

Islamic Marketing: Moving Forward and Challenges

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this chapter the reader should be able to:

- Critically evaluate the concept of Islamic marketing and its progress to date
- Explore the potential avenues for the discipline to develop into
- Critically appraise the impact of Islamic marketing as a discipline

Key Points

- Research in Islamic marketing has grown considerably over the years and it has made great strides in establishing Islamic marketing as a distinct discipline.
- A variety of contexts have been researched in the field but widening this to include other critical and growth areas of mainstream marketing would help the discipline add depth and breadth of insight.
- Similar to mainstream marketing, the growth of Islamic marketing has meant a debate and discourse on which approaches are more appropriate.
- In order to gain holistic insights it is important the alternative approaches are used to add insight and shape the discipline as it grows.
- One of the greatest challenges facing researchers in the field is to sift through the complexities of culture and religion to provide both meaningful and practical implications to organisations as well as researchers.

Introduction

The various chapters in this book have explored and discussed how Islamic marketing has managed to grow and carve its place as a distinct discipline within the mainstream marketing framework since its conception in 2011. As Sandikci (2011) explained, the growth and establishment of Islamic marketing as a discipline can be attributed to the increasing visibility of Muslims and their purchasing power. This has encouraged organisations and academics to view Muslims as a yet fully unexplored worthwhile market segment. With the emergence of multitude of research looking at Muslims as consumers and Muslim geographical areas, there has also been a steady call towards the need to explore different viewpoints and approaches in order to help move the discipline forward constructively (Wilson, 2012).

This chapter explores the challenges facing Islamic marketing and provides some insights into how it may move forward. In doing this, three areas are discussed: research contexts, research approaches, and research implications.

Research Contexts

Tournois and Aoun (2012) identified that, from its initial exploration of business ethics frameworks, Islamic marketing has branched out to other areas such as: financial services; Islamic law and its principles; 'halal' and 'haram' practices and consumption as well as branding.

Testing and approving existing marketing theories into the context of Islamic marketing is one area of exploration that can be undertaken by Islamic marketing researchers (Wilson, 2012). However, the basic premise of 'halal' and 'haram' or even the traditional marketing principles of 7Ps and branding provide a limited understanding of what Islamic marketing is about and its implications (Wilson & Grant, 2013). It can be argued that having provided some useful insights and understanding of some basic Islamic principles and its applications to organisations as well as consumption behaviour, it is high time that the discipline started to explore more complex contexts.

Not discounting the many great researches that have emerged within Islamic marketing over the past few years, many other researches have focused on explanation of application of Islamic principles in organisational and consumption contexts. In a field that is relatively new and emerging, there is a great need for this nature of explanatory research. However, if the discipline is to move forward whilst making sustainable progress towards knowledge and

understanding as well as establishing itself more firmly within the mainstream marketing framework, it is time that researchers within the field look towards more challenging and even controversial avenues to explore.

A critical look at the concept of Islamic consumers is a good starting point. Many authors have already argued for the need to understand what it means to be a Muslim consumer from a practical perspective rather than an ideological or theological perspective (e.g. Sandikci, 2011, Jafari 2012). This will be further explored when discussing research approaches below. For the purpose of the discussion here, it needs to be highlighted that from a practical perspective, rather than trying to find this elusive idea of a 'Muslim consumer' researchers need to look at providing effective and measurable means to segment this complex market. A simplistic approach of looking at people's religious beliefs or cultural backgrounds does not translate into what it means to be a so called 'Muslim consumer'. Are we expecting these Muslim consumers to behave in the same way just because they have a certain belief system? Do we know if and to what degree consumption decisions are influenced by religious beliefs when considering various products classes and sectors? Does religious beliefs influence every aspect of a Muslims consumption or is it more prevalent in specific consumptions? What are then the implications of these to organisations?

Going even beyond consumption of products and services, there are many critical areas emerging within the mainstream marketing framework that has not been fully explored within the context of Islamic marketing. Social marketing and the critical evaluation of marketing's benefit to society are concepts that have been steadily gaining relevance and importance. Islamic marketing scholars need to fully engage with this with a view to making a greater contribution to areas such as social marketing as well as establishing Islamic marketing as a context that can add value to not just food and finance but every aspect of marketing. It is not sufficient to say that as Islam as a religion is based on certain ethical values and principles, therefore almost by default, adoption of these principles can tackle issues such as social responsibility and marketing's role within it. It needs to be approached as a genuine alternative which demonstrates, from a practical point of view, how Islamic principles may have an impact on these disciplines, how these can be incorporated within the wider marketing framework from a critical and practical perspective.

There are critical societal issues such as community cohesion and even radicalisation that can benefit from the use of a combination of social marketing and Islamic principles. The use and implications of these issues have been largely unexplored by Islamic marketing

researchers. Entering into these varied contexts and engaging with mainstream marketing researchers to achieve this will provide a sound base for widening the applications of Islamic marketing.

Research Approaches

In a discourse on the role of Islamic marketing researchers, Wilson (2012) raised the question of whether, Islamic marketing refers to religion or culture. As the discussion on contexts above mentioned, there has been many calls for the need to look at Islamic marketing as a concept and Muslims as consumers from a practical perspective rather than an ideological perspective.

El-Bassiouny (2014) argued that since Islam is a religious ideology which transcends every action in life, a Muslim will be impacted by the precepts of his or her faith in every action he or she takes including consumption behaviour. This ideological assumption that every Muslim will interpret and follow their religious precepts in the same way, to the same degree of commitment, is highly questionable and only promotes stereotypical profiles of consumers with little or no practical relevance to organisations. This has been discussed widely and critically by Sandikci (2011), Jafari (2012), Wilson (2012), Koku and Jusoh (2014), Jafari and Sandikci (2015) and others. Despite these many calls for critical engagement between ideological precepts and practical interpretation reflected in behaviour combined with cultural influences, there are still very little research emerging which address these issues. As the discipline of Islamic marketing grows further, this is a crucial aspect which is needed to nourish its growth.

Attempting to untangle this complicated web of culture, religion, theological precepts, interpretation and translation of these precepts into behaviour is by no means a simple task and none of the authors who have called for this so far have claimed that this was a simple task. This complexity is probably the reason why a lot of researchers seem to prefer a reductionist approach to understanding Islam as a religion and how Muslims 'should be' thinking and behaving. However, this is similar to the discourse that also occurs in mainstream marketing when researching consumer behaviour: the so called simplistic and easy to measure, logical approaches and the call for inductive and other alternative approaches to help understand the holistic nature of consumption with all its inherent complexities. Hence, this discourse is not unique to Islamic marketing but rather a natural path that is inherent in any emerging discipline and a part and parcel of the Kuhnian

paradigmatic shift. The challenge facing Islamic marketing is for the need for researchers to apply various approaches to explore and understand the complexities within their discipline.

Authors such as Jafari (2012) have called for more inductive approaches in Islamic marketing. Setting aside the debate on the merits of one or other approach, there have been calls from both main stream marketing and Islamic marketing to understand a given phenomenon from differing perspectives. Koku and Jusoh (2014) felt that the approach appropriate to study Islamic marketing 'will emerge from a consensus of opinions' as researchers strive to build theories within this discipline. Is it even feasible to come to any consensus in a complex field such as Islam with its various interpretations, sects and followings? Would this need for consensus push us more towards reductionist approaches that critical scholars want us to avoid? As Foxall (1990:172) argued 'the emergence of a unitary coherent theory of human behaviour is improbable and almost certainly undesirable'. Therefore, in Islamic marketing, as with mainstream marketing, there is a need to explore our understanding through various lenses.

The lenses through which we aim to understand the concept of Islamic marketing and Muslim consumers could range from positivism, interpretivism, realism, constructivism and all other approaches that have also been used within main stream marketing. In addition to this, there are also other less well explored theories that can come to our aid. One such theory is Kelly's (1970) personal construct psychology. Kelly believed in what he termed 'constructive alternativism' where all knowledge and information are subject to alternative constructions. People themselves place their own construction or meaning on any event or situation that they experience in life (Kelly, 1970). It could be argued that, as various researchers have been arguing that the extent to which Islamic beliefs and values are understood, accepted, and translated into behaviour varies from culture to culture and individual to individual, then constructive alternativism would help us understand these alternative views and sift through for significant similarities and differences and the reasons behind these similarities and differences.

Research Implications

As has been argued above, Islamic marketing research to a large extent, seems to be operating under the hypotheses that Muslims are different to the rest of the consumer groups and as such organisations need to make specific effort to appeal to this segment. However, as we have also discussed above, Muslims are not and are never likely to be a

unitary segment. In order for the discipline to establish itself as providing genuine insights into Islamic marketing and Muslim consumers, future researchers should look hard at the implications of their research.

At the risk of generalising across the discipline, many research that are published fail to take the findings further and convert these into insights. What is needed is for researchers to undertake a critical evaluation of the similarities and differences of their research with that of mainstream marketing. Exploration of these similarities and differences would surely be a strong foundation with which to continue to build Islamic marketing as a discipline as well as provide a basis to break out of this exceptionalism (Jafari and Sandikci, 2015) that seems to guide Islamic marketing research.

By taking an ideological and even an ethnocentric standpoint and claiming that due to its inherent values and principles, Islam, and therefore all Muslims also will follow these values when seeking consumption experiences, whether this be a bar of chocolate or a family holiday. Yet, mainstream marketing is still attempting to understand why someone's personal values and ethics may have an impact on consumption of one class of products and not others. This again highlights the complex nature of consumer behaviour across the board including Islamic marketing. These complexities needs to be reflected and its implications explored in research. This would be a much valuable insight than a mere statement of factors influencing Muslim consumer behaviour with little effort to provide a critical viewpoint. In this way implications to not just business practice but theoretical advancement of the discipline as a whole will have more impetus.

Conclusion

Islamic marketing has made great strides since its formal conception and has managed to establish itself as a distinct discipline. Many scholars have already provided critical discourse within the discipline, the nature of current research within the discipline and calls for how the discipline should evolve in the future. This chapter drew upon this discourse and highlighted the need for researchers to expand the contexts which they study, called for variety in approaches as well as more insightful implications. The greatest challenge that we face as Islamic marketers is being critical of ourselves and asking why we are engaged in this discipline and whether we are prepared to fully immerse ourselves in the complex debate and commit ourselves to shaping the future of the discipline.

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