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Non-Muslim Perceptions of Halal Muslim Life Style in Manado City and Its Influence on Social Distance

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Abstract

Halal food/drink is food or beverages that do not contain haram food or drink ingredients (especially pork and khamr) according to Islamic law. In Indonesia, consuming halal food is one of the essential identities of a Muslim, which has recently been strengthened through public regulations. This strengthening of religious identity, especially among the Muslim minority, might create social distance characterized by Muslims' limiting or avoiding contact with non-Muslims. While previous research found social distance exists in Muslim minorities towards non-Muslims, this research explains the lack of social distance among majority non-Muslims towards minority Muslims. Using mixed quantitative and qualitative methods, through survey, observations and interviews with 50 respondents in Manado, this research found that social distance towards the "strengthening" of halal identity among Muslims is hardly seen among Christian respondents. The fact that Muslims have restrictions on consuming non-halal food, while Minahasa Christians do not have such equal restrictions on consuming Muslim food, confirms the quantitative data. In contrast to Muslims, who have restrictions on consuming non-halal food, Minahasan Christians do not have restrictions



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on consuming Muslim (halal) food. This study strengthens the argument that the “halal” identity creates social distance in Manado society among Muslims towards others and not vice versa.

Keywords: halal food, religious identity, social distance

Abstrak

Makanan/minumam halal ialah makanan atau minuman yang tidak mengandung bahan haram makanan atau minuman yang diharamkan (terutama daging babi dan khamr) menurut hukum Islam. Mengonsumsi makanan halal adalah salah satu identitas penting seorang Muslim yang akhir-akhir ini diperkuat lewat aturan-aturan publik. Penguatan identitas tersebut terutama yang terjadi di kalangan minoritas Muslim memungkinkan terjadinya peningkatan jarak sosial yang ditandai dengan pembatasan atau penghindaran kontak dengan non Muslim. Sementara pada riset terdahulu jarak sosial ditemukan di kalangan minoritas Muslim terhadap non-Muslim, riset ini menjelaskan rendahnya jarak sosial tersebut di kalangan non-Muslim terhadap Muslim yang diakibatkan oleh penguatan identitas makanan halal. Menggabungkan metode kuantitatif dan kualitatif; melalui survey, observasi dan wawancara dengan 50 responden di Manado. Riset ini menemukan rendahnya jarak sosial di kalangan responden Kristen terhadap “penguatan” identitas halal di kalangan Muslim. Kebalikan Muslim yang mempunyai restriksi mengonsumsi makanan non halal, orang Kristen Minahasa tidak mempunyai restriksi mengonsumsi makanan (halal) Muslim. Kajian ini memberikan penguatan argumen bahwa identitas “halal” menciptakan jarak sosial di masyarakat Manado di kalangan Muslim terhadap yang lain dan tidak sebaliknya.

Keyword: makanan halal, identitas keagamaan, jarak sosial

INTRODUCTION

Strengthening the expression of identity (prominence) of a religion is often considered to threaten the harmony of a multicultural society. These reinforcements, interpreted as highlighting a group's cultural expression, can have consequences for competition, societal division, and even social conflict. Unhealthy relationships between different social groups, which begin with the highlighting of symbols of religious and ethnic identity, often lead to mutual silence and unwillingness to interact, creating social distance, which can escalate into social prejudice in the future. This research aims to test the assumptions and theories above regarding societal divisions caused by the prominence of Islamic identity symbols (halal) in the Manado area. In the context of multicultural community relations, where Muslims are a minority group, this study is limited to expressions of lifestyle and halal consumption practices of Muslim communities in the city of Manado. By looking at the perceptions of non-Muslim communities, this research wants to confirm whether it is true that the strong expression of a halal lifestyle is creating divisions in the multicultural community in the city of Manado.

The word ‘halal’ comes from Arabic and is usually translated as “something that is permitted” (Lada, Harvey Tanakinjal, and Amin 2009). Acceptance and basic understanding of halal is at the core of every Muslim's beliefs (Wilson and Liu 2010). Although the word ‘halal’ defines anything permissible or lawful according to the Qur'an, it is most commonly used in the context of acceptable food. Prohibited or unlawful foods, such as pork and alcohol, are known as ‘haram’. Halal foods are clearly labeled or certified by an approved certification body (Jamal and Sharifuddin 2015). Specific requirements throughout the food

production process must be met to obtain halal certification, including slaughter, storage, preparation, display, and overall cleanliness (Haque et al. 2015)

Halal in Islamic teachings is limited to consumer products and industry. It includes the origin of the materials used to make products such as shoes, bags, or clothing. In addition, the concept of halal in Islamic teachings is not only limited to finished or ready-to-consume products but also includes the process of making or processing a product until the final product is ready to be marketed or consumed (Ahmed et al. 2019).

It needs to be certified by the relevant agency/institution to obtain halal status for a product or service. Obtaining a halal certificate will ensure that the process and sourcing of a product or service are permissible and free from questionable sources (Rezai et al. 2012). Producing halal-certified products or services will guarantee the production of quality products or services compared to products or services that are not halal-certified as halal-certified products or services tend to meet the quality standards outlined by the respective bodies/institutions (Talib and Ali 2009).

The recent aspiration of the halal concept as a halal labeling or certification program seems to promote a single conception. It ignores “other” halal conceptions and practices that have been in force for a long time in Muslim communities in Indonesia. (see Amin, Ali, Semmawi 2022). In the case of animal meat, there are additional conditions, that is, slaughtered in the Islamic way. Apart from pork and khamr, there are many different opinions and practices among Muslims regarding what they can and cannot consume, including non-intoxicating alcoholic beverages and meat from animals slaughtered by non-Muslims (Hasyim 2022). However, recently, in the era of halal “positivism,” the category of non-halal food status, for example, is often taken for granted in all types of processed materials such as food, cosmetics, medicines containing pork and its derivatives, alcohol in general, as well as the meat of halal animals slaughtered by non-Muslims (Indonesian Ulema Council 2009). The recent formalization of halal has even been positivized in “halal science,” which has almost no history before the 21st century.

In the world of halal science, recently, for example, there has been an opinion that food containing gelatin (a delicacy or preservative), whatever the level, if it comes from or contains pork, is haram. Halal meat is also limited in definition to Islam as the religion of the slaughterer. Because this conception is quite popular abroad, such as in Australia and Japan, many Indonesian students are very selective in choosing halal food within the strict definition limits above. Hence, they tend to hide from interacting with the local community and choose only fellow Muslims or fellow Indonesians (Amen 2022). It is a recent phenomenon because, before the 1980s, Muslims in Europe and America reportedly consumed beef, chicken, and lamb even though non-Muslims were slaughtering them (Bergeaud-Blackler et al. 2015).

This research uses a combined approach of quantitative and qualitative methods with a range of questionnaire data collection and observations from February 2022 to July 2022. Quantitative analysis is in the first phase; then analysis is in the second phase of qualitative

data, which characterizes a sequential explanatory design (Creswell 2003). The first step is a quantitative analysis of non-Muslim perceptions collected through a research questionnaire with 2 variables: Perception of halal food (independent variable) and Social Distance between Muslim and non-Muslim communities (dependent variable).

Primary data was collected using an online Google Form survey, and 50 respondents were selected based on the random sampling method. The number of respondents was obtained through survey invitations conducted online to church congregations in Manado during the research period, which was from February to July 2022. The number of respondents to the church congregation survey was adjusted to their estimated population size, as depicted in the respondent's church affiliation table.

The second stage was collecting primary data for qualitative analysis using in-depth interviews with five (5) Christians and Catholics selected and determined using the purposive sampling method. Participants were selected according to the criteria specified by the researchers, namely non-Muslims with Muslim relatives, friends, or family who are often involved in meetings that involve eating together. The sample also represents different genders, ages, educational backgrounds, and church denominations.

This research collected data using survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews with predetermined respondents. Likert scale statements measure all latent constructs in the conceptual model, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. All scales used were previously validated in the literature.

Statistically, this research tests the normality of data distribution to ensure that the data collected is usually distributed. Then, it tests the validity to ensure that the question items distributed to respondents can be used as valid and reliable measuring tools. The next stage is to carry out a regression test to see whether there is an influence between non-Muslim perceptions of the Muslim halal lifestyle in the city of Manado, especially in eating together between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Because this is mixed research, apart from quantitative data, researchers also conducted in-depth interviews with predetermined respondents. The interviews were conducted to discover how eating together involves Muslims and non-Muslims, what attitudes non-Muslims have toward Muslim halal living behavior, and whether the Muslim halal concept influences daily social behavior with non-Muslims.

RESEARCH SETTINGS

Halal Settings and Social Disunity

Manado has a multicultural society, necessitating encounters between different ethnicities and religions. Muslims in the city of Manado are a minority population among the majority Christians. On the one hand, Islamic teachings regarding halal food demand that they be implemented. On the other hand, they are among non-Muslim communities

who consume pork. As a minority, as in the case of Singapore, Muslims are required to apply Islamic principles in terms of consuming halal food. However, on the other hand, as city residents, we are also familiar with and involved in social integration efforts and avoid social segregation, which creates insecurity in relations between different ethnicities and religions..

Social Distance Concept

One way to understand the theory of social distance can be achieved by understanding the opposite term (antonym), namely social intimacy, which is similar to Bryan Turner's concept of ritual intimacy. According to Turner, the ritual of intimacy is an individual or social action that describes the intimacy (closeness) of relations between groups. *Rituals* of intimacy can be briefly defined as behavior or actions that express religious norms and practices as part of a sign of loyalty or religious piety/tradition in various contexts that can be ambiguous, contradictory, or even dangerous (Nasir and Pereira 2008). Rituals of intimacy are often expressed in order to show group solidarity among minorities or even the majority who are oppressed by minorities. In many minority groups, it is expected to find symbols or practices that demonstrate a strong group identity.

On the one hand, even though the ritual of intimacy means strengthening internal group cohesion, it carries out exclusion (alienation) of other groups (Tajfel and Turner 2023). We can see this in minority groups such as Salafis in Muslim society in Indonesia. Salafi congregations practice strict, even extreme, religious norms to show strong social solidarity among their group. Staying on the other side excludes people outside their group. Carrying out rituals of intimacy in a group can mean widening the social distance for other groups. For example, female members of Salafi congregations who wear the niqab in a pluralistic society indirectly strengthen their group identity rather than promoting greater integration or cohesion of the plural group. Women wearing niqabs amid people who do not wear niqabs can be interpreted as creating a transparent barrier (distance) between "us and them." It is as if there is an exclusive statement: "You are not one of us." While exclusivism strengthens cohesion in internal groups, it simultaneously strengthens exclusivism for outsiders, which has the potential for excess disintegration and social conflict. Social exclusion (Turner) can be traced to the social distance theory, introduced by Robert E. Park in 1924 and later developed by Bogardus in 1936 (Nix 1993).

According to both, social distance can be considered closeness (and division) with outside groups (Nix 1993). social distance is very concerned with the frequency and intensity of interactions between two groups. The more often two different groups interact, the closer they become socially. The sociological theory of work relations states that the frequency of ties between groups shows the strengths and weaknesses of the relationship between the two (Dyer, n.d.). This theory implies that the less frequently they interact, the more distant the two groups are. Multiculturalism engineering policies in many countries like Singapore follow this theory. Following Bogardus (1936), social distance in this proposal is defined as a condition where a plural society is divided, not mixed, because of differences in race,

religion, political affiliation, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Dining culture is often found in Indonesian society because it has a solid social function that brings together community members, even from different religions. Segregating oneself from other groups because of halal food issues can be one way that dining culture does not function as ideally.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Manado City Multicultural Society

Kawanua is another term that marks a geographical and cultural bond between Manadonese people. Nothing is unique in Manado, especially in terms of social life here. The residents of this city consist of tribes and ethnicities, which makes life more lively and busy. Most of the residents of the town of Manado are composed of the Minahasa, Gorontalo, and Mongondow tribes, which are the majority tribes in the North Sulawesi region are spread out and come from areas around the city of Manado, such as Minahasa, Bolaangmongondow, and Gorontalo. At the same time, others are a combination consisting of the Bugis or Makasar people (South Sulawesi), Javanese, and Minang (Padang). Apart from that, there are also people of "Chinese" descent who live in Chinatown villages (Chinese villages) and people of Arab descent who live in Arab villages located right next to each other. However, the city of Manado, quantitatively or statistically, is always identified with the Minahasa tribe as the majority of the population of Manado City.

Minahasan people in Manado generally come from areas around the city of Manado, such as Tondano, Tomohon, South Minahasa, North Minahasa and Southeast Minahasa. For most city residents, identifying Minahasan people and those who still have Minahasan bloodlines can be seen by looking at the physical characteristics that appear so clearly, especially women: light white skin that more closely resembles the skin color of Europeans such as the Portuguese or Dutch. Minahasan people here are often called "mountain people," meaning they come from the mountainous Minahasa area, such as Tondano and Tomohon. In the months approaching Christmas, Minahasan people usually "go down the mountain" (a term traditionally given by Manadonese to Minahasan people) to Manado to buy supplies for Christmas. Not only that, but many also come from far from Minahasa for trading ahead of major holidays, such as Eid al-Fitr, Christmas, and New Year. They usually build stalls along the roads, especially in the city center and around the Manado National Unity Park (TKB). The majority of Minahasa people, both in Manado and in the Greater Minahasa district (North Minahasa, Main Minahasa, Southeast Minahasa, South Minahasa), are Protestant Christians associated with the local GMIM Church (Gereja Masehi Evangelical in Minahasa). However, there are also churches and other churches, such as Adventist and Pentecostal, although there are Catholics among most Christians and Muslims.

Sample Description Based on Church Demonization

Church Denomination	Amount	Percentage
GBI	2	4.0
Baptist Church	1	2.0
Evangelical Church	1	2.0
Old Church	1	2.0
GMAHK	1	2.0
GMIM-Calvinist	4	8.0
GMIM-Lutheran	20	40.0
GPDI	8	16.0
Interdomination	1	2.0
Catholic	9	18.0
Charismatic	1	2.0
Malesung	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

Based on the statistical data, most respondents were GMIM congregations (24 respondents). 9 respondents (18%) were Catholics, and 8 (16%) belonged to the GPDI church. The remaining 2% of the population each represents church denominations, which include GBI, Baptist Church, Evangelical Church, Old Church, GMAHK, Interdomination, Charismatic Church, and Malesung.

Non-Muslim Perceptions about Halal, and Social Distance: Quantitative data

The following are the results of the normality test of respondent data processed using SPSS statistical tools

Data Normality Test

Variable	Statistics	Df	Significance
Social Distancing	0.954	50	0.132

This research uses the Normality test. Researchers must check whether the data to be analyzed represents a symmetric distribution before applying parametric tests. For this reason, several conditions must be checked. If all conditions are met, parametric tests can be performed to check the research hypothesis. Because the statistical sample used was 50, the normality test used in this research was the Shapiro-Wilk test.

The basis for making decisions on the Normality Test using Shapiro-Wilk is as follows:

- If the Sig value. < Research Alpha (0.05), the data is not normally distributed.
- If the Sig value. > Research Alpha (0.05), then the data is usually distributed.

The research alpha used is generally 5% (0.05). Meanwhile, the Sig value is 0.954 using Shapiro-Wilk for the sample. Based on this data, the data is a Normally Distributed Sample based on the Shapiro-Wilk Technique. Thus, the data analyzed is free from bias in the sample assessment categories.

Reliability Test

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.716	25

Reliability testing is essential in a research flow because it will determine whether the measuring instruments used are reliable or consistent in measuring (Huck 2007). A research measuring instrument is trustworthy or consistent in measuring if the questionnaire items used can measure the same construct (Robinson et al. 2008). The Cronbach Alpha coefficient value is the consistency standard for measuring instruments most commonly used in testing. Cronbach's Alpha value is the most appropriate measure of reliability when using a Likert scale, the measurement scale used in this research (Robinson 2008). The reliability coefficient value is a minimum of 0.70 (Robinson 2008).

Based on the reliability test results, the resulting Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.716, which means it is greater than Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.70. Thus, it can be concluded that the research instrument used is reliable as a measuring tool for assessing non-Muslim perceptions of halal lifestyle as the dependent variable.

Data Validity

Items	R count	R table	Status
1	0.464	0.284	Valid
2	0.507	0.284	Valid
3	0.468	0.284	Valid
4	0.510	0.284	Valid
5	0.330	0.284	Valid
6	0.359	0.284	Valid
7	0.351	0.284	Valid
8	0.402	0.284	Valid
9	0.379	0.284	Valid
10	0.341	0.284	Valid
11	0.435	0.284	Valid
12	0.413	0.284	Valid
13	0.302	0.284	Valid
14	0.331	0.284	Valid
15	0.329	0.284	Valid
16	0.463	0.284	Valid
17	0.389	0.284	Valid

18	0.331	0.284	Valid
19	0.335	0.284	Valid
20	0.361	0.284	Valid
21	0.341	0.284	Valid
22	0.448	0.284	Valid
23	0.333	0.284	Valid
24	0.285	0.284	Valid
25	0.330	0.284	Valid

A validity test is a test that functions to see whether a measuring instrument is valid (valid) or invalid. The significance level used in this research is 0.05. The test criteria are:

- H₀ is accepted if $r_{\text{count}} > r_{\text{table}}$ (the measuring instrument used is valid)
- H_i is accepted if $r_{\text{statistic}} \leq r_{\text{table}}$. (the measuring instrument used is invalid)

With a value of $df=48$, the r table value is 0.284. From the validity test results, all items have a value of > 0.284 , so it can be concluded that all questionnaire items are valid. These results explain that all questionnaire statements are valid to be used as measuring tools in research to determine respondents' perceptions.

Regression Test

Testing Model	Mark	Significance
Hypothesis	1,484	0.144
Coefficient of Determination	20.9	0.144

Hypothesis testing in this research uses Simple Regression analysis to determine whether the independent variable, namely the perception of non-Muslims (X), significantly affects the dependent variable, social distance (Y). The results of the regression analysis can be known by testing as follows:

- Determining Hypothesis

H₀ : There is a significant influence between non-Muslim perceptions of social life/social distance.

H_i : There is no significant influence between non-Muslim perceptions of social life/social distance.
- Compare the significance level (p-value), with the error.

If the significance is > 0.05 , then H_i is accepted, and H₀ is rejected

If the significance < 0.05 , then H₀ is accepted, and H_i is rejected

Based on the regression test, the hypothesis test value obtained was 1.484 with a significance of 0.144 $>$ a significance value of 0.05. It can be concluded that there is no influence between non-Muslim perceptions of Muslim halal lifestyles on social life or social distance.

The coefficient of determination value obtained was 20.9 or 29.90%. It means that the variable non-Muslim perception of the Muslim halal lifestyle contributes 20.90% to social distance in daily life. Meanwhile, the remaining 70.10% is determined by other variables that are not in this study. It also means that social relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in Manado do not experience segregation or conflict due to consumption model issues.

Non-Muslim Perceptions of Halal Lifestyle; Qualitative Data

The majority of residents of the provincial capital, Manado, surrounding districts, and small towns are ethnic Minahasans, a group consisting of several sub-ethnic groups native to the highlands of the region. Minahasa ethnicity is mainly Protestant, resulting in overlapping ethnic and religious belonging. Catholics comprise only about 4 percent of the province's population, and most are ethnic Minahasans. Muslims constitute 33 percent of the province's population and come from various ethnic backgrounds, some from the wider region (Bolaang-Mongondow, Gorontalo), and others present from recent historical and cultural migration (Larson 2022).

Islamic-Christian relations play an essential role in Manado's diversity and social development. As the majority population in Manado, Islamic-Christian relations, both socially, politically, and religiously, have encouraged the creation of creative and productive relationships. Relations between religions are not built on differences in religious theology, which never find common ground; dialogue and cooperation are instead directed towards work that involves all socio-religious elements for a common social goal. Sectarian issues are not very popular with the people of Manado City; The law of saying it is haram for Christmas or Islamic law is not very popular here. The foundations of tolerance built for a long time are not easily destroyed by sectoral issues that have the potential for conflict and give rise to divisions and social tensions.

In this research, apart from using statistical analysis involving 50 participants, researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 5 respondents (out of the 50 survey respondents). The interviews aimed to explore qualitative narratives about non-Muslim perceptions of Muslim halal food. The number of respondents is not intended as a sample (percentage) of the research object population but rather the availability of incidental respondents who provide explanations. In contrast to survey respondents who were taken randomly to show their perceptions regarding Muslim halal food, interview respondents involved respondents who frequently interacted with Muslims.

The respondents selected were those with Muslim friends or family who had experience holding meals together at celebrations or certain events involving Muslim friends or colleagues. The reason for selecting respondents with the criteria of having Muslim friends or family was because the researchers considered the factor of involvement or experience with Muslim family or friends, especially the experience of eating together. Respondents who

have Muslim friends or family have more experience related to eating together, especially at formal events at work, in the office, or at religious holiday celebrations held by non-Muslims.

Shared food activities are essential for capturing non-Muslim perceptions of the halal concept in Islam and how these perceptions influence patterns of social relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in the city of Manado. Therefore, food in this research is not just a dish but a form of representation of personal and cultural identity. Food is the language we use to convey to others and ourselves who we are. More than just food, food is an expression of identity (Anderson et al. 2021).

Like the results of an interview with Glori Batuallo, a 24-year-old Catholic woman, in Glori's view, while hanging out with Muslim colleagues, the perception of halal food for Muslims is that their religion regulates food regarding what they can and cannot eat. As Glori understands, this provision includes pork, dog meat, or other foods that Christians can typically consume.

In her daily social environment, Glori usually provides two kinds of dishes when she holds a party or celebration. These dishes contain non-halal food, such as pork or dog, and provide halal food in a separate place for friends. -Muslim friends She invited. However, according to Glori, so far, there has never been a problem with eating together with Muslim friends, and food issues have never caused any social distance. According to Glori, this could also be due to mutual trust.

Another interesting view the author obtained from respondent Fernando Ganggali, a 25-year-old Catholic youth. Fernando, called Nando, explained how social interactions with Muslim friends, especially food issues. Nando himself grew up among the majority Muslim community in an area located in the northern part of Manado.

In Nando's view, in Islam, there is such a thing as halal and haram food. In Nando's view, haram food is food or drink that Muslims should not consume, such as eating pork or dog. In Nando's circle of friends, he has Muslim friends who practice Islamic teachings differently. Some of his friends do not even mind when Nando eats dishes containing pork in front of them; according to him, others have extreme views on food issues. They even limit themselves to certain events that involve eating together with non-Muslims. However, such incidents do not necessarily create conflict or social distance in everyday interactions. It can be seen in social relations and relationships after the incident. Nando and his Muslim friends still socialized as usual, hanging out together and eating together at food places in the mall.

Candra Meko, a 46-year-old private worker, told another experience. Candra said that when he was a child until he was a teenager, he lived in Gorontalo in a community that was predominantly Muslim. So, since childhood, Candra has been used to living with Muslims, even though their family is Christian. In his experience of living together in a Muslim community, Candra admits that he has never faced social conflict related to Muslim lifestyle, way of dressing, or even food issues.

Candra revealed that Muslims have a halal concept regarding food consumption and respect the Islamic teachings they follow. For this reason, according to Candra, halal certification is necessary. Of course, because Muslims make up the majority of the Muslim population, the majority of Muslims can practice their religious teachings in peace. On the other hand, according to Candra, a halal certificate is needed so that there are no misunderstandings among Muslims regarding their consumption of halal food.

Food as a social identity is also visible in the results of interviews with respondent Shania Wuwung (Christian). Shania, a barista in one of the well-known coffee shops in Manado City, shares exciting social life experiences with Muslim friends. In Shania's understanding, halal Muslim food is food that does not contain pork, both in the cooking and serving processes. Shania shared her experience of hanging out with Muslim friends. Several Muslim friends also consumed alcohol. Even though they know that alcohol is also haram, as is pork.

Shania herself has personal experience regarding interactions with Muslims, for example, in celebrations at home or several events involving both Muslim and non-Muslim guests. During celebrations of such events, when inviting Muslims to an event that involves eating together, they are usually served separate foods, namely food containing pork or dog, and a table marked "national food" that Muslims can consume. The table is not written for Muslims, but "national dishes" explain why most Indonesians consume national foods.

A similar experience was also shared by Sharon (Kristen), an 18-year-old Samratulangi University student. Sharon is a member of the GPMI Elim church. In an interview with Sharon, she revealed she has had much experience with Muslim friends. Usually, they hold events such as birthdays or graduation celebrations and invite Muslim friends to attend. They provide non-halal dishes, pork, and halal Indonesian or national dishes for Muslim guests at events like that.

Based on Sharon's experience, when they invite Muslim friends to attend an event, most of them come. His Muslim friends did not mind the dishes provided because they knew halal national food would be provided for Muslim guests. As far as her experience goes, Sharon revealed that when hanging out with Muslim friends, there have never been any misunderstandings or social distance created in relationships because of food issues.

In this context, amidst the mixed cultural and ethnic diversity in Manado, food has become a religious and cultural identity marker. Culture, race, and ethnicity are closely related to Social identity, which is vital in studying food and food practices because it allows researchers to understand how individuals make food choices. Cooking and eating practices are often not only symbolic but also natural and concrete ways that ethnic identity is preserved by migrants in multicultural societies (D'Sylva and Beagan 2011). There is a strong desire to preserve one's culture through food practices, especially when one's culture is not the dominant culture in that society (Beoku-Betts 1995). Food is also used to give meaning to oneself (Fischler 1988), making food practices not only practical decisions influenced by access, environment, and nutritional needs but also decisions that are fundamentally social,

cultural, and psychological (Rozin 1980).

Most Muslims will be careful when consuming dishes to avoid contamination with non-halal foods. In a pluralistic society such as Manado, pork is widely used in Christian dishes, as most residents of Manado. For such reasons, halal food and a halal lifestyle not only acquire religious meaning but also represent the strong identity and ethnicity of the Muslim minority in the city of Manado.

Although most Muslims are required to follow the teachings of their religion strictly, they are also made to feel comfortable eating together in environments that are not completely halal, such as in the city of Manado, which also provides halal food. Research by Nasir and Pereira (2008), quoted by Marranci (2012), refers to practices like this as defensive dining.

Other studies support findings regarding the practice of eating together as a social cohesion strategy between Muslims and non-Muslims, especially in communities where Muslims are a minority, such as in Manado. Mokhtar and Tat Yao (Khalek et al. 2019) conducted studies about the experience of eating halal together and its impact on social cohesion in Malaysia. Although differences in eating can affect social cohesion, they are not a significant barrier to social cohesion. Muslims and non-Muslims are free to maintain eating practices by religious teachings without offending the practices of other religions.

Another study conducted by Geetha Reddy and Rob M. van Dam (Reddy and van Dam 2020) showing that different food practices are presented in the national imagination and can coexist harmoniously is a note in understanding why food identities and practices take different forms from other multicultural societies around the world. Food practices in Singapore thus facilitate the creation of a hybrid and superordinate identity – the Singaporean food identity. Since food is often at the heart of intercultural contact, especially in a country like Singapore that proudly claims its food diversity, intermingling different food practices also leads to creating and maintaining a strong national identity. Food and the practice of eating together serve as a communicative act that fosters ethnic and religious identity; thus, sharing the practice of eating together becomes an essential part of identity and daily life for Muslims and non-Muslims.

CONCLUSION

Quantitative and qualitative data from this research shows that the expression of halal identity by Muslim communities does not create division or social distance from non-Muslim communities. The moment of eating together at an event does not significantly cause disputes between Muslims and non-Muslims. It also indicates that Muslim-non-Muslim relations in Manado are not affected due to different perceptions about food consumption between Muslims and non-Muslims in Manado.

The statistical findings in this research are in line with the qualitative narrative structure regarding the lack of relevance of social distance among non-Muslims towards Muslims due to the lifestyle or halal consumption practices among Muslims. The unique context

of Manado's multicultural society, which has strong roots, namely "different but still interacting," explains that food-eating interactions provide an opportunity to get to know each other and perceive each other, including the halal food traditions of Muslims. On the other hand, the familiar understanding of Muslims regarding the habits of local people (Minahasa-Christians) who consume non-halal food means that many of them can maintain social interactions when eating together.

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