

The Global Halal Pharmaceutical Market: Strengths, Challenges, and Prospects

Dear Editor,

The strength and success of the global Halal industry has been making waves worldwide and is now emerging as one of the most lucrative and prominent market arenas in the world with an industry worth of US\$ 2.3 trillion.^[1] Recognizing this rising demand of Halal commodities, there are vast prospects for various businesses, investors, and suppliers to engage in innovations and develop strategies to appeal to Muslims, who happen to be one of the fastest growing faith-based consumer groups in the world. Contrary to popular perceptions, Halal is not merely about food and beverages. The Halal industry now encompasses various sectors such as pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and various services such as Halal tourism, hospitality services, and logistics.^[2] Although the food sector dominates the Halal industry, pharmaceuticals are the second most important segment constituting 26% of the total global Halal market with an industry worth of US \$ 500 billion.^[3]

Halal medicines are those that strictly adhere to Islamic Shariah guidelines. Halal consumption is a fundamental focus of Islam.^[4] Halal is a term referred to objects or actions that are permitted according to Islamic law. In this context, Halal foods or Halal medicines refer to those foods and drugs that are derived from Halal sources and do not contain any prohibited ingredients such as alcohol or the products of animals that are not Halal such as pork or porcine products or other substances deemed as unlawful under Islamic guidelines.^[5] As far as the prominent players in this particular industry are concerned, countries in the Asia Pacific region seem to be taking the lead with regard to the development, manufacturing, and export of Halal medicines. Malaysia is regarded as a market leader for Halal pharmaceuticals, being the pioneering country to create new Halal pharmaceutical standards: The Malaysian Standard MS2424:2012. Indonesia and Brunei are the other prominent countries that have several Halal pharmaceutical manufacturers as well.^[6]

There are some significant factors that are driving the rapid growth of the Halal pharmaceuticals industry. The foremost factor for the market growing substantially is an expanding global Muslim population.^[7] According to research, an estimated 1.8 billion people in the world are Muslims, making roughly up to 25% of the global population. In addition, currently, the supply for Shariah compliant products is inadequate to cater to their demand. Furthermore, it is estimated that the number of Muslims would reach to roughly 2.2 billion in 2030.^[8] Since Muslims are the major and

largest consumer base for Halal medicines, the escalating population is very likely to drive up the demand for Halal pharmaceutical products in the near future. Besides, lately, Muslims are increasingly becoming concerned and discerning about faith-compliant and approved products especially medicines. This is due to increased education and awareness about religious commitments, which further contributes to rising global demand for this industry.^[9] Moreover, the increasing purchasing power of the Muslims is also a contributing factor in the global demand of Halal pharmaceuticals.^[10]

Nonetheless, the lucrative prospects of the industry are confronted with appalling issues. The need to create a unified global Halal standard is currently the most challenging issue within the Halal pharmaceutical market.^[11] The interpretation of Shariah law is inconsistent having variations among Muslim countries due to different opinions of the jurists (*fuqahaha*).^[12] Moreover, Halal knowledge is aligned with Shariah laws largely as compared to having a scientific approach. This is evident from the fact that medicine and pharmacy curriculums have a dearth of contents that relate to Halal medicines, manufacturing, and contents supporting the creation of alternatives for non-Halal ingredients.^[13] Scientific knowledge particularly in this pharmaceutical area is vital for the growth of the industry globally.

Apart from the lack of scientific knowledge, there is also a scarcity of specialized human capital in the Halal pharmaceutical industry, which is another restraint.^[14] For a pharmaceutical product to be Halal, it must not only be made using Halal ingredients, but also fulfill the criteria of “*Tayyib*,” which signifies that the product is of high quality, clean, and pure, as well manufactured under standardized processes.^[15] This implies that Halal pharmaceutical production activities must be conducted under strict international standards, which require manufacturers to employ a team of specialized staff to monitor good manufacturing, hygiene, storage, and distribution practices.

Halal global industry is a vigorous and fast growing industry despite the absence of large brands names and products. Halal pharmaceuticals are the second most important segment of this industry, presenting a prime opportunity for the manufacturers and investors to enter in this arena. In addition to medicines, the vaccine market also poses a profitable opportunity, because various pharmaceutical companies are seen putting efforts into developing vaccines that comply with Shariah laws.^[16]

However, there are few issues that need to be addressed. First, the establishment of a unified regulatory framework and/or regulatory harmonization is fundamental to accelerate and boost the growth of the Halal pharmaceutical industry. Second, research and development (R&D) investment is needed to create new and innovative Halal products. Third, training of the human capital is essential for the growth of industry. Additionally, there must be an inclusion of Halal pharmaceuticals-related contents in the curriculum of pharmacy and medicine institutions, because it would help provide ideas for future research.^[17] Healthcare professionals must be educated and informed about Halal medicines, so that they are knowledgeable enough to provide better guidance to their patients and respond more appropriately to the needs of Muslim patients.^[18] Moreover, apart from Muslims, Halal medicine could be marketed to a larger consumer base if there is a broader illustration of Islamic ideals, especially Tayyib values, such as products being pure, clean and hygienic.^[19] Nevertheless, with the growing population and economic clout of the Muslim world, Halal pharmaceutical industry sees a host of opportunities that are in store with regard to the greater demand for health and wellness products together with greater awareness on Islamic values.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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10.4103/app.app_14_17

How to cite this article: Zehra F, Naqvi AA. The Global Halal Pharmaceutical Market: Strengths, Challenges, and Prospects. *Arch Pharma Pract* 2017;85:6.

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