

Creative Economy on the Halal Culinary Industry in the ASEAN Region

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Abstract

The rapid growth of the halal culinary sector in the ASEAN region presents significant opportunities to enhance competitiveness through the integration of creative economy principles. Despite strong potential driven by Muslim tourism, technological advancement, and increasing awareness of halal certification, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) continue to face major challenges, including limited product innovation, inadequate use of digital marketing, weak branding, and constrained access to financing. This study adopts a descriptive-analytical qualitative approach, utilizing secondary data from reputable academic journals, official ASEAN policy documents, and relevant studies published over the last decade. The findings reveal that the creative economy contributes to strengthening trust and stability within the halal supply chain through the adoption of advanced technologies such as blockchain, the Internet of Things (IoT), and artificial intelligence (AI). Moreover, product innovation, environmentally friendly packaging, supply chain digitalization, and culinary diplomacy among ASEAN countries further enhance the resilience of the halal culinary ecosystem. Digital branding and storytelling strategies are also shown to improve transparency and consumer trust. Nevertheless, challenges remain in the form of unequal technology adoption, variations in halal certification standards, and limited financial access for SMEs. This study concludes that the creative economy not only reinforces the competitiveness of the halal culinary industry but also positions ASEAN as a potential global hub for halal business.

Keywords: *halal culinary industry; creative economy; ASEAN; halal supply chain; SMEs*

Introduction

The creative economy is a theory in the new economic period that focuses on information and creativity by utilizing ideas and human resource expertise as factors of production. The creative economy is driven by the use of inspiration and creativity in the production of goods and services with a high level of creativity in terms of both input and output (Florida & Adler, 2020). The halal industry has a significant impact on Islamic investment, including the rapidly growing halal tourism sector. According to the 2019 Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) study, there were 25 million Muslim visitors in 2000, 98 million in 2010, and 140 million in 2018, with total spending of USD 40 billion. It is estimated that there will be 160 million Muslim tourists traveling in 2020 and 230 million in 2026, with total spending of USD 300 billion (Purnama et al., 2021).

Opportunities for developing the halal culinary sector are abundant in the ASEAN region, where the creative economy is growing rapidly. The creative economy, which combines design, technology, and ideas, is a major force in the development of value-added products and unique customer experiences (Rodrigues-Ferreira et al., 2023). On the other hand, the large Muslim population and growing global awareness of halal certification are driving the growth of the halal culinary sector. The creative economy is a sector that combines ideas, design, and technology, and is a major force in development. Halal culinary MSMEs in the ASEAN region have great potential, but there are still weaknesses in utilizing creativity, innovation, and digital marketing strategies to maximize the competitiveness and added value of the halal culinary industry. This is due to the growth of Muslim tourism, technological advances, and increasing awareness of halal certification. The gap between the aspirations of the innovative halal sector as the foundation of ASEAN's competitiveness and the reality on the ground, which shows a lack of widespread adoption of halal management, innovation, and technology, is caused by these conditions (Khairuddin et al., 2024).

In an ideal world, the ASEAN halal culinary sector should be able to leverage the enormous potential of halal tourism and the expansion of the creative economy to drive product innovation, digitize marketing, and increase international recognition of halal restaurants. The capacity and resources to fully integrate innovation, technology, and halal certification are still lacking in many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). As a result, there is a gap between the enormous potential and the current situation, which is still limited to meeting the most basic consumer needs. The relationship between the creative economy and halal businesses has been the subject of several

studies, but further research is still needed to fill some gaps. The harmonization of halal regulations among ASEAN countries remains a significant obstacle to improving cross-border competitiveness, even though strategic planning and sustainable management are crucial for halal culinary MSMEs in Southeast Asia, according to Akbar et al. (2023). Similar studies have not been conducted in other ASEAN countries, so it is currently unclear to what extent consistent innovative behavior influences the halal culinary business regionally. However, Anwari and Hati (2020) show that innovation is greatly influenced by the mentality and behavior of halal MSME owners in Malaysia. The ability of the creative economy to tangibly enhance the competitiveness of the halal culinary sector in the ASEAN region through innovation, digitalization, and regional cooperation remains understudied.

The relationship between halal businesses and the creative economy has been the subject of several studies, albeit with limited scope and focus. For example, Salindal (2019) suggests that halal-based creative MSMEs have the potential to gain long-term competitive advantage in ASEAN trade. Syukur & Nimsai (2018) study on street food in Bangkok shows how halal culinary creativity drives small business growth in Thailand and Indonesia. Technological advances such as blockchain, IoT, and AI are crucial for strengthening the halal sector, as systematically demonstrated by Ellahi, Wood, and Bekhit (2026). Most studies focus on a single country or specific field (such as media, digitalization, or SMEs), leaving gaps in the literature despite its broad scope. There is a lack of research on how creative economy synergies influence the creation of new halal culinary products in ASEAN countries, considering various cultural, technological, and legal parameters. The uniqueness of this study lies in its comprehensive methodology, which reinforces halal compliance and analyzes the creative economy while integrating technological and cultural dynamics beyond ASEAN borders in the context of halal cuisine. By connecting innovative thinking with regional values and halal laws at the ASEAN level, this multidisciplinary approach adds a new perspective to both literature and practice.

Investigating the impact of the creative economy on the growth of the halal culinary industry in the ASEAN region is the primary objective of this study. The main objectives of this research are to analyze the ways in which technology and creativity are integrated into halal regulations, determine how innovative practices in the creative economy contribute to increasing the competitiveness and added value of the halal culinary sector

both nationally and internationally, and analyze the advantages and disadvantages of cross-border integration among ASEAN member countries. In addition to enhancing research on the creative economy and the halal industry, these objectives are also expected to assist ASEAN companies and stakeholders by providing practical policy and strategy recommendations.

Methods

Qualitative methodology was integrated with a descriptive-analytical approach in this study. Secondary sources used to collect all materials included ASEAN policy documents, leading scientific journals, government publications such as the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), and relevant research from the past ten years. Information was gathered through a literature review, and thematic analysis was used to collect, display, and draw conclusions from the data. Using this method, the impact of the creative economy on ASEAN halal food companies was explored from various perspectives, including innovation, regulation, technology, and culture.

Results and Discussion

The Development of the Creative Economy in the ASEAN Region

The development of halal products in ASEAN now has increasingly complex and strategic features. This is a sophisticated strategy that combines innovation, technology, sustainability, and aesthetics, not just a formal effort to meet halal criteria (Osman et al., 2025). This step provides halal culinary MSMEs with additional options to improve their position in the local market and reach regional and global markets. This evolution also demonstrates how the creative economy plays a major role in creating halal products that meet the needs of modern consumers and comply with sharia law, making the ASEAN halal culinary industry a major force in the global value-based economy. A concrete example of how the creative economy enhances the competitiveness of ASEAN industries is halal product innovation. In addition to being a religious requirement, halal products are now considered part of a global lifestyle trend rich in cultural and aesthetic characteristics. In addition, consumers are becoming more aware of health, food safety, and environmental sustainability issues. The creation of new products that can meet these demands is what drives the halal business. According to a survey published in Nuansa magazine, MSMEs that use environmentally friendly packaging, halal certification, and natural ingredients have succeeded in attracting customers in both domestic and international markets. This fact shows a trend in halal product production

that integrates several value-added characteristics, such as sharia, quality, sustainability, and health. Due to these advances, halal cuisine has become more attractive to non-Muslim consumers who place the same emphasis on morals and health as Muslims (Tao et al., 2023; Ustadi et al., 2020).

Innovation encompasses not only the creation of new recipes or menus, but also the use of sustainable practices, packaging design, and manufacturing technology to enhance the value of halal products in domestic and international markets. In Indonesian research on bottled water products, Hamid and Tan (2023) found that environmentally friendly packaging, the Internet of Things (IoT), and digital halal certification can enhance brand image among Muslim and non-Muslim consumers. These examples demonstrate how innovation in the halal sector has evolved toward a more holistic approach, providing greater benefits in competitive markets by combining sharia compliance with sustainability and technology principles (Zhou & Bai, 2025). Innovative ways to bridge the gap between traditional halal principles and modern life include collaborating with Muslim celebrities and e-commerce platforms, using more creative packaging designs, and adding local cultural narratives (Novianti & Hapsari, 2025).

In the creative economy, government involvement is crucial. The state's involvement in educating the corporate community to prioritize public interests over private interests is evident in the creative sector. In addition, the government is clearly interested in facilitating communities to be more innovative and productive while utilizing the creative industry to preserve the environment and cultural heritage. In this sector, the government is the main stakeholder and is responsible for implementing regulations, providing services, and coordinating efforts. The creative economy is promoted by ministries or industry organizations through human resource training programs, which increase value creation and competitive advantage in this field. The government aims to create an environment that supports inclusive, sustainable, and innovative economic growth by integrating the business community, relevant institutions, and the wider community (Štreimikienė & Kačerauskas, 2020).

Characteristics of the Halal Culinary Industry in ASEAN

The development of the ASEAN creative economy is greatly supported by digital marketing, which has become a vital tool for enhancing the competitiveness of the halal culinary industry. Rapid digital growth in the region has revolutionized the way halal businesses communicate with overseas clients, build their brands, and promote their

products. Research by Sari et al. (2024) shows that halal culinary MSMEs have improved their commercial performance through the use of social media, search engine optimization (SEO), and integration with online platforms such as halal markets. This strategy increases product exposure and strengthens direct relationships with consumers, thereby increasing loyalty and brand image (Ellyawati & Kusumatriawan, 2024). Amid increasingly fierce competition, halal MSMEs currently rely heavily on digital marketing to support their expansion. In addition to social media, creative branding that highlights religious and cultural themes has been key to penetrating cross-segment markets, which include both Muslim and non-Muslim customers. Storytelling strategies that leverage local expertise, such as highlighting the cultural origins of halal cuisine, have proven effective in building deep emotional bonds with consumers. More than just a promotional gimmick, these narratives reinforce the idea that halal cuisine is an authentic and culturally meaningful product that fits with contemporary lifestyle choices. In this context, innovation serves as a tool for commercial and cultural diplomacy, increasing the market share of ASEAN halal cuisine worldwide (Weng, 2024).

This transition is not only adaptive but also represents a long-term shift in increasingly technologically sophisticated cultural purchasing patterns. The digital approach increases consumer confidence while expanding market reach by providing clear information. Currently, many halal small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia and Indonesia use online platforms to publicly share information about halal certification, production processes, and customer reviews (Sari et al., 2025). By utilizing creative communication, these programs not only enhance product validity but also strengthen public trust. The main competitive advantage of the ASEAN halal culinary sector in the global market will lie in its creative branding, which combines aspects of digital technology, culture, and religion. Therefore, digital marketing and creative branding can be considered an integrative strategy that connects local identity with global market potential through a dynamic creative economy framework, in addition to assisting in the promotion of halal products.

Another equally important element in the creative economy is halal culinary tourism, which has grown to become one of the main sectors for ASEAN countries. As the number of Muslim tourists traveling abroad increases each year, there are more and more creative efforts to make halal cuisine a major attraction. With Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand at the top, ASEAN has become one of the most popular halal tourist

destinations in the world. Along with the increase in tourism, this trend is driving the growth of the halal culinary sector through product innovation, halal culinary festivals, and cross-border cultural diplomacy. By integrating innovation in halal food marketing, ASEAN countries can reach both domestic audiences and foreign tourists who are looking for authentic halal cuisine (Johan & Plana-Casado, 2023). Cross-border promotion through regional halal culinary events has been used to strengthen ASEAN's reputation as a global halal industry hub. For example, Malaysia often hosts the Malaysia International Halal Showcase (MIHAS), which brings together international buyers and halal industry representatives, including culinary businesses (Ngah et al., 2020). Additionally, Indonesia and Brunei have halal culinary festivals that combine traditional cultural elements with modern and innovative concepts to provide a unique experience for guests. Combining regional cuisine with halal tourism destinations boosts tourism and strengthens the creative economy ecosystem based on religious and cultural values. This proves that promoting halal food in ASEAN is not only a commercial endeavor but also a soft power strategy that represents the region at the global level.

Internet marketing strategies are also an important part of promoting halal culinary tourism. ASEAN countries are increasingly utilizing the internet to promote halal culinary destinations to visitors. Through the Thailand Halal Assembly, for example, Thailand actively promotes exclusive halal cuisine in Bangkok and Chiang Mai through social media and dedicated websites. In addition to highlighting the halal quality of the products, these advertisements also emphasize the cultural stories, history, and unique experiences associated with the products. The virtual experiences generated by these digital stories convince tourists to visit specific locations. As a result, in a reciprocal context, digital marketing innovations have become a strategic tool that connects the tourism, culinary, and halal industries. However, there are still a number of obstacles hindering the development of the halal culinary tourism industry in ASEAN. These challenges include the lack of harmonization of international halal standards, the lack of Muslim-friendly infrastructure in some regions, and the inability of local MSMEs to participate in the halal tourism market. The halal culinary tourism sector in ASEAN, however, has a bright future thanks to the enormous potential offered by the growth of the global Muslim middle class and increasing global awareness of halal travel (Nuraini, 2021). Through cross-border marketing, government policy support, and creative

economic innovation, ASEAN has the potential to become a global hub for halal culinary tourism that effectively combines cultural, religious, and economic interests.

The Influence of Creative Economy on Halal Culinary Product Innovation and Marketing

The growth of the halal culinary sector in the ASEAN region demonstrates the transformative role of digitalization in halal businesses, particularly in the halal supply chain. Rising global demand for halal products has accelerated the need for creative technological solutions to address critical issues with efficiency, transparency, and halal certification throughout the supply chain. The digitization of the halal supply chain is crucial for the development of a more transparent, reliable, and effective logistics system in ASEAN-5 (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and Thailand), according to research. Real-time distribution, tracking, and certification of goods using digital technology helps alleviate customer concerns regarding product halal certification (Heikal & Rachman, 2024). As a foundation of customer trust, this shows that innovation in the creative economy goes beyond product design and marketing to include distribution management.

The application of blockchain, the Internet of Things (IoT), and artificial intelligence (AI) in the halal supply chain has improved the quality of the ASEAN halal culinary industry. Blockchain, for example, enables the recording of production and distribution data that cannot be altered, thereby enhancing the integrity of the halal system. IoT monitors logistical aspects including shipping and storage temperatures, which are critical for maintaining the quality of halal products. Route optimization and market demand trend analysis are two applications of AI. According to a study by Ghalih and Chang (2024), the application of this technology increases the production and added value of the halal industry by giving customers more confidence in the goods they buy. Therefore, innovation in the halal supply chain is very important for a creative economy that prioritizes sustainability, trust, and transparency.

ASEAN certification bodies and governments are aggressively promoting the digitization of the halal supply chain. For example, the Halal Industry Development Corporation (HDC) in Malaysia has created a digital halal system to track halal certificates from the production phase to distribution. The Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH) in Indonesia has also begun introducing app-based halal certification to speed up the licensing process and facilitate SME access to halal services. These

initiatives demonstrate how the IT industry, businesses, and governments can collaborate to build a more user-friendly halal supply chain. However, there are still many challenges to be overcome if the halal supply chain is to be fully digitized. One such challenge is that companies, especially small MSMEs and large multinational corporations, have varying levels of technological capabilities. To adopt a technology-based supply chain system, many MSMEs still lack the necessary human resources and digital infrastructure. In addition, due to differences in halal certification criteria, the halal supply chain in the ASEAN region is not yet fully connected. As a result, halal food products produced in one country based on different standards are not recognized in other countries. This issue shows that for supply chain digitalization to truly benefit all parties equally, halal regulations must be harmonized along with training initiatives and technical assistance for MSMEs. The digitization of the ASEAN halal supply chain is an innovative strategy that serves as a technological tool and support for regional halal culinary networks (Heikal & Rachman, 2024). ASEAN has a great opportunity to become a global halal logistics hub through a combination of inclusive policies, technological innovation, and SME involvement. Beyond product aesthetics, these changes highlight that the creative economy includes structural components that ensure the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of the halal culinary industry.

The Impact of the Creative Economy on the Competitiveness and Sustainability of the Halal Culinary Industry

Product innovation and supply chain digitalization, digital marketing, culinary diplomacy, and cross-cultural collaboration also support the ASEAN halal culinary industry. In addition to providing food, the halal culinary industry in this region serves as a forum for cultural exchange and representation of the identity, values, and traditional knowledge of Muslim communities. In addition to the continued growth of the tourism and halal industries, ASEAN countries have utilized culinary diplomacy to enhance their international standing. Thailand's strategic move to incorporate the halal industry into its economic diplomacy strategy is a measured step (Restuti et al., 2025). With the help of the Thai Halal Association and the Halal Science Center, the country not only emphasizes halal certification but also promotes halal cuisine as a tourist destination (Suharko et al., 2018). It should be emphasized that Thailand's public diplomacy through the halal industry has successfully enhanced Thailand's reputation as a Muslim-friendly tourist destination, even though the majority of its population is

not Muslim. This shows how creative and cross-cultural packaging for halal food can increase market share and create trustworthy international alliances (Benharoon & Tongsongyod, 2025). Another example of cross-cultural collaboration is the efforts of Singapore, Brunei, and Indonesia in organizing ASEAN halal cuisine festivals, which will feature international chefs and creative industry participants. These festivals support local halal culinary traditions by providing a platform for the promotion of halal products, the exchange of recipes, cooking techniques, and creative ideas. As shown by Anwar's (2025) research, the integration of cross-cultural halal food with halal tourism can provide an authentic experience for tourists, thereby strengthening ASEAN's position as a leading global destination for halal travel. Therefore, in this field, halal culinary diplomacy not only influences economic aspects but also the growth of ASEAN's friendly, creative, and diverse identity (Abimanyu et al., 2024).

Current issues, including uneven halal standards and inconsistent regulations among ASEAN countries, can hinder cross-border culinary diplomacy. These disparities can lead to consumer misunderstandings and limit the expansion of halal food products in the global market. To achieve successful culinary diplomacy, regional efforts to harmonize halal standards must also be undertaken. By implementing a comprehensive approach that combines cultural collaboration, halal diplomacy, and innovative thinking, ASEAN can strengthen its position as a global halal culinary center that not only meets the needs of Muslim consumers but also attracts a wider audience. (Johan & Plana-Casado, 2023). Often, SMEs must undergo recertification processes to export their goods to other ASEAN countries, which comes with additional costs and time-consuming administrative procedures. SMEs with limited management experience and resources will inevitably feel the burden of this. ASEAN halal products are less competitive than those from more connected countries, such as the Middle East, and the regional market is less efficient due to inconsistent halal standards. Customers ultimately suffer from a lack of variety in halal products available abroad and additional costs related to double certification (Akbar et al., 2023; Nurhayati et al., 2025).

The halal culinary sector has grown largely due to the emergence of a Muslim middle class in ASEAN, global awareness of halal products, and rapid developments in digital technology. In addition to producing halal food, ASEAN has the potential to lead in the development of innovative halal products that are environmentally friendly, healthy, and culturally relevant. Global trends such as "ethical food" and "environmentally friendly consumption" can be combined with halal identity to expand

the market to non-Muslim customers. ASEAN halal cuisine can be promoted as a global product that meets religious criteria while being compatible with modern lifestyles through the right creative approach. Based on these findings, ASEAN governments should focus on three areas: expanding sharia financing for halal MSMEs, accelerating regional halal standard harmonization, and closing the digital divide through improved technological knowledge and infrastructure. The public and private sectors must also work more closely together to create an environment that encourages innovation in marketing, products, and supply chains. By implementing comprehensive policy support, ASEAN can ensure that the growth of the halal culinary industry, which is based on the creative economy, helps millions of small MSMEs that are the backbone of the regional economy, in addition to large players. By addressing current structural issues, ASEAN has a great opportunity to become a highly competitive, innovative, and inclusive global center for halal trade.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that the halal culinary industry in the ASEAN region is experiencing significant growth, largely thanks to creative economic efforts in product innovation, supply chain digitalization, innovative marketing, and cross-cultural culinary diplomacy. In response to the research objectives, this study shows that the combination of innovation, technology, and halal standards not only increases competitiveness but also brings the halal culinary industry to the global stage. Recent findings show that the success of ASEAN's halal culinary growth depends not only on internal MSME variables but also on cross-sector cooperation, regional halal standardization, and support for digital technology. The use of inclusive digital technology for MSMEs, the development of research on regional cooperation models among ASEAN countries in halal standards, and the development of halal branding strategies that can attract non-Muslim customers while still complying with sharia principles are some recommendations for further research. The author would also like to thank the academics, research institutions, and other parties who have contributed to providing the materials and data that form the basis of the analysis and made this study possible.

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