not najis.

Highlight

- The *halal* status of ethanol is based on its origin, amount and intention.
- Ethanol occurring naturally in foods and juices is considered to be *halal*.
- Ethanol as a preserving agent, generated by natural fermentation and an amount not more than 0.5% is considered
- Ethanol produced from *non-khamr* industry with the intention to be used as a beverage drink is considered *haram* but can be used in other chemical industries.

INTRODUCTION

The *halal and haram* concepts encompass every aspect of Muslim life. It incorporates not only halal products such as foods and beverages, but also human and animal welfare, social equity, and a sustainable environment. *Halalan tayyiban*, which means lawful and pure/wholesome/clean/free from impurities/healthy, represents an intolerance to hygiene, quality and safety, of food consumed by Muslims (Baharuddin, Kassim, Nordin, & Buyong, 2015). A halal product is suitable for Muslim consumption. Food, cosmetics, and even pharmaceuticals are examples. The practice is to add a halal logo on halal products so that Muslims may tell if the product is halal. For Muslims, halal represents more than a brand logo but encompasses Islamic faith and values (Wilson & Liu, 2010), and with Allah's permission, can transform the mind, feelings, soul, and human morals from darkness to God's direction.

Following the teachings of the Quran, consumption of all kind of foods are allowed apart from alcoholic beverages, blood, pork, carrion, and meat from animals that have not been slaughtered according to Islamic rulings. The Islamic jurisprudence refers to the term alcoholic foods or drinks (*khamr*), as any foods or drinks (beer, spirit, wine, etc.) that contain ethanol as the major ingredient and can intoxicate an individual (Davies, Cooke, Maier, Winstock, & Ferris, 2020). *Khamr* is najis (unclean) and is completely unlawful (*haram*; the opposite of *halal*) for Muslims according to AlQuranic verse:

They ask you about wine and gambling. Say, "In them is great sin and [yet, some] benefit for people. But their sin is greater than their benefit." And they ask you what they should spend. Say, "The excess [beyond needs]." Thus, Allah makes clear to you the verses [of revelation] that you might give thought (2:219)

Again, another verse stated:

O you who have believed, do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated until you know what you are saying or in a state of janabah, except those passing through [a place of prayer], until you have washed [your whole body]. And if you are ill or on a journey or one of you comes from the place of relieving himself or you have contacted women and find no water, then seek clean earth and wipe over your faces and your hands [with it]. Indeed, Allah is ever Pardoning and Forgiving (4:43)

Lastly:

O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, idols and drawing lots for decisions are all evil Satan's handiwork. So, shun them so you may be successful (Quran, 5:90).

Several Hadith of the prophet (SAW) not only prohibited intoxicants (even indirect usage in minute quantity) but cursed them from ten angles; The one who squeezes (the grapes etc.), the one who asks for it to be squeezed, the one for whom it is squeezed, the one who carries it, the one to whom it is carried, the one who sells it, the one for whom it is brought, the one who pours it, the one for whom it is poured, until he counted ten like this." Sunan Ibn Majah (Vol. 4, Book 30, Hadith 3381).

REASONS FOR PROHIBITION OF ALCOHOLIC DRINKS AND CONSEQUENCES

To unravel the reasons for the prohibition of alcoholic drinks and the possible consequences are

1. The first and foremost reason is the verses and hadith mentioned above. These verses were interpreted as intoxicants are forbidden. Moreover, the prohibition of alcohol in Islam is not only being an intoxicant but the fact that it can make Muslims forget their prayer in a state of intoxication. Thus, the Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS), as an Islamic organization, stated that the goal of alcoholic beverages unlawful, is "to protect the human intellectual ability because alcoholic beverages can damage mental consciousness and sanity" (MUIS,2005).
2. Incur the wrath of Allah; the punishment of Allah is on anyone who partakes or consciously devours in *haram* actions (Al-Qaradawi,1984; Wilson and Liu, 2010).
3. Supplication and *dua* may not be answered. This is based on the hadith of An-Nawawi's collection: ".....then he (prophet SAW) stated the case of a man who, having journeyed far, is untidy and covered in dust, and raised his hands towards the sky mentioning "O Lord! O Lord!" but his food is haram, his drink is haram, his clothing is haram, and he has been nourished with haram, so how can his supplication be answered? (Muslim)
3. Harmful effects on health, and addiction: alcohol usage has also been associated with more than 200 diseases and medical disorders, including disorders of the reproductive system and prenatal impairment, such as increased risk of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, premature, and underweight birth (Abel, 1997), lung diseases (Guidot & Hart, 2005), osteoporosis (Kogawa & Wada, 2005), cardiovascular diseases (Ellison, Rothman, Zhang, & Djoussé, 2005), mental and behavioural disorders (Rossow, 2000), larynx, oral cavity, pharynx, oesophagus, colon, liver, breast and rectum cancers (Baan et al., 2007), hypertension (Taylor et al., 2009), atrial fibrillation (Samokhvalov, Irving, & Rehm, 2010), haemorrhagic stroke (Patra et al., 2010), and death (Rehm, Zatonksi, Taylor, & Anderson, 2011). Although health issues and addiction are not explicitly mentioned in the Quran, scholars believe that there are significant compelling arguments and rationale behind the prohibition of alcoholic beverages.
4. The World Health Organization (WHO) stated that apart from the health consequences, there are significant economic and social losses to individuals and society at large.

ETHANOL: *KHAMR* AND *NON-KHAMR*

Ethanol is the substance that causes intoxication in *khamr*, but it does not necessarily mean it is *Khamr*. The use of ethanol generated from the *khamr* manufacturing process is *najs* and *haram*. The presence of ethanol in halal food and beverages, even in minute quantity, makes their consumption *haram* (Pauzi, Man,

Nawawi, & Abu-Hussin, 2019). It is considered *haram to include* ethanol sourced from the *khamr* industry or its by-products into food products even in small amounts. Under *halal* regulations and standards, some ethanol (*non-khamr*) that occurs in food and drink products is *halal*. Ethanol found naturally in food and beverages (fruits, juices, grains, etc.), and synthesized during fermentation of food and beverages (soy sauce, vinegar, kimchi, *tapai*, *budu*, *cencalok*, and *belacan* etc.) are not intoxicating (Mansur, Oh, Lee, & Oh, 2021). Furthermore, ethanol, generated from *non-khamr* commercial production, can be utilised in food and beverages production, given its utility in natural compounds extraction, from animal- and plant-based sources (Mansur et al., 2020; Mansur et al., 2021; Price, Fei, Clark, & Wang, 2018), preservation of food (Homaida, Yan, & Yang, 2016; Seo, Jeong, Han, Kang, & Ha, 2019), and processing of food (Cunha et al., 2020). This ethanol can also be utilised in the halal industry of foods and drinks. Then, from a religious standpoint, the halal compliance of such products will determine by the usage and intention of the product.

The percentage of permitted ethanol must, however, fulfil the Halal Certification Body's criteria (HCB). The Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS), and the Assessment Institute for Foods, Drugs, and Cosmetics of the Indonesian Council of Ulama (LPPOM MUI), are among the major HCBs that have established ethanol tolerance levels in halal foods and beverages. Ethanol level ranges from 0.1% to 1% and this is dependent on the HCB, ethanol source, and kind of product (LPPOM MUI, 2018; Mansur et al., 2021; Pauzi et al., 2019). Although there are certain conditions in which the addition of ethanol into food and drinks is allowed, Islam completely forbids alcoholic drinks or beverages. Inclusion of slightest amount of alcoholic drinks into food and drinks will render them *haram* impermissible (Riaz and Chaudry, 2004; National Fatwa Council of Malaysia, 2011). The *halal* and *haram* status of a certain product is determined by the ingredients, nature, origin and food processing (Riaz and Chaudry, 2004; Bonne and Verbeke 2008) and also the subject of concern of *halal* products. To consider a certain product as *halal*, all ingredients must be acquired from a *halal* origin. Producers have to take into consideration not only the main ingredient but other minor ingredients that are added to stabilize or to standardize the main ingredient as well (Bonne & Verbeke, 2008).

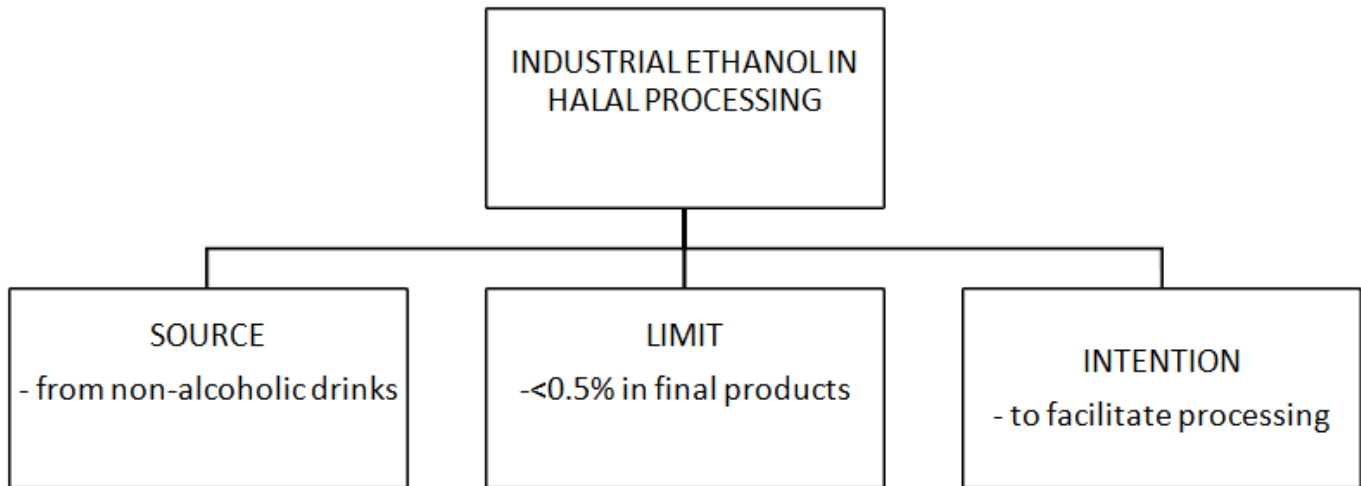
As a recreational drink, alcohol is strictly prohibited in Islam (even in minute quantity). In the food sector, however, ethanol used in extraction, precipitation, and dissolving processes is permitted if the amount of ethanol left in the finished product is insignificant (Riaz and Chaudry, 2004). This is supported by the 2011 ruling from the National Fatwa Council of Malaysia, confirming that for processing of food, utilization of industrial ethanol is *halal* (permissible), if it is derived from non-intoxicants and if the residual ethanol in the end products is below 0.5%. This ruling shows that the factors that determine the *halal* of ethanol in the production of *halal* food are the source (excluding alcoholic beverages), the intention (solely for facilitating the food process) and the final concentration in the food products (below 0.5%).

Apart from the consumption of alcohol directly, eating or drinking foods manufactured with alcoholic drinks, such as cakes containing brandy, or spiked punch is strictly *haram* or forbidden (Riaz and Chaudry, 2004). This agrees with a statement made by the 8th Jurisprudence Council in Kuwait in 1995, which states that: "Any food OR drinks that contains alcoholic drinks, even in minimal amount, its consumption is prohibited" based on Islamic law, which prohibits the consumption of anything made from alcoholic drinks, in large or small quantities (Medical Jurisprudence Council, 1995). For flavouring purposes, the inclusion of alcohol into food and drinks is prohibited, even in processes that will lead to only minute levels of ethanol left in the food or an amount that will not cause intoxication (Salam, 2003).

Industrial production of ethanol is from two methods: ethylene hydration and biological or natural fermentation of a carbohydrate food. The principal technique used in the industrial production of ethanol (synthetic alcohol) is ethylene hydration. It is a highly pure and refined substance that is mostly used as a solvent for several substances and in perfumes, paints, explosives and lacquer production. Whereas

fermentation is the primary method to produce fermented foods and beverage alcohol. Both industrial ethanols are permissible in *halal* food processing when used with the right intention and provided that the amount of ethanol in the final product is not above 0.5% (in Malaysia) (National Fatwa Council of Malaysia, 2011).

Figure 1. Requirement for the usage of industrial ethanol in the production of *halal* Food Malaysia



Source: The National Fatwa Council of Malaysia (2011)

There was no religious ruling regarding the *halal* limit of ethanol in Malaysia by the National Fatwa Council of Malaysia, before 15 July 2011 (Anis Najiha,2012). The permissible amount of naturally occurring ethanol in soft drinks is less than 1%, and in food products, where during processing ethanol is added intentionally, then the final ethanol content, must be below 0.5% (National Fatwa Council of Malaysia, 2011). Therefore, the usage of industrial ethanol is permissible in the food industry of Malaysia as the source, the limit and the intention are in line with this decree.

Naturally occurring ethanol in trace levels is acceptable because it is unavoidable (Riaz and Chaudry, 2004). Furthermore, the National Fatwa Council of Malaysia (1984) issued a ruling that concluded that food that contains ethanol as a processing by-product is *halal*. In 2011, the council additionally ruled that food or drinks containing naturally occurring ethanol, such as grains, nuts, fruits, and juices, are considered pure, and are *halal* for Muslims. This ruling further applies to food or drinks that contain minute amounts of ethanol as fermentation by-products, such as *cencaluk* and *tapai*. In Malaysia, there is no *halal* limit on the amount of natural ethanol in *halal* food or drink, which is in contrast with other Muslim countries such as Brunei and Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

The principle that not all ethanol is *khamr* will give a better understanding of the status of ethanol in Malaysia and the world at large. Due to the occurrence of ethanol in food and beverages naturally and its application in food, pharmaceutical, cosmetics and other industries, ethanol in minute quantity has been made *halal* in Malaysia with bound regulations from HCBs such as the source, intention, usage, nature of major and minor ingredients, processing, packaging, distribution as well as *halal* limits.

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