The Fast Food Consumption Experiences and Identity Construction of British Muslims: A Phenomenological Study

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by

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Abstract

Engaging with new literature on Islamic Marketing as well as general theoretical work in consumer research, this study, adopting an approach modelled on Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), explores the dynamics of fast food consumption and identity construction of British Muslim consumers. The focus revolves around the growth of halal fast food choices and, using that, understands how British Muslims negotiate their process of identity construction within the context of religious, social, and cultural forces. Phenomenological interviews were conducted to facilitate the capturing of the participants’ own understandings of key terms, like halal and fast food, and to explore their experiences of their religion, their communities, and the larger social context within which they consume food.

The analysis revealed participants mostly identified a multiple or double identity around their sense of themselves as Muslims and as British citizens. For the most part, the participants expressed that their identity as Muslims as a more central or stable identity. However, each of the participants described their interpretation of Islam as accommodating their participation in, and adoption of, many British customs, behaviours, values, and other cultural attributes. Some of the participants viewed their Muslim identity as being dominant or primary, while others saw being Muslim as just another identity that they maintain and as the same as any other socio-cultural factor. The analysis also highlighted a striking diversity in the understanding not only of halal, but also of larger questions relating to Islam as well as the orientation of the participants towards fast food in general. The active differentiation the participants offered between themselves and other Muslims shows that, instead of halal being a means of constructing an identity as a British Muslim, they used their particular interpretation of halal to construct their identities as individuals, distinguishing them both from non-Muslim Britons and from other Muslims in their community.

The analysis also revealed a limited sense of the symbolic nature of fast food among the participants. The participants saw fast food as a way of satisfying their physiological urges, rather than as a way of forging social bonds, identifying themselves through their choices, or reinforcing their cultural identities. Fast food consumption was seen as solitary and individual. This does not, by itself, mean that the individual who consumes fast food is an independent agent, but it does undermine the social aspect of fast food consumption.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

One group that have become increasingly important within Britain is Muslims, however an academic literature dealing with Muslim consumers has only very recently emerged. This study draws on this new literature as well as engaging with more general theoretical works in consumer studies to explore the dynamics of British Muslim’s consumption in Leicester. In particular this study examines how British Muslims negotiate their process of identity construction within the context of religious, social, and cultural forces as well as the marketing messaging that they encounter on a daily basis. The focus of this thesis revolves around the growth of halal fast food choices and the way that these consumers understand and interact with these new food consumption options.

The global Muslim population has recently reached over 1.6 billion people, accounting for almost a quarter of the world population (23.4%) (Desilver, 2013). This makes Islam the second largest religion after Christianity, which currently accounts for 31.5% (Pew Research Center, 2012; 2011). Furthermore, it is projected that by 2030 the Muslim population will reach 2.2 billion, increasing its proportion of the world population over the quarter mark to account for 26.4% (ibid). The “Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation” (OIC) established in 1969 is the largest Islamic body and second largest inter-governmental organisation after the United Nations (OIC, 2013). It includes 57 countries that are either predominately Muslim or have a large Muslim population and the OIC has a combined GDP of over 8 trillion USD, creating a growing combined market of 2.4 trillion USD (Alserhan, 2010).

A quarter of the Muslim population are living in non-Islamic societies, with 27% of the total Muslim population “living as [a] minority” in countries where the dominant religion is not Islam (Pew Research Center, 2012). For example, Britain, which is the focus of this study, had 1.6 million Muslims who, according to the
2001 census, accounted for 2.8% of the total UK population (ONS, 2006). Since then the Muslim population in Britain has grown “10 times faster than the rest of society” with statistics cited from a labour force survey showing that in 2008 the Muslim population reached 2.4 million (Kerbaj, 2009). At the start of 2011 the number of Muslims in Britain had reached 2.8 million with this figure projected to double to 5.5 million by 2030; by this date 1 in 10 Britons will be Muslim (Doughty, 2011). This steady increase and shift in proportions within Britain was evident in the 2011 census report. It showed that the UK Muslim population increased more than other religious groups, standing at 2.7 million and up from 3% to 4.8% of the overall population. In Leicester, which is the focus of this doctoral study, the Muslim population was 61,444, representing 19% of the city’s population (Office for National Statistics, 2011).

Given these changes in the demographics of the UK and beyond, as well as the rise of a new halal market in Britain, a deeper understanding of British Muslims and their fast food consumption choices has become essential. The sample selection seeks to maximise its understanding across multiple socio-cultural dynamics in a country that is not predominantly Islamic. This also forms the key interpretive theme of the proposed doctoral research analysis, namely the identity project of British Muslims. First, it is important to acknowledge briefly the implications of the statistical data stated so far, before addressing the gap in research on Islam in current marketing debates.

1.1 The Significance of Islam as an Influence on Consumer Behaviour

Changes in consumption behaviour, such as the growing preference for fast food dining (Key Note, 2011, 2013, 2014; Schau and Gilly, 1997), have a wide impact on consumption experiences. Relationships that consumers have with the market and products influence the totality of meanings and values in a person’s life and powerfully affect their identity construction (Firat, 1987). Therefore, it is important to understand the changes in consumption in a broader sense as a socio-cultural phenomenon affecting the life patterns and experiences, philosophies,
ideologies and emotions of human beings in general (ibid). Viewing consumption solely as a process of satisfying a need for a product or service does not capture how consumption choices are used by consumers to construct symbolic meanings that represent them as individuals (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995).

Contemporary consumers, confronted with a dynamic of constant change and a multiplicity of identifiers, offer an opportunity to examine their identity construction. As Firat and Venkatesh (1995) argue, consumers living in a world of contradicting identities do not attempt to construct a unified experience by reconciling these contradictions, but rather live with them as an existential condition. The analysis focuses on one of these identities: religion. The influence of religion as an element of culture on consumption behaviour is an important component of the general socio-cultural picture of consumption behaviour.

The relationship between religion, consumption, and identity construction was investigated by Wattanasuwan and Elliott (1999) in a study that involved Buddhist teenagers living in Thailand. In particular, they looked at the way the religious beliefs of the participants affected their process of identity construction through everyday consumption. The present thesis extends this approach to examine how religion, and specifically the individual religious beliefs of British Muslims, affects consumption behaviour and identity construction through consumption. In particular, my research looks at the potentially contradictory identities inherent in being religious and a cultural minority (i.e. trying to retain religious/cultural heritage while trying to acculturate into larger society) and how fast food consumption choices can be used as tools of identity construction within that contradictory environment.

The gap in detailed understanding of the influence of religion on consumer behaviour on a micro and macro level, particularly due to the increasing number of Muslims, has yet to be reflected in marketing and consumer behaviour research or in practical applications for strategy and segmentation. According to Delener (1990), the level of devotion an individual has to a particular faith is arguably one of the most powerful forces shaping that individual's consumption choices. The
extent to which this notion is correct will be analysed as part of the interpretive theme dealing with the identity project of British Muslims. The purpose of this theme is to explore the multiple identities that exist among British Muslims and how they are influenced by social and cultural contexts.

Among the questions raised by this theme are the existence of a gap between Islamic religious identity and British nationality and whether there is a fundamental component of the religion’s belief structure that is consistently expressed in the face of social structures and consumption choices. There are multiple beliefs embodied by different sects of Muslims that form the five pillars of Islamic law; these guide lifestyle and societal functions such as banking, advertisement, marriage, and the consumption of food and beverages (Khraim, 2010). With this in mind, it begs the question: which markets are most influenced by Islamic belief structures and is there a common factor that separates consumption choices in a predominantly non-Muslim society? This should also take into account that religious values tend to be instilled within human behaviour over a long time, particularly in domains such as morality and consumption.

According to Sacks (2001), one of the Islamic laws most important to Muslims irrespective of their nationality is the consumption of halal meat. Halal, to translate the phrase directly from Arabic, means “lawful under the allowance of Allah (God)”. Consuming non-halal meat, such as pork, is deemed to be haram or ‘forbidden’. Sacks argued that this fundamental law has direct influence on the consumer behaviour among Muslims in the food market. The perception of halal food as a component of a symbolic identity among Muslims will be addressed in this study.
1.2 A “Gap” in Researching Islam and Islamic Societies in Marketing and Consumer Research

Despite the increasing number of Muslims globally, Islamic societies are not evident in contemporary marketing theory debates. If we accept the role of cultural forces in shaping consumer behaviour, it would seem inappropriate to translate previous research on consumption and identity construction to include or represent Muslim consumers. Moreover, it is also inappropriate to homogenise Muslim consumers as one type as it potentially ignores other socio-cultural factors that differentiate individuals within Muslim communities in Britain and elsewhere. It would seem that a broad programme of research focused on the many different Islamic societies that exist today and that take into account their diverse socio-cultural backgrounds is needed to enrich our understanding, and it is to this programme that this study aims to contribute. For this reason, this research will take an approach consistent with Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). CCT considers consumption and the behavioural choices and practices involved as social and cultural phenomena, as opposed to psychological or purely economic phenomena (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Within this framework psychological variables can be regarded as a product of culture and religion, but this aspect will not be investigated in detail in order to focus on other relevant themes.

During 11 years of publication, the journal Marketing Theory produced no articles related to marketing phenomena in Islamic societies (Jafari and Süerdem, 2012). This issue is, however, not limited to Marketing Theory. According to Sandickci (2011) the area of religion is understudied in marketing and consumer behaviour in general and attention to Islam, consumption and the marketing relationship is even scarcer. There were no articles related to Islam, Islamic society, Muslim consumers or the halal market in any of the major marketing journals that I reviewed, which included International Marketing Review, Journal of International Marketing, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, Journal of Product and Brand Management, Journal of Historical Research in Marketing, Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal and Marketing Science. Several other marketing related journals have
published work on ethnic minority groups and religion in general, but none has published research on Islam or Muslim consumers (e.g. Nwankwo and Lindridge, 1998). Whilst others published studies on Islam and how British Muslims might respond to Islamist communications and Islamist propaganda (Baines et al., 2010) and segmentation and brand positioning for Islamic financial services (Muhamad et al., 2012), none have discussed the consumption choices and practices of Muslims or British Muslims specifically. The interplay between religion and nationality in their consumption choices, and their identity construction remains a significant gap in the literature.

There is also an evident lack of research on the consumption of halal food in Consumer Research and Marketing Theory journals, despite halal being a religiously-informed slaughter and meal preparation practice which is an increasingly discussed social issue in Britain, and a valuable growing market as will be discussed later in this thesis. In general, very few articles in the *Journal of Consumer Research* from 1974 until today have focused on the consumption choices of Muslims or Islamic societies in general and it contains no study related to halal consumption. To be precise there were only two articles, both published only recently, related to Islam, Islamic societies or Muslim consumers. Izberk-Bilgin (2012) investigated how the religious ideology of Islamism informed brand meaning amongst low-income Turkish consumers. Sandickci and Ger (2010) explored how veiling became an attractive choice for some middle class women in Turkey and transformed into a form of fashionable and ordinary clothing for many.

Early work by Hirschman (1983) discussed three possible theories for why religion has been omitted from consumer behaviour studies, a trend which seems to have continued. Firstly, it could be that researchers in marketing and consumer research are simply ignorant of the existence of a link between faiths and purchasing behaviour. Secondly, the absence of religion in marketing debates might be attributed to intentional discrimination within the research community to avoid sensitive topics that are easily scrutinized as “taboo”. The third reason Hirschman argued was that the subject may simply have been overlooked as a silent if influential factor.
Another reason behind the absence of research on Islamic societies in marketing and consumer research is the lack of contribution from ethnic minority scholars, including Muslim academics. In general, there is no strong racial and ethnic ontological and epistemological tradition in consumer research (Peñaloza, 2000; Costa and Bamossy, 1995). As Burton (2009) argued, consumer research continues to be dominated by a white middle class perspective and, in Anglo-Saxon countries, researchers are socialised into a white Euro-American epistemological tradition. More contributions from ethnic minority scholars may help contest the dominance of this epistemological tradition. This is supported by findings from a textual analysis of articles published in the Journal of Consumer Research from 1974–2004, which suggests that consumer research is dominated by “white faces” and “white spaces” (p. 171). Burton concluded that this results in investigators consciously or unconsciously performing what is known as “whiteness,” thereby ignoring other races or ethnicities perspectives and writing from a white theoretical, epistemological and methodological standpoint to conform to disciplinary norms. This results in “white” interests, points of view, material well-being, self-image, and notions of appropriateness being cast as the norm (p. 172):

*Whiteness needs to be acknowledged in marketing scholarship because whiteness is a distinctive epistemological standpoint. Whites may not be aware of this bias in their knowledge of the world and how it structures their work. However, many people of colour have looked to a different epistemological standpoint through which social, institutional and textual relations can be examined and made visible.*

“Whiteness” had been discussed earlier; Stern (1998), for example, argued that consumer research is dominated by white middle-class voices. Hirschman (1993) also explained that the characteristics of consumer researchers and publishers in consumer research represent certain occupational, social class and racial interests (i.e. white, professional, upper-middle class). This results in ideological blinders limiting the scope and breadth of research, a dynamic that is strongly evident (*ibid*). Minnich concluded that the reflected worldview would remain deficient and
distorted unless a conscious and collective effort to incorporate these excluded knowledges was made (cited in Hirschman, 1993).

As a response to the dearth of works on Muslim consumers, the *Journal of Islamic Marketing* (JIMA) was introduced in 2010, which obviously saw an increase in research on Islam and Muslim consumers. However, even these recent articles, whether in JCR or JIMA, focused on Muslims living in predominantly Muslim countries, for example Turkey (Kurt and Ozgen, 2013; Izberk-Bilgin, 2012; Sandickci and Ger, 2010), Malaysia (Al-Hyari et al., 2011; Aris et al., 2011) and in the Middle East (Ireland and Rajabzadeh, 2011; Riquelme et al., 2011; Teimourpour and Hanzaei, 2011). No research has been conducted that focuses on the consumption behaviour and identity construction of Muslims living in secular societies or societies where the dominant religion is not Islam. Previous studies (Jamal and Chapman, 2000; Jamal, 1998, 1996; Oswald, 1999; Peñaloza, 1994) have explored the role of acculturation in ethnic minority groups based on ethnicity or nationality, but so far religion has not received similar treatment.

Despite the recent increase in papers published on Muslim consumers, Jafari (2012) highlighted several problems with the existing corpus of research. Jafari argued that a reductionist approach to both Islam and marketing was adopted and that there was a lack of critical discourse in the articles published so far. Also research in this field tends to result in scholars defending Islam rather than adopting a critical approach to existing research (Jafari, 2012). Jafari’s main critique, however, was that the way in which the religion of Islam and Islamic societies are being conceptualised, as a homogenous group or unified cultural unit, is problematic. This approach ignores the importance of other socio-cultural factors, such as nationality. Furthermore, it ignores the individuality of the Muslim consumer and the potential for multiple interpretations of Islam among members of the same community. Therefore, it does not add to our understanding of the interplay between cultural and social structures in the individual daily life practices of Muslims.
Firat and Venkatesh (1995) argued that consumers are empowered to create their identity through consumption in the marketplace because the consumer today is more fragmented or individualistic (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Oswald, 1999; Jamal and Chapman, 2000). However, Shankar et al. (2009) note that we are also socialised into the world partly through the narratives of our family, class and culture, which provide us with 'archetypical identities', which remain as theoretical constructs until they are reproduced by consumer actions. As summarised by Holt (1997), while acknowledging that analysis of collective consumption patterns with a focus on multiple cultural frameworks and consumption practices is needed, we cannot ignore the individualistic element of consumption. This represents the challenge in research attending to macro issues of analysis such as religion and nationality as well as micro aspects of the individual, and the meso level of family and community.

This research will address the gap in consumer behaviour and marketing research that has until very recently not included explorations of Muslim consumers as a distinct group. In addition, it will focus on a particular group, Muslim consumers in a predominately non-Muslim country that has been largely absent from the existing works on Islamic marketing and Muslim consumption. From a theoretical perspective, it will use the variety and individuality of religious interpretation and expression to explore the role of individual choice and agency in consumption choices within the context of a complex of socio-cultural forces, including religion.

The main research questions are:

1. How do British Muslims use fast food consumption in the construction of their individual and group identities?
2. What is the relationship between religiosity, consumption choices and identity construction for British Muslims? How does the understanding and experience of halal impact food consumption choices for British Muslims and how does the relationship between halal and fast food affect their identity construction projects?

3. What constraints do British Muslims experience from the marketplace and from other elements of their social environment in their consumption choices and their identity construction projects?

### 1.3 Thesis Overview

Chapter 2 will develop a critical review of how religion has been conceptualised in the academic literature, looking at how the definition of religion has emerged and how it is being used for the purposes of research. This chapter will also include a review and discussion of one of the key debates in religion: whether religion is part of culture in general, or if it is an entity separate from culture. The chapter will then focus on the religion of Islam, looking at Islamic societies and Muslim consumers, and critically review and highlight the main problems with the few existing examples of research on Islam, Islamic societies and Muslim consumers with the *Journal of Islamic Marketing* as the main source for developing this review and critique. The final section will look at halal, which is a key dietary requirement under Islamic law or “Sharia”, including a critical review of how halal has been conceptualised in academic literature and will conclude with a review of the notion of “halal” food in the Qur’an and Hadith.

Chapter 3 examines the relevant literature on ‘Consumer Culture Theory’ (CCT), a socio-cultural approach to consumption that informs the basis of my thesis. It also explores identity and consumer freedom as these have been researched both inside and outside of CCT. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the fast food market in the United Kingdom and the importance of the fast food consumption experience for UK residents with specific reference to the halal market. This helps
to provide a background to the study, which focuses on fast food consumption behaviour among Muslims in the UK. The chapter continues with a review of consumption literature with a special focus on food consumption and its symbolic meaning. This enables the subsequent discussion of the role of culture in consumption. The literature on culture and consumption is key because this thesis argues that religion should be viewed as an element of culture (see Section 2.1.1.), therefore the theoretical issues relating to culture and consumption will form a substantial part of the analysis.

Chapter 3 continues with a review of identity literature focusing on ethnic identity. The link between consumption and identity construction will then be discussed in order to bring together the previous two sections on culture and consumption, and on identity. The chapter then proceeds to discuss the notion of consumer freedom, and whether consumers should be analysed as free, individual agents or as actors within cultural and social structures. The final section will provide an overview of the major theoretical approach used for this thesis, CCT, its development, a review of some of its major works, and a discussion of the main criticisms of the approach.

Chapter 4 will present and justify the methodological strategy and the research paradigm adopted for this study. The chapter introduces phenomenology, its history and its key concepts and ideas before discussing the use of the phenomenological approach in consumer research, including a look at some examples. This section will conclude by examining the phenomenological interview, the method used in phenomenological research for data collection. A discussion of the data analysis methodology follows, where the focus is on how the data collected from the interviews was analysed through thematic analysis in order to produce the research findings. Finally there will be a section discussing the ethical issues including informed consent and anonymity, and their implications for this study.
Chapter 5 will present the findings from the doctoral research and the experiences and emotions of the interviewees will be presented, analysed and discussed in detail. The chapter will be split into two sections representing the key interpretive themes from the research. This will be the basis for the conclusion and future recommendations chapter, particularly in relation to the key theoretical and conceptual material discussed in chapters 2 & 3. The chapter will use the data to argue for a move towards a more individualistic understanding of Muslims beyond socio-cultural grouping, focusing more on religiosity. Of course they will still be understood within a “structure” of religion and other socio-cultural factors. The purpose is not to support a pure agency approach, but to highlight the importance of going beyond an examination of a combination of socio-cultural factors and will also look at individual religiosity. So while not dismissing the influence of structure and socio-cultural factors, the aim is to highlight that researching religion is different in the sense that it is based on interpretation. That is why a focus on individualism is needed, as the latter does not ignore the consumer’s socio-cultural background.

Chapter 6 will summarise the research findings in relation to the research questions. The chapter addresses each of the research questions and reinforces the contribution of this research to the relevant academic literature. To conclude, the chapter will engage with the limitations and implications of this study and discuss possible future directions for research in the area of Islamic marketing and Muslim consumer research.

The thesis will begin by reviewing the relevant literature around religion and Islam in the following chapter, discussing the conceptualisation of religion, religion and culture, existing research on Islam and Muslim consumers, and the concept of halal.
Chapter 2: The ‘Socio-Historical Development’ and ‘Diversity’ of Islam

2.0 Chapter Overview

First, the literature review chapter will develop a critical review of how religion has been conceptualised in the academic literature, looking at how the definition of religion has emerged and how it is being used for the purposes of research. In doing so this chapter will argue that religion – and in this case Islam – is not a dogma construct, rather there are multiple interpretations of key religious concepts and that the role of religion in life varies between individuals. This argument of multiple interpretations within religion also highlights the important role of religiosity or the degree of intensity of religious feeling or practice. This section will also include a review and discussion of one of the key debates in religion: whether religion is part of culture in general, or if it is an entity separate from culture. The purpose is to debate whether research on the role of religion, in this case dealing with the role of Islam in the consumption behaviour and identity construction of British Muslims, should be conducted by considering religion as a factor under a cultural framework or whether religion should be researched as a separate topic distinct from culture. This study takes the position that religion should be viewed and analysed as a part of a wider cultural environment within which the individual operates.

The chapter will then focus on the religion of Islam, looking at Islamic societies and Muslim consumers. This section will critically review and highlight the main problems with the few existing examples of research on Islam, Islamic societies and Muslim consumers and it will locate the Journal of Islamic Marketing as a new main source for developing this review and critique. This section will include an overview of the history of Islam and its origins in order to demonstrate the diversity of people within Islam and the many different sects and interpretations within the religion. This will not only show how Islam started but also how it spread globally and hence the diversity of nationalities and ethnicities within
Islam. The purpose here is to highlight the diversity within Islam and critique the conceptualisation of Islamic societies as unified and homogeneous, thereby ignoring other socio-cultural factors.

The final section will look at halal, which is a key dietary requirement under Islamic law or “Sharia”. The section will begin with a critical review of how halal has been conceptualised in the academic literature and will conclude with a review of the notion of “halal” food in the Qur’an and Hadith. By looking at relevant religious texts and reviewing the extant literature this chapter will seek to expand the understanding of halal and show the multiplicity of interpretations of the concept, an understanding that has too often been lacking.

2.1 Conceptualising ‘Religion’

It is important to clarify the difference between “religion” and “religiosity” for the purpose of this thesis. “Religion” refers to the actual set of beliefs, values and practices that a group of followers adhere to, in this case “Islam”. On the other hand, “religiousness” or “religiosity” is “the degree to which beliefs in specific religious values and ideals are held and practiced by an individual” (Essoo and Dibb, 2010: 684). In other words, a person's religiosity is a measure of how religious the individual is, and how much they practice and implement these religious beliefs in their daily life practices. Religiosity, being an individualistic implementation of religion, creates multiple interpretations and levels of diversity that arise from the different degree of strictness with which different individuals interpret and practice the same religion.

It is evident from the literature that there has never been a comprehensive or widely accepted definition of religion. Clark (1958) argued that religion has many facets and that social scientists “mean very different things by the term ‘religious’” (p. 146). In Clark’s study a total of 68 social scientists were asked to define religion. Their definitions ranged from supernatural and mystical experiences to ultimate concerns and social values or group concerns.
Scott (1997) and Zinnbauer et al. (1997) also reviewed definitions of religiousness in social science writings and surveys of individuals and found that the results showed a broad distribution of definitions of religiousness with no single category accounting for a strong majority. They concluded that social scientists have a diverse and multifaceted range of definitions of religiousness or religiosity within which multiple perspectives exist simultaneously (Zinnbauer et al., 1997, 1999). However, the most common – though not overwhelmingly so – definition of religiousness in Zinnbauer’s study was “personal beliefs/personal values” (Zinnbauer, 1999). This individualistic interpretation of ‘religiosity’ will be a common theme throughout this doctoral study.

As Machalek (1977) argued, there are no true or false definitions of abstract and complex concepts like religiosity, but only more and less useful ones. Recent work by Jafari (2012) extends this argument to the study of religion, arguing that looking for a universal definition of religion diverts us from the main questions that researchers should be focusing on. Researchers’ aims should be to understand what religion is and what it offers, but more importantly they should be concerned with how it is enacted in the reality of everyday life. Because there is no agreed upon definition of religion or religiosity among social science researchers, it will be more effective for the definition to come from the informants themselves. The focus of this study is on the role religion plays in the lives of the participants; their definitions can have a greater value than a definition imposed by the researcher. Equally as important is to understand the socio-cultural factors that impact on an individual participant’s understanding of religion and the role that it plays in their life, rather than just how they define the term “religion”.

This is not to deny that Muslims have common beliefs or some homogeneous characteristics, rather the study begins from a position arguing that it is clear that religion should not be oversimplified to the point that it ignores other socio-cultural factors. As Jafari and Süerdem (2012) explained, transcendental guidelines within religion are open for interpretations within the framework of different cultural contexts and individuals’ daily practices.
Berger (1974) made an earlier argument that although we have many different definitions of religion, they have all been defined through two approaches: the “substantive approach” and the “functional approach”. The substantive approach defines religion in terms of the contents of the phenomenon (Berger, 1974).

Reviewing substantive and functional definitions of religion (see Appendix 1), the differences between the two approaches can be summarised as follows. The substantive approach is concerned with defining what religion is, focusing on the essence of religion, and its fixed practices and beliefs, while the functional approach is concerned with defining what religion does, and the role it plays in the daily life practices of the individual. Religion, despite its influence on the individual, is also a powerful social and cultural force. This research focuses on the functional aspect of religion, specifically how it influences both the consumption decisions and the identity constructions of British Muslims. The next section will discuss the role of religion in culture and whether religion should be considered as an element of culture.

2.1.1 Religion and Culture

One of the key debates in the literature on religion is whether it is a separate entity outside of culture or whether religion is part of culture. The notion that religion is a part of culture has attracted some criticism from academics. Roy (2006) criticised the notion that religion is embedded in culture or that any culture is based on religion. He argued that religious believers form a community with its own customs, social fabric, diet and so on, and that community leaders maintain some sort of social control over the community. Roy based his argument on the proposition that many Muslims feel a clash between Islam and the West and worry about the deculturation of Islam as opposed to feeling a culture clash between the West and their country of origin. He went on to explain that newer generations adopt their new country’s language, dress and food. The persistence of halal food among Muslim immigrants in western countries is explained by the fact that halal is not a traditional ethnic cuisine, but a dietary requirement based on religious belief. Roy (2006) concluded for many Muslims there is a disconnect between
religious markers and cultural content. This means that the issue is not a clash of cultures between West and East but the recasting of faith into what is seen as a “pure” religion based on isolated religious markers.

Jacobson (1997), in an earlier study comparing ethnicity (which is considered a key element of culture) and religion, came to a similar conclusion. Jacobson argued that there is a difference between the universal applicability of religious teachings and the limited relevance or usefulness of “culture”. Religious commitment is the acceptance of a set of absolute truths, recorded for all time and for the benefit of all people (religious doctrine), while ethnic identity is a loyalty to disparate customs from a distant place. What distinguishes religion from ethnicity is that the perception of ethnic identity is in terms of one’s attachment to a place of origin, while religious identity signifies belonging to a global community and, indeed, commitment to a set of doctrines asserted across all boundaries of “race” and nationality (Jacobson, 1997). These arguments are, however, subject to substantial criticism.

The argument that religion is separate from culture seems to be based on problematic notions. Roy (2006) bases his argument by looking at Islamic fundamentalism, which many would agree is not a representative conceptualisation of the Muslim community. Furthermore, the argument is viewed from a perspective, discussed and critiqued later in this chapter, where Islam is set in opposition to the West, modernity and consumer culture. Another problem here is how religion is viewed as a fixed construct rather than one that has developed historically. Additionally, the role of individual interpretation seems to be ignored. Finally, it is evident from both Roy (2006) and Jacobson (1997) that they view religion as sacred for Muslims above other socio-cultural factors which, as this chapter will highlight, results in a narrow and essentialist perspective.

In contrast, many scholars in marketing and consumer research argue that religion is just another element of culture. O’Guinn and Belk (1989), for example, argued that religion is a significant force in establishing, shaping and sustaining cultures. Lindridge (2005) concurred, concluding that religion represents a set of cultural
norms and values that are intertwined within cultural structures. As Tillich (1946) argued earlier, although religion may be considered the “ultimate concern”, it is part of culture; in other words “religion is the substance of culture and culture is the form of religion” (p. 80). Substance here refers to essence or spirit. Religion is seen as the ultimate concern, the spirit of culture, or as something that is powerful and gives meaning to culture. Culture as the form of religion refers to a way or a “form” of expressing this meaning that comes from religion. These forms essentially come out of cultural processes or norms (Fig. 1).

![Diagram](image)

**Fig. 1. The Relationship between Religion and Culture**

Tillich went on to explain that neither religion nor culture can be considered in the absence of the other, arguing that “no cultural creation can hide its religious ground” (1946: 200), because despite the difference in direction and level of intensity they both convey meaning. The essence of Tillich’s argument is that the two sides, religion and culture, are mutually interrelated and heavily influence each other. Religion gives meaning to life and allows us to interpret life which influences our culture, and our culture sets the norm or approach by which we express these meanings and ideas.
Despite what may appear to be a decline in religiosity, especially among European nations, the symbolic value of religion as an element of culture is still important. Morgan (1977) explained the persistence of religion by arguing that culture and religion are the same in that they are expressions of meaning, which refers to purpose or direction in life. These meanings are communicated through symbols, as I illustrate in Fig. 1, and the analysis of meaning will therefore involve an analysis of symbols. The use of symbols to communicate meanings is something not just applicable to culture but also to religion (ibid).

The consumption of specific items is not just seen as following religious rules but it can also be viewed as expressing religious identity through symbolic consumption. Similarly, Saroglou (2003) asserts that religion, like culture, is based on beliefs, rituals, moral codes, and emotional and communal aspects. Therefore religion is intrinsically related to and identifies itself – at least partially – with culture (Tillich, 1946). Tillich emphasised and highlighted the great importance of religion in some cultures and its role in creating culture. In advanced societies, the shared symbols that constitute a religion not only help individuals construct a sense of self-identity, but also provide a means of communicating social and cultural norms, attitudes, and rituals.

Geertz (1973) also supported the idea argued that religion is part of culture. Culture enables people to develop and communicate their knowledge about and their attitudes towards life. The importance of religion here lies in its capacity to serve, for an individual or for a group, as a source of general (yet distinctive) conceptions of the world and the self. From these conceptions, cultural functions flow and religious concepts spread, providing a framework of general ideas where a wide range of experience can be given meaningful form. Based on this, Islam becomes not just a set of rules for Muslims to follow but a framework that provides meaning for their consumption experience, their daily practices and lifestyle. Muslims are able to communicate their religious identity through symbolic consumption, similar to cultural consumption.
This argument led Geertz (1973: 90) to define religion as “(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic”. This definition of religion further develops an earlier definition of culture by Geertz as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life” (1973: 89).

However, the definition of culture that was used by Geertz to characterise religion has been criticised by Asad (1983) as framing the definition of religion in terms of communal symbols to result in a research focus that is too internal to the given religion and its practitioners. This misses the importance of social practices and discourses from outside the religious community. The Geertzian definition of religion, specifically in its engagement with symbolic communication, does not necessarily imply a purely individualistic or subjective approach. The symbolic value of goods or acts is socially constructed and operates as a discourse outside of, and impacting on, the individual consciousness. Religious symbols, in this way, are no different from other objects or acts with symbolic value. The nature of religion and religious symbols has, especially with respect to Islam, been the victim of an overly sacralised interpretation (Jafari, 2012). The next section will provide a critique of this approach.

2.1.2 Beyond the “Sacralisation” of Islam

The issue of religion and culture is important in the context of this thesis as it touches on a key criticism of previous Islamic research. The critique focuses on the sacralisation of Islam as a fixed transcendental reality that is divine or mystical and beyond common thought or experience. Sacralisation holds that religion in general, and Islam in this case, is above or more influential than other socio-cultural factors. This interpretation sees Muslims’ behaviour and identity as based on, or
affected more by, their religion than any other factor such as their age, gender, nationality or ethnicity. From this perspective, religion is always seen as a homogenising force across the Muslim population (Sandickci, 2011), and other socio-cultural factors are ignored. All Muslims are grouped under one identity based on following the teaching of Islam, ignoring the fact that these Muslims come from different countries, ethnic backgrounds, social classes and generations.

As Jafari et al. (2014) argued religion should be considered more broadly in multi-ethnic/cultural societies and marketplaces. The separation of religion and culture, as argued in greater detail later (see Section 2.2.1), results in a rigid, dogmatic understanding of religion, rather than generating an empirical understanding. This dogmatic conception results in research that does not explain fully how religion (Islam) affects the daily lives of people, but rather produces a stereotypical and static understanding of Muslims. This leads to the homogenisation of people into a religious identity and ignores other socio-cultural factors. It ignores the historical development of Islam, providing an essentialist perspective on Islam and Muslims. Furthermore, it does not acknowledge how Islam and Islamic societies have changed and adapted to modern society. The rest of this section will argue that religion is a part of culture and should not be viewed as a separate, sacred construct. The discussion will focus on Islam and emphasises the need to move away from an essentialist approach and argues that we need to view religion as an element of culture, integrated into the total mix of cultural forces and symbols that surround consumers, Muslim or otherwise.

Researchers need to recognise that they must focus on understanding all the forces negotiated and experienced by Muslims, including religious, political and cultural elements, in their consumption experiences as they construct and reconstruct their identity. Jafari and Sürerdem (2012) argued that since religion is not a transcendental reality and is socially constructed it should not be seen as outside or above the culture of society. Understanding Muslim consumers requires researchers to go beyond the fixed pillars of Islam and a narrow understanding of the religion, generally based on a literal translation of sacred texts, in order to acknowledge that the nature of consumption is complex and dynamic, even in
Islamic societies (ibid). Sandickci (2011) explains that this means researching how religion interacts with other socio-cultural identity variables such as nationality and ethnicity, because while all Muslims are linked with their religious beliefs, they also come from different socio-cultural backgrounds.

Given the above review, this research will argue that religion is a part of culture and that investigating the role of religiosity in consumption choices and identity construction should be conducted in a broader context to include other socio-cultural factors that affect the individual. While acknowledging that Muslims share religion as one common factor, it is important to remember that they also come from different races, ethnicities and nationalities. All these affect their consumption choices and identity construction. This shows that not only are there differences between Muslims and that Muslims cannot be homogenised into one group, but also, for example, that British Muslims are different from Muslims living in other cultures and that even British Muslims will be different from each other to a certain extent.

2.2 The Problems with Current Consumption and Marketing Research on Islamic Societies

As mentioned earlier the notion of “whiteness” in consumer research and marketing has arguably played a role in the lack of research on Islamic societies in this discipline. This is changing and there has been a recent increased interest in researching Islamic societies. However, as Jafari (2012) highlighted, there are several criticisms that need to be addressed in order for the discipline to develop a better understanding of Islamic societies. One critique of the existing research on Islam and Islamic societies is that it adopts a reductionist view of Islam as a marketing tool. This oversimplification consists of marketing to Muslims as a unified market segment or using Islam as a primary differentiating factor. Jafari (2012) argued this oversimplifies the role of both Islam and marketing. Marketing is one resource out of many that shapes the market (Peñaloza and Venkatesh,
2006; Araujo, 2007; Tadajewski, 2010) and to assume Islam as a marketing tool would narrow it down to the limited boundaries of this one resource.

Religion, and in this case Islam, needs to be viewed by researchers as one of many resources that shape market practice (Jafari, 2010). Jafari (2011) and Jafari and Süerdem (2012) emphasised this point and used as an example the rigid dichotomy that is common in Islam of “halal” versus “haram”. Halal generally refers to things that are considered allowed or lawful for Muslims to do or consume, while haram simply means forbidden. While some aspects may be straightforward, the interpretation of what is halal is not clear and causes debate amongst Islamic scholars worldwide.

Currently these terms are oversimplified, misunderstood and misrepresented in the marketing literature (Alsehran, 2012; Wilson and Liu, 2010). Jafari (2012) argued that these labels are complex concepts that need to be analysed alongside more complicated issues such as identity and consumer agency. If research on Islam and Islamic societies continues to operate within such inflexible margins that are bound by time and context, not much will be added to the existing understanding of Islam (ibid). This research is intended to add depth and complexity to the study of Muslim consumers, bringing Islam into the same context as other factors that influence the consumption decisions of British Muslims.

Another criticism of the existing research on Islamic societies is the lack of self-critique and reflexivity. Adopting a critical approach in research establishes dialogue, questions given statements and assumptions, generates further ideas and fosters reflexivity (Jafari, 2012). The lack of reflexivity and self-critique is considered the biggest drawback of Islamic marketing research, with the majority of Muslim scholars not critiquing their own ideas or practices. They instead focus on critiquing Western and non-Muslim ideas to defend Islam (Jafari, 2012). This approach will allow researchers in Islamic marketing to investigate Muslims’ multiple engagements with markets through more open-ended inductive methods that allow the development of new theories (Jafari and Süerdem, 2012), preventing this new discipline from using existing narrow deductive approaches to research already existent theories.
Some of the most recent work in the field of Islamic marketing attempts to address some of these critiques. In a study examining the relationship between religiosity and product involvement, Yousef and Malik (2013) found that high levels of religiosity gave structure to consumers’ consumption choices and reduced the impulsiveness and brand consciousness of these consumers. Their study, which used students from universities in Pakistan, focused on the degree of religiosity as opposed to viewing Islam as a monolithic category for the purposes of marketing analysis. A similar study, this time looking at Muslims living in the non-Muslim context of Sydney, found that the level of involvement and brand consciousness of food and personal hygiene products for Muslim consumers varied with the level of religiosity, with more religious consumers having higher levels of involvement (Razzaque and Chaudhry, 2013). Varul’s (2013) investigation challenges the supposed conflict between Islamic values and consumerist behaviour by exploring how Sufi ethics have been interpreted to define an emergent Muslim consumerism. These recent works look at Islam in new ways, reflecting the variety, flexibility, and context of Islam.

Finally, self-critique and reflexivity will help scholars to investigate marketing phenomena in the broader context of the social reality of life. Peñaloza and Venkatesh (2006) critically review key aspects of markets and market-making which have long been taken for granted. They proposed a new market practice based on conceptualising the market as a social construct with multiple actors in the market interacting to influence the market content and structure. The aim of this critical perspective is to emphasise the importance of marketing within the broader context of society (Firat and Dholakia, 1997; Peñaloza and Venkatesh, 2006; Tadajewski, 2010). People do not simply live in or for the market, but rather they engage with markets and marketplace resources, using it as a bundle of resources and constraints to manage their life, including negotiating their identity (Peñaloza and Venkatesh, 2006; Tadajewski, 2010).

While the lack of self-critique and reflexivity in the existing research on Islamic societies and the fact that this body of work adopts a simplistic reductionist view on Islam as a marketing tool are critical problems, they are not the biggest concern.
The main problem with the existing band of research is the way Islam and Islamic societies are conceptualised in research (Jafari, 2012), and this will be discussed in greater detail in Section 2.2.1.

2.2.1 History of Islamic Societies

Questions such as whether Islam can be spoken of in the singular or whether there is a universal definition of what Islam is, are very similar to the question of whether there is a universal definition of religion. Do all Muslims in different parts of the world have the same perceptions of Islam and Islamic teaching, and do they all behave in a similar way? These are the central issues for today’s research on Islam and Islamic societies (Jafari, 2012, 2011, 2009; Jafarai and Süerdem, 2012; Sandickci, 2011; Al-Azmeh, 2009). In Section 2.1 it was argued that religion is a multifaceted concept and it has no universal definition. More importantly, it was argued that levels of religiosity are diverse and therefore an individualistic approach to understanding religion is important. This argument will now be extended to the conceptualising of Islam and Islamic societies. In order to do so an understanding of the historical development of Islam is important.

Islam originally began in the Arabian Peninsula in 610 CE with the revelation of the Qur’an to Muhammad (PBUH), which is the holy book of Islam and Muslims view this text as the literal or verbatim word of God (Allah) (Nasr, 2009). The Arabian Peninsula at the time was split into many Arab tribes, and before the introduction of Islam there had been many different civilizations (Nigosian, 2004). This adds to the importance of the historical socio-cultural factors relevant to researching Muslims. A common notion is that the Prophet Muhammad set out to unite the different tribes under the banner of Islam with a vision of an Islamic “Ummah” or state, which Nigosian (2004: 17) defined as “a community of shared identity and of unity, in which cultural forms, societal patterns, and political realms all coalesce with religious and devotional aspects”. This description suggests a place where Islam regulates the lifestyle of the people. However, using the Qur’an

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1 (Common Era, also referred to as Christian Era)
2 Peace Be Upon Him
it can be argued otherwise, i.e. that Islam acknowledges the existence of different nationalities and ethnic groups.

In one example of many in the Qur’an (Holy Qur’an, Surat\(^3\) Al-Hujurat, 49: 13\(^4\)), the difference between individuals is dealt with by explaining how Allah “the creator” created different genders, ethnicities and nationalities. Similarly, in the Qur’an it is argued that the existence of many different ethnicities and languages is evidence of Allah’s existence and His powers (Holy Qur’an, Surat Ar-Rum, 30: 22). This further supports the rejection of homogenising Muslims as one group, solely based on their religious belief and ignoring other socio-cultural factors.

The socio-cultural diversity within Islam today is illustrated by the historic development and spread of the religion since the revelation in the Arabian Peninsula. From its beginnings in 610 CE, Islam spread all over the world, and by 750 CE Islam had entered into many diverse regions, including the northern part of Arabia and encompassing Syria, Palestine, Iraq and Jordan. It also entered North Africa and spread to East Africa (including the “Horn of Africa”) and West Africa. Persia and Eastern Europe followed before it reached Eastern Asia, including Malaysia and India and Western Europe, entering Spain and Portugal. The numbers of followers increased and Islam continues to spread globally through increased immigration, mainly into Europe (Nasr, 2009).

In Europe more specifically, Buijs and Rath (2002) have explained that the number of Muslims increased because of immigration from the Middle East and former Asian, African and Caribbean colonies. In many areas there are now large communities of first and second generation Muslim immigrant. The introduction of Islam to the UK took place in the mid-nineteenth century and continued to grow after the Second World War. Most migrants were from South Asia but there were also migrants from a diverse range of nationalities including Arabs, other Asian countries, Eastern Europeans and Africans (Ansari, 2002). The number of Muslims moving to the UK increased dramatically in the late 1950s and early 1960s until

\(^3\) Surat refers to Chapter (Chapter Name; Chapter Number: Verse)

\(^4\) See Appendix 3 for all Qur’anic verses and Hadiths.
the passage of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962) curtailed automatic entry to the UK for Commonwealth citizens. The large Muslim communities that were established by then continued to grow in numbers. Recently, the numbers also increased as asylum seekers, mainly from war-torn areas such as Iraq and Bosnia, came to Great Britain (ibid).

Here we see that before Islam, different ethnicities or “tribes” existed who had their own cultures. Furthermore, since its origin the spread of Islam has entered into many areas with very diverse ethnic and cultural contexts, from Africa to Asia and Europe, which means that from the early days of Islam, Muslims were not a homogenised community. Rather they constituted a diverse group that continued to diversify over time. These diverse ethnic and cultural roots are not homogenised due to shared religious beliefs and are evident today within groups of Muslims from different regions or backgrounds, and these diverse ethnic and cultural roots cannot be ignored. In summary, this means that contemporary Islamic societies are formed from a variety of socio-cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, Muslims are spread globally, while most are concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region, with 62% of all Muslims living there, 20% living in the Middle East and North Africa and 16% in sub-Saharan Africa. While this means that only a minority of the world’s Muslim population is in Europe (3%) and the Americas (less than 1%), nevertheless this accounts for 43.5 million people in Europe and 3.5 million in North America, the Caribbean and Latin America (Desilver, 2013; Pew Research Center 2012, 2011, 2009).

Not all Muslims are unified under one sect. After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, divisions occurred that resulted in the development of the several different branches of Islam that exist today and the different interpretations and understandings they have regarding key concepts within Islam. The two major sects that exist today are Sunnis, who constitute the overwhelming majority (87-90%) and Shias, who account for 10-13% of the Muslim population (Hino, 2012; Pew Research Center 2012, 2011, 2009). Even within these two sects there are different schools of thought. Sunnis, for example, are split into four major schools, Hanafi, Maliki, Shafii and Hanbal, as well as the less prominent Zahiri and Salafi.
branches. Shias are also split into different schools of thought that are mainly classified as Jafari, Ismaili and Zaiddiyah, which are then further split into sub-categories.

This not to dismiss the fact that Muslims have a shared belief in embracing Islam (see Appendix 2.1) and there are salient concepts within Islam that are agreed upon by all Muslims. For example, the “five pillars of Islam” represent the five key practices that all Muslims should undertake (Prokopec and Kurdy, 2012; Qaradawi, 2011; Arham, 2010; Fisher and Bailey, 2008). The first pillar refers to the pronouncement of the confession of faith, that “there is no God but Allah and Mohamed is His messenger”. The second pillar is “Salah” or prayer, which is conducted five times daily. The third pillar is “fasting” during the holy month of Ramadan once a year, abstaining from food, drinks, smoking and sex. The fourth pillar relates to “zakat” or the act of charity that requires Muslims to donate 2.5% of their wealth to Islamic charities. Finally, the fifth pillar is “Hajj” or pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime if the individual has the ability to do so (Fisher and Bailey, 2008).

However, there are two agreed upon sources for Muslims, first, the ‘Qur’an’ which is the holy book of Islam revealed to the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in 610 CE and Muslims view this text as the literal or verbatim word of God (Allah) (Nasr, 2009). The second source is “Hadith”, which are the recorded sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which provide further explanation on how the Qur’an should be practiced in life (Luqmani et al., 1987; Nasr, 2009). These two sources form the basis for “Sharia Law” which is the name given to the sacred law of Islam that all Muslims are expected to follow and which governs all aspects of their life (Mutsikiwa and Basera, 2012; Hanzee, 2011; Lada et al., 2009; Ahmed et al., 2001; Naughton and Naughton, 2000). Sharia law is composed and interpreted by religious authorities according to Islamic jurisprudence using these two sources, the Qur’an and Hadith (Fisher and Bailey, 2008). This means while some aspects of Islam maybe considered as “fixed”, such as the five pillars, a large aspect of Islam is based on interpretation and therefore individual Muslims will have their own view of what religion means to them. Their interpretation of Sharia law and
the role Islam plays in their life, consumption choices, and identity construction is influenced by multiple socio-cultural factors.

Nigosian (2004) also argued that there is a divide within the Muslim community regarding the identity of Islam. There are two factions or identities that have emerged: modernists and traditionalists. Modernists are attempting to merge Islam with concepts that are considered non-Islamic by some, such as national sentiment, government structures and legal systems and self-critique. In contrast, traditionalists reject this and also discard any non-Islamic institutions that they claim can corrupt or exert a malevolent influence on Islam (see also Parray, 2011; Janson, 2007; Moaddel, 2005). This conflict within Islam is especially relevant to the consumption behaviour of Muslims in western countries and this research explores the impact of these identities on the participants’ consumption habits.

2.2.2 Conceptualising Islam in the West

The divisions that occurred within Islam during its historical development illustrates the potential for many different understandings and interpretations of Islam today. This highlights the importance of not corralling Muslims into a unified group based on religious identity and ignoring other historic socio-cultural factors. It is also important that researchers look to understanding Muslims as individuals, and to understand their own personal view of Islam and its role in their life. However, as Jafari (2012) highlights, this is not happening and the way Islam and Islamic societies are conceptualised in research is problematic mainly because this falls into the trap of “Orientalism”, a term first coined by Edward Said (1978) and also what Jafari has described as “self-Orientalism”. Orientalism is evident when a “heterogeneous, dynamic and complex human reality is approached from an uncritically essentialist standpoint” (Said, 1995: 333). This is basically when a phenomena or a group of people are viewed from a standing point of view where there is no acceptance that their behaviour or ideas may change or have changed over time. It also looks at groups of people as unified in terms of their ideas, attitudes and beliefs or “homogeneous” rather than acknowledging the variation
and mixture amongst people even within the same religion, nationality or culture. The central idea of Orientalism is the stereotypical Western view of Islam and Muslims as the inferior other. Said argued that Western knowledge is not generated from facts but from personal subjective opinions.

Such Orientalist representations have had a major impact on how Islam and Muslims were viewed in marketing and consumer behaviour literature. Muslims were considered as a unified or singular group, or even as a mere market segment. Researchers assumed that, for example, all Arab Muslims would follow a similar consumption pattern or have the same attitudes and beliefs. There was a lack of acknowledgment of individualism or other factors in their surrounding environment. Sandickci (2011) argued that falling into the trap of Orientalism produced and reinforced Islam as a socio-cultural force in opposition to the West and which was incompatible with consumerism.

Muslims were therefore categorised as a group outside the values and practices of western consumer culture. For example, works such as “Jihad versus McWorld” (Barber, 1995) portrayed the idea that Islam and consumerism were incompatible. Barber argued that they are two forces operating in opposing directions, one being consumerism or “McWorld” and the other being Islamic fundamentalism or “Jihad” which has arisen in reaction to consumerism. Other works also added to this notion; Turner (1994) claimed that the fact that consumerism offers a wide range of lifestyle choices is in opposition to what Islamic fundamentalism calls for, which is a consistent or uniform lifestyle.

The theory of a “Clash of Civilizations” proposed by Huntington is another example of a work promoting the view that Islam is against the West and consumer culture. Huntington (1997) explained that civilization is a cultural entity and that regions, ethnic groups, nationalities, and religious groups all have distinct cultures with different levels of cultural heterogeneity. Huntington added that “Civilizations are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and, most important, religion” (p.4). This suggests that religion is one of the most important factors of cultural difference, and that cultural characteristics in general are not
easily changed or compromised. Huntington’s emphasis on religion is explained by suggesting it is difficult for a person to believe and live two religions i.e. to be half-Muslim and half-Catholic for example, but it is common and manageable to be of dual nationality.

Using religious terms to define identity can lead to “us” versus “them” relationships. In regard to the direct relationship between Islam and the West, Huntington explained that the fault line between the two civilizations is a historic one dating back more than 1,300 years. Both sides see their interaction as a “clash of civilizations” (p. 8) and that while there are obstacles for all civilizations when engaging with western thoughts and ideas, it is greater for some more than others, and one of these is Islam. Brooks (2011) in his article “Huntington’s Clash Revisited” stated that Huntington believed that Islamic civilization is “most troublesome” and Arabs do not share the values of the Western world, citing individualism as one example.

However, it was not only Western analysts who created the notion of Islam versus the West and engaged in the essentialist position of viewing Islam and Islamic societies from a standing or non-evolving point of view. Muslim scholars themselves added to this practice (Kahani-Hopkins and Hopkins, 2002). Some of the latter viewed consumer culture as wasteful, harmful, individualistic (Sandickci, 2011) and therefore opposite to what they considered to be the so-called recommended Islamic way of life, which is meant to be modest and to avoid excessive consumption. This is what Jafari (2012) explained as “self-Orientalism”, resulting in Islamic consumption being defined in contrast to Western modes of consumerism. This results in some sort of Western imperialist perspective that assumes consumption culture in Muslim societies is purely affected by Western consumerism or “Westernisation” and ignores the changing nature of contemporary life in Muslim societies (Jafari and Süerdem, 2012). As Wong (2007: 451) argued, in Islamic societies, consumer culture is therefore “often portrayed as a threat, harmful to religion as it privileges hedonism, pleasure, individualism and an excessive lifestyle”.

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A review of the existing literature on consumption from an Islamic perspective supports this and shows how current studies rotate mainly around the notion of Islamic modesty, as opposed to the Western model of consumerism (Sandıkcı and Ger, 2010). According to a review by Jafari and Süerdem (2012), a large number of contemporary Muslim writers argue that market-driven modes of consumption contradict the foundations of the Islamic way of life. Firstly, they argue that consumerism promotes a Western model of individualism and hedonism, threatening what they consider as key aspects of Islamic identity, such as societal integrity and family values. Secondly, they argue that it facilitates the capitalist Western economic and cultural invasion of Islamic societies. As Kiliçbay and Binark (2002: 501) argued, “the capitalist system is powerful enough to assimilate religious institutions, ethics and the aesthetics of Islam into consumption, which is thereby considered a threat to the Islamic lifestyle”.

This notion has been further evidenced by Bonsu and Belk (2010), although there focus was not the religion of Islam. They argued after researching Pentecostalism in Ghana, that globalisation is having an effect on human experience, including religion, which is not immune to the effect of contemporary global consumer culture. They have criticised what they saw as a new form of Pentecostalism in Africa that is based on the customisation of religion through individual selection of doctrine and practices to meet the compelling material needs of individuals. They concluded that this leads to the suppressing of local religion and economic imperialism, a situation where every human characteristic, in this case religious identity, is mixed or given a commercial character. They argued that this new form of religion is a branding exercise designed to make religion appealing for the masses in today’s society. This study appears to indicate that consumerism acts in a manner antithetical to religious belief and that it undermines a traditional community’s religious life. This confrontational approach is in line with an earlier argument by Mills (1959) who, discussing religion in general, suggested that given the rise of modernisation and secularisation, religion would disappear into the individual’s private world.
Inglehart and Norris (2004) argued antagonism is not, necessarily, the only way to view the relationship between religion and consumerism as it relies upon a premise that religiosity has, in fact, dropped in direct correlation with the rise of modern consumer culture. They argue that the perception of conflict between religion and consumerism is based on selected anomalies and focused on Christianity in Western states (mainly the USA and those in Western Europe), ignoring other broad trends in religion, and that today there are more people attached to traditional religious values. Previously, Stark (1999) argued that secularisation is a myth and that religious decline is based on an exaggerated perception of religiousness in the past, stating that there is no demonstrable long term decline in religious participation in Europe and claiming that subjective religiousness in Europe remains high. Furthermore, outside of Europe and away from Christianity, there is evidence from nations where other religions are dominant that modernity is compatible with religion (ibid).

Hadden (1987) claims this notion of religious decline was developed in a time where social and cultural settings and global changes suited this thought and supported the rise of the notions of modernisation of the time. Inglehart and Norris (2004) do acknowledge that the economic growth that can come with modernisation does increase security in life and therefore may mean less need for religious reassurances that people in many communities relied on. But that does not mean religion will no longer play a role in the individual’s life. Security is not the only attraction to religion in life. Inglehart and Baker (2000) argued earlier that spiritual concerns are important and will always be part of the human outlook. Where do we come from? Where are we going? Why are we here? Questions that look to address the meaning of life will mean religion plays a role for the individual at some level even if religious institutions continue to decline. There is less attachment to traditional forms of religion but we are more likely to spend time thinking about the meaning and purpose of life, and broader spiritual concerns have become more widespread (ibid). Inglehart and Baker concluded “Economic development tends to push societies in a common direction, but rather than converging, they seem to move on parallel trajectories shaped by their cultural heritages. We doubt that the forces of modernization will produce a
homogenized world culture in the foreseeable future” (2000: 49). These parallel trajectories can be seen clearly in the multicultural cities of the UK, particularly among British Muslims, who are the focus of the next section.

2.3 Understanding British Muslims

The Orientalist stereotypes which view Islam and Islamic societies as unified, homogeneous and fixed is evident in research on Islam and Islamic societies conducted by both Muslim and non-Muslim researchers. The latter have ignored the historical socio-cultural factors that influence Islamic societies (Jafari, 2011), viewing Islam and Muslims from all over the world as an agreed-upon homogeneous collective culture that is uninfluenced by other factors (Jafari, 2009). Al-Azmeh (2009) explained how this misconception establishes a life-world based on the perceived essential and closed homogeneity of Islam and Islamic societies. Religion is viewed as having an “autonomous essence” that remains unchanged and Muslims are seen as practicing the same Islam that was practiced in the 7th century (Jafari, 2012). This ignores Islam’s historical development (Asad, 1993; Al-Azmeh, 2009), and its experiences and changes on its route to modernity (Jafari, 2012). It prevents any understanding of the complex ways Muslims negotiate their religious, racial, and ethnic identities (Abdullah, 2008), and leads to an essentialist understanding of Islam, Islamic societies and the consumption behaviour of Muslims. Sandickci (2011) argued that Muslims are assumed to be a group of people who have shared characteristics that make them different from the western consumer and this assumption produces a very static perspective on culture where all Muslims have a fixed and essential identity and have no shared characteristics with other consumers in general.

Increasingly, there is recognition that Muslims are looking to adapt their Islamic values to a consumerist lifestyle (Wong, 2007). This bringing together of religion and consumption in everyday practices contributes to the making of a new Muslim identity that draws from multiple resources (Sandickci, 2011). Researchers therefore must understand how Muslims are negotiating their Islamic values with
their consumerist aspirations in their daily lives and practices (ibid). Jafari (2012) therefore expresses the importance of conceptualising Islam and Islamic societies from a fresh perspective and avoiding the trap of Orientalism (Said, 1978). The latter results in researchers conceptualising Islam and Islamic societies based on theoretical structures developed in Western philosophies, ideas and beliefs rather than their own. There is no single definition of Islam (Jafari, 2012), and Islam and religion in general is historically defined (Asad, 1993).

Interpretations of Islamic texts are supposed to guide Muslims in everyday life situations and help them understand how they should live. The openness to interpretation allows individuals to practice different lifestyles within certain boundaries. This multiplicity of lifestyles is based on the understanding that Islam as a religion is not a separate entity, rather it is part of a culture that has developed historically and which has been shaped by the socio-cultural influences of different countries and ethnicities (Jafari and Süerdem, 2012). Therefore, although all Muslims use the Holy Qur’an and Hadith as their source for understanding their religion, researchers must acknowledge that Islam has a variety of interpretations, and that in fact many Muslims themselves believe that Islamic teachings have multiple interpretations (see Appendix 2.2). As Jafari and Süerdem (2012) argued, Muslims refer to Islam as a set of transcendental guidelines and they interpret and reinterpret them in different ways to make better sense of their socio-cultural and economic behaviour. For example, halal is a commonly recognised and shared concept in Islam. But Muslims interpret halal differently and how it is negotiated and experienced in the daily lives of Muslims is complex and dynamic (Sandickci, 2011).

In comparing Indonesia and Morocco, two countries where Islam is the dominant religion, Geertz (1968) concluded that Islam developed into two entirely different systems of religious meanings because the culture of both societies impacted on how Islamic beliefs were interpreted. Instead of looking at Islam as a set of dogmatic beliefs and seeking a theologically correct interpretation of Islam, researchers should demonstrate the possibility of multiple interpretations and focus on how Muslims’ interpretations affects their behaviour (Jafari, 2012).
Based on this, researchers need to study religion and Islam by looking at how religious beliefs are enacted in everyday life situations (Jafari, 2012). It is essential for researchers to acknowledge that religion is not static, rather it is continuously evolving and changing because of new knowledge and changes in the socio-cultural contexts of the religion (ibid). Therefore Islam should not be viewed as just an identity, but rather as a source of truth for individuals to help them organise their life (Jafari and Süerdem, 2012). This means that even within the same homogeneous society that they are a part of, their religious beliefs maybe enacted in different forms of practice (Jafari, 2012).

The purpose of this research is not to understand how British Muslims define religion or Islam but rather to examine how they negotiate their religion and other socio-cultural factors, the role Islam plays in their daily lives and how it affects their consumption practices and identity construction. Therefore, for the purpose of this a functional approach is adopted (Berger, 1974) in order to conceptualise Islam and understand the religion in the form of what it does, not what it is. Geertz (1973) also suggests that one of the main features of religion is that it addresses the “problem of meaning” – the purpose and direction of life and existence. This point is further supported by Peterson and Roy (1985) who also argued that the role of religion is to provide a source of meaning and purpose for people, in other words to provide a framework which makes life understandable and interpretable.

The argument is that religion is like culture in that it provides meaning to an individual’s life. It is not just a set of rules to be followed; instead it is a set of guidelines to provide individuals with ways to provide meaning to their experiences in life. This further suggests that a functional approach (Berger, 1974) should be used to provide a definition of Islam that emphasises the role of the religion in the individual’s life, how it affects their daily practices and the meaning that their religion provides to their life. This is in contrast to previous studies that defined Islam in a dogmatic fashion and focused on defining what Islam is and what its beliefs are.
Individualism is a key factor in that the individuals being researched should define what religion is, because of the fact that there are so many different interpretations of religion and its role in people’s lives (see Appendix 2.3 and 2.4). As Berger (1974: 125) stated, “the scientific study of religion must bracket the ultimate truth claims implied by its subject”, and return to a perspective on the phenomenon “from within”. Blasi and Weigart (1976) also explained that because empirical approaches to knowledge logically begin with the question whether a phenomenon “exists” and “What is it?” religion cannot be defined using historical and universal definitions. Religion therefore should be defined based on individual meanings and patterns of action. This then provides and organises meaning and patterns of action for social groups, providing a system of symbolic meaning and social structure. It is this emphasis on British Muslims as individuals and their detailed experiences in their own words that leads to the phenomenological approach chosen for this doctoral study.

As Thompson et al. (1990) explained, although social context is seen as the basis from which meanings emerge, there should be an emphasis on detailed “first person” descriptions of the consumer’s life-world rather than on the cultural setting observed from a “third person” viewpoint, since individuals’ experiences emerge in specific contexts. A first-person description will allow the researcher to understand the informant’s own interpretation and narration of the phenomena being studied based on their life-world experience. This will allow the researcher to gain an understanding of how the individual subject defines religion, its role in his or her life and the subject’s own interpretations. All of this will emerge in their own terms and categories to allow us to understand their consumption choices and identity structuring behaviour. The idea is to understand how individuals interpret their religion and discuss the role it plays in their lives, while acknowledging that personal understandings are drawn from cultural systems and are expressed within certain sociocultural fields.
2.4 Understanding the Concept of “Halal” Food

The increase in the number of Muslims in Britain (Doughty, 2011; ONS, 2011, 2006), combined with the increase and importance of fast food consumption in today’s western society (Key Note, 2014, 2013, 2011; Schau and Gilly, 1997) has opened up an important area of research focusing on British Muslims and the role of halal as a key concept in their fast food consumption choices and their identity construction. The concept of halal, literally translated as “permissible” or “lawful”, is an important part of Islam as its followers (Muslims) are commanded by Allah in the Qur’an to eat only food that is considered as such (Holy Qur’an, Surat Al-Baqarah, 2: 168, 172). Using Islamic Sharia law which, as earlier discussed, is based on two sources, the holy book of Qur’an and the Hadith, Muslims judge whether the food is pure, wholesome and permissible: that is, fit for human consumption (Mutsikiwa and Basera, 2012). This dietary requirement of halal food, as a key aspect of Islam, will be central to this thesis and will be used to illustrate the diversity of Islamic societies and the religion’s multiple interpretations. Also, by comprehending the concept of halal, a better understanding can be gained regarding the way British Muslims negotiate between their religion (Islam) and nationality (British), the role of Islam in their daily life, and how it affects their consumption practices and identity construction.

This literal translation of halal as “lawful” or “permissible” and many similar terms seems to be the common definitions used to define halal in research. Hanzee (2011) and Kamali (2003), for example, define halal as food that is “permissible under Islamic law”, Wahab (2004) also defines halal as a general term that means permitted, allowed, authorized, approved, sanctioned, lawful, legal, legitimate or licit. Rahman et al. (2011) added that halal meaning “lawful” or “permitted” is the opposite of “haram”, meaning “unlawful” or “prohibited”, a simplistic dichotomy that is critiqued in this chapter.

Reviewing the literature on halal and the authorities that certify restaurants or food as such, there is an evidently common belief that for food to be considered halal the animal must be slaughtered by a Muslim and “in the name of Allah”.
Ruževičiūtė and Ruževičius (2011), for example, defined halal as food “authorized by Islam”. They also elaborated by adding that for food to be halal it should be slaughtered in the name of God (Allah) \( (ibid) \). Ahmed (2008) concurred that the slaughter should be conducted by a Muslim cutting the animal’s throat with a sharp instrument \( (Sahih Bukhari^5: 67: 414) \) to make sure that the main three vessels are cut and the blood flows out, again emphasising that the person must do this “in the name of Allah”, similar to the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as narrated in the Hadith \( (Sahih Muslim, 22: 4842/4854) \). This is known as “tasmiyah”, a concept that is present in the everyday life of Muslims who are expected to commence all their actions including animal slaughter with “tasmiyah” reciting “in the name of Allah, the most merciful, the most compassionate”. This also leads many to argue that only Muslim inspectors can monitor the food process and production for the food to be considered halal and receive halal accreditation \( (Hamdan et al., 2013; Malaysia Halal Certificate, 2009; Chaudry, 1997) \).

In the Holy Qur’an \( (Surat An’am, 6: 118, 119, 121) \) it states that Muslims should consume food where the name of Allah has been mentioned, referring to the “tasmiyah” before slaughter and they might not eat it if the name of Allah has not been mentioned. This created the notion that any animal that is not slaughtered in the name of Allah is categorically unlawful or haram, as argued by Ahmed et al. \( (2001) \). For example, in a study by Marzuki et al. \( (2012) \) they aimed to explore the attributes of halal certification among Malaysian restaurant managers. They stated that according to the Islamic dietary laws, there are three main categories of food for Muslims: halal, haram, and syubha. They defined halal as lawful, permitted, pure, wholesome, and recommended under Islamic law according to the Qur’an and Hadith and haram foods are unlawful and prohibited for Muslims, while “syubha” foods are questionable and therefore should be avoided. Their interpretation is that if food is not clearly halal then it should be avoided. Riaz and Chaudry \( (2004) \) and Nasir and Pereria \( (2008) \) concurred, adding that Muslims put great emphasis on assurance that their food is halal.

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\(^5\) Sahih Bukhari is one of the “six books” of Hadith collections in Islam
In essence, like Islam, halal has also been conceptualised in a dogmatic manner, being defined as what is “permissible” and “in the name of Allah”. These terms are problematic because they are oversimplifications and offer a restricted definition of halal, reducing it to a simple dichotomy in contrast to haram. This creates an essentialist understanding that does not fully illustrate the complex and dynamic nature of these terms. As Jafari (2012) argued this creates misunderstandings and misrepresentations of the term halal in marketing literature. As this section will highlight, the reality is that halal is not a fixed construct, rather it is a diverse, flexible concept with multiple interpretations, with many debates about how the Qur’anic text and Hadith should be interpreted concerning this issue.

When researchers use these literal terms such as “permissible” or “lawful”, or even attempt to elaborate and explain what they consider to be halal, it does not necessarily represent what their informants or research subjects believe is actually halal. Muslims are born into societies that consist of various cultural forces that shape their daily practices. So, although they have a common factor in the form of their religion with agreed upon sources of Islamic text, which are originally in Arabic but have been translated into many different languages, and there are different national cultural groupings that lead to different interpretations of halal (Wilson and Liu, 2010).

One example that highlights the problem behind oversimplifying the term halal and the potential for different interpretations among different Muslims is Alam and Sayuti (2011). Like many other academics they also define halal as food that is “lawful” or “permitted” under Islamic law. However their interpretation is that the Qur’an states all food prepared by Muslims, Christians, or Jews is halal or lawful except those that are explicitly mentioned as haram or prohibited (i.e. pork, dead meat6 and slaughtered in the name of idols), even if it is not slaughtered using the process mentioned in the Qur’an or Hadith and is not “in the name of Allah”.

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This interpretation can be traced back to the Holy Qur’an, Surat Al-Baqarah (2: 173), and also in a Hadith (Sahih Al-Bukhari, 67: 387/396/404) it is relayed by several narrators that the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated that for those living in land ruled by “people of the books” referring to Christians and Jews, Muslims can use their utensils for cooking and eating if needed. Furthermore, it was narrated that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated if Muslims are unsure whether or not Allah’s Name has been mentioned when slaughtering the animal to mention Allah’s Name (tasmiyah) before eating it (Sahih Al-Bukhari, 67: 415). Finally, in another Hadith by Malik Ibn Anas Al Muwatta (24.2.5), a renown Islamic scholar, it states that Muslims are allowed to consume what Christian Arabs hunt or slaughter and their food and products, because it is not haram as they are considered “people of the books”. So while others who have used the same words to define halal would argue that if a Muslim does not slaughter the meat and if Allah’s name is not mentioned in the slaughter then it is not halal (Hamdan et al., 2013; Halal Authority UK, 2012; Malaysia Halal Certificate, 2009; Chaudry, 1997), Alam and Sayuti (2011) disagreed, and both arguments are made drawing on the Qur’an and Hadith.

Similarly, Qaradawi (2011) disagreed with the notion that for food to be halal it needs to be slaughtered in the name of Allah and by a Muslim, an assertion that is widespread in academia and that is also used to justify what is permissible by “halal authorities” in Western countries. He states that Allah did not forbid the food

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6 Dead meat/animal refers to the following (Qaradawi, 2011: 46)

- **The strangled**: an animal which has been strangled, for example, by a rope around its neck, or suffocated, as for instance by putting its head into something which produces suffocation.
- **The beaten**: an animal that has been beaten to death by a club or similar object.
- **The fallen**: an animal that dies as a result of a fall from a high place, or by falling into a gully or ravine.
- **The gored**: an animal that dies as a result of being gored by the horns of another animal.
- **That which has been (partly) eaten by wild beasts**: an animal that has been partially devoured by wild animals and dies as a result.
of the Jews and Christians who are referred to in Islamic scripture as "people of the books", referring to verses in the Holy Qur’an (Surat Al-Maidah, 5: 3, 4, 5). This is excluding the things that are clearly forbidden (haram) in other verses in the Holy Qur’an and various Hadiths, which is pork (Holy Qur’an, Surat Al-Baqarah, 2: 173), the meat of dead animals (Sahih Bukhari, 67: 439/440) and carnivorous animals (Sahih Bukhari, 67: 435/438).

Qaradawi (2011) elaborated that food slaughtered for Christian festivals or churches is not haram, because while Muslims are allowed food from “people of the books”, it is under the assumption that the food was slaughtered without being dedicated to Gods or religious idols. In that case, even though the food is not dedicated to Allah, it is not haram because it is not dedicated to another religious idol. Also, according to Hadith (Sahih Bukhari, 67: 415) Muslims are not expected to go seeking the truth regarding the meat they have been given when they did not witness its slaughter, such as if the name of Allah was mentioned or how it was slaughtered. As long as it is performed by a Muslim, Christian or Jew then Muslims are asked to mention the name of Allah “Bism Allah” or “In the name of Allah” before they eat and it is then considered halal (Qaradawi, 2011).

So, while Muslims are asked to cut the throat of the animal in a specific manner for the purpose of the halal slaughter of meat (Sahih Bukhari, 67: 414), it does not mean that food from Christians and Jews must be cut in the same way. Qaradawi (2011) argued, applying the above verses from Surat Al-Maidah, that if a Christian slaughters an animal, it is still considered halal even though the method used is not how Muslims are asked to slaughter meat for halal food. This is because Allah permitted Christian or Jewish food for Muslims unconditionally, as long as they do not do anything that is clearly stated as haram such as killing animals by strangulation (they would be considered dead animals not slaughtered for food). Qaradawi even argues that using electric shock as is common in the EU is not haram, but halal, explaining that “we know that imported meats, such as chicken and canned beef, originating with the People of the Book are halal for us, even though the animal may have been killed by means of electric shock or the like. As long as they consider it lawful in their religion, it is halal for us” (p. 60).
This interpretation by many Muslims that practices of “people of the books”, such as consuming their food, is acceptable to them as long as it is not clearly forbidden in the Qur’an or Hadith, also comes from Judaism and Christianity being considered as Abrahamic monotheistic religions. That is, they are religions that worship only one God and who trace their origins to Abraham or view him as a central figure in their religion. In Islam, Abraham was referred to many times in the Qur’an (Holy Qur’an, Surat Al-Baqarah, 2:135; Surat Al-An’am, 6: 161; Surat An-Nahl, 16: 123; Surat Al-Ankabut, 29; 46) and normally in the context of “Millat Ibrahim” (Abraham) or the path of Ibrahim in which he embraced Islam and accepted that there is only one God (Allah) according to Islamic beliefs. Meanwhile Christians refer to Abraham as the “father in faith” and Jews claim to be descendants of Abraham and follow his practices as one of the three spiritual fathers (Peters, 2004). Therefore, as Harrison (2006) argued, Judaism, Christianity and Islam may be seen just as diverging traditions within the extended family of Abrahamic monotheism.

Finally, it is evident from the Qur’an that there is flexibility regarding the requirement to consume ‘halal’ food depending on an individual’s situation. In Surat Al-An’am (6: 145) it goes as far as allowing Muslims to consume food that is haram in a scenario where there are no other options or the person is “constrained”. Of course this is based on extreme and rare circumstances but highlights that this issue is not as fixed as it appears in previous understandings. It can also reflect a flexibility regarding the requirement to consume food that has been slaughtered adopting Islamic methods while living in Western countries. So while this method of slaughter is desirable and mentioned in the Qur’an and Hadith, it does not mean it is the only form of halal food. It can be argued that it is acceptable for Muslims living in a context where it is not easy to regularly access food slaughtered according to the Islamic method, to consume meat prepared using different methods.

So what can be clearly concluded from the Qur’anic text and Hadith regarding the issue of halal food? Muslims are required to consume only halal food, pork is not allowed, food slaughtered in the name of another idol/God other than Allah and
carnivorous animals are not allowed. The animal must be alive at the point of “slaughter” (dhabh) for consumption in order for it to be halal and the animal must not die first for any other reason (Qaradawi, 2011: 46) before being prepared for consumption, after that nothing can be argued to be concrete or fixed.

2.5 Halal Authorities and Logos

The halal certification or logo is an important part of the halal market and it gives consumers the confidence to make informed choices (Marzuki et al., 2012). This is especially important according to Pointing and Teinaz (2004) because of the many international cases of malpractice in the supply of meat, with the recent horsemeat scandal where the latter was found in beef meals across Europe as a good example (BBC, 2013). The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) claimed that up to 90% of meat and poultry sold in UK as halal may not be actually halal and is sold illegally (Ahmed, 2008). This illegal trade of “haram” meat, or meat that is sold as halal when it is not, is now the third largest illegal trade in UK and is estimated to be worth £1 billion annually according to Pointing and Teinaz (2004). Recently the Ministry of Justice suspended a firm from supplying halal food to prisons in UK after traces of pork DNA was discovered (BBC, 2013).

Supermarkets such as Asda, Morrison’s and Sainsbury’s who sell halal meat now look to get halal certification from authorized UK authorities to guarantee the authenticity of their halal products and to attract Muslim consumers (Ahmed, 2008). There is a difference in opinion amongst Muslims about whether they would accept purchasing halal food from a place that sells alcohol and pork as both are considered haram (ibid). According to Hanzae and Ramezani (2011), the lack of a consistent global halal standard or a global halal trademark is the biggest challenge for Muslim communities and the halal market. They stated that at the World Halal Forum 2007 there were 17 different halal logos presented. Studies have shown that Muslim consumers are concerned about the presence of a halal logo (Hamdan et al., 2013), however there is a trust issue and some consumers doubt the authenticity of halal food (Shafie & Othman, 2006; Zainal et al., 2007,
According to Shafie & Othman (2006), a few reasons that might contribute to the doubt include:

1. The inconsistency of the definition of halal concerning the aspect of slaughtering the animal;
2. The introduction of a halal logo by individual firms;
3. The use of Arabic-sounding or Islamic-signalled brand names;
4. The rampant display of Quranic verses (or the use of Arabic characters) by food operators to indirectly signal that the premises is operated by Muslims and that it offers halal foods; and
5. The lack of enforcement by the authorities with regard to the misuse of halal logos.

Any individual Muslim, Islamic organization or agency can issue a halal certificate according to Hanzae and Ramezani (2011), but the issue is the acceptability of the certification by the country where the product is sold. There are government-approved halal programs in countries like Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia. However, in predominantly food-exporting countries there are independent certification bodies (*ibid*). In Malaysia the Islamic Development Department of Malaysia or *Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia* (JAKIM) is a government body that issues the Malaysian halal certificate and logo. JAKIM recently cut down its list of approved organisations from 16 to just three who can authorize halal food (Hanzae and Ramenzi, 2011). A similar government organisation in Indonesia, *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI), only approves five organisations out of the 40 organisations in the USA that authorize halal food. However, these are countries with a predominantly Muslim population and therefore there are government organisations that monitor the halal authorities. In the UK this does not exist.

These numerous halal authorities and certifications mirror the argument regarding the multiple interpretations of the concept of halal in Islam. For example, in the UK there are several organisations that regulate the halal industry. Two of these are the Halal Food Authority (HFA) and Halal Monitoring Committee.
(HMC), but they differ on what is halal in regards to the issue of stunning and using machinery (BBC, 2009). HFA argues that the use of machinery and stunning is allowed and can be used for the production of halal meat. They state that stunning is allowed, as long as the animal does not die from it, but is just stunned (HFA, 2012). However, HMC disagrees and says animals should be slaughtered by hand and using any machinery, including stunning, is not halal (HMC, 2012). Critically, both claim slaughter needs to be conducted by Muslims and invoking the name of Allah, while as argued earlier using Islamic text from the Qur'an and Hadith is debatable, to say the least. Furthermore, this claim is not made by other halal authorities in their certifications, such as the European Halal Development Agency (EHDA) and the Halal Authority Board UK (HAB), which highlights the issue of multiple interpretations of what is considered halal by Muslims.

These conflicts between different so-called halal authorities or certification providers are common and reflect the multiple interpretation aspect of Islam. Another recent example was when Muslim children in schools in Lancashire were urged to boycott the halal food supplied by the schools because the Lancashire Council of Mosques (LCM) argued it did not meet halal food standards (BBC, 2012), despite the fact that the supplier was halal as certified by another halal authority (the same halal authority used for the Olympics). Furthermore, in this case all suppliers to schools stunned animals before slaughter as the Lancashire County Council refused to use any supplier who does not stun animals, which as discussed above is another point of debate amongst Muslims (that is whether stunning is allowed or not).

There are many components of what makes food halal, not just who slaughters and prepares the meat or how it was slaughtered. This includes animal wellbeing, health, quality control issues, hygiene and standards for cleanliness and sanitation (Yacoob et al., 2007; Lada et al., 2009; Ruževičiūtė and Ruževičius, 2011). Given that there are so many criteria that need to be considered for food to be halal, the inevitable result is different requirements and standards by different halal authorities.
2.6 Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature on religion and argued that there is no universal definition of religion and that in fact definitions are diverse and multifaceted in terms of their construction. This is also reflected in Islam and the chapter outlined how religion and Islam mean different things to individual Muslims and the role they play in their life varies between individuals. This then leads to the argument that religion should be researched by focusing on what religion does for an individual or the role it plays in their life rather than offering a substantive definition which focuses on what religion is and its practices and beliefs. Researchers who focus on Islam, Islamic societies and Muslim consumers should attempt to understand the definition of religion and the role of Islam in terms of consumption behaviour and identity construction from the point of view of Muslims as individuals, rather than assuming a universal definition of religion and Islam based on a set of rules and practices. Essentially, the key argument here is to emphasise the importance of individualism when studying religion and in this case when researching Muslim consumers in the context of consumption choices and identity construction. A phenomenological approach, such as the existential phenomenological approach proposed by Thompson et al. (1989) that will be used for this study, is an approach that allows the researcher to provide a holistic view of how individuals reflect a consumption phenomenon.

The chapter also discussed religion and culture, and whether religion is a part of culture or a separate entity. The researcher supports the argument that religion is part of culture and is one of many socio-cultural factors that play a role in the Muslim consumer’s life. Separating religion from culture will provide a dogmatic and fixed understanding of religion and Islam, ignoring the complex and dynamic behaviour of Muslim consumers. It also leads to the homogenisation of all Muslims under the identity of religion, thereby ignoring their historical and socio-cultural background. The review of Islam, its history and current status has illustrated many key issues.
First, although Islam has almost 2 billion adherents globally, its history shows a high level of diversity within Islam. Islam started in the Arabian Peninsula, which itself included many different tribes, and then in its early years it spread to Asia, Africa and Europe, and the number of its followers in Europe has increased with substantial immigration in recent years. This means that within Islam we have many different ethnicities and nationalities with different cultural behaviours. This diversity emphasises the importance in avoiding the homogenisation of Muslims as a consumer group and encourages researchers to focus on individualism while researching Islam. More importantly, researchers are urged not to sacralise religion and ignore other socio-historical factors. Furthermore and adding to this argument the review of Islamic history showed disputes and splits within the religion that have led to many different sects and schools of thought, which in turn means multiple interpretations of key issues in Islam such as halal.

Looking at the current status of Islam today it can be concluded that Islam is a religion that is on the increase globally. Facts suggest that it is the fastest growing religion and a quarter of the world’s population are now Muslim. In Europe in general and in the UK specifically we can see a rise in the number of Muslims with the latter constituting the fastest growing religious group. As a community they are becoming a key player socially and economically and therefore a deeper understanding of Muslims is important for academics. Their consumption behaviour and identity construction and the role Islam plays in their life are areas that have not been researched sufficiently. This is surprising considering the number and influence of Muslims in the UK. This lack of research on ethnic minority groups in general was earlier discussed by Stern (1998), who argued that research in general focused on the white middle class and that researchers in consumer behaviour themselves were mainly from the white professional upper-middle class backgrounds. Jafari (2012) highlighted three other criticisms that were discussed in greater detail in this chapter. The conceptualisation of Islam, Islamic societies and Muslim consumers was problematic mainly due to the homogenisation of Muslims as a unified group under a single religious identity and ignoring vital socio-cultural factors. The reductionist approach used in researching
Islam, Islamic societies and Muslim consumers and the lack of self-critique and reflexivity were also criticised.

All of this was reflected in the final section by reviewing the notion of halal food using the Qur’an, Hadith and academic literature, thereby highlighting that halal has been conceptualised in a fixed, dogmatic fashion just as Islam has been. There has been an oversimplification of what is halal that also ignores the complex and dynamic nature of halal and the role it plays in an individual Muslim’s life. The review also showed that there are many different interpretations using Islamic text of what is considered halal or haram and there is no unified agreement on key issues like stunning and who should perform the slaughter. The following chapter will build upon the review so far by focusing on the fast food, consumption and identity literature, and relating it to the key topics discussed in this chapter.
Chapter 3: Consumption and Identity Construction of British Muslims

3.0 Chapter Overview

This literature review chapter will begin by discussing the central focus of this study, fast food consumption, which has increasingly become a popular food consumption choice amongst Britons. It begins with a review of the literature to understand how fast food has been defined in previous research. This will be followed by a discussion of the fast food market in Britain, highlighting the increasing role it plays in the daily life of many British consumers.

The main part of this chapter will examine consumption and identity, linking these concepts with the previous chapter on religion to understand the role of socio-cultural factors in consumption choices and identity construction. The section will begin with a review of consumption literature to understand the role it plays in constructing and reconstructing identities and also how choices are affected by socio-cultural factors. The main focus will be on consumption, with special focus on food consumption as a meaningful symbolic activity and the cultural meanings of consumption. This will then lead to a review of the literature on identity construction, arguing that individuals today tend to have multiple identities constructed through both individualism and socio-cultural structural influences. After reviewing the consumption and identity literature, the focus will narrow to food consumption choices and the role they play in identity construction.

The chapter will then engage with the literature on “consumer freedom” focusing on the socio-cultural factors affecting consumption choices, and arguing that structural constraints affect consumers and their consumption choices. This will be linked with the previous chapter on religion and the discussion on consumption and identity in order to highlight how consumers are affected by religion and other socio-cultural factors. The study will argue that while still enjoying substantial choices and freedom in what they choose to consume, consumers are not totally
free from structural constraints when choosing what to consume and in creating their identity. Although they may often express or narrate freedom, we can observe from their narratives that their choices are constrained and shaped.

The final section will focus on discussing Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), which is a key theoretical and conceptual framework for this doctoral study. The section will begin with an overview of CCT and then focus on identifying the key areas of CCT that this study looks to contribute to. It will continue by discussing the link between this doctoral study and the CCT sub-discipline. There will also be a review of the existing CCT-based research, its development, and a discussion on some of the criticism CCT has faced.

### 3.0.1 Fast Food

To help provide a context for the discussion of the role of fast food consumption in identity construction, this section provides a brief review of the current status of the fast food market in the UK, and what is meant by “fast food.” The term “fast food” is summed up by Bender and Bender (1993) as a general phrase used for a “limited menu of foods that lend themselves to production-line techniques; suppliers tend to specialize in products such as hamburgers, pizzas, chicken, or sandwiches” (cited in Akbay et al., 2007, p.904; Davies and Smith, 2004, p.80). Jekanowski et al. (2001) add that what distinguishes fast food from restaurants or other food consumed away from home is the fast or on the spot service, consistency and standardisation of the products menu, and also convenience in regards to store location and ease of access.

Fast food has become a major part of western culture and the industry has grown rapidly over the past few decades, with McDonald’s undoubtedly the market leader. McDonald’s has, essentially, become part of our society to the point where 96% of US schoolchildren were apparently able to identify Ronald McDonald in a survey, second only to Santa Claus (Schlosser 2002). There are about thirty
thousand McDonald’s restaurants worldwide, and two thousand new restaurants open each year (ibid). In the UK alone there are more than 1,000 McDonald’s restaurants, serving over 2.5 million people on a daily basis (Brewis and Jack, 2005). Fast food consumption is becoming the main source of Britain’s workday diet, while the traditional meal at home is more likely to be reserved for weekends and special occasions (ibid).

The extraordinary growth in fast food consumption has been attributed to a multitude of factors, mainly linked to the notion of time scarcity. According to Grier et al. (2007), the increase in fast food consumption can be explained by the fact that there are more single parents in today’s society and more families with both parents in employment. Jekanowski et al. (2001) states that families with both parents working are the highest spenders on food prepared away from home, with fast food being the most popular choice. Mattsson and Helmersson (2007) argue that one reason for the growth of fast food is the increasing number of women who are now working rather than staying at home. Another reason for the increase in fast food consumption is the increasing irregularity of eating patterns. Instead of eating regular meals, many people take quick breaks for individual eating.

The UK fast food, takeaway and home delivery market reached a value of £10.13bn in 2009, an increase of 4.3% compared with 2008 (Key Note, 2011). This market appears to have weathered the economic downturn in the UK reasonably well. The low prices charged for many fast-food products have helped to sustain consumer interest and market growth. Despite the recession, many of the leading fast-food chains, such as Subway, Domino’s Pizza, EAT, Greggs and Costa continued to increase the number of outlets they operated in the UK in 2009 and beyond. New store openings of major chains, continuing during the recession, have boosted the overall growth rate of the sector at a time when like-for-like outlet sales growth has been slower. This trend continued in 2012, when the market grew by 2.5% (Key Note, 2013), and it is forecasted that the value of the UK fast food, takeaway and home-delivery market will show steady – if not particularly spectacular –
levels of growth between 2013 and 2017, estimated at 6.8% \textit{(ibid)}. With economic climate expected to remain difficult, the attraction of fast food, including the low prices and on-going increases in the number of outlets, will likely continue. Most recent figures seem to prove this with the market recording a further 3.5% increase in 2014 \textit{(Key Note, 2015)}.

The prevalence of fast food has not only increased quickly over recent decades but it has also diversified and fast food consumption has become a global phenomenon \textit{(Schau and Gilly, 1997)}. In an attempt to increase patronage of the growing Muslim population in the UK, some major fast food chains in the UK including KFC, Subway and Domino's Pizza are performing trial runs offering halal food as part of their product offerings. In some cases the trials have ended up with them implementing halal food as part of their regular product line in certain outlets in major cities across UK, mainly in areas where there is a high number of Muslims. A menu offering halal food is important because for Muslims who follow the guidelines, halal strictly limits their food consumption options. A restaurant without a halal option would be effectively eliminating these people as potential customers. Ramdani \textit{(2005)} claimed, however, that previous attempts to integrate halal food into fast food menus were often unsuccessful because of lack of insight into the food consumption behaviour of Muslims \textit{(cited in Bonne et al., 2007, 2009)}. The growth in fast food options targeting Muslim residents raises an interesting question about the relationship between religion, culture, identity, and fast food consumption choices. This study is intended to help answer that question.

\textbf{3.0.2 The Halal Market}

The Muslim population is large, making up a quarter of the world’s population, and is the fastest growing religion today both by birth and adoption \textit{(Alam and Sayuti, 2011)}. In Europe alone there are over 18 million Muslims \textit{(ibid)}. While not all Muslims strictly adhere to the religious rules concerning halal food, it is estimated that 70% of Muslims worldwide consistently follow halal standards in their food
consumption choices (Minkus-McKenna, 2007). In the United States (Hussaini, 2004) and in France (Bergeaud-Blackler and Bonne, 2007) studies have shown that 75% and 84% of Muslims in those countries base their eating on halal regulations. These studies suggest that even after Muslims migrate to non-Muslim countries the majority still consume halal food (Bonne et al., 2007). In Europe the potential market size expressed in terms of the Muslim population is substantial. It is estimated that there were between 12 and 18 million individuals before the most recent European Union enlargement (BBC News, 2005; Buijs and Rath, 2006). If the proportion of Muslims consuming halal food from the French and American studies were consistent across Europe, the potential European market in 2006 could have been more than 10 million consumers (Bonne et al., 2007).

The growth in Muslims as an ethnic group in Europe and elsewhere is mirrored by a growth in providers of halal products. In countries where Muslims are a minority the halal market is still considerable. In France there are 4.5 million Muslims who consume 300,000 tons of halal meat each year with a total sale value of €3 billion and which can be purchased from 3,000 independent butchers or supermarket chains (Assadi, 2003). In Russia there was an increase of sales of halal food not only because of an increase in Muslim numbers, but because non-Muslims started buying halal food believing it to be fresh, safe, injection free, and non-genetically modified. In Australia, the Muslim population is growing faster than any other minority and this is resulting in a growing demand for halal food (Marzuki et al., 2012). 94% of sheep meat produced in New Zealand is now halal and is exported to the European Union, North America and Asia (McDermott et al., 2008). They are also the biggest exporter of halal goat meat to the United States (Knudson, 2006).

In the UK there is also increasing demand from consumers and supermarkets as well as other businesses and organisations such as hospitals, schools airlines, hotels and prisons (Ahmed, 2008). Adding to that is the potential for exporting of halal products to the rest of Europe with an estimated 18 million Muslims in Europe (ibid). In the UK, Muslims account for 5% of the population but consume
around 20% of British lamb and mutton (UK Government Statistics, 2006; Scottish Executive, 2006; NISRA, 2006; BBC, 2005, cited in Ahmed, 2008). With the Muslim Council in Britain (2002) estimating the value of the halal trade globally at £30 billion, British farmers have been encouraged to diversify and enter the halal food market (Jackson cited in Ahmed, 2008).

In fact, regarding the economic value and size of the halal market, there are many different figures that have been suggested in recent times. Other estimates of the global value of the market range from $150 billion (Riaz, 1999; Bergeaud-Blackler, 2007) to $580 billion (Al-Harran and Low, 2008) with estimated growth rates of 2.9% (Asia Inc, July/August 2007) to 7% (Al-Harran and Low, 2008). The UK halal food market alone is estimated to be valued at $4 billion (Islam Forum, 2008; Alam and Sayuti, 2011), and demand is outpacing supply (Alam and Syuti, 2011). Although there are many different figures cited regarding the value of the market and the numbers of Muslims who consume halal food, what cannot be disputed is that it is a large and growing market that needs to be taken into account by global food producers. As Kearney (2007) argued, Muslims are the fastest-growing consumer segment in the world and are quickly becoming a base for future growth especially because many of the world’s more traditional consumer segments are reaching saturation point. This makes the potential value of the halal market too substantial to be ignored by food manufacturers (Alam and Sayuti, 2011; Ruževičiūtė and Ruževičius, 2011).

There are many reasons for this growth in the halal market. Hanzee (2011) explains that Muslims nowadays are more educated and aware of the conditions of food production and that they are requesting halal-certified food products. Furthermore, it is not only religion that determines halal meat consumption, but also other issues such as health, animal welfare, and social issues such as ethnic identity and the degree of acculturation (Bergeaud-Blackler and Bonne, 2007; Bonne and Verbeke, 2006; Bonne et al., 2007; Burgmann, 2007). Another reason is a general acceptance of halal by non-Muslim populations. This acceptance is
encouraged by immigration and tourism (Alam and Syuit, 2011). Ruževičiūtė and Ruževičius (2011) state that one third of halal food is actually consumed by non-Muslims who consider a halal logo a symbol of quality, health and ethics. Furthermore, 80% of halal food products are produced in what are considered non-Muslim countries. However, despite the large and growing importance of the halal market among Muslim and non-Muslim consumers, Ahmed (2008) argued that there is still a limited availability of literature on halal marketing and the existing literature is vague because of a tendency to overgeneralise and to view Muslims as a monolithic group.

The halal market is an important part of the set of food consumption options in Britain today. Along with traditional, western fast food choices, it forms a part of the range of options available to individuals. In addition, as will be discussed below, halal food exists alongside other symbolic signifiers like fair trade or organic that consumers choose as a part of their process of identity construction. In order to understand how consumption is viewed as a socio-cultural phenomenon, the next section will examine the literature on consumption, focusing on consumption choice making and the associated thoughts, feelings and practices involved.

**3.1 Consumption**

There is more to consumption than what Marx described as the “animal functions” of satisfying the physical need for food, clothing and shelter, consumption is instead a social need (Zukin and Maguire, 2004). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) worked with an “experiential view” of consumption, which, they argued is phenomenological in spirit. This approach focuses on the symbolic meanings as well as the more subjective aspects and feelings that arise from consumption. It views consumption as primarily a subjective state of consciousness where consumption objects had symbolic meanings, often indirectly related to the
utilitarian or functional aspects of the products (see also Levy, 1959, 1981; Firat, 1987; Lodziak, 2000). Consumption objects are perceived by consumers as being necessary in order to attain a certain life pattern (Levy, 1981).

In another study demonstrating the breadth of the symbolic nature of consumption, Hall (1989: 131) observed “the fact is that greater and greater numbers of people (men and women)—with however little money—play the game of using things to signify who they are. Everybody, including people in very poor societies whom we in the West frequently speak about as if they inhabit a world outside of culture, knows that today’s ‘goods’ double up as social signs and produce meanings as well as energy”. Consumption is more likely to be played out on the field of symbolic meaning rather than consumers’ economic needs and wants (Oswald, 1999). Although these articles demonstrate that there are elements of these symbolic meanings that are subjective and individual, other scholars have emphasised the cultural and social aspects of consumption and particularly the symbolic meaning of consumption.

In one article investigating the social aspects of consumption, Barthes (1993) argued that the dual aspect to consumption – fulfilling consumers’ needs while also being embedded within social, cultural, and symbolic structures – meant that the functional role of goods cannot be separated from their symbolic meanings. The process of consumption combines the consumption of the physical object and its symbols; no object has any inherent function or value independent of the symbolic (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). As a result, the act of consumption can be seen as a way in which consumers create meaning for themselves out of the symbolic content of consumption objects. This point is explored by Slater (1997: 131), who stated that “consumption is a meaningful activity” and central to the meaningful practice of our everyday life (see also Firat and Dholakia, 2006). Consumption plays an important role in determining consumers’ values and experiences regarding life and being (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Essentially, consumption is the way in which consumers use products in a fashion they see fit in order to assert
or affirm their values and to create and maintain their image (Belk, 1995). But consumption is not only important for individual identity construction, it also is viewed as a cultural process where the symbolic meanings of objects of consumption are constructed through socio-cultural processes, such as marketing, as well as by individual consumer choice and interaction with those objects and their meanings.

### 3.1.1 Consumption as a Cultural Process

Slater (1997: 8) argues that all consumption is not just individually meaningful but is also cultural; “consumption is always and everywhere a cultural process”. His argument is based on four notions, firstly, consumption always involves the individual’s perception regarding the symbolic meaning that a product carries, as opposed to only the pleasure or satisfaction derived from consuming the product. Secondly, these meanings are shared by members of the same cultural or sub-cultural groups. Thirdly, consumption is a culturally specific activity and therefore carries different meanings in different cultural contexts. Finally, it is through consumption that we produce and reproduce cultures, social relations and society itself. We build identities as members of culture by enacting “meaningful structures of social actions” (ibid). Consumer research sub-disciplines like CCT conceptualise culture as the very fabric of experience, meaning and action, and it also makes certain patterns of behaviour and sense-making interpretations more likely than others (Arnauld and Thompson, 2005).

Simmel (1900) was one of the first sociologists to examine the relationship between consumption and culture, arguing that consumption helps individuals construct identities by allowing them to attach their own meanings to objects they consume, and that consumption determined consumers’ values and experience regarding life and being (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). In a similar vein, Douglas and Isherwood (1979: 63) argued that consumption is a highly symbolic act with meanings based on cultural frameworks and objects are a way of conveying a
message. They went on to state that: “The individual human being, stripped of his humanity, is of no use as a conceptual base from which to make a picture of human society. No human exists except steeped in the culture of his time and place...cultural analysis sees the whole tapestry as a whole, the picture and the weaving process, before attending to the individual threads”. McCracken (1988) supported Douglas and Isherwood and the link between consumption and culture by arguing that products carry and communicate cultural meanings and symbols. We use these meanings to create cultural notions of the self, to acquire and sustain lifestyles, to demonstrate social connections and to promote or accommodate changes in both the self and society. We consume these cultural meanings to “live” in this “culturally constituted world” – “Without consumer goods, certain acts of self-definition and collective definition in this culture would be impossible” (McCracken, ibid, p. xi).

Studies have shown how individuals use their consumption behaviours to collect past meanings, negotiate future meanings, and assemble present meanings of cultural constructs such as religion (Venkatesh and Meamber, 2008). Holt (1997) argued that meanings are formed by the way people act in particular social contexts, and it is wrong to assume meanings are formed prior to their expression in social life. Often there are multiple possible meanings for a consumption object within a social context and the individual social actor selects which, for themselves, is the most meaningful linkage. These meanings are not separate from history and are continually re-constructed through a cultural process. Although actions are individualistic, they are also structured by multiple social categories (Holt, 1997). Therefore, consumption patterns are structured by contextualized cultural frameworks and are socially constructed “idiographic phenomena structured by the particular configuration of collectivities in a given socio-historical setting” (Holt, 1997: 341).
The impact of social contexts on consumption can be seen as people who have experienced similar social conditions display similar behaviour that leads to similar consumption. A product can be consumed in a different way or for different reasons, therefore similarity in consumption practice means that a similar cultural framework is applied to the act of consumption (Holt, 1997). As an object of consumption, food is of special interest because it is, at the same time, a universal human need and also subject to almost limitless variety and cultural particularity.

3.1.2 Food as an Object of Consumption

Marshall (2005) explained that products are not just consumed for what they do but also for what they mean. A product becomes a symbol or representative of a social category or group (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979), and this adds emphasis to the importance of the symbolic aspect of food consumption. Food is similar to other objects of consumption in that it has both practical and symbolic importance for consumers (Kniazeva and Venkatesh, 2007). Askegaard and Madsen (1998) added that while people need to consume a certain amount of calories and liquid to satisfy their physical and biological requirements, this does not define what, where, when and how we should eat. Additionally, specifically social food consumption, like a family dinner or a meal at a restaurant with friends, is more than just eating. It is a lived experience that groups physiological, psychological, and sociological aspects in a highly symbolic event (Lalonde, 1992). It is through these eating practices that families and the idea of family are constituted (Moisio et al., 2004).

In general, the literature views food consumption as a complex interplay of cultural, economic, social, political, and technological forces. Kniazeva and Venkatesh (2007) emphasise the dual nature of food as both a commodity, which refers to the physical aspect of food that is for satisfying hunger and nutritional needs of humans, and as a metaphor that refers to the symbolic meaning that food carries for the individual consuming it. Food consumption can be a complex
interplay between the self and socially-imposed prohibitions and permissions regarding consumption. In addition to socially constructed meanings, individuals can construct their own relationship with food, against traditional consumption patterns. The symbolic framing of food as a consumption object can be seen clearly in the descriptors associated with food manufacturing: homemade, manufactured, natural, organic, packaged, processed, and frozen (see also Costa et al., 2014; Kniazeva, 2005; Moisio et al., 2004) and the symbolic value associated with these manufacturing processes is used by consumers to identify their social or cultural values. The identified symbols link together food properties, eating patterns and food values (Kniazeva and Venkatesh, 2007).

Food consumption is not just symbolic or representative of certain socially defined meanings but, as Feeley-Harnik (1995) argues, it is transformative and offers a space for the transformation or reorientation of social relationships and meanings. Food consumption practices therefore cannot be understood fully by researching the topic from the perspective of nutrition or as a physically satisfying act. Rather, the symbolic meanings of food must be considered, as is essential for individuals in their attempt to make sense of daily consumption experiences and especially for minority cultures who look for symbolic meanings and attachment in food consumption (Bardhi et al., 2010). It goes beyond just eating. It is also about the social context in which the food is served and the social positioning people look to maintain through food consumption (Gumerman, 1997). Holt (1997) described the social meanings of food consumption as the constellation of consumption patterns, so basically consumption should not be looked at as individual action but rather a grouping of behaviour. Similarly, others argued that the symbolic meanings in food consumption are not fixed and are also affected by how food is used and the context or situation in which the food is consumed (Marshall, 2005; Barthes, 1997). Food consumption can therefore also be viewed as an aspect of culture, as summed up perfectly be Mead:
Food habits are seen as the culturally standardised set of behaviours in regard to food manifested by individuals who have been reared within a given cultural tradition. These behaviours are seen as systematically interrelated with other standardised behaviours in the same culture (1943: 21).

More recently, these arguments have been repeated by Gofton (1996), Gumermarn (1997), Warde (1999), and White and Kokotsaki (2004). Culture influences food consumption choices and establishes how people use food. Food also has symbolic meanings within religious beliefs, some being prohibited and some associated with a specific religion such as halal in Islam and kosher in Judaism (ibid). Jamal (1996), referring to ethnicity instead of religion, argued that the consumption of ethnic foods by consumers is viewed as an expression of shared cultural meanings. The impact of social and cultural factors on food consumption suggests that community influence is high (Marshall, 2005). Food consumption exercises immense importance in any community, and its importance and symbolic role result in countless rules and expectations for the individual’s food consumption patterns (Marshall, 2005).

While globalisation can result in a homogenisation of food cultures, it can also result in an increased emphasis on easily identifiable symbols that distinguish various local cultures (Askegaard and Kjeldgaard, 2007). Europe, for example, is very heterogeneous when it comes to food culture with deeply rooted and diverse cultural patterns (Askegaard and Madsen, 1998). The variety of food consumption options in the globalised world gives individuals a broad palette of symbols with which to construct their identity. Identity construction today is an important aspect of an individual’s experience, but it is also subject to socio-cultural constraints. The next section discusses the literature on identity and the role that the concept of identity construction plays in the study of fast food consumption.
3.2 Identity

Identity is what would connect the unconnected, make a process out of random happenings, a life-project out of drifting and short-lived concerns. Identity is what one would be able to build up, brick by brick and floor after floor, so that it would grow in solidity and stature, with each step more secure and reliable. Identity is what would allow one to deploy freedom of choice in the service of determination and certainty, to streamline the succession of desperate and inconclusive forays into the pilgrimage of self-creation (Bauman, 1996: 50).

The quote shows the importance and role of identity for individuals as it concerns freedom of choice and self-creation. In discussing identity, Kellner (1992: 141) noted that identity used to be a straightforward concept: “one's identity was fixed, solid and stable...One was a hunter, a member of a tribe and that was that...,” adding that identity “was a function of predefined social roles...which provided orientation and religious sanction to one’s place in the world”. Today, identity is more problematic. Giddens (1991) explained it has become a project or a process that has to be monitored reflexively, organised and managed. Therefore it is not just about sustaining a coherent self-identity, but also about constantly revising that identity. This point is shared by Shankar et al. (2009) who argue that identity is no longer a “thing”; they follow Giddens in arguing that it is a project, a process and a practice. They conclude that identities are dynamic, they have to be produced and reproduced, and are no longer a fixed or stable concept – “...because identities are socially meaningful categories, some identities and the symbolic meanings associated with their reproduction will be difficult to negotiate or even non-negotiable...what also emerges is a sense that people are constantly negotiating competing and conflicting trajectories of identities” (p. 88).
People today may have multiple identities that may be in conflict or based on completely different values and these conflicts result in a sense of self that is in a constant process of change and negotiation (Jafari and Goulding, 2008). An example of people who engage in this process of negotiating multiple identities are British Muslims who practice a religion that is not dominant in the society in which they live. In the recent 2011 census Christianity was the dominant religion, followed by “no religion” or people who identified themselves as secular. Islam, though practiced by a substantial number of Britons, is still very much a minority religion and British Muslims are a subgroup within the United Kingdom.

Islam, like all religions, can help individuals structure their identity construction process (see Section 2.1.1). However, Zukin and Maguire (2004) argue that traditionally stable frameworks such as religion for individual and group identity are weakening with people living a more independent life. On the other hand, Jenkins (1996) explains that, in everyday life, identity is complex, and that the construction of an individual’s self-identity cannot be separated from the parallel development of collective social identity. Jenkins argued the self is rooted in social practice and therefore that an individual’s self-identity must be validated through social interactions. The development of self-identity becomes a social process that is flexible, open to multiple interpretations and changing continuously throughout an individual’s life. Jenkins concludes that “social identity is our understanding of who we are and who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people’s understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us)” (1996: 5). The social construction of identity is a mixture of self-definition and definition of self by others, so it is a combination of internal and external definitions. Jenkins (1996) described this problematic relationship as the internal-external dialectic of identification, which works on three levels: the individual level, the interactional level and the institutional level. Therefore, at one level the individual looks to internally define themselves and creates the identity they wish to portray, but on another level their identity is defined externally by the characteristics of the social group they wish or see themselves part of.
Identity is not just an individual sense of self, but also a way in which an individual is seen by society. Hogg (2009) argued that social identity is described, prescribed, evaluative and used to judge the individual. Basically, a social identity framework is constructed by society’s values, it sets the norm for individuals within a given society to follow. Earlier, Tajfel (1981) developed social identity theory, in which he argued that individuals gained pride and self-esteem from being group members, and that membership of social groups is a key part of self-identity. This makes self-identity a complex psychological process (ibid). Tajfel (1981) went on to argue that the members in the group will discriminate against those members outside the group to enhance their self-image – “us” versus “them”.

This is evident in more recent work on brand consumption and identity construction. As Elliott and Davies (2006) argued subcultural activity is becoming increasingly important for the construction and expression of identity and subcultural choices are also consumer choices involving brands of fashion, leisure and a wealth of accessories, which speak symbolically to members of the group. Kozinets (2001), for example, examined the cultural and subcultural construction of consumption meanings and practices by researching devoted followers of Star Trek. He argued that consumption can fulfil a hunger for a conceptual space in which consumers construct a sense of self by choosing and connecting to the market-defined attributes of a particular subgroup.

Along the same lines, Arsel and Thompson (2011) discussed consumers’ reflexive efforts to manage, protect, or enhance the identity value of the cultural and social capital they have acquired through identity investments in a specific field of consumption, in this case consumption of indie music. They found that subjects’ consumption practices and identifications were sparked by a mix of serendipitous discoveries and social connections. Over time they became vested in the indie field through emotion, friendship and the social connections they made through being part of the indie sub-group. The subjects developed a sense of being part of a group and increased feelings of self-enrichment and status by acquiring items of symbolic
value in the consumption field of indie music (*ibid*). In both of these studies, the role of the individual as a co-creator of their identity, using the symbols and images produced by the marketplace, is clearly demonstrated among the membership of chosen subgroups. See also Schembri (2009) and Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) work on consumers’ experience of Harley-Davidson, the work of Muniz Jr, A. M., and O’Guinn (2001) on brand community focusing on three brands Ford Bronco, Macintosh, and Saab, and Yeh and Choi ’s (2011) work focusing on Mini Cooper highlighting the role of the brand community in relation to brand meaning creation.

As Wong (2007: 455) explained, “to evaluate cultural practices and behaviours as the basis for understanding consumption, we need to turn to everyday life as the site for expressions of cultural symbolism”. One of the aspects of everyday life that influences identity construction for many people in Britain is their ethnicity, both in how they perceive themselves and in how they experience others’ reactions to them. The next section discusses the role of ethnicity in identity construction and how it relates, in reference to Islam, to religious identity.

### 3.2.1 Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity implies many dimensions including “a sense of common customs, language, religion, values, morality, and etiquette” (Webster, 1994: 321). It is a symbolic activity that symbolises boundaries of inclusion and exclusion from social groups and a process by which individuals construct identities, using ethnic labels (Geertz, 1973; Jamal and Chapman, 2000). Laroche et al. (1992) argued that the basis of ethnic identity is divided into subjective and objective measures. An individual’s identity based upon personal belief is a subjective measure, whereas a socio-cultural factor such as religion is an objective measure.
These two elements are not entirely distinct. Geertz (1983: 67) argued that people are not detached from their background and that the self is a socially and historically bound concept. Holt (1997) and Jamal and Chapman (2000) argued that ethnic identities are constructed in particular socio-historical contexts in relation to other ethnic collectivities relevant to a group’s life and that an individual’s ethnicity is a process of self-identification. In Jamal and Chapman’s (2000) study, they found that “based on their everyday experiences with their many in-groups and out-groups, the informants were continuously revising and recreating the systems of perception of self and perception of others, within which identity was constructed and deconstructed” (p. 383). Therefore, ethnic identity is a dynamic concept that is impacted by the individual’s interaction with others and his or her personal experience, and is shaped by elements from different cultural origins (Jamal, 2003).

One factor that plays a role in the consumption practice and identity construction of ethnic minority consumers is acculturation and the extent to which they adopt the consumer culture of the society they live in (Jamal, 2003). Acculturation is the “phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (Berry, 1997: 7). Typically, acculturation research focuses on identity construction and multiple identities, and on ethnicity in the form of nationalities, but not religion. Acculturation studies look at distinctive subgroups within larger societies, such as Haitian immigrants in the USA (Oswald 1999), Greenlandic immigrants in Denmark (Askegaard et al., 2005), Pakistani and Indian immigrants in the UK (Lindridge et al., 2004; Jamal, 1998; 1996; Jamal and Chapman, 2000), Mexicans in USA (Peñaloza, 1994) and Turkish immigrants in Denmark (Ger and Ostegaard, 1998). Acculturation looks at the adaptation of consumers into new or different cultures, including socialization processes (Peñaloza, 1994) and food consumption patterns. Different societies will have different norms and perceptions in regards to food consumption, making these practices a good research area for ethnic minority consumption and acculturation issues (Jamal, 1998). It has been argued that food consumption
practice is amongst the last things to change or be adopted by ethnic minority groups in society (Jamal, 1998; Murcott, 1988), although it has been shown that it is through consumption that immigrants access their knowledge of the host culture (Oswald, 1999).

Ethnicity can be a powerful influence on individuals, but the availability of consumption objects from a variety of cultures makes it possible for individuals to manage their ethnic identity through their consumption choices. Oswald (1999: 304) argued that, “in consumer culture, ethnicity can be bought sold and worn like a loose garment”. In her study of Haitian immigrants in the USA, Oswald suggested that they demonstrated multiple identities through race, class and ethnicity. Immigrants use goods to forge new identities and their ethnicities are not fixed. Rather, ethnic identities are more like an accessory and no longer a core element of self. She concluded that for a minority group “ethnicity is no longer an exception to a cultural norm but a model for the construction of consumer identity” (1999: 317). Members from the same family in Oswald’s study (1999) played out their ethnic identity individually based on their daily life practices. The Haitians did not conform as individuals or as a group to one specific ethnic group and they “chose when and where to wear their ethnicity” (p. 315). This phenomenon has been referred to as “culture-swapping” (ibid) or “situational ethnicity” (Stayman and Deshpande, 1989).

In a similar study, Jamal (2003) showed that British Caucasian and Pakistani informants both constructed and maintained multiple identities and at the same time co-existed, interacted and adapted to each other while still retaining unique and distinct cultural identities. This situational ethnicity leads to individuals behaving differently in different situations with different individuals (Jamal, 2003). Participants felt a stable sense of identity as Pakistanis but also experienced a fluid sense of identity where they could play with different images of themselves or identities (ibid; Jamal and Chapman, 2000). Treating ethnic minority groups as a monolithic cultural unit because they share a common factor, such as religion, is
problematic because individuals are constantly revisiting and recreating their self-identity (Jamal and Chapman, 2000). The consumer today is more individualistic than in the past (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Oswald, 1999; Jamal and Chapman, 2000). This needs to be taken into account when looking at the interplay between consumption behaviour and identity construction, which will occupy the next section.

3.3. Consumption and Identity

Products or objects of consumption are a source of symbolic meanings that consumers use to implement and sustain a project of the self, and there is no self outside of the symbolic meanings the individual collects and arranges in their identity construction project. Consumers employ consumption symbolism to identify or associate with others and to construct and express their self-identity (Gregen, 2001; Elliott, 1997; Wallendorf and Arnold, 1988). According to Elliott, these symbolic meanings operate outward to construct the social world and inward to construct the self-identity of individuals within that world. The individual’s construction of their self-identity is a process where they use the available symbolic materials so that “the individual weaves into a coherent account of who he or she is, a narrative of self-identity” (Thompson, 1995: 210). The constructed identity provides both a sense of self-identification and an understanding of the way in which cultural norms guide an individual’s perception of social entities and his or her own place in within society (Rex, 1996). The process of an individual selecting symbolic meanings through consumption can be viewed as an individualistic process or as a more structurally-determined process. As mentioned above, Jamal (2003) argued that an individual can construct and maintain multiple and coexisting identities through their consumption choices. This also includes avoiding particular types of consumption (Wattanasuwan, 2005).
3.3.1 Consumption and Individual Identity Construction

Consumption is such an integral part of daily life that it holds a central place in the construction of individual identity. As Giddens (1991: 8) noted, “to a greater or lesser degree, the project of the self becomes translated into one of the possession of desired goods and the pursuit of artificially framed styles of life”. Instead of hedonistic desire or need fulfilment, Lodziak (2000) argued that self-identity construction was the main motivation for consumption. Creation of self and consumption are inseparable (Elliott, 1997; Gabriel and Lang, 2006), and consumerism is not just the acquisition of goods and services, but it also creates and erodes identities, and can lead to confusion among individuals (Firat and Dholakia, 1998; Wong, 2007).

Beck et al. (1994) have argued that contemporary society is essentially premised on anxiety or uncertainty and that consumption provides some sort of resolution to such conflicts. Consumers adopt symbolic meanings for self-creation from consumer products and when one is looking for a particular identity, Gabriel and Lang (2006) argued, there is probably a product somewhere that could provide it. Food production and marketing, as could be seen in the attempt by fast food companies to incorporate halal menus, is responsive and reactive to the desires of consumers to find products that help them construct the identities they want. Because food is both widely available in a huge variety of forms and yet is also subject to numerous social constraints, such as religious regulations, food consumption is seen by many academics as a complex interplay of self- and society-imposed prohibitive and permissive consumption (Kniazeva and Venkatesh, 2007).

It is widely considered that the creation of the self in contemporary society is inseparable from consumption. It is not conceptualised as a given product of a social system or as a fixed entity that the individual can simply adopt, but rather as something we actively create, partially through our everyday consumption.
(Gabriel and Lang, 2006; Lodziak, 2000; Elliott, 1997; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Giddens, 1991; Belk, 1988). Consumer culture is the use of symbolic goods by individuals or groups in constructing identities that sometimes conflict or overlap. As Arnould and Thompson (2005) explained, individuals negotiate symbolic meanings carried by the products consumers use in social situations and the consumption of symbolic products is not the only issue central to consumer culture; the exercise of free personal choice in the private sphere of everyday life is also an important component. This is because “all consumption holds some kind of expressive meaning, we endeavour to incorporate into our self-creation project those meanings we aspire to, while struggling to resist those we find undesirable” (Wattanasuwan, 2005: 179). It is therefore important to understand the link between consumption and identity. Slater (1997: 8) explained that the “social arrangement in which the relation between lived culture and social resources, between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, is mediated through markets”. The symbolic meanings of the products we consume are significant for our self-identification as well as for how others see us (Dittmar, 1992).

3.3.2 Consumption and Group Identity

The growing influence of markets in shaping the symbolic meanings of consumption objects has affected consumer communities as well as individual consumers by causing the fragmentation of consumers into more isolated groups, undermining important social institutions, such as community (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). The findings in the research by Kniazeva and Venkatesh (2007) showed that today's consumers individually establish their personal relationships with food, easily breaking up eating patterns established by their families. Lodziak (2000) also argues that individual consumption can be explained in terms of contemporary living conditions and that the influence of consumer culture is generalised and overstated. In this explanation, culture based explanations of consumption are of limited value as they only explain a part of consumption behaviour. However, others argue that a person's identity is less individualistically
constructed, rather it is established through group membership, social class, and other demographic characteristics and that identity is an inherently social construct, with identity projects realised through social interaction (Shankar et al., 2006; Venkatesh and Meamber, 2008). These “archetypical identities” remain as theoretical constructs until they are reproduced by the individual consumer’s actions.

These other social structures, outside of the marketplace, have a substantial influence on consumer behaviour. The market power of Western products, especially global food brands, is not as dominant over the narratives of family, class, ethnicity, or religion as may be thought. Wilk (1999) argued that the theories of globalisation and Westernisation were inaccurate as today we see more and more new diverse cultural and social divisions, leading to strengthened local identities as a challenge to globalisation and Westernisation.

A person’s identity is established through group membership and, with the powerful influence of consumer culture, individual identities are constructed based on how consumers relate to their possessions (Venkatesh and Meamber, 2008; Belk, 1988; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). Self-identity can be created or acquired by consumers through “positional goods” that have symbolic meaning and that demonstrate membership of a certain group (Wong, 2007). According to Wong (2007), consumers seek “positional goods” to demonstrate their group membership and to identify themselves; thereby self-identity can be fashioned and acquired. Through the expressive symbols of consumption we can create an identity for ourselves (Belk, 1988). For consumers to affirm values, and to create and maintain images, they use consumption; they make choices and use products as they see fit (Belk, 1995).
Specific symbolic meanings of products or social category boundaries also play a role in shaping consumption patterns (Holt, 1997). Some consumption patterns are more important than others in order to maintain an individual identity that represents a specific social category, such as ethnicity. Many studies have shown that food is a symbol of self and group identity, representing both individuality and a sense of group membership (Wilk, 1997). White and Kokotsaki (2004) argued that food consumption can represent ethnic identity and is used socially to develop relationships. They go on to state that in religious groups, certain foods have specific symbolic meanings or may be prohibited. Food consumption habits are key cultural expressions that are central to the processes by which people establish, maintain, and reinforce their (sub)cultural, ethnic, and individual identities (Reilly and Wallendorf, 1987; Penaloza, 1994).

3.3.3 Food Consumption and Identity Construction

Food consumption is an important daily practice; in addition to its biological importance as nutrition studies have shown a strong relationship between food and self-identity. The symbolic meanings foods portray are an important aspect in the construction of our self-identity and shape individual and collective identity (Bardhi et al., 2010; McDonagh and Prothero, 2005; Rozin, 1999; Falk, 1994). Food consumption practices are also key cultural expressions central to the processes of establishing, maintaining and reinforcing cultural, national, ethnic and individual identities (White and Kokotsaki, 2004; Wilk, 1999; Penaloza, 1994; Reilly and Wallendorf, 1987).

Individuals use their food consumption choices to express their identity (White and Kokotsaki, 2004), as in when they consume ethnic minority food. Regarding the consumption of halal food, White and Kokotsaki (2004) argued that religion is present as a reminder of the tradition of eating specific foods. For people in contemporary society with multiple potentially competing identities, “food consumption patterns are complex expressions of overlapping social group
memberships” (Reilly and Wallendorf, 1987: 289). Jamal (1998) explained that in every culture of the world there is a different food system with its own patterns of meanings. Consumers use the consumption of food as an expression and means of creating ethnic identity (ibid).

Food consumption practices are shaped by an individual’s socio-economic and socio-cultural standing and history, and are not easily changed (Thompson and Tambyah, 1999). Food consumption is often considered as resistant to change, and among the most resistant during acculturation (Bardhi et al., 2010; Thompson and Tambyah, 1999). However, as discussed above, ethnic subgroups within Britain exhibit culture swapping, regularly switching between mainstream British culture and their ethnic culture when it comes to food consumption (Jamal, 1996, 2003). This shows that despite the importance of ethnicity or religion in shaping identity, individual identity is not stable, rather it can be fluid and changeable. Food consumption choices change constantly and can move outside traditional boundaries (Warde, 1997). The boundaries that differentiate cultures still exist but food consumption practices have altered constantly and quickly, raising the challenge or fear of loss of identity in our food consumption practices (Wilk, 1999). Food can be a product that provides familiarity, such as a favourite dish from home when feeling homesick during travel (Bardhi et al., 2010). Furthermore, “food consumption simultaneously asserts the oneness of the ones eating the same and the otherness of whoever eats differently” (Fischler, 1988: 275).

A good can be an object that stabilises or changes an individual’s identity (Askegaard and Madsen, 1998), and people construct an identity using the symbolic meanings of products. They do so to avoid what Shankar et al. (2009) referred to as a potential existential crisis that may occur due to the decline of more traditional and historical forms of identity. This also means people are constructing their identity individually and are freer from structural constraints (ibid), or are empowered to create their identity through consumption and the marketplace (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995).
While it can be argued that self-identity is now seen as individualistic, multifaceted and fragmented (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995), Jafari and Goulding (2008) ascertained that young Iranians in the UK found it difficult to ignore or free themselves from their religious socialization and its restrictions, despite having the nominal freedom to practice individualism in the UK. Jafari and Goulding concluded, “these paradoxes are rooted in the complexities of social structures” (2008: 87). The subjects were in conflict between expressing their Persian identity and their desire for Western freedom and consumption (*ibid*). Shankar et al. (2009) argued that despite having some choice in constructing our identity, not all identities are available to everyone. They explain that because identities are socially meaningful, some identities have symbolic meanings that are difficult or impossible to negotiate. These studies and this theoretical understanding of identity construction and the practices of consumption are largely consolidated in the sub-discipline in consumer research called CCT (Consumer Culture Theory).

### 3.4 Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)

#### 3.4.1 History and Definition of CCT

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is a sub-group of consumer research that adopts an approach to the study of consumers and consumption that considers consumption and the behavioural choices and practices involved as social and cultural phenomena – as opposed to psychological or purely economic phenomena (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). CCT focuses on many issues to do with the consumer’s life-world such as: consumers’ personal and collective identities; the cultures created and embodied in the lived worlds of consumers; and their underlying experiences (*ibid*). CCT was used by Arnould and Thompson (2005) in order to brand or collect together research that had been conducted over the previous 30 years that centred
its core theoretical interests and questions around the socio-cultural, experiential, symbolic and ideological aspects of consumption. As explained by Arnould and Thompson (2005: 868-869), CCT is “a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings... CCT explores the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that exist within the broader socio-historic frame of globalization and market capitalism”. They argue that previous characterisations of this research tradition do not capture the theoretical connections among different perspectives. Instead, these characterisations emphasise differences in methodology that may not be relevant to the broader goal of understanding consumer behaviour within a socio-cultural context.

CCT research draws from an interdisciplinary body of theory to develop analytic theoretical frameworks that assist in understanding and explaining the socio-cultural dynamics that drive consumption habits. Additionally, CCT research seeks to advance a theoretical conversation that has arisen around four interrelated research domains. This framework of four "interrelated" and “mutually implicative” research areas was proposed by Arnould and Thompson (2005: 871) for researching CCT and was further extended by Arnould and Thompson (2007) to better explain and represent the “holistic connections” or “interstitial” linkages between the four proposed research areas. Since my thesis looks at British Muslims in Leicester, their fast food consumption choices, and the role of religion – more specifically halal – in their consumption choices, there are two research programs that are relevant in this context. Firstly, the socio-historic patterning of consumption which is concerned with “the institutional and social structures that systematically influence consumption” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 871). Secondly, there are consumer identity projects which address “the co-constitutive, co-productive ways in which consumers, working with marketer-generated materials, forge a coherent if diversified and often fragmented sense of self” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 874).
As a complex of perspectives and approaches, CCT draws upon a wide range of research projects, where the consumer is viewed as a co-creator, using the symbols, images, and goods in the marketplace as part of an identity construction project. The influence of cultural forces on identity construction was investigated by Thompson (1996), who researched the social construction of feminine identities and cultural conceptions of motherhood among professional working mothers. These women, he argued, are of a generation socialized into a common system of conflicting cultural ideals, beliefs and gender ideologies, thereby forced to “juggle” between work and family duties. He specifically addressed how this need to manage conflicting roles and cultural norms was reflected in their identity construction. Thompson (1996) also found that consumption was central to personal and cultural meanings, with symbolic meanings operating parallel to the self-perception of these professional working women. While this study focuses on gender, the challenge of navigating bifurcated or multiple identities is a central theme of CCT and is applicable to other socio-cultural differences, such as religion. Along similar lines, Thompson and Tambyah (1999) analysed the consumption stories of expatriate professionals trying to construct a cosmopolitan identity. They found that there was a conflict or contradiction in identity for these expatriates as they navigated between adapting to local cultures and maintaining their status or identity as members of expatriate subgroups.

A study by Jafari and Goulding (2008) showed how young Iranians in the UK found it difficult to ignore or free themselves from the restrictions of their religious socialization, despite having the freedom to practice individualism in the UK. In this case, the subgroup identity, specifically the religious identity, dominated over the host country identity. Despite the internal contradictions presented by the multiple identities in both studies, the sense of cultural dominance of either host country or subgroup limited the subjects’ freedom in constructing their own identities out of the symbols, words, and products in the marketplace.
3.5 Summary

Identity is constantly being constructed and reconstructed by individuals who, in today’s society, can have multiple identities. Furthermore, these identities are situational and flexible or may become more visible in different situations or scenarios. At times, these identities can compete with one another or come into conflict. Consumption and identity go hand in hand, and they can even be called inseparable. Consumption is the way in which symbolic meanings of identity positions are incorporated into an on-going self-identity project. The argument in this study is that the choice of fast food consumed by British Muslims is not just to satisfy their physical and nutritional needs, but it also has a symbolic meaning attached which determines the consumption choice. I will attempt to understand the role that religion as part of culture plays in the consumption of fast food for British Muslims and their identity construction, and how it interacts with other socio-cultural factors in the process.

One aspect of consumer research is the notion of consumer freedom, and whether consumers are acting freely as individuals or if they acting within cultural and societal structures. This study argues consumption choices and identities are not automatically produced or fixed for several reasons. People have agency in their consumption and interpret their tastes differently according to the situation or context and therefore even have the potential to transform broader social relations. In addition, many cultural frameworks exist, thereby making lifestyle and consumption patterns unstable. Dimensions derived from social life including religion are distinct from but not autonomous to consumption patterns (Sewell, 1992; Belk, 1986; Holt, 1997). Given these arguments and because the social patterning of consumption has become more “subtle and complexly intertwined”, a more “sensitive” approach is needed to describe consumption patterns (Holt, 1997). We must focus on multiple cultural frameworks and consumption practices but not ignore the individualistic elements of consumption (ibid).
This thesis will aim to understand if and how British Muslims generally use halal and fast food in constructing and reconstructing their identity or identities as British Muslims. The latter can be considered as a group who are essentially in the process of negotiating or constructing different identities simultaneously, that is between non-negotiable symbolic meanings associated with consuming halal and having Muslim and British identities, and living in a Western and non-Islamic culture, which can be considered in this context as conflicting or contradictory.

In doing so, the issue of consumer freedom in terms of social reproduction and identity transformation will be addressed. What role do religious beliefs and nationality play in the consumption choices and identity construction of British Muslims? Are their consumption choices and identity construction individualistic in nature or are there structuralist constraints that impact on their behaviour. To what extent do they feel free from the market and structural influences?

**The main research questions are:**

1. How do British Muslims use fast food consumption in the construction of their individual and group identities?

2. What is the relationship between religiosity, consumption choices and identity construction for British Muslims? How does the understanding and experience of halal impact food consumption choices for British Muslims and how does the relationship between halal and fast food affect their identity construction projects?

3. What constraints do British Muslims experience from the marketplace and from other elements of their social environment in their consumption choices and their identity construction projects?
Chapter 4: Methodology

4.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter will present and justify the methodological strategy for conducting this study. The chapter starts with a brief introduction to the research topic and outlines the interpretive approach that will be used to conduct the study. The chapter will argue that by adopting an interpretive approach, the researcher was able to better understand the diversity of consumption practices and their meaning for Muslim consumers. More importantly this approach would be a major step forward in exploring Muslims’ actual everyday life practices and demonstrating their diversity of consumption practices. The section will also include a detailed look at the research paradigm adopted for this study, including the researcher’s assumptions about what a social inquiry should be and the ontological and epistemological assumptions about social reality that the study adopted.

In Section 4.1 the focus will be on the philosophical approach of the research, which is based upon phenomenology. The chapter will present a brief introduction of phenomenology, its history and its key concepts and ideas in Section 4.2 before discussing the use of the phenomenological approach in consumer research. Section 4.3 will examine the phenomenological interview, the method used in phenomenological research for data collection. It will discuss how it was used, its key features, benefits for this type of research, and will also address some of the criticisms highlighted regarding phenomenological interviews. Section 4.4 will explain and justify the sampling method used to find informants for the interviews, how and from where the researcher gathered the sample of informants, the selection criteria and the number of interviews conducted.

A discussion of the data analysis methodology follows in Section 4.5, where the focus is on how the data collected from the interviews was analysed in order to produce the research findings. This will include a brief discussion on the
“emic”/“etic” debate, and justifying the emic approach for this study based on the objectives and the chosen research strategy and methodology. The section will also discuss thematic analysis as the data analysis technique selected for this study. The intention behind using thematic analysis, why it is used and how it was conducted will be explained in detail, including the process of coding. Finally there will be a brief section discussing ethical issues and their implications for this study. The section will focus on informed consent and anonymity as the two key ethical issues to be addressed here and will specifically link to research on the topic of religion, which may be considered a sensitive topic by some.

4.0.1. Introduction

The literature review has shown us that the definition of religion and its role in the lives of individuals is highly complex. In previous studies many different categories were created to group together the multiple definitions of religion. More importantly, it became clear in the literature review that the definition of religion and the role religion plays in a person’s life varies between individuals and within different social contexts. The phenomenological approach adopted in this study emphasises the importance of individuality, perception, and subjective interpretation when discussing the topic of religion and argues that the subjects should define what religion means to them for the purpose of the study. As Berger (1974: 125) argued, “the scientific study of religion must bracket the ultimate truth claims implied by its subject” and return to a perspective of the phenomenon “from within”.

In the context of this study, where the focus is on British Muslims, this means that although all Muslims use the Holy Qur’an and Sunnah as their source for understanding their religion (Islam), the study must acknowledge that Islam exhibits different forms and interpretations. As Jafari and Süerdem (2012) explained, Muslims refer to Islam as a set of transcendental guidelines, and they interpret and reinterpret them in different ways to make better sense of their
socio-cultural and economic behaviour. For example, halal is a commonly recognised and shared concept in Islam, but as Sandikci (2011) argued, it is interpreted differently by individual Muslims, and how the concept of halal is negotiated and experienced in the daily lives of Muslims is complex and dynamic. Therefore, researchers must acknowledge that Islam is based on these transcendental guidelines that are open for multiple interpretations within the framework of different cultural contexts and the daily practices of Muslims (Jafari & Süerdem, 2012).

Despite the diversity of Muslim backgrounds and interpretations, the majority of existing Islamic consumption literature tends to view Muslim consumers as a broadly coherent group. This literature fails to emphasise variations in both the nature of their religious beliefs and the degree of their devotion, as characterised by their daily practices (Jafari et al., 2011). Multiple recent studies (Mutsikiwa and Basera, 2012; Marzuki et al., 2012; Alam and Sayuti, 2011; Rezai et al., 2010) use methods, mainly surveys or questionnaires, which do not acknowledge the possibility of multiple interpretations of halal. The basic assumptions that form the basis of the quantitative scales used in these studies are too rigid to capture the variation and individuality in the interpretation of halal. Within the surveys or questionnaires, halal was given a simple, uniform definition by the researchers. Adopting such a methodological stance does not allow us to understand deeply how halal is defined or viewed by individuals.

Adopting an interpretive approach allowed the present thesis to understand the diversity of consumption practices and their meanings for Muslim consumers. Importantly, this moved away from current trends in the literature that pay little attention to Muslims’ actual everyday life practices and make general assumptions about Islam that do not accommodate the diversity of Muslim consumers’ consumption practices. It was also a step in eliminating the major problems highlighted by Jafari (2012) and discussed in Section 2.2, which include the lack of self-reflexivity and self-critique amongst researchers studying the consumption
choices of Muslims. These issues can lead researchers to substitute their own interpretation or understanding of a phenomenon for the subjects’, thereby missing out on the variations and complexity of Islamic belief and practice. This research focused on the participants’ understandings, avoiding the issues highlighted by Jafari (2012) and contributing to a fuller understanding of Muslims’ beliefs and behaviours.

The purpose of this research was therefore to conduct an interpretive study to investigate British Muslims, their fast food consumption experiences, and the role that religion plays in their fast food consumption choices. How they negotiate the interplay between their religion (Islam) and their nationality (British) in their fast food consumption choices and identity construction was also be a key part of the study. Finally, halal – a key concept in food consumption for British Muslims and the role it plays in their identity construction – was investigated.

4.1 Research Paradigm

The overall aim and objective of this study was to provide a deeper understanding of the fast food consumption experiences of British Muslims and how they negotiate their religion, nationality, the social forces from their communities, friends and families, the pressures of work, and the influence of marketing messages in their fast food consumption choices and identity construction. The study adopted an interpretive approach and appropriate qualitative methods were used to collect and analyse the data (Spiggle, 1994). Burrell and Morgan (1979: 28) describe the interpretive paradigm as a tradition that is “informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience”. Hackley (2003) elaborated by explaining that interpretive research is characterised by the “rich” description of social phenomena focusing on a particular social context and dealing with the complexity of social worlds rather than trying to generalise the findings across
different groups and settings. Finally, the existential-phenomenological approach, the approach used in this study, assumes people are “agents” with some power and freedom to define their own actions.

By adopting an interpretive approach, the study overcame the generalisations that have limited Islamic consumption research (Jafari et al., 2011). An interpretive approach allowed my research project to grasp the subjective meaning of halal and fast food for individual British Muslims, providing a detailed understanding of their fast food consumption experiences, their identity construction and how they negotiated their religion and other complex influences they encounter daily. Qualitative research used in line with an interpretive tradition attempts to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). The qualitative approach provides the opportunity to get closer to the research informants and build a rapport with them. The relaxed, comfortable setting and open-ended questioning allows the researcher to ask follow-up questions, engage with the informant, and create a dialogue that can elicit a more active response from the informant. This should result in the informants describing freely their experiences in greater depth, and providing detailed, richer and more meaningful perspectives so that a holistic impression can be formed (Bayley and Nancarrow, 1998; Verdurme and Viaene, 2003). This entails looking at the totality of their experiences interdependently rather than separating their particular experiences out from each other and their world.

However, it is important to note that the qualitative nature of the study means that the research findings are specific to the individuals interviewed and there is no attempt to generalise the particular research findings across Muslims – or even British Muslims – as a consumer group. The goal of the research was to explore the rich complexity and the depth of the informants’ understandings of Islam, halal, and themselves within the context of their lives as British Muslims. It did not attempt to assess whether the interpretations or understandings offered by the informants are representative of the majority of British Muslims, or even the
Muslim residents of Leicester. The results of this study should help to identify some of the key modes of thinking, perceptions, and methods of sense making among this group of consumers.

The epistemological and ontological assumptions underpinning the research approach offer certain guidelines as to the method used to collect and analyse the research data (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Ontology questions whether the reality that is being studied is objective and exists in the external world, pressing in upon the observer or whether that reality is actually a phenomenon internal to the individual consciousness (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 1). An interpretive approach does not believe that one real world exists, and that, in order to make sense of their world, individuals create their own theories and categories (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Reality is therefore socially constructed and because we as individuals are different, there are different group perspectives and multiple realities (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988: 509). Thompson et al. (1989; 1990) added that understanding the nature of a person requires situating the individual’s experiences within the world they inhabit. Adopting this approach allows the research to view individuals’ realities holistically and to understand their experiences as interdependent rather than separate from each other (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Finally, contexts give meaning and construct realities and therefore it is important to understand the context or situation in which the behaviour took place so we can understand the behaviour.

Epistemology is concerned with “how one might begin to understand the world and communicate this as knowledge to fellow human beings” (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 1). As stated by Hudson and Ozanne (1988), the primary focus of an interpretive study relates to the particulars of a phenomenon. In this case, these particulars are the consumption decisions of British Muslims regarding halal fast food. The knowledge generated from the research is idiographic, time bound, and context dependent.
4.2 Introduction to Phenomenology

Phenomenology is based on the work of Edmund Husserl (1900/1970) who argued that “we must go back to things themselves” (Churchill and Wertz, 1985: 550) and focus on the perception of the “things in their appearing” – the way the world appears to people (Landridge, 2008). Phenomenologists argue that using methods and concepts intended for natural science to study human behaviour is unscientific because humans are completely different from natural science phenomena, and phenomenology aims to “complement and contextualize empirical scientific investigations by clarifying the ‘essence’ of such regions of study as nature, animal life, and human psychic life” (Churchill and Wertz, 1985: 550). This is a view shared by Wilhelm Dilthey (1894-1977), who argued, nature is something we explain, but we must also understand what he called “psychic life”. An approach was needed to understand complex human psychic life, as it lacks the “exactness” of physical nature, therefore quantification and causal explanations are not appropriate approaches to understanding human behaviour (ibid).

There are three key concepts in phenomenology that were key for this study: intentionality, life-world and bracketing. Intentionality refers to consciousness. Phenomenology recognises the intentionality of all lived experiences, including social behaviour and perception. Intentionality does not refer to the intention of an action, for example going to a restaurant, but rather to the notion that consciousness always has an object. Whenever we are conscious, we are always conscious of something. The concept of intentionality aims to release psychic life from being inside the individual and separate from outside objective reality. The focus here becomes the way consciousness is turned onto the world and the relationship between our consciousness and the world or the public realm of experience (Landridge, 2008; Churchill and Wertz, 1985). The experience and the subject of experience are seen as a co-constituting unity (Thompson et al., 1989). This bridges the gap between traditional concepts of subject and object so that the very unit of investigation becomes the person-in-the-situation.
The methodology therefore aims to create conceptual categories that are led by the informants rather than generated by the researcher prior to the beginning of the research (Thompson et al., 1989). It is important to note that intentionality emphasises the vagueness of the individual about their life situation and that their various experiences are not lived through or reflected upon in an explicit or clear way (ibid). This means that the informants would be unlikely to have uniform interpretations of – or responses to – researcher-generated categories or definitions. Responses based upon the informants’ differing interpretations of these categories could then cloud the results by introducing conflicts or contrasts where none exist or agreement where there are differences. By allowing the informants to generate their own conceptual categories, the study was able to avoid this potential source of error.

The second concept of phenomenology is life-world or Lebenswelt. This is the “world” that the individual lives in and is seen as a larger order unity outside of which no single human activity can be understood (Churchill and Wertz, 1985). This world of everyday life is a personal world that differs for each individual even though it shares many common social structures (ibid). Methodologically, the focus becomes concerned with questions around the nature of the informant’s subjective experiences and the way in which individuals consciously reflect on and experience their life-world. The informant here is seen as a conscious actor who actively constructs meaning (Landridge, 2008).

The third and final concept is “bracketing”. Husserl argued that it was necessary to bracket off one’s natural attitude in order to discern the essence of the “things in their appearing” (Landridge, 2008). By putting aside any preconceived notions about a phenomenon, it allows the researcher to experience first-hand the process of discovery through direct contact or “intuition” (Churchill and Wertz, 1985). Bracketing is an ideal and an imperfect process. It is impossible to assume a view from nowhere (Ricoeur, 1996), as all experiences are grounded in our embodied being in the world. Therefore, we cannot put all our experience and understanding
to one side and view a phenomenon as if for the first time. The phenomenological method is an attempt to understand the elements of a phenomenon by looking first at the phenomenon as a whole.

The respondents’ descriptions allow the researcher to gain “access to the world of the subject and at the same time grasp this world as a function of the subject’s presence, or intentionality” (Churchill and Wertz, 1985: 554). While the researcher attempts to bracket off their own expectations and understanding to one side, they also recognise this is imperfect and reflect on what they bring to the analysis. Bracketing does not mean ignoring or denying that the researcher has preconceptions about a phenomenon. What it means is that the researcher makes an active effort to avoid using the descriptions or concepts of other researchers or theorists or even their own to understand their participants’. This helps the researcher to see the participants’ lifeworld. This is not to accept it is a real concrete thing but to keep at bay pre-concepts and other framing, allowing the participants’ framing to come through. This approach still recognises the researcher’s frame in the analysis.

These phenomenological principles are beneficial to the field of Islamic marketing as the field has been criticised as lacking in reflexivity. This means that the research has been missing a critical approach and a degree of reflection on the presumptions and preconceptions of the researchers themselves (Jafari, 2012). In practice, this requires the researcher to critically examine their own interpretations when working with the data and to allow patterns and themes to emerge from the informants’ experiences and descriptions (Landridge, 2008).

4.2.1 A Selective Review of Phenomenology in Consumer Research

The following section will discuss a selection of the literature on the use of phenomenological methodologies in consumer research that my research drew
upon in terms of its methodological approach. The studies selected focus on the individual’s consumption experiences while attending to the socio-historical context of consumption, and they focused on some of the key issues I discussed in my research such as symbolic consumption and an individual’s interpretation of a phenomenon based on their life world and the interaction of key socio-cultural factors.

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), in an early work discussing the use of phenomenology in consumer research, defined what they called the “experiential view” of consumption. In their view, consumption was phenomenological in spirit in that consumption is a primarily subjective state of consciousness and a phenomenon directed toward the pursuit of fantasies, fun and feelings. At the time Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) considered one of the key issues, which was missing from consumer behaviour research is the feelings and emotions that arise from consumption.

In researching “possessions of special importance” using a phenomenological approach, Myers (1985) was able to find out more about individuals’ experiences of attachment to emotionally significant possessions at different ages because the phenomenological approach allowed the informant to bring out information that would otherwise have been impossible to anticipate and could be missed by a more structured interview technique. Fennell (1985) supported this by explaining that phenomenology would bring us closer to the reality of the consumer decision-making process and the consumers we study, as well as providing empirically generated data for specific issues to be further studied, which is part of what this study aims to do. O’Guinn and Faber (1989) adopted a phenomenological approach to the study of compulsive-buying behaviour. Informants were asked to provide a detailed account of a buying behaviour. The research was designed to be flexible and allowed the informants to discuss in great detail their thoughts, feelings and behaviour regarding the issue of compulsive buying and the first realisation of their problem.
Likewise, Thompson et al. (1989) argued that existential-phenomenology allows the researcher to provide a holistic view of how individuals reflect on a consumption phenomenon. They explained that although social context is seen as the basis from which meanings emerge, there should be an emphasis on a detailed “first person” description of the consumer’s life-world rather than on the cultural setting observed from a “third person” view, since individuals’ experiences emerge in specific contexts. A “first-person description” allows the researcher to understand the informants’ interpretation and narration of the phenomena being studied based on their life-world experience. The phenomenological approach facilitated the collection of detailed descriptions from the informants’ points of view in this research.

Bergadaa (1990) also adopted a phenomenological approach to study the temporal system of consumers, which was seen as an important but neglected aspect of individual action and consumer behaviour. The emphasis of the research was framed around individuality, which is why a phenomenological approach was used. According to Bergadaa (1990), it is problematic to assume all respondents will have the same perception or that their perception will be the same as the researchers. A research method that recognises the subjectivity of individuals is therefore important in consumer behaviour research (see also Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). An exploratory study that followed this methodology was conducted by Mick and DeMoss (1990) and was based on the notion of “self-gift” by adopting a phenomenological approach and gathering data through individuals’ descriptions of recent self-gift experiences. The research provided an understanding of a new concept where no empirical research had been conducted (self-gift) and outlined a number of directions for future research.

Similarly, studies by Cotte et al. (2004) and Eccles (2002) used a phenomenological approach to explore consumers’ understandings and experiences of deciding what to do with discretionary time and female consumers’ experiences as shopping addicts. In both studies, this approach provided the
opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge into a specific group of individuals and their personal histories as consumers. My thesis adopted a similar approach by focusing on the lived experiences of British Muslim consumers and their understandings of halal, fast food, and the socio-cultural context within which they make food consumption decisions. Like Cotte et al.’s (2004) study, the research looked for emergent themes that capture holistically the informants’ complex worldviews and decision-making processes. In line with the Eccles’ (2002) study, this research used open-ended questions to allow the informants to tell their own story, concerning both their fast food consumption experiences and their everyday lives. This approach explored the complexities and diversity of the informants’ practice and interpretation of Islam, their orientation towards fast food in general and halal fast food in particular, and their understanding of their socio-cultural context.

4.3 The Method – Phenomenological Interview

The data was collected using one-to-one phenomenological interviews with British Muslim informants. As Kvale (1983) argued, a phenomenological interview is a powerful method for gaining in-depth understanding of people’s experience. As a method, the phenomenological interview allows the researcher to “gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale, 1983: 174; Stern et al., 1998). Phenomenological interviews were therefore conducted in order to be able to provide a first person description (Thompson et al., 1989), thereby understanding the fast food consumption experiences of British Muslims from their own point of view.

Each interview focused around the concepts discussed in the literature review, namely the patterns of fast food consumption, the role of halal in fast food consumption choices, and the relationship between individual identity, group
identity, and fast food consumption. The interview technique was designed to allow the participant to extrapolate and explore ideas and the questions were generally intended to encourage the participant to delve deeper into their experiences of these concepts. The interviews were first recorded and then transcribed to enhance the conversational feel of the interview process and to put the participants at ease.

Spiegelberg (cited in Kvale, 1983) argues that the importance in using a phenomenological interview lies not in analysing or explaining, but rather it describes the phenomena as precisely and completely as possible. Describing and understanding the life-world of the informant and the central themes he or she experiences and live was the main aim of the phenomenological interview. Each interview resulted in a large volume of raw data from the informant's responses. Close reading of the transcripts of these interviews revealed themes and patterns within and across the interviews. The data analysed for this study were those themes and patterns that emerged from the raw data of the interviews. The interview and data collected were designed to be able to describe and understand the meanings of central themes in the informants' life-world (Kvale 1983). This allowed the participants' own world view to emerge from their discussions, then themes were identified and the analysis moved out to examine the whole sample to identify patterns among the participants and to highlight areas of variation.

The unstructured nature of phenomenological interviews was a key factor in achieving the research objectives. The aim of a phenomenological study is to gather thick qualitative data and not to collect quantifiable responses (Stern et al., 1998), and obtain uninterrupted, precise, first-person descriptions about the informant's life-world, experiences and feelings regarding specific situations (Kvale, 1983). The reason why the first-person perspective is so valuable in this approach is because it allowed the definitions, metaphors, and themes to be generated by the informant, rather than the researcher. By exploring the concept of halal from the perception of the participant, the data was enriched by multiple
points of view or interpretations, which was critical when researching this issue but it is also evident from the literature that the potential for multiple interpretations is unacknowledged. As discussed in Section 2.4, the definitions of halal used in many research studies are rigid and generally drawn from the researcher’s point of view (Ahmad et al., 2013; Alserhan, 2010; Wilson and Liu, 2010). Using a singular definition of halal does not allow an in-depth understanding of how individuals define halal and the role it plays in their life. Furthermore, consumption patterns are organised by multiple cultural frameworks in relation to particular social contexts and therefore an idiographic approach aiming for an in depth exploration and understanding of a phenomenon (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) is needed to understand how people consume in a particular socio-historical context (Holt, 1997). As Machalek (1977) argued, “real” definitions are an attempt to isolate the essential empirical properties of a phenomenon and do not provide a “true” picture of the phenomenon under consideration.

Despite the unstructured nature of the interviewing, the phenomenological approach does ensure that the research remains focused on a few specific themes directly related to the study at hand. As set out by Thompson et al. (1989) a phenomenological interview is not a question and answer session with the informant, instead the aim is to create a circular dialogue around key issues. The role of the researcher will be to set the first question, which tends to be very general and provide a context for the informant to describe their experiences freely. The rest of the dialogue is then set by the informant. The interview is allowed to go where the informant takes it (Kvale, 1983; Thompson et al., 1989) through free dialogue in which the researcher creates questions that ask for greater description in response to the informant’s own responses (Stern et al., 1998). That means the data gathered is not just rich in description but is also what Kvale (1983) described as “pre-suppositionless”, which means simply conducting interviews with great openness and without any pre-defined or ready-made categories or themes for interpretations. The categories and themes are provided through the informant’s own description of experiences, allowing for new
unexpected phenomena. Furthermore, in a more open dialogue, the researcher has the flexibility to adapt to changes during the interview. The researcher can not only adapt the questions based on the informant’s descriptions but can also acknowledge that the informant may change his or her description of a theme or meaning (Kvale, 1983: 177).

Using this method with British Muslims allowed me to address the research aims and objectives and to gain an understanding of their fast food consumption experience by creating an open dialogue with the informants. This was set through the course of the interview based on their responses and by gaining an in-depth first person perspective of their own fast food consumption experiences. Furthermore, this method was suitable for this exploratory study due to the lack of research on the role of individual interpretations of halal in Muslim consumers’ behaviour and consumption choices and allowed the researcher to discover new phenomena.

While the questions in an unstructured, phenomenological interview can be probing, the question “why” is generally avoided. As argued by Thompson et al. (1989), this type of question demands rational responses and is ineffective for generating descriptions of lived experiences. These questions can lead to short but reasonable responses that do not address the purpose of the research or allow a deep understanding of the informants’ experience as it is lived (ibid). To elicit a more detailed description, this research used short, descriptive questions or clarifying statements that flow from the informants’ responses. This gave the informants the space to expand and to offer information that the researcher may not have been able to foresee.

Another key issue discussed by Kvale (1983) is the importance of equality, or at least the appearance of equality of power and knowledge between the researcher and the respondent. The researcher should not give the impression that they know
more about the topic being researched, in fact the opposite is desired to allow the informant to feel they have the best knowledge regarding their experience since it is their own experience that is under discussion. One of the ways in which this potential issue was managed in this study was through the use of open-ended questions that allowed the informants to provide their own definitions, instead of requiring that they respond to a definition provided by the researcher. Additionally, follow-up questions regarding the informants’ daily lives placed the informant in a clear position of superiority of knowledge, which helped to balance the structural power dynamic.

Therefore, in order to address the research questions and gain a better understanding of the fast food consumption experience of British Muslims, unstructured one-on-one phenomenological interviews were conducted with British Muslim informants regarding their recent fast food consumption experiences. The interviews lasted, on average, between 1-2 hours and took place in one of three locations: the University of Leicester library and either the informant’s or the researcher’s home. The main aim behind selecting a particular location was for the informant to feel comfortable in the interview and to be able to express him- or herself freely. While interviews in the family home (if the informant lived with their family) ran the risk of encouraging feelings of familial attachment or memories of meals at home, this risk was minimal compared to the need for the informants to feel open and comfortable when expressing themselves.

The informants were asked to describe their current fast food consumption experience. The interview, in line with the phenomenological approach, began with a general question to allow the informant to start describing their experience freely and in detail. The first question for all the informants was the same; “tell me about your understanding of “fast food” and can you tell me about a time when you consumed fast food, describing your experience in as much detail as possible?” The aim was to start an open dialogue with the informant using this opening question, in line with the phenomenological interview technique of Thompson et al. (1989).
Following on the initial questions, the direction of the dialogue and the questions asked were guided primarily by the informant’s responses. The research questions formed a loose framework and a reference point for the discussion, but every attempt was made to allow the informants to elaborate on and further explore their responses.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed and field notes were also taken by the researcher during and after the interview in order to record any actions and behaviour that were unclear in the audio recordings and that may have had an impact on the data analysis. This includes body language and facial expressions. Furthermore, given the iterative and changing interview approach adopted for this study, the field notes allowed the researcher to record any new ideas or changes in direction or emphasis per the interview topic guide. This was done during and after each interview, and was taken into consideration after analysing each interview, before moving on to the next informant.

Data was analysed from the verbatim interview transcripts to gain a thematic description of British Muslims’ fast food consumption experiences. An emic approach to interpretation was followed, with the aim of describing the data collected from the informants’ points of view, not the researcher’s. The choice of conducting individual interviews rather than group interviews was not just affected by the aim of the research, which is to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon from an individual first person perspective. The methodological choice was also shaped by the topic to be discussed – religion. Some informants may not have felt comfortable discussing religion-related issues in a group situation. Madriz (2000) explained that certain situations and topics like this may cause discomfort for informants and in such cases individual interviews are preferred (cited in Bryman and Bell, 2007). Furthermore, during group interviews informants may experience the pressure to conform, and individuals may be constrained rather than stimulated by the group (Frey and Fontana, 1991).
Finally, desk research was also used as part of this research as it is a useful tool that can provide significant data on the status of the market place quickly and inexpensively on key issues relevant to the study (Bradley, 2013; Beri, 2013; Haguet et al., 2004). In this study newspaper articles, official government statistics and market reports were used to understand a variety of key elements. This included the current status of the fast food market and the socio-cultural factors that may impact fast food consumption such as the recession, families and household and working hours, as well as the current figures regarding the Muslim community in Britain and globally. The following section will address the critique of the phenomenological method used for this study, discussing how could have impacted the study and how any issues were overcome during the interviews.

4.3.1 Challenges to Phenomenological Methods in CCT

Consumer Culture Theory has experienced criticism from a methodological angle. Askegaard and Linnet (2011) have criticised CCT research as relying too heavily on individual interviews, arguing that the interview method leads to researchers over-emphasising consumers as individualistic or overly agentic units of analysis who are powerful and affect the market. Further, these criticisms argue that most CCT research is ahistorical and similar to classic consumer and marketing research. This would mean that CCT is ignoring one of its initial goals of researching the sociocultural shaping of consumption and the ideological production of consumer subject positions. Askegaard and Linnet argue that this agentic approach of CCT can “overshadow the notion that the human being is first and foremost a social and cultural animal” (2011: 400). The essence of these critiques is that CCT is leaving “culture” out of its analysis.

There have been also similar criticisms of this approach from Moisander et al. (2009), namely that existential-phenomenology and its preferred method, the phenomenological interview, is inadequate for cultural analysis in consumer research. They argue that it focuses attention mainly on individual, first person
experience locating the production of social order in the minds of individuals. What the critique misses is the fact that certain concepts, like religion, are highly personal in their interpretation and that the complexities of religious experience and interpretation require in-depth explorations of individual experience to be captured. Moisander et al. (2009) also argue that phenomenology’s emphasis on personal independence and the role of individuals in social life fails to account for the cultural complexity of social action and marketplace activity. They argue that the phenomenological method ignores questions about the culturally constituted nature of experience and social reality and assume that cultural meanings are a resource pool for personal meaning-making (ibid).

While the approach that they described may have those faults, a phenomenological approach is not necessarily limited to the examples they discuss. In this study, drawing upon the theoretical background of CCT, the socio-cultural context of the informants is given a central place in the analysis. Moisander et al (2009) also argue that phenomenological approaches fail to recognise the historical, political and social aspects of social action and that the emphasis should be more on community interdependence, negotiation and dialogue as the basis for social action of consumers. However, as the results of this study showed, the over-emphasis on community forces can mask the diversity within even close-knit communities.

Moreover, Thompson et al. (2013) countered these criticisms, suggesting that they were selective; that, in fact, CCT studies have extensively addressed the institutional, historical, ideological, and sociological shaping of consumption. CCT research has regularly studied the broader market and social systems that situate consumers’ identity projects and consumption practices. Thompson et al. (2013) cite several examples in addition to those mentioned in Section 4.2.1, concluding that CCT is not solely focussed on the study of consumer identity projects, at the expense of historical and sociological considerations. Furthermore, CCT does not favour an agentic account over structuralist explanations, even if this may have
been evident in early CCT work. Rather, CCT looks at how relations between structure and agency play out in different forms of consumption and different marketplace contexts (*ibid*). Even when CCT projects utilise the resources of personal interviews or discuss the role of individuals as co-creators of their identities, they rarely lose sight of the socio-cultural context that shapes and provides the materials for these identity constructions.

Further criticism of CCT methodology by Moisander et al. (2009), argues that the minimising of interviewer intrusion is detrimental to data collection because interaction and dialogue between informant and researcher can be of assistance in stimulating thoughts and is a strong creative force in producing cultural talk. The interviewee should not just respond to the questions but rather should discuss the questions with the researcher in a collaborative manner. They argue that both the researcher and informant should be engaging in a creative dialogue “drawing from the cultural narratives and other culturally shared interpretive resources that are evoked, produced and made available in the interview setting” (p. 14).

Moisander et al. (2009) suggest the use of projective techniques and elicitation materials – especially visuals – to generate cultural talk and facilitate a dialogue on the specific topic being researched. They argue that it helps informants to elaborate on the topic by providing them with a concrete context for abstract or personally distant issues. Another approach is to use tools like role play, where informants play the role of someone else and interpret the behaviour and opinions of others rather than their own. This also helps the informant when talking about sensitive issues as they can distance themselves from the issue and act as if they are not talking about their own experience, which makes it easier and more comfortable. However, the technique of discussing questions with the informant or conducting role play can lead the informant to act as a “naïve scientist”, attempting to interpret the behaviour of someone else instead of giving their own opinions. This could lead them to trying to understand why the question is being asked and also to try to provide rational well thought through responses for specific
behaviours. Using the recommended methods by Moisander et al. (2009) there is a risk of missing unexpected phenomena and channelling the informants into specific directions rather than letting them decide the course of the dialogue. This unstructured and open manner was more beneficial for this research, where the topic in question is new and requires in depth data.

In this thesis, the critique of Moisander et al. (2009) and Askegaard and Linnet (2011) are taken seriously. However, the focus was on how individuals negotiate between their religion and nationality when it comes to their consumption of fast food in order to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences from a first person perspective. Therefore, the individual phenomenological interview (as proposed by Thompson et al., 1989) was the most effective tool to understand the relationship between religiosity, consumer culture, and individual identity formation. It is designed for the purpose of studying consumer experience from a fairly individualistic perspective, while allowing me to generate a thematic description of their experience.

This is a critical issue and the primary reason for this is because religiosity is by definition personal and individual. The extent to which an individual follows or values the tenets or regulations of a religious system can best be examined by allowing that individual to explain and explore these concepts in an interview setting. This makes religiosity an extremely difficult concept to measure or to generalise (Wilson, 2013). To recap, the importance of individuality cannot be emphasised enough when researching religion. The literature has shown us that religion has many different definitions and more importantly, that religion means different things for different individuals. Therefore as Berger (1974) argued, researchers must adopt a perspective of researching the phenomenon from within and the respondents need to define how they see religion.
In this case, although Muslims use the same sources for understanding Islam, there are multiple interpretations and Muslims interpret and re-interpret their religion differently to make sense of their lives. For example, regarding the issue of halal food, which is the key issue in this study, it can be argued that although it is a shared concept in Islam (Sandikci, 2011), how it is negotiated and experienced in the daily lives of Muslims is complex and dynamic. While we share many common social structures across the world, it is still a personal world and how each individual is affected by or uses these structures differs (Churchill and Wertz, 1985). This is not to say, of course, that these individuals exist outside of the marketplace of social, cultural, and religious symbols. The strength of CCT is how it balances the importance of consumer identity projects with the role of social and cultural structures in the construction of individual identities. The following section will look at how the respondents for this study were selected and what were the criteria, justifying the sample selection method, sample size used as well as providing more information on each respondent.

4.4 Sampling

Hackley (2003) explained that the word “interpretive” implies that data gathered is not for the purpose of generalising across time and social context. For that reason Patton argued that the main criterion should be that the sample of informants should be information rich (cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). The reason is that the aim is not to collect a sample that is statistically representative; rather it is about recruiting individuals who can provide useful insights for your specific research area (Remenyi et al., 2003).

From a phenomenological perspective, a “random sample” is rarely if ever relevant for the research purpose and a non-probability sample based on some sort of subjective assessment is more appropriate (Remenyi et al., 2003). As Malhorta and Birks (2003) explained, non-probability sampling is a technique where the
researcher uses their personal judgement to *purposely* select the informants because they fit the criteria of the desired informants. Selecting informants through a purposive sampling approach requires the researchers to think critically about the characteristics of the population being studied (Silverman, 2010), therefore the researcher carefully selects informants matching the specific criteria required for this research and who illustrate key features that relate to the research questions. In this case the only criteria were for the participants to be British, Muslim and have consumed fast food.

The question of appropriate sample size is difficult to answer in qualitative research. Initial plans were to conduct 10-15 in-depth phenomenological interviews; however, there is no definitive or model answer in terms of how many interviews should be conducted for a qualitative research project. Hackley (2003) explained that the answer to “how much data shall I collect?” depends on several factors: the nature of the subject matter, the type of data sought and the quality of data that is obtained. The objective of qualitative research is usually to create in-depth analysis and representativeness is less important, hence samples are often purposeful (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

Over the past two decades Thompson and other scholars have adopted a phenomenological as well as a hermeneutical approach, and used in-depth interviews as a method to investigate various consumption phenomena in terms of different consumer groups. In recent studies, the sample size varied according to the aims of the research, some inquiries included only four informants (Thompson, 1996) and in other research projects there were ten informants (Thompson, 1990), twenty informants in Thompson and Haytko (1997) and twenty-one informants in the study by Arsel and Thompson (2011). Denzin and Lincoln (1998) argue that six informants is an adequate number for qualitative research, which highlights the point that in a phenomenological or indeed any interpretive research the number of informants varies according to the aim of the research and quality of data collected from each informant. The right number of informants is
reached when the data collected results in the phenomenon being studied reaching a saturation point, so to speak (Silverman, 2012; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Kvale, 1983). This is when the participants were not introducing any new experiences or perspectives; therefore interviews were adding little or no value. While this can be difficult to achieve as each individual may add a slightly different perspective on the topic, consistent themes should begin to clearly emerge and are discussed repeatedly by different participants.

The current research focused exclusively on British Muslims in the multicultural city of Leicester, where, according to the 2011 ONS census report, there were 61,440 Muslims in the city, double the 30,885 reported in the 2001 census (Leicester City Council, 2012). In the context of this doctoral study, focusing on one city was sufficient. A more diverse sample from across the UK would not have provided additional benefit because the aim of the study was not to generate a representative analysis of all British Muslims, but rather to explore a set of concepts in-depth through the understanding of individual informants. In the research, individual in-depth phenomenological interviews were conducted with British Muslims. The two key socio-cultural factors the research focused on are religion and nationality, therefore the only criteria for the informants were British or hold citizenship and were Muslims. This research looked specifically at how British Muslims negotiated between their religion, their nationality, and their community in terms of fast food consumption and their identity construction. The study did not focus exclusively on people who consumed fast food on a regular basis because the reasons why the informants decided not to consume fast food or halal fast food were also valuable for the analysis.

A variety of channels were used to recruit the informants for the study. I looked to utilise the increasing popularity of social networking in general, specifically Facebook, to advertise for research informants on Muslim or Islam-related groups. Finally, other channels were used to find more British Muslim informants, such as the University of Leicester and DeMontfort University Islamic societies and some
of the local mosques/Islamic centres. Groups targeting the Muslim community in Leicester were the main source on Facebook and I joined several of these to be able to advertise for informants either on the group “wall” or forum, or by sending messages to the group members. Furthermore, I was able to keep up to date with events run by these groups and to attend them in order to enhance my network and meet possible informants for the research. A similar approach was used on Twitter by “following” accounts based on targeting Muslims in Leicester. Example of such groups include the Facebook groups “Leicester Muslims”, “Federation of Muslim Organisation Leicestershire”, “Darul Arqm Educational Trust” and the Facebook group and Twitter account of the “Islamic Foundation Organisation” and the “Islamic Society of Britain” who also have a centre in Leicester.

There are also Islamic societies and centres in Leicester that I used to gain informants. Again this was achieved by attending events run by these societies or centres for the Muslim community in Leicester and also advertising on their websites through forums and by emailing the organisation requesting assistance. The main society in which I was an active member is the “University of Leicester Islamic Society” (ULISOC), as well as an Islamic charity and community centre “Muslim Khatri Association” and “Masjid Umar – Evington Muslim Centre” where I was a regular visitor. A total of 12 British Muslims were interviewed for this study, with the majority being recruited through Facebook and the University Islamic Society and none were from the same family. There was no difficulty encountered in recruiting participants, many volunteers showed great interest in participating in my study, with Facebook being the most effective tool. All participants were asked to sign an informed consent form and were fully briefed of their rights, including the freedom to withdraw at anytime. They were also assured about the confidentiality of the study and the names of the informants have been changed. They were all given pseudonyms as listed in Table 1 and in the data analysis in order to protect their identity.
<table>
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<td>Asian</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umar</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>Media Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darwish</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makram</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Taxi Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amir</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>Financial Analyst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samir</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Participant Information*

The following section of this chapter will discuss how the data collected for the phenomenological interviews was analysed, focusing on the use of coding and thematic analysis.
4.5 Data Analysis

Phenomenological analysis aims to work reflexively with the data providing a structured description of a specific phenomenon by identifying common themes or patterns in the informant’s experiences (Landridge, 2008). The research was designed to be an iterative process and the researcher should be going back and forth to analyse each transcript more than once (Stern et al., 1998), to develop themes and gain a holistic understanding of each informant as suggested by Thompson et al. (1989; see also Connolly and Prothero, 2003).

Kvale (1983) argued there are several phases of interpretation that can help achieve the description and understanding of the meaning of themes in the life-world of the informant. The first phase is where the informants talk freely about his or her actions, thoughts and feelings regarding a specific theme with no interference from the researcher. The second phase is where the informants themselves see new meanings and connections in their life world experiences based on their initial description and again this is done without any interference from the researcher. The third phase discussed by Kvale (1983) is the first one where the researcher plays a role, but again the role is minimal: to ensure the data is based on the informant’s description of their experience. The researcher interprets the detailed description given by the informant on the spot during the interview and asks the informant to confirm or deny what they meant by what they initially described. The aim is to ensure the analysis is closer to the informant’s true experience rather than the researcher’s interpretation, in line with the phenomenological approach. Meanwhile, Kvale (1983) discusses other phases of interpretation for qualitative interviews that will not be used for this research, as they move away from the aims of the research.

Thompson et al. (1989) also explained that the goal of research adopting a phenomenological approach is to provide a thematic description of the informants’
experience by adopting a holistic strategy and attempting to relate the informant’s descriptions of specific experiences to each other and to the overall context of their life world. This is done through the verbatim-transcribed scripts of the informant’s interview that become the text from which interpretation ensues (Kvale 1983). The sole reliance on verbatim interview transcripts in a phenomenological approach is a reflection of the emic approach, autonomy of the text, and bracketing, which constitute the three key methodological criteria of phenomenological interpretation (Thompson et al., 1989). The emic approach reflects that the interpretation of the data is based on the informant’s own terms and category systems rather than ones that are set by the researcher (Kvale, 1983; Denzin 1989). The second criterion is that the data is treated as an autonomous body based on the reflections of the informants on their lived experiences. Finally, bracketing, the third criterion, is where the researcher puts aside his or her own assumptions, which is necessary for attaining an understanding of respondents’ lived experiences (Thompson et al., 1989).

The terms “emic” and “etic” as approaches for analysing social and cultural settings were first discussed by Kenneth Pike (1954). As another critic has remarked, “Emic constructs are accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the native members of the culture whose beliefs and behaviours are being studied” (Lett, 1990: 130). I attempted to put aside any prior assumptions or theories, allowing themes to emerge from the data provided through the informant’s own detailed descriptions. In contrast, there an is “etic” approach: “Etic constructs are accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the community of scientific observers” (ibid.). In an etic approach the researcher uses existing theories and concepts and examines them in a different cultural or social setting. This research used an “emic” approach, in line with its phenomenological orientation (Thompson et al., 1989).
The aim of conducting “existential-phenomenological” research on British Muslims was to identify common themes from their experiences on how they individually negotiated between their religion and nationality in the context of fast food consumption and identity construction. “Existential-phenomenological” research provides this thematic description of experience (Thompson et al., 1989), and therefore data analysis for this research was conducted through “thematic analysis”.

Thematic analysis can be used for many purposes according to Boyatzis (1998), including analysing qualitative data. It takes the researcher through three detailed phases of inquiry; observation, recognising, and interpretation. Boyatzis (1998) explained that thematic analysis is the process of encoding qualitative information, and Hackley (2003) added that thematic analysis is a method for interpreting data to see if any major themes emerge from the transcriptions of the interviews. Thematic analysis allows a large amount of qualitative information to be analysed in a systematic manner. This helps the researcher to gain a better understanding and interpretation of behaviour (Boyatzis, 1998).

In keeping with an existential-phenomenological approach, the interview transcripts were treated as an “autonomous body of data compromised of respondents’ reflections on lived experiences” (Thompson et al., 1989: 140). It is the interpretation of the informant’s own words and category systems, rather than those generated a priori by the researcher, that are the focus of attention (Kvale, 1983). Interviews were transcribed and analysed immediately after each one was conducted. In this way, common themes were being identified through the coding process and during the data collection process.
4.5.1 Coding

Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 27) stated, “Coding can be thought about as a way of relating our data to our ideas about these data”. Coding also assists in the organisation, processing and analysing of qualitative data (ibid). Boyatzis (1998) explains that encoding requires an explicit “code”, such as a theme, “a pattern found in the information that at a minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (p. 4). A theme could be a simple term describing something that was directly observed or a more detailed term describing a phenomenon based on the observation. In this research the codes or themes were inductively generated from the detailed description provided by the informants, rather than being pre-defined or deductively generated from previous research or theories.

The qualitative data in this study consisted of identifying emergent themes from the existential-phenomenological interviews conducted with 12 British Muslims living in Leicester and determining how their identity construction projects are influenced by things like their religiosity, their social environment, the fast food market, etc. The codes emerged through a careful reading of the interviews, first individually to understand the individual’s experience and then again across respondents. The codes standardised the interviewees’ responses so that they can be compared and analysed more easily. For example, if one interviewee says that they choose to eat halal food because they believe it is higher quality and another says they choose halal food because it is free of hormones or GMOs, these both could be coded as: “Reasons for Choosing Halal—Health”. The frequency of mentions of health reasons can then be compared to, say, “Reasons for Choosing Halal—Religion”. The themes generally relate to the major issues identified in the Literature Review, but the emergent nature of the coding ensured that unexpected themes are also identified and factored into the analysis.
The codes were generated as a part of the interpretive process. After reading through the transcripts of each interview several times – in order to become familiar with the words, phrasing, and style of each respondent – the researcher began making notes on the responses that seemed relevant to one or more of the research questions. The purpose of the multiple readings is not simply to catch elements that may have otherwise been missed, but also to develop a holistic sense of the participants’ meanings and experiences. In this way, the personal views and preconceptions of the researcher can be, to as great a degree as possible, separated out from the meanings constructed by the participants. From these notes, the researcher developed the abstract codes that form the basis of the analysis.

After a thorough reading of the interview transcripts and several iterations to develop coding, a full list of emergent themes were generated and the responses have been categorised into these themes. The development of these themes calls for a substantial amount of interpretation and creativity on the part of the researcher. Codes that are similar in a holistic sense were grouped together to form the themes. This does not mean that the codes “agree” or that they support one another; rather they revolve around a similar major concept. For example, responses involving the intensity of religious devotion, such as “religion is not a major influence in my life”, “religion is a major influence in my life”, or “I don’t think about religion very often” may have different codes, but they were all discussed under the theme of religiosity. It should be noted that the responses may have relevance to different themes, so the same codes and statements can show up in different sub-sections. These themes were then analysed under the relevant issue headings derived from the Literature Review. In this way, the quotes and selections used in the analysis to support the key arguments had a rationale for inclusion. Additionally, the analysis goes beyond a kind of anecdotal approach that selects relevant quotes according to the researcher’s opinion and instead has a more formal and analytical method of breaking down the interview transcripts.
The final section of this chapter will discuss the ethical implications encountered during this study and how I used informed consent and anonymity to address and concerns that may arise for the respondents especially in relation to the topic of religion.

**4.6 Ethical Issues for this Research**

There is no single set of rules or practices for ethical behaviour in research (Richardson and McMullan, 2007). Humphrey (cited in Sin, 2005) agrees that it is difficult to achieve a universal set of rules or practices in research. There are several academic bodies that have published professional codes of ethics or conduct; the British Sociological Association’s *Statement of Ethical Practice and Guidelines for Good Professional Conduct* (2002), the Social Research Association’s (SRA) *Ethical Guidelines* (2003) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Research Ethics Framework (REF) which is probably the most relevant for this field of research. The aim of the REF for social science research that was formally introduced by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in January 2006 is to protect the dignity, rights and welfare of the research subjects. Other research ethics definitions include Saunders et al. (2009: 202) “the appropriateness of your behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of your [research] work, or are affected by it”. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) defines research ethics as “the moral principles guiding research, from its inception through to completion and publication of results and beyond” (2015: 43).

There were three key ethical issues in this research: informed consent; confidentiality; and anonymity. Crow et al. (2006) explain that informed consent requires the researcher to provide information to the informants regarding the research that they will be participating in. More importantly, the informants need be made aware that they have the right to decline or withdraw at any time without
any consequences. Sojka and Spagenberg (1994) argued that informed consent creates a "halo effect" as the informants feel more secure and are assured of confidentiality, increasing the likelihood that they will be willing to provide honest descriptions of their experiences.

Confidentiality in a research context is achieved by “presenting findings in ways that ensure individuals cannot be identified (chiefly through anonymisation)” (Wiles et al, 2008: 418). Sojka and Spagenberg (1994) argued that the trust between researcher and informant is very important, and providing confidentiality and anonymity will help build this trust. Trust between researcher and informant will also increase the ability to obtain more detailed and descriptive data; data that reflects his or her true experiences. Lee (cited in Wiles, 2008) argued there is a range of different harms that might occur to research informants from disclosure of their details after participating in research. These harms include embarrassment and violence. For that reason the researcher may feel that in some research areas it is necessary to exclude some of the data collected to protect the research informant from being identified (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006). This obviously raises issues about the impact of confidentiality and anonymity on the quality of the data collected and the research, while Bryman and Bell (2007) have argued that if the requirements for the process of confidentiality and anonymity in research become too rigid this could affect the ability to conduct meaningful research.

In order to address potential ethical problems with the research, special attention was paid to the issues of informed consent and confidentiality. This was important because many informants, including members of the Muslim community, consider religion to be a sensitive topic. Consent was gained from each informant after explaining to them the research purpose and his or her rights as an informant including declining to be interviewed or withdrawing at any time without any consequences. In regards to confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms were used for each informant during writing in order to ensure anonymity and they were
informed that the data collected from their interviews would only be for the purpose of this research.

4.7 Summary

This chapter has discussed and justified the methodological strategy of this study in detail. First, the research aims and objectives were explained and the research questions to be addressed by the study were outlined. Following that there was an explanation as to why an interpretive approach would be better in understanding the diversity of consumption practices and their meaning for Muslim consumers. This included a discussion of my ontological and epistemological stance and assumptions about reality and social world for the purpose of this study. The main body of this chapter discussed phenomenology as the approach being taken in this study and its use in consumer research, before its phenomenological interview method was discussed, supported and key criticisms of the method were unpacked.

A rationale for selecting the informants through purposive sampling and the other sampling issues were discussed and explicated, such as the number of informants. The data analysis section followed where the use of thematic analysis was justified and a detailed explanation on how the data collected from the interviews will be analysed through coding followed by a discussion of the aims of the data analysis and how the data findings will be presented. Finally, the ethical issues of informed consent and anonymity were then discussed as key issues for this study as it focused on the sensitive topic of religion. The following chapters will present the empirical findings of this study from the data collected from the British Muslim informants in the one-to-one phenomenological interviews that were conducted. The chapters will also discuss and relate the findings from the study to the concepts and the literature on religion, consumption and identity discussed in chapters 2 and 3.
Chapter 5: What is ‘Fast Food’ and Why Do British Muslims Eat It?

5.1 Introduction

The interviews presented and analysed in this chapter are the result of an in-depth, phenomenological interview process with twelve Muslim consumers from Leicester. Chapter 4 identified the phenomenological interview as the appropriate method to capture the participants’ own understandings of key terms, like halal and fast food, and to explore their experiences of their religion, their communities, and the larger social context within which they consume food. Chapters 5 and 6 present the results of the thematic analysis. The data analysis is organised into two chapters that are subdivided into subsections relating to the research questions. Following this introduction, Section 5.1.1 restates the major research questions from the literature review and examines the context of the interviews. In Section 5.1.2, there is a brief review of the main theoretical issues discussed during the literature review and the methodology, and their importance in the present analysis is examined. Section 5.1.3 will provide a brief overview of the structure of the argument and Section 5.2 will provide an overview of the first analysis chapter.

5.1.1 Research Questions

The review of the literature on the relationships between consumption and identity, religiosity, and the cultural forces that influence both consumption choices and individual identity construction projects led to a series of interconnected research questions. These questions helped to focus and provide a structure to the phenomenological interviews conducted during the study. The questions build upon one another, with the final question incorporating the concepts (fast food, culture, religiosity, identity construction) illuminated by the preceding questions:
1. How do British Muslims use fast food consumption in the construction of their individual and group identities?

2. What is the relationship between religiosity, consumption choices and identity construction for British Muslims? How does the understanding and experience of halal impact food consumption choices for British Muslims and how does the relationship between halal and fast food affect their identity construction projects?

3. What constraints do British Muslims experience from the marketplace and from other elements of their social environment in their consumption choices and their identity construction projects?

5.1.2 Theoretical Issues

The data collected through these phenomenological interviews reflect the individual subjective narratives of the participants who took part. This study argues, following the approach of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), that consumption is a social and cultural phenomenon where the individual consumer has to be understood within the context of their social environment. This is in contrast with other theories that look at consumption as a psychological phenomenon, where consumers act to satisfy their internal hedonic desires, or as a purely economic phenomenon that portrays consumers as responding rationally to their needs and the offerings of the marketplace. While CCT does not view consumers as agents with pure autonomy in terms of their consumption choice or identity construction projects, it does acknowledge the co-creative or co-constitutive role of consumers in forging a coherent sense of self using market-defined symbolic goods.
This study, drawing upon in-depth interviews and emergent narratives, seeks to expand the role of consumer freedom and autonomy and of individual variability both in terms of consumption choices and in the interpretation of market-defined goods, and of their social and cultural environment.

5.1.3 Overview of the Analysis

The interview participants offered a deep and varied set of commentaries on their experiences and understandings of fast food, Islam, halal, and identity. Although the interviews had a rough sense of order or direction, as phenomenological interviews they followed the thread of the conversation as it unwound. In this analysis, the participants’ responses and my interpretations are presented in an argument that is intended to accumulate and discuss key factors influencing the social construction of the consumption processes of British Muslim fast food consumers, placing the individual in historical, social and macro economic formations (see Fig. 3). Throughout this argument, the participants’ subjective narratives about themselves, their lives and practices will be analysed against the research questions.
The analysis begins with a discussion of fast food experiences, including both the participants’ understandings of what constitutes fast food and its major positive and negative attributes. Once the parameters of this experience are set, the analysis moves from a micro level towards a meso/macro level. The argument will proceed to explore the interaction between fast food as a functional product, fulfilling the participants’ needs to eat given a time starved environment, and fast food as a symbolic product that informs deeper aspects of the participants’ social and cultural lives. From here, the analysis moves on to a discussion of the relationship between fast food and identity, namely the connection between fast food consumption and the structure of the participants’ days, their busy schedules, and their social relationships. The next section discusses the notion of consumer freedom and individual autonomy as experienced by the participants, and their understanding of the influence that marketplace symbols have in their lives.
5.2 Chapter Overview

Chapter 5 will discuss the increasing prevalence of fast food amongst British Muslims and the influence of Islam on their fast food consumption choices. The CCT theoretical perspective, specifically the “socio-historical patterning of consumption” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 871), is central to this chapter. The chapter will present how fast food has become an increasingly important part of the study participants’ lives in the light of recent social changes. In particular, it will discuss how fast food is increasingly seen as a functional product with little or no symbolic or social aspect associated with it. This will be used to critique the over-generalisation of products as symbolic objects and emphasise the importance of contextual and social issues such as increased working hours and the economic recession in terms of fast food consumption. However, while the consumption of fast food is a functionally based practice, the notion of halal, in contrast, carried symbolic meanings for my respondents based on the social structure of religion (see Chapter 6).

The importance of halal food as “symbolic” will be supported using the data and will be clearly separated from the increasing view expressed by participants that fast food is a functional product. This is not to deny that the consumption of fast food may hold symbolic dimensions, but rather is an attempt to highlight the neglect of the physiological dimension of food consumption, and to offer a critique of the over-emphasis on the symbolic dimension in consumer research literature. This will include a critical review of work on the symbolism of products, such as works by Levy and Elliott, and will discuss the relevance of symbolism in the context of fast food in light of today’s social and economic environment. Using the interviews, this section will argue that factors such as increasing working hours, commuting, general lack of time, low cost of fast food in comparison to other options and the current recession have meant that these Muslims are looking at functional options and are returning to being the “physiological consumer” in the context of consuming fast food. These constraints also raise the issue of consumer sovereignty and how free consumers are when choosing fast food in this environment.
5.3 Analysis of Interview Results: What is Fast Food?

“The line for fast food is becoming blurred” (Darwish).

The focus was primarily on experiences and the participants’ understanding and interpretation of their experiences. The changing and diverse understanding of what constitutes “fast food” was evident from the interviews. All participants started by using what can be described as the “typical” definition of fast food referring to unhealthy food purchased from major franchises (Dunn et al., 2008), limited and standardised menus, mainly hamburgers, pizzas, chicken or sandwiches (Akbay et al., 2007; Davies and Smith, 2004; Bender and Bender, 1993), that is served quickly and is convenient (Jekanowski et al., 2001). Mounir’s first response when asked what fast food meant to him was “I would say that the term fast food would be like junk food, it’s like a synonym of having junk food”. However, this typical definition of big multinational chains, (McDonald’s being the main example, in addition to smaller fast food chains, such as Merryland Chicken and the independent take away restaurants) changed as the interviews progressed.

What emerged was that respondents’ own consumption experiences were not always at the type of places that they initially defined as fast food outlets. The participants’ definitions of fast food changed or extended to include more types of restaurants and food. This created a degree of confusion or “blurriness,” as one participant described it, regarding what is considered fast food, an insight that was clearly evident in many of the interviews. It appeared that it was the introduction of the so-called “fast casual” restaurants that was the main source behind the confusion amongst participants regarding what fast food is. Fast casual restaurants are one of the fastest growing sectors in the food industry, characterised by short menus and the offer of healthier food, which you can often see being freshly prepared on the premises. These establishments are considered a step-up from fast food, but cheaper, faster and more convenient than a full service restaurant (Brown, 2013).
A sense of confusion became clear, with participants unable to determine easily whether some of the places where they regularly consumed are considered as fast food or not. Nando’s and Handmade Burger were common examples of this confusion, places that served what may be considered as fast food, such as burgers, but were also seen as healthier, more service-orientated and expensive than typical fast food and not as quickly prepared, while at the same time they may not be seen as high-end full service restaurants. This general change meant that for individuals what was considered fast food was not as clear-cut as they had thought at the start of the interview.

5.3.1 Unhealthy but “Healthier”

For most of the participants, the concept of fast food evoked convenience, speed, low-cost, and unhealthiness. Zahra used her most recent consumption experience of fast food at McDonald’s to discuss in greater detail her understanding of what constitutes “fast food”. Her description was a representation of how all the participants began their discussion of fast food.

“Fast food, I kind of consider that to be unhealthy, burgers, fries, milkshakes, food that's available from McDonald’s and KFC. The last time that I had it was yesterday, I went to McDonald’s, ordered a Filet-O-Fish meal with a Frappuccino. I think it was quick, the service, you kind of, you have this expectancy of the food tasting in a certain way, there's no surprises, it's always the same, it's always, it hits a craving. It's cheap, it's quick and then you kind of feel a bit guilty afterwards because you know it's unhealthy. It was fun, because I went for a drive, the weather was nice so it just seemed like the perfect time to have fast food where you can't be bothered to be in the kitchen and make any food yourself or eat my mum’s food. It was all about convenience and there’s an element of fun associated with it” (Zahra).
Zahra touches on several key sub-themes that emerged from analysing the participants’ interviews regarding their understanding of fast food. The first one she mentioned was the “unhealthiness” of the food and she continued to do so through the interview, using different terms that represented her understanding of fast food as unhealthy. She later explained how she believed it is “high in calories”, “high in sugar and salt” and in general “not very healthy”. This was a common theme repeated by all participants. Many participants also described their image of fast food as greasy and oily food, normally fried from frozen and prepared quickly. Yassin, for example, described his impression of fast food as:

“The term fast food to me, when I first think about it the picture it paints in my head is of, greasy, slimy, oily kind of food which is just served to you within two to three minutes, something that you have whilst you’re on the go” (Yassin).

The understanding of fast food as unhealthy is not surprising. However, what was interesting was how the participants, despite showing great awareness of the negative impacts of fast food on their health, maintained it as part of their regular diet because it was convenient, quick and consistent.

A genuine sense of confusion began to emerge, however, as many participants shifted from their initial definitions of fast food as unhealthy to an argument that fast food options are becoming “healthier”. Many participants used that change as a basis to justify their regular consumption of fast food. For them fast food is not as bad as they initially made it out to be and therefore not as dangerous to consume regularly. Amir for example recognises that fast food is unhealthy, but then argues he also eats Nando’s which, while fast food in his opinion, is not as unhealthy as McDonald’s and Burger King, which he had defined as typical fast food at the start of the interview. Here we also see how the increase of fast casual restaurants like Nando’s added to the uncertainty in defining fast food:

“I recognise that sometimes it’s unhealthy and that’s why I try to stay away from it as much as possible. But there are other kinds of what I would consider fast
food, for example Nando’s. They do grilled chicken, they do different kinds of chicken fajitas, chicken burgers and so on that are healthier, I assume, than McDonald’s and Burger King. But for the same kind of convenience I can still order a takeaway from Nando’s and have it” (Amir).

Here, Amir makes a distinction between fast food that is unhealthy and options that have the speed and convenience attributes of fast food yet are healthier than traditional fast food options.

Not all of the participants defined fast food outlet by the type of menu choices they offered, but rather by the customer experience they offered. Darwish, for example, talked about fast food as a “culture” defined by a set of principles. These principles relate to the types of interactions the customer has with the food, the staff, and the space of the restaurant. Even eateries that offer healthier alternatives that take longer to prepare still offer a similar experience to traditional fast food restaurants, including paying when ordering and taking food from the counter to either the seating area or out of the restaurant. Here it becomes clear that the participants’ definition of fast food is not fixed, rather it is diverse:

“I think there’s a lot more demand for healthier alternatives, so you can go to a fast food place and then you’re there for 20 minutes waiting for, let’s say, a steak burger made of real steak meat which takes them 20 minutes to cook. So, really and truly, I think fast food is, in a way, a culture, it’s defined by a set of principles, such as you walk in, you pay first, you get your food and then you leave or you sit down and eat with it. But at the same time a lot of what wasn’t fast food, is fast food now…but at the same time it’s the same concept as anything else that you call fast food, but it’s just a healthier alternative” (Darwish)⁷.

⁷ “…” Ellipses representing words being omitted from the full participant quote.
So the term “fast food” is not fixed for the participants, but it seems to at least include a health issue, even if only as a baseline against which “healthier” fast food alternatives can be compared. Darwish’s description of the fast food establishment as a space within which the consumer and service personnel interact according to a prescribed set of behaviours is an insightful view of fast food that frames his understanding of the term and the categories/commodities to which it applies. The form of a fast food interaction is not necessarily related to the specific food that is consumed, but rather to the manner in which it is eaten. Of course, this might result in the food being less healthy, since it is difficult to prepare fresh food that quickly, but this is a by-product of the interaction rather than an essential definitional element.

When discussing the issue of health during the interviews, many participants related it back to their religion. This was under the notion that Islam encourages people to eat healthy food and look after their bodies, as the body is a “gift from Allah”. So although the consumption of unhealthy food is not forbidden in Islam, it is against Islam’s “guidance” regarding lifestyle and therefore impacts on an individual’s fast food consumption choices. This is another reason that seems to have led the participants to try and justify their regular consumption of fast food and the argument that not all fast food is unhealthy. For example, Zahra discusses this and argues that fast food is not bad as long as it is consumed in moderation:

“Oh, you have to be healthy, in Islam you have to maintain yourself, be fit and healthy and take care of your body because you’ll be accountable of that as well... your body, your life is a gift from Allah and everything is going to return to him and you will have to answer for how well you've taken care of something that was his. So as long as you eat it moderately and you exercise and you take care of yourself, because it's not just about the religious aspect, it’s halal food and there's always a place for fast food.”

Similarly, Yassin argues that fast food is acceptable in moderation but the terminology used is interesting. Yassin argues fast food is not “haram” or forbidden in Islam but it is recommended that Muslims do not consume foods that damage
their health. He describes this distinction between forbidden activity and activity that is simply not recommended as follows:

“I think the role of religion when it comes to fast food, as with any food, is that it has to be halal, as a Muslim it has to be halal and it has to be something which Allah has said that you can eat, is acceptable. For me personally, as well as being halal, it has to be something which will nourish the body and will not have a negative impact on your body as the body is a gift from God … I think there are certain aspects that do derive from religion but it’s not haram, but it’s just you should eat healthy, look after body. So, me personally I like to look after my body so I refrain from oily kind of food” (Yassin).

Fast food, despite its unhealthy attributes, is a highly popular form of food consumption in the United Kingdom (see Chapter 2, Section 2.0.2). British Muslims consuming fast food encounter pressures from both Islam and pro-health messages in wider British society and, as a result, produce justifications for their food consumption choices. The act of justification and the knowledge of the unhealthy nature of fast food suggest that the participants are making conscious choices about their food intake and that the health aspects of fast food are an element of their decision making, just not a determinative one. The exploration of the definition of a fast food restaurant in the perceptions of the study participants also featured discussions of the homogenised or standardised nature of these establishments and the cost, convenience and speed that tend to characterise them. It is important to analyse these attributes in terms of understanding the participants if the role of halal in fast food is to be properly contextualised, because these attributes affect their food consumption choices.

5.3.2 Homogenised Menus and Standardised Processes

Although Zahra began her definition of fast food by describing it as unhealthy, she then went on to highlight several characteristics of fast food that can be argued as positive. She felt one of the benefits of consuming fast food is that there were “no
"surprises" and you always knew what you would get. Many participants agreed, arguing that fast food is about homogenised food menus and standardisation in the overall process of preparing and serving food. For many this meant that "consistency" in quality and taste was a key characteristic of fast food, therefore it was seen as a popular and safe option with no surprises or risk involved. Makram explained that when he thinks of fast food, he thinks of big multinational chains and when he goes to these big fast food chains he knows what he will get and that it is exactly the same every time:

"You think of the big chains. You think of Burger King, you think of McDonald’s, all these kinds of things, KFC, you know you think of these big corporate machines that just churn out food, you know. Everything’s the same, everything’s, you know, homogenised, standardised, everything’s the same and you go for that continuity basically. You know when you go out for a Big Mac or fries, you know it’s always going to be the same, 99 times out of a hundred it’s always going to be the same” (Makram).

However, this did not necessarily mean fast food was viewed as high quality food, but was of a standardised quality, as several participants explained. Amir, for example, suggested that fast food is not a consumption choice that he would make on the basis of food quality:

"I would consider it a sort of standard quality food, not high quality food, that’s served quickly and conveniently… Fast food to me is the kind of standard quality food for the masses” (Amir).

However, this consistent quality and taste characteristic that was a feature of the big multinational franchises is not always guaranteed across the board with fast food. For many participants their fast food definition included the smaller franchises, for example Merryland Fried Chicken and independent take away restaurants. Although these examples are not major franchises and not as consistent as McDonalds or KFC, for the participants they had the key features of
what constituted fast food. They were unhealthy, cheap, fast, and they served
similar, homogenised menus prepared following similar standardised procedures
used in multinational franchises.

However, quality was the one issue that varied. While in some cases the smaller
restaurants were less consistent, in some cases they are actually better. Darwish
explained this phenomenon, highlighting how large and small fast food restaurants
vary in their attributes:

“The quality between an independent store will vary store to store, but nine
times out of ten they’re always better than a large chain. But a large chain will
have a consistent quality throughout the board... It’s a lot more homogenised in
everything, whereas if you go to two independent stores, one place might have
the best chips, they might not have as good burgers and vice versa with different
stores and I think overall the quality is far superior in independent stores.”

The diversity in quality is another feature of the fluid definition of fast food and the
role that fast casual restaurants have in this market. Similar to Darwish’s example
of diversity amongst independent fast food takeaway restaurants, many
participants view fast casual restaurants as fast food and therefore argue that fast
food is no longer as consistent or homogenised as it used to be. These places tend
to offer better quality and fresher food unlike typical fast food places like
McDonalds but for many they still maintain the principles of fast food because they
are still reasonably cheap, fairly quick and convenient.

5.3.3 Cheap

Zahra also mentioned that fast food was “cheap” at the start of this section. This
was a common theme amongst all participants. For example, Tarek also described
fast food as easily accessible and cheap:
“Fast food and the general experience of fast food is quick, if you're in a rush it's just there, it's available, it's cheap. You can eat quickly and get on with your day.”

All participants discussed the low-cost aspect of fast food and it was compared to eating at home and to ready meals in terms of cost and not just other eating-out options. Many participants considered fast food to be cheaper than eating home-cooked meals or supermarket ready-made meals. Here, fast food is being viewed as primarily a source of nutrition and a method to satisfy hunger, rather than as a social or experiential event, as a formal restaurant would be understood. Nermeen argues that you can consume certain types of fast food and it could end up costing you less than cooking at home. She was referring to discounts she got as a student and vouchers or offers at various restaurants:

“I'm sure I could probably, with all the deals that are out at the moment, you get them all the time through your letterbox, you could probably dine on pizza for a week and it be almost the same cost as if you bought the food from the shop” (Nermeen).

All participants agreed on the low cost of consuming fast food, but what the cost issue highlights is that the individual’s financial situation may affect their definition of fast food. Some participants considered a meal at Handmade Burger for example as cheap for them personally therefore they are able to define it as fast food because it is in line with the principle that it is cheap. Others believed that such a meal is expensive and therefore do not define such restaurants as fast food even if it has some of the other attributes of fast food. The cost attribute is a variable in the definition of fast food that is dependent upon the individual’s financial resources. However, despite the individual variation, the fast food category generally refers to lower priced food options.
5.3.4 Convenience and Speed

However while unhealthiness, homogenised menus, consistent quality and low cost are all key themes that emerged in analysing the participant interview data, the main element in the participants' understanding of fast food was that it was “convenient”. However, the term “convenience” had a different meaning for different individuals. It is difficult to narrow down what is convenience because as many authors have argued it is a complex and multidimensional construct (Bava et al., 2010; Buckley et al., 2007; Jaeger and Cardello, 2007; Scholderer and Grunert, 2005; Jaeger and Meiselman, 2004; Shove, 2004; Candel, 2001; Warde, 1999; Gerht and Yale, 1993). As Yale and Venkatesh (1986) explained, an individual’s orientation to convenience varies depending on the individual and the situational context.

Time was undoubtedly a key issue, and DeBoer et al. (2004) summarised the common elements of convenience in the context of time because fast food minimises preparation, cooking and cleaning up time. Davies and Marsden (1997) argued convenience also referred to not needing to shop for food, as it is a significant consumption of time, not just preparation and cooking. Buckley et al. (2007) however, explain that convenience is not just about time, but also involves the mental and physical effort of the whole process from purchasing, storing, preparing and consuming the food. Therefore it is about “reducing the input required from consumers in either food shopping, preparation, cooking or cleaning after the meal” (p. 601). Similarly, Brunner et al. (2010) explain that convenience is more than time saving and includes reducing physical and mental effort of planning and preparing meals. The multifaceted nature of convenience was evident in the participant interviews as “convenience” was used to define fast food but what was convenient or what form of convenience was important differed between individuals.

Alongside convenience for many was speed, primarily the speed of service. The understanding of fast food as food that is quickly served was emphasised by all participants but what also emerged is the comparison between fast food and
alternatives such as cooking at home, ready-made meals from supermarkets, and dining-in restaurants. Fast food was not just defined as food that is served quickly, but it was seen as the fastest option available and was a frequently cited reason for participants to explain their increasing reliance on the consumption of fast food. This notion of speed is exemplified by Darwish who explains that the speed of fast food service is not just because the food is prepared quickly but that most fast food is already prepared before the customer orders it, therefore it is just a matter of packaging the food. Based on this understanding of fast food, only certain types of food can be classified as fast food according to Darwish and in general that does not include fresh food:

“Fast food is somewhere where you walk in, you order at a counter and then it’s like a defined series of food, so it’s anything that is made quickly, that can be kept warm, held warm and then left there and you can still be served… Nine times out of 10 what you order is there behind you, they pull out your food, put it all into a little paper box and you pay for it and you usually just go and sit down, grab your salt, grab your own condiments or you take it away (Darwish).

Based on her own experiences Nermeen also argues that fast food is becoming the quickest form of eating and to illustrate this she compares how long it would take her to order a take away delivered to her house rather than buying food and cooking:

“I suppose the purpose of it is that you order something and then you get it quicker than if you had to go to a restaurant or something or if you even made it yourself.”

However, the participants’ fast food consumption experiences suggest that the idea of all fast food being defined by speed of service is no longer the case, which is further evidence of the changing nature of fast food. The general increase in fast food demand, as well as the increasing demand for and consumption of grilled and healthier alternatives has increased the waiting time for service and food
preparation at many typical fast food places like McDonald's. Additionally, participants' perceptions of wait times was influenced by the inclusion of fast casual restaurants like Nando's as fast food. Hussein for example argues fast food is no longer always served quickly. There are two reasons why he believes this. First, he argues that high levels of demand at certain fast food restaurants, especially at peak times, leads to long periods waiting in the queue. Second, the extension of the concept of fast food to include fast casual restaurants like Nando's that offers grilled food take longer to cook than traditional fast food restaurants.

“It used to be like fast food, but now it is not fast food anymore because it takes at least 12 to 15 minutes to get to the food or to get my order done… It’s not fast food anymore because fast food is meant, like, to be done, like, as soon as possible which mean like it takes like maximum of four minutes. But these days it takes more than… that, maybe no less than eight minutes” (Hussein).

Hussein's comment highlights the changing perception of time and speed, and how the quality of fast food plays a role in all of this. Similarly, Jamal talked about how busy his local takeaway can get during the weekend which suggests, from his perspective, the increasing popularity of fast food. However, he adds that the waiting time depends on what he orders. So, unlike the notion that in fast food outlets the food is generally ready and kept warm, it seems as if the diverse menu choices means some food is not always ready quickly.

“So they tend to be quite busy at peak times, so on Friday or Saturday night it’s really busy. You need to queue up for a good 15 to 20 minutes, depending on what you want” (Jamal).

Several participants had different perspectives and stated that even if fast food is witnessing an increase in waiting time due to high demand or longer cooking times for fresher food, it is still faster than other options. Darwish argues that even the places that serve grilled food who take longer to prepare it are still faster than alternative eating options, therefore it is fast food:
“So that’s speed in terms of the delivery of receiving the food, because even 20 minutes at a grill place is still 20 minutes faster than most restaurants. It’s still 20 minutes faster than going to a shop and getting your own ingredients, it’s still 20 minutes faster than cooking a wholesome meal yourself.”

The speed of service was one of a number of factors related to convenience. Many participants talked about eating fast food at work and, in those cases, referred to ease of access as one of the convenience factors of fast food. Fast food needed to be in a convenient location that was accessible with minimum effort so they could get lunch without taking too much time. The time constraints presented by some of the participants’ limited break times meant that they tended to choose lunch options that were close to their place of work. The practice of consuming food on the way back to the office during lunch or in the office itself requires that the food be easily consumable.

Umar’s and Makram’s experiences show that they consume fast food at work regularly and highlight the importance of convenience in terms of speed, ease of consumption, location and access. Umar works as part of a media production crew. The majority of his work is out in the field doing TV recordings. He regularly consumes fast food with his work colleagues while out recording for production and he discussed the importance of fast and convenient food that can be purchased and eaten “on the go”. Firstly, it was important that Umar and his colleagues are able to buy food quickly for large number of people and secondly, that the food was convenient in the sense that it is easy to consume while on the road and in the car:

“My understanding of fast food is food that is served quickly… it was easy to access, it was very easy, just go through the Drive Thru and you make your order and in two minutes you go to the other window and you have everything that you ordered, even if it's a large amount of people, we were like seven and you just drive off. And we had our lunch on the way while driving… It's delicious, quick, quick to buy, and quick to finish, quick to eat” (Umar).
Similarly, Makram, a taxi driver, values fast food for its convenience before anything else, especially in his job role where he looks for something on his work route and “on the go”:

“Fast food is convenience, first and foremost, you don’t want to be waiting around, you don’t want to wine and dine, you don’t want to take in the ambience or anything like that. It’s just about what’s fast, what’s convenient and something on the go.”

Convenience also referred to the handiness of consuming fast food due to the lack of preparation needed such as grocery shopping, cooking and cleaning. In this sense, convenience was about minimising the effort needed as well as the overall time involved in the process of consuming fast food. What emerged was that different individuals defined convenience differently depending on their lifestyle. Therefore working professionals who consumed fast food at work viewed convenience in terms of nearby location and speed of service due to short lunch breaks. Respondents like Jamal and Darwish looked for the convenience of delivery and not having to cook or clean up due to their busy working life and lack of time to cook at home. Finally, those who do not have a mode of transportation were concerned with either close location or delivery services. Therefore, the definition or interpretation of “convenience” varied depending on each individual’s life world:

“Fast food generally for me means quick service, decent quality, cheap food and convenience. So you know, you don’t come back from work and cook and that sort of stuff. It is just ready and go out and buy it if you need to and then consume it straight away” (Jamal).

“So you don’t need to put anything out on a plate, you don’t need to get a glass for your drink, it is literally you can eat out of the box and then throw the box away…there’s no cleaning up involved” (Darwish).
The aspects of fast food evident in the participants’ interviews revolved around the cost, speed, ease, quality and consistency of the food. In addition, experiential factors involving the self-service, pay-first, sit-down or walk-out nature of the fast food restaurant creates something of a fast food culture. What did not immediately emerge from the participants’ descriptions of their fast food experiences was its symbolic role. For most of the participants, the elements of fast food that were most commonly cited were purely functional. The participants’ use of convenience as an aspect of their fast food experience differed based on other aspects of their lives, such as their work environments. This is in line with the work of Yale and Venkatesh (1986) who emphasised the context-specific nature of the concept of convenience. The following section discusses the symbolic vs. function role of fast food in greater details, including the factors raised by my respondents during the interviews as key to fast food playing more of a functional role in their daily lives.

5.4 Symbolic vs. Functional Role of Fast Food

5.4.1 The “Functional” Role of Fast Food Consumption

Levy (1959) argued that individuals consume products not just for their specific functional use but also for the symbolic meaning they carry and since then this notion of “symbolic consumption” has become predominant in marketing and consumer behaviour literature. Many authors have consolidated this notion (Mick, 1986; Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1988; Dittmar, 1992; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Douglas and Isherwood, 1996; Elliott, 1997, 1994) arguing that objects of consumption carry symbolic meanings beyond their physical dimensions and core utility. It is also widely proposed that food consumption carries symbolic meanings beyond its physiological role in terms of satisfying humans nutritional needs (Bardhi et al., 2010; Kniazeva and Venkatesh, 2007; Marshall, 2005; Gumerman, 1997). However, when analysing the interview data in relation to participants’ understanding of fast food and its role in their daily life it emerged that for many, fast food was considered primarily as a “functional” product. It was an option that
provided individuals with a practical consumption choice that just satisfied their hunger and their basic physiological needs. Amir explained that he consumes fast food when he needs to eat quickly and to get on with the rest of his day. So while fast food may not necessarily be his favourite choice for a meal, it does offer a practical solution for satisfying his hunger given his schedule:

“It’s really a last resort kind of thing, when there’s no other alternative or when I just want to get a quick meal and continue my business or whatever. That’s when I turn to fast food…it’s usually something I consume either alone or when I’m with just one friend and we’re looking for a quick meal. We have something to do later, we want to grab something to eat quickly and then continue with whatever we’re doing that night or that day” (Amir).

Furthermore, the emphasis on how he consumes fast food normally, i.e. alone or with one friend, suggests that it does not carry any symbolic meaning for Amir and has a limited role in his social life. Similarly, Mounir, who consumes fast food three or four times per week, describes it as “nothing special”. It is just an option for him when he has no other plans for dinner. All this arguably shows how fast food does not carry any symbolic meaning for him and neither does it play a significant social role. It is just a functional product that serves his physiological need for food:

“I would say that it’s like three times a week, so sometimes it’s four times a week, it depends, you know. And how do I feel? Nothing special, nothing so special, it’s like eating, it’s nothing at all… Usually it’s like I’ve decided like to have a quick lunch or dinner, as I said, so I decided that I don't have time to like, to sit and dine or maybe I was alone and no one is having lunch or dinner with me, that's why I decided just to get in to one of those fast food restaurants. So usually I went to any, like, any restaurant that I like it, like McDonald’s or whatever and having my take-away like. Usually I don't eat over there” (Mounir).
Many participants, like Amir and Mounir, consumed fast food alone or occasionally with close friends, fitting it into their normal daily routine. It was never a pre-planned meal like eating out at a more formal restaurant or having friends for dinner. This highlighted that the symbolic and social aspect of food consumption for these Muslims, at least within the context of fast food, may have been overemphasised in the literature or may simply no longer be as relevant.

Similarly, Darwish clearly views fast food as just part of his normal diet and not something that either carries any symbolic meaning or is consumed as part of a social event or outing. In essence fast food is just something to eat when he is hungry and nothing more. However, what was also interesting was Darwish’s comparison of fast food with eating at a restaurant or cooking at home. He portrays that eating at a high-end restaurant carries more symbolic meaning and social aspects than eating fast food. He adds that cooking at home may be considered more special and symbolic than eating fast food.

The higher cost of eating at restaurants is an understandable reason for why it may carry more symbolic and social meanings. In addition, eating at restaurants normally involves a social gathering. However, the idea of eating at home being “special” was for different reasons, more along the lines of being a rare occasion. As Brewis and Jack (2005) and Taylor and Lyon (1995) previously argued home cooked meals are becoming weekend and special occasion food, while fast food is becoming a key part of the workday diet. This was seen in Darwish’s comments. What can be argued is that because cooking at home can require much bigger effort and preparation time than eating fast food, this makes it more special:

“I think it’s [fast food] a normal part of life. I wouldn’t say it’s more of an event or an outing. Generally for outings and events you’re more likely to go somewhere that’s not fast food related, like a restaurant or maybe on a special occasion you’ll cook, specifically you will cook for that event. But when it’s just a group of friends hanging out and spending time together, it’s entirely different. That’s just a case of okay I’m hungry, fast food” (Darwish).
In order to get a better understanding of why fast food may now be seen as primarily a functional product rather than a symbolic one and to understand why it is becoming a key part of my respondents diet, a better understanding of their individual’s life world is needed. As Buckley et al. (2007) explained, society has changed dramatically in recent years and this has impacted upon food patterns, therefore to understand food we need to understand the changing lifestyles of individuals and the sources of these changes.

Many people’s contemporary lifestyles have led to a great demand for convenience food products (Brunner et al., 2010). Such social and cultural changes give individuals the sense that they are constantly struggling to find time, feeling that they are “time poor” or “time pressured” (Beshara et al., 2010). This feeling of time scarcity has become widespread across industrialised societies such as Britain with many different terms used to describe this phenomenon including “time crunch”, “time pressure” and “time famine” (Jabs and Devine, 2006; Godbey et al., 2006). People are now “constrained” to eat food that is “convenient,” such as fast food, as they have other aspects of their lives that take up more of their time and they experience difficulty in the scheduling of everyday life activities (Buckley et al., 2007; Warde, 1999). The next three sections are a more in-depth analysis into factors that meant fast food was more of a functional product for my respondent; the recession, working hours/commuting and changes in the household.

5.4.2 Long Working Hours

For some time now Britain has been known for its culture of long working hours. Britain has a longer working day than any other country in Europe. As long ago as 2002, more than a quarter of Britons were already working more than 48 hours a week (Kodz et al., 2003), with almost four million workers exceeding 48 hours a week and one in 25 men reaching 60 hours a week (Daily Mail, 2002). In general British men were working 3.5 hours longer per week than their colleagues in any other EU country and British women were working 0.8 hours longer per week (White et al., 2003). In 2007, an International Labour Organisation report showed
that out of all developed countries Britons are working the longest hours (Daily Mail, 2007). Chatzitheochari and Arber (2009) argue that the UK has minimal legislation in place to protect workers from working additional hours, adding that it is the only EU member state to retain the right of exemption from the 48 hours paid work limit set by the European Working Time Directive signed in 1993. This means workers in Britain are free to work more than 48 hours if they wish to do so by signing an agreement with their employer.

However, Chatzitheochari and Arber (2009) explain that many employees feel pressured to do so because of competitiveness in the labour market, increasing pressure from employers and to counter the recession downturn. In essence, all this has meant that Britons continued to work longer hours than their European counterparts. In other words, 9 to 5 no longer constituted normal working hours with many individuals starting earlier and leaving later, and with the majority of workers having lunch at their desk taking an average of only a 33 minute break (Daily Mail, 2010). This increase in working hours has resulted in what Godbey et al. (1998) have discussed as people feeling “time scarcity” due to the pressure to increase productivity at work.

This culture of working long hours plays a role in one of the key themes that emerged in the interview data is the increasing consumption of fast food as the most practical option in the participants’ busy and hectic daily working lives. A variety of reasons were given by participants for choosing fast food, but nearly all fell into this category of not having enough time and being too busy for other options. Therefore fast food, being quick, convenient and also cheap, so regular consumption of it is not problematic financially, was the best option. There is no time for cooking, restaurants are too expensive, ready-made meals from supermarkets are not as cheap and do not taste as good and still require some preparation and washing up afterwards. Also, participants noted they did not have enough time during their lunch break to eat anywhere except fast food places and insufficient time to make food before coming to work. Makram, the full time taxi driver, talked about how he regularly consumes fast food for lunch while at work because he has very limited time to stop. This could be due to work pressure or his
personal decision to not want to stop to avoid losing money, but it shows the increasing role of fast food consumption as a practical solution for the long working hours and short breaks faced by my respondents:

“I was driving [for work], felt a bit peckish and went through a Drive Thru, got what I needed to do, had a little bite in the car and away you go and it really is as simple and easy as that” (Makram).

Similarly, Hussein, an IT engineer, consumes fast food on a daily basis at work. He elaborates by explaining that in his work role he is out of the office regularly at different sites and in most cases he would consume fast food while travelling between sites as his “break”. On the rare occasions where he is based in the office, he only gets half an hour break so again he consumes fast food because it is the quickest and most convenient option:

“When I am travelling or at work, obviously at work, I just go to a fast food because I have half an hour break. But when I am travelling, usually, on my way all the time I go to so-called fast food” (Hussein).

Jamal, the Marketing Consultant, consumes fast food frequently after work and he justifies this because he finishes late and does not have the time or energy to cook:

“I think being in a sort of busy profession I tend to get back late from work so it is usually a case of get back home from work and decide to get take away.”

In essence, participants feel time pressured and also use this to justify what they defined earlier as negative behaviour of consuming something that is bad for them. There was one case of a doctor (Nermeen) who had changed her consumption habits because of her job and what she learnt and saw at work. She argued, as I did earlier, that people used time pressure to justify the choice to consume fast food and to excuse themselves from negative self-judgment for eating an unhealthy diet:
“I think it's probably more the fact that we feel we haven't got the time, as opposed to making the time to make your own food. I think we will probably all fall in to that sort of like terrible mind set saying I don't have the time to do it myself, whereas if, for example, you just went to bed 15 minutes later or while you were studying you had something cooking for tomorrow, you would realise that you actually did have the time. We probably all just like making excuses, or at least I felt that’s what I was doing, I was making excuses as to why I couldn’t do something” (Nermeen).

However, while this might be one possibility, the increasing feeling of “time scarcity” is evident in the fast food consumption experiences of many participants. Another related issue is that, as well as long working hours, Britons face longer commutes to work. Today the number of commuters who travel more than 3 hours per day to and from work has reached two million, an increase of 50% in the last five years (Massey, 2013). The increase is not new for Britain's work force. In 2003 the average commute was 45 minutes, the longest in Europe (BBC, 2003) and long distance commuting was rising with more than 800,000 workers travelling more than 30 miles (Adam, 2005). Tarek explains that there is little time to go home between college and his part time job in the city centre, which is close to his college, so he consumes fast food nearby before he goes to work or during his break. Tarek’s case is interesting as it is now very common for students to have a part time job to support their studies. It can be argued that this phenomenon has contributed to the increase in fast food consumption amongst these Muslims:

“Like sometimes if you live far from home and you can’t go back home to make yourself food, it's just there, it's ready. You just go, you order your food, you pay and you eat it, it’s quick” (Tarek).

Changes in working patterns, which include longer working hours, shorter break times and longer commutes all contribute to the increasing consumption of fast food. This means that the choice to consume fast food in general can be seen as a response to wider structural factors that relate to the changing nature of
capitalism and concomitantly to the need for convenience. In this context, fast food serves a functional purpose rather than carrying symbolic or social meanings.

5.4.3 Households

Another changing factor in British society that has led to an increase in fast food consumption and to its functional or practical as opposed to symbolic role is the shift in the composition of households. Households today have more single-parent families, families with both parents working and more people living alone. There has been a consistent and steady rise in single parent families in Britain that has been widely reported in recent years (O’Grady, 2013; Beckford, 2012; Doughty, 2011). The participation of women in the labour market in Britain has also changed. Today the traditional conceptualisation of the family where roles can be assumed based on gender, which have included mothers in general assuming a housewife role looking after meals and only men working (Redman, 1980) has changed: today both parents are more likely to be working outside the household (Jabs and Devine, 2006; Barnet and Hyde, 2001). Employed mothers are among those experiencing the greatest time pressure, juggling multiple responsibilities both inside and outside the home (Jabs et al., 2007; Mattingly and Sayer, 2006) and for many women, convenience is a necessary tool for coping with time constraints and their busy lifestyle (Beshara et al., 2010).

In a recent study comparing the twenty-one leading industrialised nations, results showed that British working mothers spent an average of 81 minutes a day looking after their children including meal times, which was almost half that in some other countries (Donnelly, 2001). The increasing number of both parents being employed has also resulted in families struggling with time scarcity (Godbey et al., 1998), with less time for traditional household work such as cooking (Buckley et al., 2007; Jacobsen, 1999; Suen, 1994). Therefore time saving and effortless options are in demand, especially during the working week (Buckley et al., 2007) and there has been an increase in the demand for food that is considered convenient (Buckley et al., 2007; Somogyi, 1990; Stafford and Wills, 1979). Zahra who is a full
time secondary school teacher talks about the lack of time and energy she has for cooking after work so she resorts to fast food because it is convenient in terms of the limited preparation time required:

“Well I’m not really the best cook so anything that, where I can go and eat quickly and have that need fulfilled, I think that makes it convenient, especially because I don’t really have a lot of time to prepare food because I’m teaching and then by the time I finish I’m really hungry, so you kind of go for that, that's the convenience of it.”

There are also an increasing number of people eating alone and one of their key demands is food that requires minimal cleaning up (Buckley et al., 2007). There were 26.4 million households in the UK in 2013, of these 29% consisted of only one person (Office for National Statistics, 2013), with 16% of adults living alone. This figure has almost doubled since 1971. Younger adults aged 25-44 were five times more likely to be living alone in 2011 (10%) than they were in 1973 (2%) (Office for National Statistics, 2011). My participants generally used their lifestyle to justify their behaviour. For example Umar compared living alone and living at home when discussing his fast food consumption frequency. He explains that he consumes more when he is alone and there may be many reasons behind this. Arguably it is cheaper to eat fast food while living alone in comparison to buying and cooking food at home, which is not the case for couples or families who save money because they purchase greater quantities. Living alone costs an extra £250,000 over a lifetime compared to living as part of a couple (BBC, 2010) and in terms of food single people spend £2,000 a year on food compared to £1,500 per person for couples (Daily Mail, 2011). Furthermore, with a family there is a social motivation to bring the family together to eat, which may be done by cooking at home and eating together. All this could drive consumers living alone into the fast food market:
“I mean it depends whether I'm with family or if I'm on my own. If I’m living by myself, which is most of the time, I might consume fast food every day or, you know, five times a week, something like that, as at least one meal every day” (Umar).

The relationship between single living and fast food consumption supports the concept that fast food consumption is, if not anti-social, a less social form of food consumption than, for example, going out to a sit-down restaurant or eating at home with family. As a result, divorced from the social context, fast food is viewed by the participants as having less symbolic importance.

5.4.4 Recession

Another factor that the participants identified as being behind the perception of fast food as a primarily functional good is the recession and the resulting tightening of many family budgets. The UK entered into a recession for the first time since 1991 in early 2009 and suffered the largest quarter-on-quarter economic decline since 1980 with two consecutive quarters of negative growth in 2008 (BBC, 2009; Smithers, 2009). The UK economy has still not recovered from the longest and deepest recession in modern history; rather it has been a much slower and weaker recovery than previous recessions (BBC, 2013). The economic picture is still grim and Britons are getting poorer (Milliken and Schomberg, 2013), with GDP almost 4% below its previous peak (Inman, 2013). It is estimated that GDP actually fell in the early days of the recession by 7.2% not 6.3% as previously thought and that disposable income fell by 1.7% -- the biggest drop since 1987 (Paige, 2013; Euronews, 2013). Recently, it was reported that nine million people in Britain are living in serious debt (BBC, 2013).

Households with less disposable income have shifted their food consumption patterns to include more lower-cost fast food options. As a result, fast food chains continued to record increasing profits during the recession. Dominos recorded an increase in profit of 10% during the early days of the recession and KFC
announced major expansions (Kolewe, 2009), which created up to 9,000 jobs (Savage, 2009). The sandwich chain Subway announced plans to open 600 stores in the UK and Ireland, creating 7,000 jobs and McDonald's European sales were up by 7.6% during the start of the recession in the last quarter of 2008 (Savage, 2009). This led former High Streets Minister Brandon Lewis to criticise the government's attempt to ban fast food, arguing it is good for the economy and individuals should be responsible for their own consumption choices (Chorley, 2013). As stated by O'Connor (2009) Britons are “filling up on buckets of fried chicken and takeaway pizza as the recession deepens”.

In 2011, for the first time ever fast food made up more than half of all the meals eaten outside of the home with 5.54 billion visits to fast food chains out of the total of 11 billion meals eaten out of the home, including locations such as work canteens, restaurants, pubs or sandwich shops (Wallop, 2012). According to NPD Group (formerly National Purchase Diary) market research company, customers felt fast food was more value for money and consistent (ibid). This has meant fast food, as a cheap option, has provided individuals with a practical choice. Amongst many participants, Amir explains that towards the end of the month, when money is tight, he is likely to choose a fast food place rather than a restaurant or even eating at home because it was seen as a low budget form of food consumption. Therefore, it can also be seen that the low cost of fast food was also due to its convenience. It was an option that did not have an impact on participants’ budget or require any special financial arrangements or thought like an expensive meal at a restaurant. In essence it was interpreted as just part of their normal consumption plans:

“I tend to go to fast food restaurants more at the end of the month than at the beginning… generally when you go to a fast food restaurant you’re looking for the kind of low budget option” (Amir).

The role of the recession and general societal changes in the increased consumption of fast food is evident. As Holt (1997) explained people who have
similar social conditions acquire similar behaviours that lead to consumption becoming socially patterned, therefore similarity in consumption practice means that a comparable cultural framework is applied to the act of consumption. With so many individuals feeling time pressured, when faced with analogous working conditions and financial constraints this has resulted in a continued increase in the demand for fast food in Britain.

On a macro level, the consumption of fast food in Britain has been driven by a number of broad factors, such as the long working hours that many residents face or the financial pressure to pursue lower-cost food options. These trends have moved the food consumption patterns of many Britons towards a more informal, individualistic, and less social form of eating. For the participants in this research project, the impact of these shifts in social and economic conditions has, for them, lowered the symbolic content of the food consumption process and reduced many of their meals to a purely functional activity. This hyper-functionality of fast food consumption, in itself, may be considered an expression of a lower level of social connection and cohesion than could be found in social groupings where formal or ritualistic group meals are more common.

5.5 Summary: Fast Food Consumption and Identity

This chapter analysed participant narratives that related to their understanding of fast food and the place of fast food in their general food consumption choices. This relates to the first research question and incorporates issues regarding how food consumption, traditionally a communal activity, has become increasingly individualised and separated. The participants’ experiences of fast food, their understanding of what a fast food restaurant is and how it figures in their lives is an important aspect of this study. These elements are a basis for Chapter 6, which analyses the participant narratives on the role of halal fast food in their lives as British Muslims and its role in their individual process of identity construction.
The experiences of the British Muslims in this study highlighted that fast food in general did not seem to have symbolic meaning to them but their consumption choices of food and opting for fast food were impacted by economic and social change. Fast food consumption’s functional values, the solitary mode of consumption, and the way it fits within the structure of the consumers’ lives, as opposed to giving structure to their lives, all indicate that fast food consumption is not considered to have a symbolic value or play a role in the identity construction. This is in contrast to other forms of food consumption such as eating a home cooked meal or at a high-end restaurant.

In terms of identity, self-identity is conceptualised as being actively created by individuals and in contemporary society is related integrally to the act of consumption (see Section 2.2). In contrast to approaches that view consumption as an individual, hedonic activity or as an economic act of need fulfilment, this study follows CCT in locating consumption within a socio-cultural environment of symbols and identity construction. The individual consumer draws from a range of market-defined symbols and, through consumption choices, forges their identity. One of the tensions within the literature is the degree to which the individual acts as an independent agent, forming their identity through their own conscious choices. Some approaches place greater emphasis on the role of communities, groups, and social pressures in setting the boundaries for individual identity construction. Other approaches highlight the role of the individual consumer in shaping the market through their desires for new symbolic meanings (Giddens, 1991).

An emphasis on individual agency does not necessarily negate the powerful influence of markets and communities in setting out the boundaries and defining the vocabularies of symbolic meanings that are involved in identity construction (Thompson et al., 2013). Despite the fragmentation of society into more isolated groups, even within large populations, the role of community is still powerful in terms of shaping individual behaviour. Family, class, and culture (including religion) are what socialise people into the world. Some scholars argue that identity itself is a social construct. The objects that people consume express social
meanings and their expressions are constituted within the structure of social categories. Chapter 6 turns to the subject of religion and specifically the notion of religiosity or the degree of religious commitment or involvement. The analysis will look at how individuals view themselves as members of born or chosen groups and how their consumption choices interact with those group identities.
Chapter 6: The Diversity of Islam and its Role in Consumption and Identity Construction

6.1 Chapter Overview

The increasing numbers of so-called “second generation” Muslims makes understanding their identity project even more important, as it is no longer a case of acculturation or adapting. These Muslims were born and raised in Britain and this is their home; therefore, unlike studies of first generation immigrants, acculturation is not a central issue. The issue is rather about managing the multiple identities that these second generation Muslims were born into and have had all their lives. The focus of this study is on Muslims living in non-Islamic societies where these issues create different challenges than those experienced by Muslims living in Muslim countries, which have been the focus of research so far.

There are four subsections to discuss the analysis, each relating to different aspects of the research questions discussed below. The subsections include: religiosity; the dynamics of Islam within the understanding of the interviewee; living Islam within British society; and halal, food consumption choices and identity construction. These subsections build upon one another to address the ultimate question posed by the study. The order of the presentation of the analysis, moving from fast food consumption to concepts of consumer freedom and religiosity, and from there to the role of Islam and, specifically, halal in the understanding of the participants will help to highlight both the commonalities and the diversity within the Muslim community sampled in this study (see figure 2).
Figure 2: The interconnections between Fast Food Consumption, the structuring influence of Islam, Halal Consumption and Identity.
Again, the analysis will begin at a micro level by examining the individual’s understanding of halal and role of religion before going on to meso/macro level of analysis by looking at the individual’s interaction with the community and religion (see Fig. 3, Section 5.1.3). The participants’ own religious beliefs as well as their observations of their friends and family members, helps to form a picture of the relationship between the intensity of religious belief and the influence of religion on consumption choices. This chapter engages with the concept of differing degrees of religiosity and explores more fully the dynamics of the interpretation of Islamic teaching within the experiences of the participants. Because halal is a doctrine that is subject to multiple readings, the participants’ direct knowledge of how the interpretation of halal influences their food consumption behaviour and that of their friends, neighbours, and family members is very helpful in gaining a more nuanced picture of halal consumption in Britain. The chapter then ties these topics together to explore how the participants’ interpretation of halal influences their food consumption and how halal certified or marketed products influence their identity construction projects. Finally, Section 6.6 will summarise the results.

Therefore, the analysis will present how my respondents construct and maintain multiple identities based on the diverse social structures that they engage with. This includes a religious-based identity and a nationality-based identity, which were used by individuals depending on the specific situation or context. The analysis will also highlight the contradictions that arose from the participants’ attempts to manage multiple identities. The importance of halal food as “symbolic” to the identity of these British Muslims in terms of constructing and maintaining their identity as a minority group will also be supported using the data.

The chapter will also discuss how understanding British Muslims’ experiences and identity construction using CCT theoretical concepts and adopting a phenomenological interview embraces the role of culture or social structures in identity construction. The analysis of participants’ experiences or narratives was not conducted without considering their historical perspective and ignoring their background or the development of Islam itself. Adopting a more individualistic approach, the research supports the role that multiple interpretation and
Religiosity plays in the consumption choices and identity projects of the participants. This chapter will also address the conceptualisation of halal in research and contrast it with the understandings of halal offered by the participants. Using the data from the interviews, the analysis will highlight the multiple interpretations of halal and argue that while all participants shared common factors (as British Muslims living in Leicester), they had different understandings of halal. This was mainly down to how religious each individual was; however this was not the exclusive factor. This will support the criticism that previous methodological approaches to understanding halal did not allow the participants to express the complex term “halal” in their own words and to explain how it is relevant to their daily practice.

6.2 Religiosity

Religiosity is the degree to which an individual holds or practices certain beliefs. Religiosity is different from religion in that religion refers to a set of beliefs, values and practices, and religiosity refers to the intensity of those elements in an individual (Essoo and Dibb, 2010). In the context of this study, religiosity involves, primarily, the impact of religious beliefs in a couple of key areas. First, religiosity is important in understanding the role of halal dietary regulations in Muslim consumers’ food consumption choices. Also, strong religious belief has been shown to impact on the degree of consumerism (Yousef and Malik, 2013; Razzaque and Chaudhry, 2013). In the interviews I allowed the participants to explicate their own understanding of religiosity and the degree to which religion impacted on their lives, their decision-making processes, and their identities. Many scholars have been critical of the notion that religion is in decline, due to the rise of modernisation and secularisation (Inglehart and Norris, 2004; Stark, 1999; Hadden, 1987) and as described in the literature review, research has shown that the religiosity of consumers has a substantial impact on their consumption choices. This section will examine the intensity of individual interviewees’ religious beliefs and the degree to which religion shapes their lives.
All the participants referred to religion as a set of “guidelines” with elements of flexibility, rather than a set of dogmatic rules. For example, Darwish discussed how religion helped him to deal with what he described as “information overload” in today’s society by providing him with a solid foundation and a set of principles to be able to refer to when making life decisions. Darwish’s description of society and his discussion of the role of Islam in his daily life indicated that he can feel confused about what is wrong and what is right. He experiences, as Jafari and Goulding (2009) described it, a “torn self”. Religion provides him with guidance to understand the world and the problem of meaning; it supports his life choices and helps him to construct an identity. However his use of the word “guidelines” also shows clearly that what religion is providing him is just general assistance with a lot of flexibility depending on the situation he encounters. As a result, the intensity or degree of his religious belief can be seen as limited:

“I see it as a moral, ethical guideline. I personally believe that everyone needs to base their morals or draw them from somewhere… there’s all different information thrown at you all the time and, for me, my religion provides me with those clear set of guidelines where I am in a world of information of what’s right and what’s wrong and, in essence, it’s providing me with a grounding” (Darwish).

Similarly, Jamal described religion as a set of social guidelines, a term which was commonly used by the participants. He argues that religion for him was an agent of “social control” that guides individuals regarding how they should behave in society and, as he discussed his understanding of religion as a social guideline, he repeatedly highlighted the importance of moral behaviour. However, the term “social control” can also reflect that while individuals have great flexibility as individuals, religion is one framework of many in society that can contain this freedom within certain boundaries:

“So religion, for me, is an agent of social control. So it defines how I behave in society, what I do. Whether what I am doing is morally correct or incorrect. It’s
the everyday sort of way of living for me. Rather than sort of the practice aspects of it whereby you are required to do certain things, pray five times a day for example. Obviously those elements are important as well, but I think of most importance is being a good Muslim in the society in which you live and being morally correct and doing the right thing. Not going around stealing or beating people up, that sort of stuff. I think that is more important than being a practicing Muslim, which can be difficult to implement in western society that we live in, in the life styles we have. We are working during the day and that kind of makes it difficult. So for that reason I tend to put less emphasis on those things personally in my life compared to the things that are more easily implementable in the society, such as being a good, honest person, being kind to your neighbours, being polite and not being violent, not being aggressive, being a pleasant person” (Jamal).

Jamal makes a distinction between the practice of Islam and the moral content of Islamic teaching. He resolves the conflict between Islamic practice and the requirements of society, such as having a job, by focusing on those elements of Islam that are easy to implement and integrate into his life. The opportunity to access halal food choices at fast food or fast casual establishments may provide a low-impact way of maintaining elements of Islamic practice while not compromising on social requirements.

6.2.1 Spirituality

In relation to religiosity, the spiritual element of Islam for many participants also emerged from analysing the participants’ answers on their understanding of religion and the role of Islam in their daily life. Although the terms “spiritual” or “spirituality” were never used by the participants, their discussion of the role of Islam in their lives showed clearly that it went beyond their initial description of it as a way of life and a set of social guidelines concerning moral and ethical behaviour. This is in line with Jafari and Süerdem (2012) who argued that religion also addresses transcendental concerns for many of its followers; for example
several participants including Darwish and Zahra talked about their belief in the “afterlife” and their spiritual relationship they have with God:

“It’s also a belief in terms of what’s going to happen after we die. So it’s not just a question of what’s going to happen from when I’m born to when I die, but what’s going to happen after I die and I think that’s a huge part of what religion is to me” (Darwish).

Zahra also described how she “talks” a lot to Allah (God) and has a personal relationship with him. Firstly, this emphasises the idea that religion is a personal matter by discussing this one-on-one relationship that she has with God. It also adds to the sense of individualism in Islam and how everyone uses religion differently. In Zahra's case, religion provides her with the support she needs to get through difficult periods in her life. This highlights the spiritual role of religion for Zahra; as Inglehart and Baker (2000) argued, spiritual concerns will always be part of the human outlook as individuals look to address the meaning of life and therefore religion will play some part for many individuals in their lives, even if religion is declining at an institutional level:

“I think it's the sole purpose of my existence… I think it's, it gives me hope, it's my whole, it's the whole reason for existence… It brings me out of my depression, it gives me a sense of what I need to do and where I need to go and the fact that there's a bigger picture, everything, it helps me to make sense of my world and to know that this isn't the world, there's an afterworld that I need to strive for. So, and it also makes some feel loved, and I'm someone that, and I like to talk to Allah a lot, it's who I am. It's not just a religion or a way of life, it's my whole purpose of being here. I like, I think I question my importance in the world and I'm trying to understand my purpose of being here and it's always overshadowed by there's a grander plan. But it depends on the relationship you have with God and you have with the messengers or Allah and so I think Islam is just, Islam is my soul. It makes me understand myself, understand the world, it gives me expectations, gives me boundaries, it sets goals that I need to strive for” (Zahra).
More interestingly, we also see how religion can address an important aspect of life, which is the “problem of meaning”. Zahra for example explains that she feels that Islam provides her with the reason for her existence and also helps her make sense of her life world and to address the challenges she faces in today’s society. This highlights the role of religion in the daily lives of these Muslims. As Geertz (1973) and Peterson and Roy (1985) argued, one of the main features of religion is that it addresses the “problem of meaning” – the purpose and direction in life and existence, and provides a framework which makes life understandable and interpretable for individuals. This point was evident in the interviews as the participants described religion as more than a set of guidelines, rather it constituted a source of meaning regarding their life experiences. Nermeen also argued that religion provides her with something to strive for beyond material goods, thereby addressing the problem of meaning and the purpose of existence for her personally:

“I suppose Islam is like, kind of is your foothold into the afterlife, by doing things here through an Islamic way it kind of puts you in good stead for what there is to come. And I think if I didn’t have something to strive for, if it was literally just material things and just things in this life, I don’t really know how I would cope” (Nermeen).

Similarly, we also see this with Umar, who explains what religion “does” for him, namely it provides him with comfort and energy:

“Religion plays a very important part in my life because I feel that religion is my source of energy and my source of comfort and it determines a lot of things in the process of how things are done. Religion is a belief that you believe in and it’s a faith that you feel comfortable with and you believe that you are created by a creator and you believe the teachings are associated with this religion and it determines certain processes that you have to follow in order to get things done” (Umar).
These British Muslims highlight the importance of not looking at religion from a substantive perspective that is concerned with defining what religion is, or focusing on the essence of religion and its fixed practices and beliefs. The functional approach is more suitable as it is concerned with defining what religion does, and the role it plays for individuals in their daily life practices.

This discussion of religion and religiosity has highlighted the importance of the individual interpretation, expression, and experience of religion. The participants in this study each expressed differing levels of religious belief and intensity of religious feeling. This thesis, in line with a number of other works in the field (Wilson, 2013; Yousef and Malik, 2013), argues that individual level of religiosity has an impact on the way that individuals make consumption choices. Although this linkage is supported, the specifics of the relationship require additional study. In a highly diverse society like Britain, there are numerous groups with different levels of religious belief and who subscribe to different religions along with a large number with minimal or no religious belief. A macro analysis of the impact of religiosity on the consumption behaviour of Britons of different religious backgrounds would help to substantiate and expand our understanding of this linkage.

6.3 Dynamics of Islam in Interviewee Understanding

As discussed in the literature review (Section 2.7.1), Islam is like other religions in that it is not a separate entity or category within an individual’s life, but is embedded within culture, historically developed, and influenced by the socio-cultural factors of region, country, ethnicity, and economic status (Jafari and Suerdem, 2012). While all Muslims base their understanding of Islam on the Qur’an and Hadith, the numerous variations in Islamic doctrine and practice throughout the world clearly demonstrate its embeddedness in culture and society. This does not mean, however, that religion is not a potent cultural force in itself, rather it is part of a mix of cultural forces and repertoires of symbolic
meaning that influence individuals in their process of identity construction (Jafari and Suerdem, 2012). Regarding specific systems of religious meaning, such as halal dietary restrictions, the development of the interpretation is influenced by the socio-cultural environment. This section will examine the participants’ understanding of Islam as a religion and as a socio-cultural force as well as the differences and similarities between their interpretations and those of their contemporaries.

A common view on Islam amongst participants is represented by Hussein defining Islam as his “own personal beliefs and thoughts”. This interpretation supports the concept of religion as a personal matter and how the role of religion and interpretations of religion vary between individuals. Similarly, Zahra added that while Islam offers a general guidance for a better way of life, individuals are accountable for their own actions. She argues that how she adopts religion into her way of life is up to her and other Muslims have no right to judge her or any other Muslim. The key argument that she made was that there is not a fixed and correct way of life in Islam. She uses the term “my Islam” several times when discussing this point, further supporting her view that religion is something personal:

“I think Islam is just very personal, you can’t really say these are Muslims and this is what they believe. I think Islam for me is, my Islam might not be exactly the same as your Islam, so there are certain things that I do and I don’t do. But it’s not about judging whether I’m doing it right or judging you for whatever choices you decide to make, I think everyone is accountable for their own being, for rights and the wrongs and everyone’s going to make mistakes, everyone’s going to mess up” (Zahra).

This is in line with the research conducted by Zinnbauer et al. (1997) who, when they asked 305 individuals from a variety of professional and religious backgrounds to write their own definitions of religiousness, found that the notion of a universal definition of religion is not feasible. There were thirteen categories detailed in their study, with no single category accounting for a strong majority of
the definitions of religiousness. However, the most common definition of religiousness in their study was “personal beliefs/personal values”, a theme that also emerged from the participants’ interviews. Makram also argued that Islam is not about who is right and who is wrong, it is about respecting others opinions and acknowledging different religions as well as different interpretations within Islam. Makram was discussing the notion that religion is a personal matter using the existence of different religions as his example. However, he elaborates that this is also applicable within Islam by discussing the multiplicity of the interpretation of halal food:

“I said religion isn’t a case of you’re right, he’s wrong. I think it’s a case of what it’s been like from the olden days of when Islam came about. It wasn’t a case of okay you’re wrong, you’re right, it was a case of this is our religion, that’s your religion, what we’re going to do is we’re going to live together in peace and if you think this religion is of worth or anything, then by all means you can come into the fold” (Makram).

This aspect of religion being an individualistic and personal matter can also be seen from Amir’s understanding of Islam as “personal jihad”. They explain that Islam is about struggling against the bad in the world and doing good, and this struggle always begins within each individual:

“This is the definition of jihad. This is the definition of struggle. The word ‘jihad’ means a religious struggle and that starts within yourself” (Amir).

The general theme that emerged from analysing the participant interviews was that religion provided the participants with “guidelines” on aspects of life, in line with Jafari and Süerdem (2012) who argued that Muslims refer to Islam as a set of transcendental guidelines that they interpret and reinterpret in different ways in order to make better sense of daily life practices. The emphasis on social behaviour over religious practice in Islam by many participants also highlights the importance of moving beyond the assumption of a unified definition of Islam based
on a clear set of rules. Islamic societies must be looked at as a diverse group of individuals that are influenced by multiple socio-cultural factors, as the homogenisation of Muslim consumers is problematic.

In summary, the participants’ definition of religion, and more specifically Islam, as a set of “guidelines” and as a “way of life” highlighted several key points. First, religion as a way of life shows how religion, for many participants, is an individualistic and personal matter and that its role in each individual's life varies. It means Islam provided these individuals with the freedom to use religion differently to suit their own lifestyle, depending on their current situation. Secondly, guidelines also added to the sense of flexibility within Islam. Many respondents viewed Islam as a recommended way of life based on moral and ethical guidelines, not as fixed or rigid, but rather to be adapted differently by individuals depending on their lifestyle and their interpretation. However, “guidelines” also suggest a framework that constrains how much freedom the individual truly has.

While these guidelines offer a certain amount of interpretative flexibility there are some elements that are clearly considered “haram” or forbidden. Finally, this idea of religion as providing guidelines for general behaviour not only increases the flexibility in regards to the role of religion in individuals’ lives but also places more emphasis on being as a good person and less on the formal elements of religious practice. It can be argued that participants tried to emphasise this point to prove they are still Muslim in terms of their identity even though some acknowledge that they were not necessarily “practicing” Muslims. The participants’ responses show that even with a common belief there is the possibility of multiple interpretations.

The diversity of Islamic belief that emerged within this research project suggests that, as Jafari (2012) has argued, Islamic consumers cannot be analysed as a cohesive or unified bloc. In fact, it calls into question the notion of “Islamic marketing” as a separate area of focus. While the individuals interviewed identified themselves as Muslim, the specifics of that identification and the meaning of the appellation differed substantially. As a result, even though there is a coherent
group of people within Britain who identify themselves as Muslim, there are questions about the value of this diverse and variable group as a marketing audience. Section 6.4 will analyse my respondent’s experiences of being a Muslim in Britain, discussing the flexibility of Islam and the multiculturalism of Leicester.

6.4 Living Islam within British Society

Identity is constructed by drawing upon a range of symbolic objects that are manufactured by cultural forces, such as marketing, religion, community, and media (Slater, 1997; Firat and Dholakia, 2006). Often, an individual’s identity is fragmented, complex, and dynamic, incorporating elements that are seemingly in conflict with one another (Giddens, 1991; Shankar et al., 2009; Jafari and Goulding, 2008). One of the concepts involving identity that often discussed by participants was the notion of living as a Muslim in a Christian/secular country. The conflicting identities, discussed in the literature review (Section 3.3), are not simply binaries between religion/community/family on one side, and country/city/media on the other. There are differences between Muslims living in Britain and Muslims living in other countries, just as there are differences among Muslims living in the same towns in Britain. This section looks at this potential conflict between practising Islam and living in Britain, whether the participants see it as a conflict and how they navigate this.

6.4.1 Flexibility of Islam

Many participants did not feel that there was a conflict between their religious beliefs and them being British. Again as with the case throughout this study, each individual had their own different explanation or reason behind why they felt adopting an Islamic way of life did not create a problem for them being British and living in a non-Islamic society. For example, Darwish talks about being able to follow Islam’s way of life and still maintain his British lifestyle, arguing that even if
there are differences between the two cultures, most of the key principles are similar:

“Within Britain I find that I can pretty much do what I feel. I can follow my religion and still be British at the same time because a lot of what I’ve been taught by my religion are British principles or principles that a lot of British people subscribe to, it’s just a different perspective on them” (Darwish).

Although each individual gave their own reason for why they did not agree with the notion that being both a Muslim and British conflicted there were two sub-themes that offered an explanation as to why there is not really any conflict involved. The first was that Islam as a religion provided individuals with great flexibility concerning how to adopt religion into their daily life. The second theme was that Britain as a multicultural society, and specifically Leicester in this study, provided Muslims with great freedom to practice their religion.

Amir, for example, argued that in general being a Muslim did not create any major constraints while living in a non-Islamic society. He discusses how Islam, according to his understanding, is a balanced religion that provides great flexibility and does not require its followers to go out of their way to maintain a specific Islamic way of life:

“It’s a religion of the middle ground in everything. You don’t go to extremes in anything in Islam and we are required and taught not to go to extremes in Islam… to me Islam is a religion of ease, where you are required to do what you are capable of doing” (Amir).

Essentially, what can be interpreted from Amir’s understanding of Islam is that it offers general guidance and, more importantly, that the way we practice Islam will vary depending on the individual’s life situation. For example, in this case living in
a non-Islamic country, he believes there is flexibility in the interpretation of certain aspects of Islam and this is something that is acknowledged and accepted by Islam. A major aspect of this idea is that Islam encourages its followers to “respect the law of the land”. Analysing the participant interviews it becomes clear that this notion of “respecting the law of the land” is a common understanding amongst participants, and it goes beyond the literal understanding of respecting the country’s law if it was different to Islamic Sharia law. Many participants interpreted this as meaning that Islam highlights the importance of integration within the society that individuals live in and that Islam provides this flexibility for Muslims to adapt to different societies and to live different lifestyles:

“It’s something Islamic, as long as we are here we have to defend it, we have to respect their rules, we have to respect their country, we have to respect the culture and we should not do something that might hurt them or against their culture” (Hussein).

Hussein argues that it is considered “Islamic” to respect Britain and its culture even if it is considered different to Islamic culture. He also argues that Islam teaches us not to offend people, and that if certain aspects of practicing Islam are seen as offensive for British society in general then Muslims should not do this, and that Islam teaches us this. He cited examples such as wearing the burka and halal food. Umar also argues that Britain is not an Islamic country and therefore the laws of Islam are essentially changed from what they are in an Islamic country. He argues in Islam we are taught to adapt as much as we can to where we live within certain boundaries and not to expect Islamic law to be implemented consistently different contexts or situations:

“Another thing is that as a Muslim when you’re in a country that the religion is not Islam you need to understand that the laws of religion that you would apply in a Muslim country are not really – these laws do not have to necessarily be applicable in a non-Muslim country and you have to do a lot of research into this because there’s a lot of interpretations and there’s a lot of knowledge that exists
that backs up this point, that in a non-Muslim country the laws are not the same as in a Muslim country” (Umar).

Nermeen also emphasises the importance of respecting the society that that British Muslims live in as, in her opinion, it is what Islam asks its followers to do. She cited two examples, one of which was her opinion regarding the “Niqab” or full-face veil. She said she was against it because she felt it goes against the norm or acceptance of society and can cause offence, therefore it is unnecessary to wear it in Britain. The second example, and a more personal issue for her, was how hospital rules go against her personal religious beliefs regarding elements of her dress code such as not being allowed to wear long sleeves while working. She argues that, although she thinks it is a ridiculous rule, Islam encourages people to respect the rules and she personally does so by adhering to the hospital dress code, even though it goes against her own personal beliefs:

“However saying that when I do have to go to the hospital I have to wear, I have to have my arms bare below the elbow, so even if there’s like an inch of fabric below the elbow I’ve even been told off, which I think is ridiculous because I don’t, if I’m going to touch a patient then if their skin’s touching me there then it's going to touch a lot higher up, so then what are they saying, I should wear completely no sleeves? It’s ridiculous. But if I am going to the hospital and I have to wear short sleeves, if it’s a hot day like it is today then I’ve got some spare sleeves that I put underneath, they’re like half sleeves and they’re elasticised so I can wear my three quarter length jumper or top and then I can just take the sleeves off when I’m on the ward and I can put them back on when I go out for lunch and stuff” (Nermeen).

Similarly, Jamal emphasises the importance for Muslims to integrate into British society and Islam teaches Muslims this according to his understanding. He also argued that in many non-Muslim societies, such as Britain, the key principles are
similar and normally based on religion. He cites the historical Christian roots of British culture and the Christian origin of many British laws as an example:

“With the current climate that we live in as a Muslim I think it’s important to respect the laws of the country that you live in. That is one of the things we are taught in Islam as well anyway. Which ever country we live in, to respect the laws of that country, integrate. So I think we are doing what the government requires of us as well as what our religion requires of us at the same time by mixing with the western society and balancing all that. Again, it is one of the things I have been brought up with and taught…they say a lot of these laws and rules have been derived from religious texts. If you look back as to when they are written and when they are derived, so they may not come from Islam but as far as I’m concerned all the religions, all the major religions in the world, are really similar in terms of what they dictate the followers should. So if you compare the details of, for example, Islam versus Christian versus Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, there will be elements which are very similar in all of those that will be very common in all those religions. So I think by following the rules of the country where you live, you are not necessarily going against what your religion says as a Muslim” (Jamal).

This flexibility within Islam that allows individuals to practice their religion and adapt it to their own lifestyle and their life in a non-Islamic society is a further critique of the notion that Islam is incompatible with Western values. Stark (1999) specifically cited Islam as one religion that has shown it is compatible with modernity. It is also a rejection of the idea that by adapting Islam into their life in Britain Muslims are diluting their religion or, as with Pentecostalism in Ghana, allowing individuals the freedom of mixing the sacred and profane without feeling guilty (see Bonsu and Belk, 2010). It can be argued that British Muslims’ view of the role of religion is in line with Holt’s (1997) who argued in general – and not specifically referring to Islam – that multiple meanings tend to exist and that individuals tend to choose the most meaningful linkage in a particular context which are not separate from history and reconstructed through a cultural process.
Multicultural Leicester

It is not only Islam that provides the flexibility for my respondents to integrate in British society while also maintaining their Islamic identity. Multiculturalism within Britain and more specifically in this case, Leicester, means these Muslims are not required to move away from the key principles of their religion and its way of life in order to integrate into British society. This notion of Britain and specifically in this case Leicester being multicultural is discussed repeatedly by participants and is argued as a reason why the participants do not believe there is a clash between being British and Muslim. Hussein argued that because Britain is a civilised country and respects other cultures, he feels able to maintain his identity as a Muslim and maintain an Islamic way of life in Britain:

“As a Muslim living in the UK I have no problems at all as I see. Like the culture of this country, this is the thing about a civilized country. Because of their civilization they have so much respect for other cultures. This is the thing about Britain. Like it’s not about being British, as I said, we don’t care about cultures. No. This is the thing, like when you talk about a country that has a civilization, a good civilization or like… well obviously they respect other cultures” (Hussein).

Yassin also acknowledges that Muslims have great freedom in practicing their religion in Britain on a daily basis without any difficulties. He discussed how back at school and now at university they have an Islamic prayer room and defined it as “amazing”. Here we see two key issues, first the acknowledgement of Muslims that they are able to practice an Islamic way of life in Britain and maintain their Islamic identity and second the feeling that they are part of British society therefore are able to also maintain a British identity alongside their Islamic one:
“To be honest we’re very lucky that in this country we’re allowed to do so many things. I’ll give you an example, for example when I used to be in secondary school and for Friday prayers they would give us our own hall to go and pray Friday prayers. At my university I study, so at university we’ve got our own prayer room, we’ve got an actual allocated space to pray and that’s amazing. That’s why I think we’re really lucky, but to put a spin on that there are some places, I live in Leicester and Leicester is quite dominated by Muslims, there are a lot of Muslims in Leicester, I think Leicester is the most multi-cultural city in the whole of the UK. So, that’s another real good reason why we have these kind of opportunities” (Yassin).

However, although many participants talked of the freedom they have in Leicester to practice Islam, this level of freedom varied when considering their experiences of other geographical spaces and might be less in other places. Yassin discusses this variation between different locations and emphasises that the multiculturalism of Leicester makes life easier for British Muslims. Although he was referring to prayer rather than halal food consumption, it showed that while in the context of Leicester there is flexibility for Muslims to practice their religion, this cannot be generalised across other towns or cities in the UK. Furthermore, it shows while some Muslims focus more on Islam as a way of life and guidelines, others view practicing, in the sense of performing required actions such as praying and fasting, as equally important and this may cause a conflict of interest with the society they live in:

“I just spoke to a mate yesterday and he studies in Sheffield and he’s not allowed to go for Friday prayers, and because he’s not from this country he doesn’t realise that actually there… what his tutor told him was, you live in a Christian country, you can’t go for your Friday prayers and I don’t want you to talk to me about this topic any more, that was the actual words. And, then he told me and I was shocked, I was like, ‘wow I’ve never, ever come across that ever’. We’re really lucky that in Leicester, I can’t generalise about other areas, but in Leicester we’re very lucky that we can do certain things. I can go for a job and I can wear my thobe [Islamic dress] in the job, it wouldn’t be a problem, but
there are some places in England where they would be really against you doing certain things” (Yassin).

The feelings that were expressed by many participants were that they feel no conflict between being a Muslim and being British, especially in the context of their fast food consumption experiences in Leicester. This theme contrasts with the Orientalist influence in the understanding of Islamic societies that is evident in the literature, which has created the sense that Islamic values and the Western way of life are conflicting. Works such as *jihad vs. McWorld* (Barber, 1995) have argued that Islam and consumerism are incompatible. Also, as discussed by Brooks (2011), Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* proposed that religion is the one cultural characteristic that is inflexible and more specifically that the fault line between Islam and Western civilization is historical and deeply rooted. This led Brooks (2011) to concur and argue that Huntington’s work also shows how Islamic civilization does not share Western values such as individualism.

All this has added to the notion of Islam versus the West, which is evident in academic research on Islamic societies but the themes that emerged in my data critiqued this. The multiculturalism element of Leicester including the large Muslim community and the widespread availability of halal fast food in Leicester highlights the importance of context in understanding consumption choices and identity construction of these British Muslims. While many participants felt no conflict between their Islamic and British identities in terms of fast food consumption in Leicester (see Section 6.4), some argued that different aspect of life were possibly more conflictual than food. In addition, if they were outside of Leicester their understanding and behaviour may be different due to the situation or context being different, for example a smaller Muslim community and fewer halal options. The next section discusses the different multiple identities these British Muslims constructed and maintained, which were mainly centred on their religion and their nationality, allowing them to use these multiple identities as and when needed depending on the context or situation they were in.
6.4.3 Multiple Identities of British Muslims

Analysing the participant interviews it became evident that their religion is a major part of the identity of all twelve participants and all when discussing their identity used the term “Muslim” to define who they are. Most participants defined themselves as “British Muslims” and in some cases they also discussed their ethnic identity in terms of their family roots. However, what emerged is that individuals had a different understanding of what constituted a British Muslim identity and they managed their identities differently. This meant there were different forms or types of multiple identities; a religious dominated identity and a more balanced religious/national identity. Whether the participants saw Britishness and Islam as inevitably competing or as potentially integrating, they saw the two identities as being distinctive. Some participants understood integration into the country where they live as being a part of Islamic teaching, but the contrast between the religious and national identities was consistent across the participants. The flexibility of Islam in the participants’ understandings allowed them to operate within a non-Muslim society with a greater degree of freedom than someone with a more rigid interpretation would have.

A British and Muslim Identity

In general participants maintained multiple identities, generally a Muslim religious-based identity and a British national identity. Furthermore it became clear that they did not feel a clash between their identities. Their experiences show that they alternated between and adopted different identities depending on the context and the people they were with. Jamal for example defined himself as a British Muslim and discussed how for him no single identity is superior. Both identities are equally important and discussed how his identity is constructed through a combination of both cultures, namely Islamic and British cultures:
“I would say the term ‘British Muslim’ is a fair way of saying it. I’d say it is not necessarily in that order, but it really is a combination of the two I think” (Jamal).

Makram defines his religious identity as a Muslim as “being in your own bubble or cocoon”. This indicated that he practiced his religion privately and behaved as a Muslim amongst his fellow Muslims but had another identity outside this religious “cocoon” that he used to interact with non-Muslims. Makram’s discussion of how he has a religious identity with family and Muslim friends and a different identity with non-Muslim friends is in line with Jamal (1998; 1996) who argued that British Pakistanis experienced multiple states of being and interacted differently with their own ethnic group and those of Caucasian ethnicity. Similarly, we see how Makram and many participants engage in what Oswald (1999) termed “culture swap”, moving between multiple identities to negotiate between their different cultural backgrounds:

“Islam is a way of life for me, on that same spectrum we live in a secular society, you are, in a sense, in your own bubble, where you’ve got to adhere to your own faith … but you’re also interacting with the society around you, while you’re in a cocoon of your own identity. I mean I’m a Muslim, at the end of the day, and I know, for example, when I interact with people who are non-Muslims I’ve got to address them in a certain way, I’ve got to talk to them in a certain way. So you are different to different people in that sense, so you act differently toward different people. I think it comes down to identity, at the end of the day, so when I’m with non-Muslim friends, colleagues, things like that, I do. It’s not that I’m a different person, because I’m still the same person, but do I act differently with them? Yes, but I act differently with different people because that’s the way of the society we live in. So everybody’s different in that sense and we all are, we all do the same things, so yeah we all act differently to different people” (Makram).
Umar on the other hand was one example of a small proportion of participants who also added an ethnic identity to the concept of being British Muslim, creating a new form of identity that is based on religion, nationality and ethnicity. In his case he explains that he is also Egyptian and it becomes clear from the analysis that this is an important aspect of his identity:

“Personally I view myself as a British Muslim Egyptian, but when I'm here I am, primarily I'm a British Muslim. When it comes to food I'm just a Muslim. I'm a Muslim because this is what determines what I eat and what I don’t eat” (Umar).

However, as with many participants they explained that in the context of living in Britain their primary identity is British Muslim. This is not to say that their other ethnic identities, such as Pakistani, Indian, and Egyptian, play no role in their lives in Britain but these take a secondary role in their daily life practices behind Islam and being British. Furthermore, Umar adds later that when it comes to food he is just a Muslim as it is his religion that determines what is allowed and what is not. So again, we see how in different contexts and in this case in the situation where he is choosing what to eat he uses his religious identity.

**An Islamic Identity**

Another form of multiple identity that emerged from the analysis was a religion-dominated identity. Yassin for example, despite using the same term as Jamal, “British Muslim”, to define his identity, had a different view of the role of each in his identity construction and (more importantly here) consumption choices. He argued that Islam is his primary identity and being British is secondary. Interestingly, he concluded by emphasising that he does not feel any conflict when maintaining both identities because it is clear for him what his main identity is. Further, he argued that in Britain he has the freedom to maintain his Muslim identity without changing his behaviour, adding this also allows him to identify
himself as British at the same time. This idea is reflected in Tillich (1947), who discussed how religious identity can be dominant yet still exist as one of a number of different identities within an individual. He argued that religion is part of culture and not a separate entity; however Tillich acknowledges the idea of "religious culture" where religion is the dominant factor that gives meaning and seriousness to a culture. As Yassin stated,

“I’m British but my religion comes first. Islam is first without a shadow of a doubt. Yes, you know, Britain is a great country don’t get me wrong, there are so many benefits we get here, we’ve got a free healthcare system, we have so many things, education is phenomenal here, people come from all around the world to study in England. However, you know, as I mentioned earlier there are so many things that Islam does which would improve the country, would improve Britain, so even though I am British Islam is my religion and that’s what I have to follow, and that’s what makes me feel better in myself. So, even though I am British, absolutely I am British I was born here, but first and foremost I’m a Muslim and if there was a conflict and one I have to follow. But, to be honest I don’t think now there’s many conflicts, because a conflict occurs when you don’t know which path to follow, for me personally I don’t have the conflict because I know which path to follow and that’s my religion” (Yassin).

In the case of Hussein and Nermeen they defined themselves just as Muslims with no national identity, neither British nor another nationality linked to their roots. However, in reality their experiences contradicted their statements and as the interviews progressed it became evident that they maintain and interchange between different identities and behaved differently according to the context of the situation. In some cases they moved away from their religious identity, therefore contradicting their claim of only having a single, namely Muslim, identity. For example, as Hussein states:
“I am Muslim and I am proud to be a Muslim. I am not British, I see myself as a Muslim, not a British” (Hussein).

Hussein explains that he is only a Muslim and does not see himself as British yet later in the interview argues that he does not practice Islam in a situation where it may be seen inappropriate or cause offence. His reasons are that integration and respecting the culture of the country you live in is part of Islam (see Section 4.1.1). In this scenario he is moving away from his religious identity and integrating by adopting a local identity of being “British”. This does not necessarily mean he is not maintaining his identity as a Muslim but in this case he is not using it, therefore it can be argued that Hussein is constructing an alternative identity for specific situations:

“As a Muslim living in a non-Muslim country I have to show respect to their culture, to whatever they have. If that hurts them… like even to practice Islam in front of them, in front of certain people, Islamically we have to avoid some points” (Hussein).

Similarly, Nermeen defines herself as a Muslim and explains that being British for her is just an official status. She argues that she does not fit in with the culture of British people as she believes it is a non-religious society and that goes against an Islamic way of life. She also adds that she does not feel she is Arab, which is her family’s ethnic background, as she has not been brought up in an Arab culture. She also explains how religion was the common factor at home between her parents and that could explain why her upbringing has mainly been about her religious identity rather than any national identity, either British or Middle Eastern. Finally, it was also apparent that religion was a major factor in her daily practice and this is clear in her intention to move only to cities that have a large Muslim community:
“Yeah, I think that’s the only thing that ties my parents together. So when I think about my own identity, because there are such big differences, culturally, that is kind of where I place myself. I’ve tried to fit in with the English people and the British culture, but I find I can’t really do that… so I don’t really see myself as British, but then equally I don't really see myself as Arab because I’ve not really been brought up in that sense… and so I think overall I’m still probably trying to find myself, which is one of the reasons why I applied to work in Birmingham because they’ve got a much bigger Muslim population there, and I thought even if I don’t have anything in common culturally then the thing I do have in common with a lot of people who do live there is religion. And if it means I define my life by religion, I don't really think it’s a bad way to go to be honest. So although it says British nationality on my passport, and that is the nationality that I go under because I was born here and my mum’s British as well. But I think a lot of the time I don’t feel like I do fit in to the British culture because I do things that British people, as in English people I think I’m probably saying, they don't do. Like they don't believe in God, a lot of people I know are atheists and that's their choice and I respect that, and to live in this kind of society where there are lots of people from different backgrounds and cultures it’s difficult to say that Britain is one thing… It’s difficult to say exactly what Britain is because it’s such a mish-mash of different cultures and different religions and different ideas thoughts and educational background that, but I don’t know whether people who call themselves atheists or non-believers or people without religious labels, actually, I mean I don’t know whether that’s what we’re defining as British culture because that probably is the mass” (Nermeen).

However, Nermeen began to show signs of having multiple identities and changing her behaviour depending on context. First, towards the end of the above quote she acknowledges that Britain is a multicultural society including different religions. While she argues she does not feel British because the British lifestyle is in conflict with what she sees as an Islamic lifestyle, she then says that her initial understanding of British culture is perhaps based on a stereotype and that in fact Britain is a mixture of different religious beliefs. This implies that Islam and religion in general can also be a part of British culture.
Furthermore, the analysis showed that Nermeen behaved differently and in some cases acted against what she believes is the correct Islamic way of life in order to adapt to the demands of her job role and also bowed to social pressures in order to maintain a network at work. For example, she discusses below how she refrains from using religious or Arabic words at work that she would normally use, not because it is not allowed but because she believes it is not appropriate in this context. She explains that acting in that manner, which I would argue is constructing another identity for work, occurs “90% of the time at the moment.” Therefore her main identity in her daily practice is not the purely Islamic identity she claims that she maintains. Essentially, she is alternating between different identities, including her identity as a Muslim. Both Hussein and Nermeen show how individuals live in a world of contradictions of their own making and do not attempt to reconcile these contradictions to produce a unified experience, but continue to live out these contradictions as existential conditions as argued by Firat and Venkatesh (1995):

“Even if I’m just sitting with people who aren’t Muslim, which actually is probably 90% of the time at the moment, particularly, even in the hospital, you don’t really have the chance to, I suppose, be the Muslim you really want to be in a society where people don’t want to associate themselves with religion because they think it’s old fashioned. So often I don’t really talk about my religion unless somebody talks about it with me… I think often it isn’t just what you believe in but it’s the way that you come across with it. So like a lot of the time I tone down a lot of things. So if I’m with my family then I would say things like Inshallah, Hamdullah, Masha’Allah, those kind of things, and if I’m with other Muslim people, even if there are like other people around, if there are more Muslims around and they’re talking to me about something and I feel like I want to praise God’s name that way then I will just come out and say it, and I don’t feel self-conscious about that. Whereas I feel like I have to tone it down a lot and I actually, sometimes, have to stop myself from saying things, because I’m like that’s not appropriate in this context for me to say Inshallah, even though in my mind I’m saying it” (Nermeen).
Nermeen goes on to discuss the social aspect of work and provides another example of how she feels that she has no choice but to act in a way that she sees as being against her Islamic way of life. Once again we see Nermeen essentially creating another identity that can be argued to clash with her religious identity in order to integrate into British society and socialise with her colleagues:

“I mean on the whole I wouldn’t want to go somewhere where they’re selling alcohol, but on occasion in order to socialise with the people who I do work with I have had to go to bars with people. I don’t feel happy that I’ve had to do that and to be honest if I never had to do that again I would be more than happy. But then, realistically, if you want to get on with your colleagues and your co-workers and you want to build relationships with them in the professional sense, sometimes there has to be that bend in the rule. I’m not saying that I want to bend the rules and I wouldn’t do it if I had the choice, but there doesn’t seem to be that choice” (Nermeen).

So it becomes evident from the analysis that some individuals do not feel totally free to openly practice their religion for several reasons such as fear of exclusion or not fitting in (Askegaard et al., 2005) or for example being affected by religious socialisation in their home country (Jafari and Goulding, 2008). Barnhart and Peñaloza (2013) argue that identity construction through consumption is essentially individual agency within collective endeavour. The analysis supports this position as the participants all expressed some degree of influence from their religious beliefs and from their community on their consumption choices. However, the participants also expressed a desire to retain elements of their religious identity within a non-religious context, demonstrating that the dominance of the social or cultural aspects of the religious community may be less than Jafari and Goulding (2008) suggest.
6.5 Halal, Food Consumption Choices, and Identity Construction

The themes discussed in chapters 5 and 6 so far are considered as a whole in this section. The issues of identity construction, religion, religiosity, socio-cultural forces, and food consumption are all incorporated into the role of halal fast food consumption in the identity construction of the participants. Halal foods are those that are permissible to eat under Islamic Sharia law. These concepts of permissibility and lawfulness are subject to a variety of interpretations (Hanzee, 2011; Kamali, 2003; Wahab, 2004; Ruževičiūtė and Ruževičius, 2011; Ahmed, 2008). This section will explore the different understandings of halal among the participants. It will also examine the extent to which the participants’ food consumption choices were influenced by halal dietary restrictions compared to, for instance, the general food consumption patterns of their Muslim or non-Muslim contemporaries.

6.5.1 What is “halal”?

It emerged that it was easier for many respondents to state what is considered to be haram (not allowed) than explaining what is considered halal (permissible) food. While all 12 participants agreed on what is considered haram, the understanding of halal in contrast provided multiple definitions. This clear pattern of my respondents finding it easier to explain what haram is rather than what halal is can be found in Amir’s response when asked about his understanding of halal. His response was to define what is haram rather than what is halal:

“To me the understanding of halal food is a very simple definition. Halal food is food that is not haram. Pork is haram, carnivore meat, alcohol – these are the kind of things that are forbidden in Islam. Poisonous elements… The country you’re in is not Christian, not Jewish, and not Muslim, the food is not halal…an example would be China or Nepal. Nepal is an area where the majority are
Buddhist. They’re not Muslim, they’re not Christian, they’re not really believers in the books that we consider holy books. So for us it is forbidden to eat their food” (Amir).

Amir’s description of what is haram also represents a key unified understanding that emerged regarding what is considered as unquestionably not halal; that is that swine (pig) meat and also meat prepared by what the Qur’an referred to as “non-believers” is haram. The term non-believer in the Qur’an that was also used by many participants refers to all people who are not “people of the books” i.e. the three traditional holy books of the Qur’an, Bible and Torah for Muslims, Christians and Jews respectively. Umar also discussed what he considered as haram when outlining his understanding of halal fast food:

“A non-halal food is pork, pig and a food that is not served as slaughtered by the people of the book, such as, for example, a Buddhist for example is not considered as a person of the book so therefore we will not be allowed to eat their food” (Umar).

The ability for the participants to provide a unified understanding of what haram is but the diversity in interpreting what halal is shows that these Muslims are working within a framework in the form of religious guidelines which limits their freedom, that is, they are not totally free from social and religious structures. At the same time there is flexibility within these guidelines regarding how religion is interpreted and its role in their daily life practices. Regarding what is halal, two general themes emerged from the data collection but even within each theme there were differences between each participant’s interpretation of halal. One theme was that halal is only food slaughtered in the name of Allah by Muslims and the second was that all food slaughtered/prepared by anyone who is considered as constituting “people of the books” i.e. Muslims, Christians or Jews is halal. So beyond swine meat being haram, the slaughtering method and who performs it
clearly emerged as the key issues when interpreting what is considered halal. As Darwish argued:

“Halal literally translates to lawful, I believe, i.e. it is allowed for us to consume, so a pig is not lawful in any way, but generally, I believe, in context of fast food halal is the way an animal is slaughtered” (Darwish).

Samir offers another interpretation:

“Halal is mentioned in our holy book and is explained by our prophet sayings. All seafood are halal, vegetables, of course, are halal... lamb and chicken, it is only considered halal if it is prepared and slaughtered by Islamic Law, where you should cut a vein, let them bleed before electrocuting them like other people do and you should mention the name of Allah during this process. They should be under observation of some Islamic higher authority or something like that” (Samir).

This method as described by Samir follows a strict interpretation of the Qur’an. The first key issue he explains is that halal slaughtering should be done without the use of stunning and the second is that the name of Allah should be mentioned before slaughtering the animal. These two issues are critical in the debate surrounding halal. While Samir argued the slaughter should occur with no “electrocution” or stunning, this is debated by some participants, including those who, like Samir, also believe in consuming only meat prepared by Muslims in the name of Allah. This issue is part of a theme, the importance of animal welfare in Islam and the issue of stunning, which will be discussed in a later section of this chapter. The issue of reciting the name of Allah before the slaughter is another contentious issue, as Muslims who believe in the “people of the books” interpretation argue that the meat can be considered halal if the name of Allah is mentioned before eating it and not necessarily before slaughter.
Trust

Hussein argues trust is key because he believes halal is also about ensuring the food that he eats is not mixed with food that is haram in his opinion, and he uses McDonald’s and Subway as examples. He believes that places like these have strict regulations and that all food is handled separately. For example, he talks of Subway in Leicester, which is halal, and he is confident they would not mix pork with halal meat or use the same gloves and utensils. Therefore he consumes the halal-certified meat there despite pork being sold and prepared in the same place:

“The food is clean, the place is absolutely clean. They have two managers at least on shift to make sure… one of them keeps that, his or her eyes, on the floor just to make sure everything is clean. Nothing touches veggies, everything is in the right place. Bacon for bacon, a bacon griller for bacon, a beef griller for beef, chicken griller for chicken and veggies for veggies. That’s it, they don’t mix it. I know that the food is absolutely… is going to be 100% clean etc. Just like Subway. Like I trust them as well because I can see when they are cooking my food” (Hussein).

Similarly, Darwish also believed that importance of halal is based on the actual content of the food and the meat being halal but was not concerned regarding the place where he consumed fast food:

“When I say places, I say the meat at those places, so, for instance, if I go to a pub I’ll eat vegetarian food. There are so many vegetarians in the country now, I wouldn’t say it’s because of Muslims in the country, I’d say it is vegetarians in general, people that want non-meat options for health reasons or whatever. There’s an abundance of vegetarian options wherever you go, so if I go to a pub I wouldn’t say I’m not going to eat at the pub, but I’d say I’d only eat vegetarian food or I’ll only eat fish. There are strict legal guidelines in terms of separation of meat and vegetables, you know, for vegetarians specifically. In that sense if
I’m going to a pub with some friends I’ll just order a vegetarian meal. In terms of me eating meat there are a few halal certification authorities that I would follow, such as HMC, for instance” (Darwish).

Both participants talked about experiences where they consumed fast food at places that do not serve halal meat, including pubs, but they consumed vegetarian food or seafood instead. The argued that they felt safe to do so because of strict regulations in Britain making them trust that in fast food outlets their vegetarian food would not be mixed with meat products. As we can see from Darwish and Hussein their willingness to consume at places that also served pork is not just because their interpretation of halal meant they are more focused on how the meat is slaughtered rather than where it is served, but also that they trusted the places that they discussed in their fast food consumption experience.

Participants generally had a very few selected fast food places where they consumed food regularly and in cases where they were unable to access their regular fast food place for any reason, such as travelling, they would then turn to the recognisable “trustworthy” big multinational chains. Samir, who only consumes halal-certified food, explained that if he did not know someone who sold halal his backup choice would be eating at a multinational chain. This includes either chains that served halal, such as KFC or, in the case of McDonald’s, who do not serve halal, they would consume seafood or vegetarian options.

This highlights the importance of familiarity for Samir. His discussion of choosing multinational chains who supposedly have stricter guidelines regarding hygiene, cleanliness and the process of handling different types of food further highlights the importance of trust and feeling secure that your consumption beliefs are not at risk of being violated:
“If we are in a place where we don’t know someone who sells halal we usually go either to McDonald’s where we get the fish meal from McDonald’s as it is halal and some places other than here, there is some shops which sell halal, like KFC halal and also we have, in some places, Subway which sells halal sandwiches, meat ones, that’s it” (Samir).

Comments such as this from Samir and other participants indicate a strong level of consumer choice in seeking out, if not fully halal restaurants, at least eateries that offered some choices that would meet halal requirements. These are highly conscious choices where the participants investigate the menu options with an eye towards finding options that will allow them to eat at the restaurant while continuing to adhere to the requirements of halal.

6.5.2 Taste, Health, and Cleanliness

Questions were also raised over whether halal-certified meat was not just consumed purely for religious purposes and represented another tension that participants manage. They argued that the meat was healthier, cleaner and tastier. It shows a sense of bluriness between religion and lifestyle as participants look to justify their behaviour or belief, not solely based on a religious point of a view, but looking at other issues such as health and taste. Jamal, for example, talked of consuming halal meat because he felt it was cleaner seeing as it was drained of blood and that this also meant that it was better in terms of quality and taste:

“I think it definitely impacts the cleanliness of the meat at the end of the day. If the blood is not properly drained out then it has an impact on the quality of the meat.”
There was always this sense of an attempt to justify any behaviour or choices by individuals. In this case it seemed like participants were defending their choice to consume only halal-certified food on non-religious grounds, rather than all food prepared by “people of the book”, which some believe is halal. This attitude can be criticised as it goes against an Islamic principle that Muslims should not reject what has been made halal to them in Islam and by doing so it can be considered to be rejecting a gift from God. Darwish provides a detailed description of how the animal is slaughtered under the Islamic sharia method and ended his description by arguing that this meant the meat was cleaner and healthier if this method is used:

“The blade needs to swift from one jugular vein to the other in one motion as fast as possible, at which point the first jugular vein is cut, the brain immediately cries out for blood so the heart pumps all available blood up to the brain by which time the second jugular vein is cut and at which point all the blood comes gushing out. So, in essence, the meat is cleaner as well because there isn’t blood in it, blood has a lot of toxins in there” (Darwish).

Finally, Hussein went further and talked about several non-Muslim friends and colleagues of his who now consume halal meat regularly because they felt it was healthier for them and cleaner. This again shows the attempt to explain or justify the consumption of halal beyond it constituting a religious rule to be followed:

“Well I have so many friends. They only have halal food and they are not Muslims at all. They don’t believe in any religion anyway, these people. But they are more into science. These people prefer halal food or they always eat with me. Like whatever I eat, they eat with me. They prefer either halal food or kosher and I was surprised. And when I asked them ‘Why do you eat this?’ They think about their health, that’s why. Because they [halal and kosher] are more healthy. That is why they say ‘We prefer it for these reasons because we know like in halal food there is no blood that stays there, germs are killed’” (Hussein).
The place of halal in food consumption patterns is, therefore, highly complex and layered. The health and cleanliness aspect is also an attraction for these Muslims. While the choice to consume healthy, clean, and well-treated meat can, in many cases, be an act of identity construction, it is a separate set of symbolic meanings from the religious elements of halal. Muslims could choose to consume halal food because they wished to construct an identity that was health-conscious and sensitive to animal welfare. On the other hand, Muslims could choose to eat halal food as a part of their identity as practicing Muslims.

6.5.3 Animal Welfare

Animal welfare was frequently discussed during the participant interviews and was equally important for both Muslims who consumed only halal-certified food and those who consumed all food prepared by people of the books. In general it was understood that for the food to be considered “halal” the animal’s welfare must have been looked after prior to and during slaughter. Yassin explains that one of the key issues is to ensure the animal feels the least pain possible when being slaughtered as they are considered, like humans, as “a creation of God” and therefore must be treated as a gift from God and with respect:

“Always in Islam when we do slaughter the animal we aim to cause as least pain to the animal as possible, that’s what we aim to do… because in Islam as you know we have to do the sacrifice in a way which, you know, we can’t cause harm to the animal, because the animal is the creation of God” (Yassin).

Jamal also emphasises the importance of maintaining the animal’s welfare standards in order for the food to be considered acceptable in Islam. He explains that the Islamic method is designed to be the least painful option and he elaborates by explaining that other animals should not witness the slaughter:
“Animals need to be slaughtered in a certain way with a sharp knife, taking the jugular vein… to cause minimum pain to the animal and so that the animal dies in the least painful manner and the blood is drained out of the body… whilst that is happening, no other animal should be in a close proximity of the animal being slaughtered as well so they don’t see that” (Jamal).

Similarly, Darwish discusses the importance of slaughtering the animal away from livestock in order not to cause fear or negatively impact the psychological welfare of the animals to be slaughtered. He also elaborates and discusses the importance of the animals’ welfare prior to slaughter.

This issue that Darwish also discusses is one that has caused disagreement between halal authorities in Britain in relation to the welfare of the animal prior to slaughter. He argues in order for the meat to be halal the animal must have been looked after well and strongly criticises the approval of battery chicken farms as halal suppliers where the animals are caged and confined to a small and high-density area. He discusses KFC as a particular example, which is approved as halal by the HFA and explains that he refuses to consume their food because it is not really halal. He knows they use battery farm chickens, which is in his opinion does not constitute good animal welfare:

“I think for meat to be halal certified, number one; animals have a certain regulation behind their welfare so, in essence, chickens in battery farms cannot be halal because animals are supposed to be free to roam… I think that’s the first thing that the welfare of the animal prior to it being slaughtered. Secondly, is an animal being led into the slaughterhouse, it has to be slaughtered, it cannot be slaughtered within view of all of the other animals… Some people argue that animals have instincts, they know what’s coming next in the sense of if you’re coming to kill an animal it can sense your presence… There are a lot of battery chickens that HFA approve of and I personally don’t see how a battery farm can produce halal chicken. There’s barely enough space for these places to breathe,
for these chickens to breathe, let alone roam around, let alone slaughter them in a separate part of the abattoir, whereas looking at something like HMC, they’ve got a full and clear set of regulations, whereas HFA haven’t. It’s just a question of halal, not halal, it’s very simplified” (Darwish).

The issue of animal welfare is not limited to halal-observant Muslims and is a frequent topic in Britain. In Darwish’s case in particular, his interpretation of good welfare is in contrast to the official stance of halal certification authority. Animal welfare is a complex issue and draws from religion and ethics, in addition to the biological sciences. An individual interpretation of Islam, in this case, directly relates to the choice of food suppliers and a lack of blind reliance upon halal certificates.

6.5.4 Commercial Halal Certification

Halal certificates are commonly used in non-Islamic societies to identify places where the food sold is slaughtered and prepared in accordance with Islamic sharia. Amir argues that the purpose of halal certificates is to provide “conservatives” with a sense of comfort that they are eating meat that has observed Islamic sharia in its slaughter and preparation methods. However Amir went on to criticise the growth of halal certifications specifically in Britain as a Christian country. The idea that the halal label eliminates confusion in his view is untrue and misinterprets the actual definition of halal. He argues that Muslims have been made to believe that if the food is not halal certified then it is not allowed, which he and other participants question:

“The importance of the halal label is to eliminate confusion, to eliminate the grey area. This is 100% Islamic and halal food, slaughtered in the Islamic way. There is no confusion about the method in which the cattle was slaughtered. There is no confusion as to the source and so on. So this provides conservatives with a very clear and realistic and accessible solution to the halal food issue.
However, the label sort of creates confusion, I think, for many Muslims because many Muslims believe that food that does not have this label is forbidden. But then you think of what makes this food halal or non-halal” (Amir).

For Amir, this limits choice for the “conservatives” and is a perversion of the guidance laid down. It takes away the responsibilities on the part of the Muslim person to interpret the guidance and exercise judgement. This is de-skilling but also a narrowing of choice.

Furthermore, there are no government owned halal certification organisations in Britain and these certificates are generally provided by privately owned organisations. This creates the belief amongst some informants that the halal label is a business or marketing tool rather than a religious symbol. Umar highlights this by discussing the phenomenon of halal food in Britain. He argued that when there was no halal meat available Muslims did not stop consuming meat and that is because in Islam there is the flexibility to adapt to your context. In this case Umar was referring to the ability to consume food of people of the books and is critical of Muslim communities demanding halal food. He argued that while it is good to have halal meat available, Muslims can do without it and there are no obligations in Islam that Muslims in this context are required to demand halal meat in a non-Muslim society. Therefore, in his opinion the halal certification market has become financially motivated rather than religiously oriented:

“So I’m not really bothered but when it’s halal chicken it’s more comfortable to have, it’s more comfortable to eat, you know, you have no issues. But in general I have no issues whether it’s halal or not and I personally believe that this halal issue is just a big business and money-making scheme that Muslim communities have made and I think the obsession with it is due to lack of understanding of religion and lack of research. Firstly this is not a Muslim country as in it’s not a land where Muslim – I mean Islamic law is not – there’s not a rule of this country, the religion of the country is not Islam, the people that live in this
country, their religion is not Islam, it’s Christianity and through our religion, throughout Islam Christianity has been respected and the Prophet has been to Christian people’s homes in the Middle East and he ate from there with no problems. And I think 30, 40 years ago there was no halal shops and I’m 100% sure that Muslims used to eat meat without any problems before this phenomena existed. Another thing is that as a Muslim when you’re in a country that the religion is not Islam you need to understand that the laws of religion that you would apply in a Muslim country are not really – these laws do not have to necessarily be applicable in a non-Muslim country and you have to do a lot of research into this because there’s a lot of interpretations and there’s a lot of knowledge that exists that backs up this point, that in a non-Muslim country the laws are not the same as in a Muslim country” (Umar).

The scepticism regarding the financial basis of halal certification is also discussed by Jamal who supports this notion by looking at the recent media war between the two main halal certifiers in Britain (BBC, 2009). He argues that what has been happening recently and the media coverage it has received is due to competitiveness between two organisations rather than being a religious debate. He explains this happened because the halal certification market is too commercialised and is just designed to gain more customers willing to pay for a halal certificate:

“But what is interesting for me is the fact that they are both [HMC and HFA] competing, commercial organisations… so quite recently there has been some media and press coverage. Not in the mainstream media but in some articles I’ve read and stuff where one of those organisations is accusing the other of not being authentic. So you know, it’s what you would expect because they are both competing commercial organisations” (Jamal).
This notion that halal is not just a religious symbol, but is more of a financially attractive market that businesses are trying to benefit from is extended to the multinationals who offer halal food, not just the halal certifiers. This can be seen in the interview with Mounir, who argues that it is just a marketing strategy targeting the Muslim population in Britain for financial gain:

“I can see, from my experience, that so many people, they’re using the term halal for marketing to do business, to like approach the minority societies” (Mounir).

Similarly, Nermeen raised the issue of trusting the motivations of some restaurants having a halal certificate. She argues that it is not just about a certificate but is also who is involved in running the place. She elaborates and says that she is more inclined to trust a halal label from a Muslim-owned business, as it is a personal and religious aspect for them rather than the major corporations who are aiming to cash in and therefore cannot be fully trusted. Here again we see the lack of trust that is being created through the perception that there are financial gains involved in the halal certification business:

“Well places like, I think, Nando’s and I think KFC now, I’m not sure about other places, but they’re the only places that I know other people go to, and they say that their meat’s halal, but I don’t really know whether it is. So I don’t feel like I could trust somebody just saying it was halal. I’d have to make that decision for myself. So if I knew the shop or I knew maybe the shop owner. Say, for example, like La Mamas, they’re from like northern African states, aren’t they? Morocco or Algeria I think, and their sort of like, certificate for halal status is up there. And I’ve heard them talking about the meat, where they buy it and things, and that really makes a difference knowing that they care a lot about, that they’re religious and they care about where their meat’s coming from and that it definitely is halal. Whereas Nando’s I feel are just kind of like trying to cash in on the fact that, well, Muslims will eat here if we make things halal, and that makes me feel a bit uneasy because they could just be saying that, I don’t know whether that’s actually true… I think, well still, I still think that companies are out to make money, they’re not there to, I suppose, pander to people’s
religious convictions. So I don’t know, it’s just, they’re out to make money and if they can make money off the fact that somebody’s Muslim, I just think it’s a bit shameful really” (Nermeen).

This whole debate really highlights how individual respondents’ interpret halal differently in order to fit into their lifestyle or to allow them to achieve certain objectives. At a basic level it could be argued that the differences in interpretation between HMC and HFA is due to the subjective and open nature of Islamic texts. For example, it could be argued that HFA are allowing stunning due to their belief that it helps the animal feel less pain and is therefore “Islamic” in terms of looking after the animal’s welfare. It could also be argued their allowing of stunning has more to do with accepting that stunning is widely used in Britain and that Islam allows flexibility within practice depending on national contexts and encourages integration. A more cynical opinion is adopted by many participants, which is that the HFA could be allowing stunning in order to be able to sell more certificates to restaurants who do not wish to change their supplier to stop stunning in accordance with HMC rules but who also wish to target the Muslim community.

KFC use HFA who allow stunning (HFA, 2012; BBC, 2009). Subway use the “Islamic Foundation of Ireland” to certify their halal food and they state on their website that while they prefer stunning not to be used, they do allow it under their guidelines (Subway, 2015). On the other hand, HMC do not allow stunning and they heavily market this so could it be an approach to target the conservative segment of the Muslim community and to brand HMC as the label based on “Islamic Sharia”. Interestingly, their reason on their website for not allowing stunning is that “it leaves huge doubt on the 'halalness' of the animal” (HMC website, 2014). Therefore, while multiple interpretations and flexibility within Islam are a key reason behind the different rules for halal meat, the way people choose to interpret the Islamic text can be seen as more down to context, lifestyle or personal objectives.
Responsibility

Another point where the participants differed was the amount of research Muslims are expected to do in regards to checking halal label authenticity and is varied between the informants. Zahra and Samir believed their role was just to look for the halal sign and that their responsibility ends there. Zahra explained that they personally put their trust in people and that certifiers have a better knowledge than her regarding what is halal. If the place is certified as halal that is enough for her to eat there without asking questions regarding who the certifying body is and what rules they follow. She refers to the HFA and HMC debate as an example of Muslims taking it a step too far regarding what should be considered halal or not, arguing it is more of a “political debate” or business competition, rather than trying to ensure the rules of Islam are followed. Interestingly, Zahra concludes by explaining that her sister disagrees with her and believes that she should check, not only if the food is halal but also if it is prepared in the kitchen properly and away from non-halal food. This meant that her sister does not consume vegetarian food or seafood from McDonald’s and shows how even within one family there can be different interpretations:

“I think if its HMC approved or HFC approved, I'm not into the whole HMC, HFC debate, the political debate that's going on, I think if it says halal I'll believe it, I'll go in, I’ll kind of have my own instincts about it. I think especially kind of living in China I’ve kind of become a little bit easy going with accepting whether it’s halal or not, I’ll kind of believe the person if they say it’s halal and they’ll show me a quick sign of it. I don't really have access to their kitchen and the way it’s prepared an awful lot so I do go on the faith of if they say it is then I’ll believe it. But sometimes you have to kind of make exceptions a little bit. Because I know one of my sisters is very strict about McDonald’s and she doesn’t quite like the Filet--O--Fish aspect of it and she says it’s not quite prepared right” (Zahra).
Samir stated that if the place has a halal certificate, then he would eat there because if the food is not really halal then it is not his responsibility therefore “not his sins”. This issue raises an interesting point in regard to the different halal certifications and their different rules. The informant is adamant that no stunning is allowed yet they consumed food at KFC Leicester because it is certified halal. The authority that KFC uses (HFA) actually allows stunning but Samir does not show awareness of this because he believes that it is not his role to find out:

“Well it is not my role to decide, it should be clear there that this shop sells halal food. I understand your point that who is responsible for that, because there were rumours about this halal meat shops and that it is not really halal, but it is a way for getting some benefits and profits. But my understanding that these shops should be under higher religious authority control, so when I go to a shop it should be clearly stated that it is halal and if there is anything happening the thing should be on them, not on me” (Samir).

In contrast, Yassin believes individuals are responsible for doing as much as research as possible to find out more about the halal certifications used. He explains how he used to eat all halal certified food before he started to do more research and realising that not all firms follow what he thinks is the proper procedure for halal slaughter. Yassin highlighted this by discussing a Subway in Leicester which is certified as halal, where he occasionally consumes fast food but only seafood and vegetarian options, and even then he is extra vigilant over how his food is prepared. He was convinced that their halal certifiers do not have the correct understanding of the halal regulations regarding the issue of stunning and therefore in his opinion they should not be approved as halal:

“The same one, so like I said I used to eat HFA because I was under the impression if it says halal it’s halal, I will eat it. However, you know, over time I’ve realised that people are trying to make money and we have this debate all
the time, what they believe is if the person has told you it is halal you take his word for it and you eat it. With me I like to know where have you got it from? which is your monitoring committee? so I can eat it. Before I used to eat at Subway until I found out that no, we can’t eat it, so I stopped eating that Subway food. So, yesterday when I went, even when he was putting chicken into the thing, afterwards he was about to make my roll, excuse me can you please change your gloves, because obviously I don’t want to be in contact with it at all. That’s one example of how really, really important it is for me to consume halal food as a Muslim” (Yassin).

The different allocations of responsibility, between the retailers, certification authorities, and consumers, reflect different understandings of social and religious responsibility and agency among the participants. For those, like Yassin, who place a substantial emphasis on individual agency and choice, he will always have to second-guess and check the certification process and guidelines. For others, like Samir or Zahra, there is a greater inclination to rely upon an established authority to determine the religious question of halal or haram. This reflects a largely personal preference and predisposition.

6.5.5 Awareness of Multiple Interpretations

The in-depth awareness of other interpretations of halal by individuals, in addition to their own personal opinion and understanding regarding what constitutes halal, was very evident amongst participants. This awareness and acknowledgement of different interpretations amongst my respondents is further support for scholars and critics to move away from a dogmatic view of religion and the homogenisation of Muslims in consumer research to reflect reality. Makram, for example, who only consumes halal-certified food, explains that he is aware that in the Qur’an it states that Muslims are also allowed to eat food prepared by Christians and Jews and therefore cannot argue with those who do so. He explains that he respects individuals who interpret this as Islam allowing its followers to eat food prepared
by people of the books at any time but he personally believes it is not applicable in this case. Firstly, he believes it is the case only when meat slaughtered using the Islamic sharia method is not available and, secondly, he believes that Britain can no longer be considered a Christian society. This interpretation of the people of the books Qur’an verse by Makram and his view of British society is further evidence of how individuals have different interpretations to suit their lifestyle and justify their practices:

“I know some people … and when I mean people, I mean Muslim people, they’ve got different takes on this and I respect their beliefs totally, but I also want them to respect mine. So they might, for example, eat food that was permissible to eat by, let’s say, a Catholic or a Jew. The reason why is because in the Qur’an it does state that a Muslim is allowed to eat food, well meat in particular, that is lawful for people, for children of the book. So children of the book is basically Christians, Catholics and Jews, Judaism, so if the Qur’an is saying it then who am I to refute that?” (Makram).

Similarly, Yassin talks about his friends and how their interpretations of halal are different from his and that he feels it is not his role to criticise them. In this case Yassin was referring to Muslims who are not British and how they believe that because they are not in a Muslim country they are not required to eat halal-certified meat and can consume meat prepared by those who are Christian or Jewish. In this case we again see that Muslims from different backgrounds and cultures may have different understandings of the consumption of halal in a non-Islamic society. His friends see it as acceptable, perhaps because it is just a temporary measure. They are in a country they are unfamiliar with, a non-Islamic society and Muslims are taught to adapt to different cultures. Many reasons can be given for their interpretation and all under the name of Islam, but Yassin argued that his life is different. He was born and raised here and this is his life. His consumption patterns and choices might change if he was living in a country that he is unfamiliar with, but in Britain he believes he has access to what he needs and
is familiar with his options. Therefore there is no need to step away from what he believes in:

“We had this debate in the car the other day...how I see it as if there’s a place and there’s a chance it is haram what’s the point eating there and you know there’s another place round the corner which is 100% halal, what’s the point taking the risk? What’s the point displeasing Allah with something so small, why do you want to displease your creator with something so small? But, fair play to them, that’s their belief, I’m not going to argue with them, that’s what they believe in terms of what they were taught as kids in their country. The way Islam was taught to them in their country is that if you go to another country and there’s no halal meat, or you don’t know whether it’s halal, then as a Muslim in a worst case scenario, let me emphasise on that, worst case scenario, you can consume food or meat, chicken etc. animals which you are allowed to consume, even if they have been slaughtered by a Jewish individual or a Christian individual. That’s one of the things that they believe, it is true, but it’s never been taught to me that how it is with us is if there is no halal meat at all, if there’s nothing, then we can do it. With the way they’ve been brought up is even if there is halal meat you can still eat meat from another place, even if they say it’s halal or even if it’s not halal, as long as Christian or Jewish people have dealt with it, because Christians and Jews are the people of the book” (Yassin).

Amir also respects the opinions of others regarding this issue but what is interesting is that again he defines halal as the extra mile, which means he does not see it as necessary, but he is also not against the idea. He explains if he had both options he would consume halal, but he would not go looking for it. Furthermore, while he has what he sees as a liberal or more balanced understanding of halal, he is willing to go the extra mile not for himself but for his friends who wish to do so in order to respect their beliefs:

“I respect the opinion of others and I respect that if some of my companions want to go that extra mile I would go and it doesn’t make a difference to me
because, at the end of the day, if there’s a Subway that’s halal and a Subway that isn’t, then why not? Let’s go to the halal Subway” (Amir).

Jamal discusses the potential for multiple interpretations and the importance of understanding that there is no such thing as a “correct” definition of halal by looking at the two main halal certifiers in Britain. They have two different interpretations of what is considered halal but, as Jamal explains, it is difficult to decide who is right and who is wrong as both of them back up their interpretations using religious leaders and Islamic text and this should be respected:

“The HMC in particular are, in my opinion, one of the more well-known, like I say… HFA, a similar organisation but what HFA classify as halal may not agree with what HMC classifies as halal. So there are potentially conflicts there. Both organisations… I am not saying which one is right and which one is wrong, but both organisations are probably backed by their own individual schools of thought and imams and their books. You know, they are totally different organisations” (Jamal).

However, what was interesting was that while some participants respected that other Muslims’ interpretations of halal that was different from their own, others were critical and argued that people were intentionally interpreting religion differently to suit their own individual lifestyles. Mounir, for example, defined those who do not consume all food prepared by people of the books as “semi-extremist,” arguing that it is allowed so there is no genuine reason not to consume it:

“I would say religiously there is like two opinions about the term halal in Islam. One of them has been endorsed by semi-extremists, like saying that you are not allowed to eat any like food from Jewish or Christians without asking from where they get it and so on. And the other opinion it’s like, it’s allowed to eat without even asking about the source, from where does it come or whatever. So I’m from those groups who I, like, the other opinions saying that I don’t have to
ask, I don’t have to ask from where it came from, you know? It’s like I’m allowed to do it, I’m allowed to eat without asking” (Mounir).

Zahra was also critical of her cousins for consuming meat from Tesco as they believe it’s halal for them because it is prepared by people of the books. Her criticism was mainly on the basis that halal-certified food is widely available so that this is unnecessary and it is more to suit their lifestyle and make it easier for them. Interestingly, she concludes by saying, “I don’t want to be there,” suggesting that such behaviour is against her identity as a Muslim or changes who she is:

“I think there's quite a few, again I think right from the fact that when I was a kid and my uncle took me to McDonald’s and he said eat the chicken burger, just say ‘Bismillah’ [In the Name of Allah] and you’ll be fine. I think that's an aspect, I’ve come across quite a few people who’ve done that and one of my cousins has kind of turned into just buying organic meat from Tesco and preparing it and saying ‘Bismillah’ and kind of saying ‘no, that’s fine and it’s acceptable’. I’m not there, I don’t want to be there. I think if we have food that's available and it’s halal then we should make every effort to stay, to eat halal food” (Zahra).

Samir was also critical of those who consumed non-halal meat, arguing that in order to do so strong justification is needed. He discussed how he used to consume non-halal certified meat previously but only before moving to Leicester when he had lived in an area where halal meat was not available. His explanation suggests that without a strong reason for not consuming halal-certified food, it can be argued that such behaviour is done to satisfy an individual’s lifestyle choices. The acceptance of multiple interpretations of halal, and of Islam in general, seemed to be dependent upon the other person having some kind of rationale or justification that went beyond simple convenience. To not even attempt to consume halal food when it is available was generally seen as falling below most of the participants’ opinion of good Islamic behaviour.
6.5.6 Changing Understanding and Practices

Multiple interpretations of halal were not only evident between different individuals; several participants also discussed how their own personal understanding and interpretation of halal had changed through time. It seemed as if the individual’s lifestyle at different stages in their life impacted on how they interpreted halal and what role religion plays in their life. Yassin talks about how he was not always a practicing Muslim, therefore he consumed non-halal certified food and did not see the halal topic as a major issue in Islam. However, he explained that as he became more religious and started practicing Islam consuming halal food became more important for him. Yassin shows that religiosity plays a role in his understanding of halal and as religiosity changed for him so did his interpretation and consumption behaviour:

“I don’t know, to be honest I’ve not been a practicing Muslim my whole life, I live in a different country, I live in a western country so I’ve not been a practicing Muslim my whole life. So, I’ve obviously felt the other side of the spectrum as well, not eating halal food and when I’ve not eaten halal food what I’ve noticed, just me personally, I don’t feel right. So, when I eat halal I feel good, the food stays, I feel my body feeling good, you know, my day feels good, I feel really nice. That’s why I make sure 100% that whenever I eat anything it has to be halal, I will make sure, I will not touch it, even if there is 1% doubt in me I will not touch it because at the end of the day I will be held accountable by God. I’m a practicing Muslim now and that’s why I would be held accountable by God so I ensure that there can’t even be 1% of doubt” (Yassin).

Changes in lifestyle can also impact on how individuals interpret halal. Several participants discussed how their interpretation changed at a time in their life when they went through major change. Samir discussed how his consumption of halal changed when he moved to Leicester because of the easier access to halal meat in the city. Umar changed his understanding and consumption patterns after
conducting his own research when he moved away from his family to go to university. He explained that his main reason for changing his understanding was researching the issue to a greater extent. However, several participants mentioned the influence of family on the individual’s understanding of halal and this might have also played a role in this case. Furthermore, the fact that his consumption habit changed coinciding with living alone for the first time suggests again that lifestyle may have played a role. So while halal was provided at home and therefore required no effort, it may not have been as easy while living away from home during university:

“My personal understanding has changed throughout the years. Through my father I learnt that eating beef in Europe is okay because when the beef is – because in Islam we cannot eat something that is dead (before slaughter)…so from what I learnt from my dad is that a group of researchers went to a slaughterhouse and they found that when the cows are stunned they don’t completely die. So then when they are cut up they're not dead which means they’re permissible for us to eat because we are allowed to eat meat of the people of the book, Christians and in the UK we consider the English people to be Christians and the people of the book and therefore we are allowed to eat their meat. However, if the meat is dead we cannot eat it and therefore I did not in the past eat chicken because I believed that chicken was stunned and it was dead, it just dies straight away and therefore I could not eat it. But then when I grew a bit older and I did some research myself I found opinions that say that the food of the Christians is permissible and therefore, although I'm not 100% comfortable with it, sometimes I make concessions when there’s no other options or it’s just convenient I eat chicken or beef that is not halal or not certified to be halal” (Umar).

The changing interpretations of these individuals over the course of their lives is further evidence that Islam is not a fixed construct. While they acknowledged that what is halal is debatable, this has opened up an understanding that is not reflected in previous studies.
6.5.7 Influence of Others

It also emerged from analysing the participant interviews that other people in their lives affected their understanding of halal. Nermeen explains how much of her religious belief and understanding comes from her father, including her understanding of halal and what she is allowed to consume as a Muslim:

“I think probably it’s based from what my dad has told me because he’s the only one who’s ever really told me anything about like religion and all that kind of stuff. I’m not that knowledgeable about it but my dad’s just always said that, when he used to go, because we used to sometimes go with him, like this is the time you, you say a blessing in the name of God and because you’ve said God’s name over it, it makes the meat okay to eat now basically. But like in the same breath my dad always said that if you couldn’t ever find halal meat then it would be okay to eat kosher meat because it was done in a similar manner. But I don’t know exactly how the Jewish procedure goes” (Nermeen).

Similarly, Umar who discussed how he learnt a lot about what is considered halal from what his father taught him when he was growing up, added how his changing understanding of halal was based on his reading of Muslim scholars at a later stage in his life:

“Credible, very credible authors that say that you can eat anything, any form of meat, as long as it’s not pig, that’s served by the people of the book” (Umar).

Zahra recalls a childhood experience where she consumed non-halal certified food when she was with her uncle and cousins and how this angered her parents. This is interesting because she explains that since then she was careful not to consume non-halal food. It clearly played a major role in her understanding and interpretation of halal, but also highlights the diversity of understanding within one family regarding halal meat:
“I was a child and I didn’t quite have an understanding of halal and like Qur’an and he just said say Bismillah and eat it and it’s fine and it’s halal. So I think I ate that one chicken burger and then I went home and told my parents and my parents were really annoyed and they weren't very happy about it. And I think since then kind of, I was very careful with what I ate” (Zahra).

Finally, Jamal said that their local mosque also plays a role in his understanding and that the issue of stunning was discussed in a Friday sermon and they argued that HFA certification – which permits stunning – is considered acceptable. Therefore, the Muslim community and his local mosque and imam played a role in his understanding of halal:

“That particular opinion is backed up by the mosque I attend in Leicester. It is backed up by the imams and the mosque I follow says its fine so that’s where I draw the line really” (Jamal).

This is in line with White and Kokotsaki (2004) who argued that social experience impacts on an individual’s experience of food and Mattson and Helmersson (2007) who added that during our childhood we form our attitudes towards food mainly through socialisation within the family. As Bourdieu (1984) explained, there are “cultural intermediaries” affecting the consumption process of individuals. In this case we see religious leaders, for example the mosque and its imams, affecting Jamal’s interpretation.

The next sub-section brings together the key areas of the analysis by looking at my respondents’ experiences in terms of the role that consuming halal plays in relation to their identity.
6.5.8 Halal Consumption and Identity

Jafari (2012) argues that halal is a complex concept that needs to be analysed alongside more complicated issues such as identity and consumer agency. The role of halal as an identity symbol for many is evidence that consumers are not totally free in their identity construction. It highlights the consumer’s need for group belonging and the consumption of symbolic products to associate with a specific group, in this case a specific religious community. There is much doubt about the notion of autonomous consumer action where consumers are free and independent in their consumption choices; For example, Baudrillard (1998) argued that autonomous consumer action has become impossible. He argued individuals conform given fear of cultural isolation. The consumption of halal for my respondents is considered symbolic of their religious identity and being part of the Muslim community. This also reflects Baudrillard’s argument that consumption is a repressive form of social control, operating through a “consumption code” that specifies acceptable behaviour. This results in the narrowing down, constraining or even cutting off of possibilities for alternative social visions and shackling human potential (Cherrier and Murray, 2005). In this case consuming halal is not just a religious requirement for many but it is the consumption of a symbolic item that is to conform to a religious group and to feel part of a community because individuals fear isolation.

The symbolic role of halal is in line with Levy (1959) and the widely acknowledged point that products carry a symbolic meaning beyond their functional usage. While consuming fast food may have been functional, the consumption of halal was more symbolic for the participants. This is illustrated in figure 2 (Section 5.1) which draws out the interconnections between fast food consumption at the base of the pyramid, as a basic functional product, and at the top of the pyramid halal consumption as a symbolic consumption product playing a role in identity construction, with religion as the key factor in between.
Halal consumption was considered as key to the respondents' identity as Muslims and arguably provided them with a common factor and a feeling of being part of a group or community. Beyond the multiple interpretations of what is considered halal, the differences between alternative halal certification authorities and the religious purpose of consuming halal meat, a deeper relevance for halal emerged from the interviews. Halal was considered for many as an important part of being a Muslim; therefore it can be considered as part of their identity construction. Zahra, for example, explains how halal is an element of Islam that she feels she must fulfil as part of being a Muslim. More importantly with food being the context examined here, we see the important role halal plays as it is an issue she faces on a daily basis:

“It’s just part of my daily life… I think that is kind of part of being a Muslim and making sure that I take every action to fulfil the requirements of being a Muslim” (Zahra).

Similarly, Darwish defines it as “part and parcel” of his identity as a Muslim, and the use of such an idiom suggests that for Darwish halal is a necessary part of being a Muslim and cannot be separated from Islam:

“For me, halal is something that is part and parcel of me being a Muslim. It represents my beliefs in terms of my religion.”

For some, halal was more important than for others. Yassin, for example, suggests that halal, and in fact religion itself, is more than a cultural element for him. While he initially explained that religion is part of culture, he argues later that religion is more than just part of culture, indicating a higher importance for religion and any religiously-related symbol for him personally. His discussion provides an image of religion as being a transcendental aspect of his life:
“It’s a cultural thing, it’s part of the religion. I think if you were saying culture I think that would be grabbing the wrong end of the stick, because culture implies just that it’s done through generations. This is done through generations but this is something that God has told us that we have to do, also our prophets said it was the way for us to slaughter our animals… I think identity does play a part because eating halal is part of the Muslim identity, we have to eat in that specific way, it does form our identity absolutely… it goes deep, it goes really, really deep because it’s a really strong base, it’s part of the foundation of our religion” (Yassin).

Makram also argued halal played a major role in his identity because he is living in a secular country and halal is always a reminder of his identity. Its importance can be seen by how he defines halal as a tradition, which indicates a historical or cultural element that has a symbolic meaning for Makram as a Muslim. Also his emphasis on the importance of halal within the family and especially teaching younger members of his family about it adds to this sense of halal being a key part of his identity as a Muslim. Makram's discussion provides the sense of an individual looking to construct and maintain their cultural identity, and possibly attempting to defy acculturation:

“It’s a reminder, at the end of the day, it’s a reminder that, yes, I am a Muslim and I have got to eat halal food, so to that aspect, yes, it does kind of re-emphasise my faith in that sense… I think that, yeah, I mean when it comes to food and giving it to younger ones, family members, I think it may not be more than just about halal food, maybe it might be something deeper. Maybe, it could be holy traditions and keeping the faith in that sense” (Makram).

What also emerged was the relationship between halal as a symbol and pride amongst participants. Samir explained how consuming halal shows his colleagues at work that he is proud of his religion and that he is also able to maintain his identity as a Muslim. Again we see here how Samir talked about “keeping
“Buying halal and consuming halal, for me, is showing what I am. I am proud with what I am and I’m not hiding, I’m proud as a Muslim and I’m continuing with my same culture when I live in multi-cultural society and the people around me will know that and will respect my feelings and my attitude of consuming. If we are at work, for example, my colleagues know that I am Muslim, so if I choose to eat halal foods everybody knows that I am proud of my religion, I don’t do that, I don’t eat that, so that makes me feel better actually, that I haven’t changed it totally like some other people. I am still keeping my traditions and I am proud of that, so that makes me feel better” (Samir).

This was also evident from Zahra’s discussion. She argues that halal is important for her to maintain her identity and she explains how she is unwilling to give halal up, allowing us a sense of how large halal is as part of her identity as a Muslim. However, of interest was the critical tone used, in which she seems to criticise those who do not consume halal-certified food to make life easier or to maintain a specific lifestyle and then “ask for forgiveness”. Her argument is based on the fact that people do not need to consume meat and that even if halal meat is not readily available, alternatives such as seafood and vegetarian food are. Therefore, in her opinion, consuming non-halal certified food is inexcusable and not in line with Islam:

“But, I don’t know, I think living here you just have to take a little bit of a step back without giving up completely and thinking, oh no, I’m going to go eat Tesco meat because we’re in a Christian country, I’m not willing to give up that part of it. Because living in China I could have very easily have turned a little bit of eating meat as a necessity, because I went weeks without eating meat and it
did affect my health a little bit. But I still kind of stuck to my guns and I knew that I still wanted to keep it halal, I’m not going to die without meat and I’m not going to kind of give up the halal aspect of it and eat meat and just ask Allah to forgive me because it was a necessity, I don’t think that’s part of what I believe in, so” (Zahra).

In addition, several participants mentioned the role of the media in their consumption of halal food such as Darwish, who argued the backlash against halal in the media, has made him more adamant about consuming halal. The media war between HMC and HFA (BBC, 2009) also shows the role of “cultural intermediaries” in the consumption process, in this case playing a role in individual understandings of halal. For Darwish, it is not just about pride but also sticking to your principles. He refers to the rising criticism of halal slaughter amongst some sections of the media and society in the West, including Britain. This has him to be more adamant about consuming halal food in order to maintain his identity, thereby refusing to bow to social pressure. However, he refers to fear of change, how the introduction of halal food is a big change for British society, and that halal is not a traditional part of British identity:

“The issue, I believe, is related more closely towards what is, in essence, xenophobia towards change. I think when any new culture, colour, ethnicity come in I think the first thing that hits people is fear. Fear that they’re going to lose what was once theirs and the fear of change, in essence, I don’t think people like change. People like what they’re comfortable with, people like what they’re used to and anything that’s different, unless it significantly enhances people and people’s lives, it’s never really considered to be a good thing…change such as people walking through, immigrants coming in, for instance, different cultures coming in, it’s not a change that people like. I think it’s the same issue with halal. It’s something that’s different and therefore people feel fearful of it as opposed to trying to truly understand it. So if anything, it makes me feel a bit more proud for eating halal food because when somebody is trying to push you in a certain direction without understanding what you’re doing and why you’re
doing it, you feel more pride in the fact that you’re not going into that direction as opposed to being cattle that’s just walking along with the wind. So it’s suddenly decided that okay halal meat is a bad thing, but you know it’s a good thing, nobody has provided you with a rational argument for why it’s a bad thing. In essence, you feel good for sticking to your principles rather than feeling ashamed and guilty about it” (Darwish).

Overall, each participant had a slightly different perception of what halal meant and how it affected their lives. In addition, they were generally aware of the diversity of views within the Muslim community in Britain regarding the meaning of halal. This awareness and acknowledgement of different interpretations amongst Muslims themselves is further inducement to move away from a dogmatic view of religion and the homogenisation of Muslims in consumer research in order to reflect reality.

Finally, despite not consuming halal-certified food, Umar also discusses the symbolic importance of halal as a British Muslim. He focuses on how the increased availability of halal is like the increase in mosques; it is a sign of Muslims becoming integrated into society. Therefore he explains that it makes Muslims feel that they are also at home and also British. His description of halal as being similar to a mosque suggests that he also views halal as a major symbol associated with Islam and therefore its meaning reaches beyond religious guidelines for consumption:

“Well I’m happy to see that there’s many, many halal places in the UK because halal is – I feel it’s not just – it’s a signifier of the spreading of, you know, the spreading of all the openness of and acceptance of the society for Muslims and their culture. And the same thing goes for a mosque, when I see a mosque I feel the same way. When I see a halal shop and I see the mosque funnily enough I feel the same way. Well, I feel that Muslims are welcomed, I feel that Muslims are welcomed and I feel that Muslims are allowed to exist freely and are allowed to live their life according to the way that they believe is correct without anyone
bothering them and, yeah... Oh, I think it has a symbolic aspect in terms of that Muslims in this country, when they have a lot of halal restaurants and halal places they feel that their religion is catered for, they feel that their needs are catered for. They feel that they’re part of the fabric of the society and that the society is open to accept them... I’m happy that I can consume halal fast food at multinational fast food chains – because sometimes as a Muslim you could feel isolated from, especially when it comes to the big chains in fast food, you feel isolated because you can’t have it, you can’t eat it because it’s not halal. When they make something like the halal, you feel that you’re part of a wider culture, a wider global culture that consumes that sort of food” (Umar).

The symbolism of halal for many participants underlined how it was a key part of their lifestyle and identity as Muslims and how it connected them as individuals to a social group. This is in line with McCracken (1988), who argued that products carry and communicate cultural meanings and that we use these meanings to create cultural notions of the self, to acquire and sustain lifestyles, to demonstrate social connections and to promote or accommodate changes in both the self and society.

The final sub-section builds upon my respondents experiences analysed for and discusses one of the key topics in social sciences, structure versus agency, in relation the identity construction of these British Muslims. The key question being how free where they in creating their identity considering the cultural frameworks they were attached too and more importantly in terms of research how British Muslims should not viewed as a homogenous group whilst recognising their common traits and beliefs.
6.5.9 Consumer Freedom and Individual Agency in Identity Construction

One of the key insights to come out of this research project has been the importance of individuality. The individual participants in the research each expressed differing interpretations of their shared religion and different levels of religious belief and feeling. Socio-cultural factors, including reduced free time because of long working hours, the prevalence of single-parent or dual-earner families, and the financial pressures resulting from the recession, all contribute to increases in fast food consumption amongst both the interview participants and in British society at large. The consumption of halal fast food by the participants was primarily driven by their religious beliefs, but they also expressed a number of other factors, including their concerns for health and animal welfare, that go well beyond the dietary requirements of their religion.

The scope of consumer freedom in both consumption choices and identity construction is still a contentious area of consumer research. The notion of the freely-consuming individual runs up against constraints from the marketplace, in terms of the limited range of goods available, and from society, in terms of the limits of acceptable purchasing behaviour. The consumer freedom perspective claims that centralised and top-down market-defined messages are eroded by the decentralised, individual subject (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). However, the market limits on consumer behaviour are still potent and pervasive, including the availability of ethnic minority foods, vegetarian options, or halal food choices. Other limitations, rooted in the social or community structures within which the individual lives, include the role of consumption in forming social bonds and signalling membership of a social group. The analysis above highlights how the concept of consumer freedom dovetails with the highly diverse and individual interpretations of Islam.

This highlights the importance of integrating both structural and agentic levels of analysis in CCT research. It is also important to understand how the relationship between structure and agency is played out in the context of British Muslims’ fast
food consumption choices and identity construction. Many modern social theorists argue for a balance between structure and agency and consider these as complementary forces. Structure influences human behaviour, and humans are capable of changing the social structures they inhabit. Structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) is one example of an approach that aims to avoid extremes of structural or agentic determinism through the “duality of structure” where it is argued that social structures make social action possible, and at the same time that social action recreates those very structures. Korczynski and Ott (2006) used “menu” as a metaphor to illustrate how consumers are free to a certain extent but are still constrained by structural forces. They argue that by having a menu, an individual has the freedom to choose from a variety of choices but only from the available food. They explain this allows both individual agency and structure to exist by operating as a “key form of mediation between people’s sense of individual autonomy and larger structures of power” (p. 911).

In this context, while it is important to move away from homogenisation of Islamic societies and to look at Muslims as individuals, it is equally important to acknowledge that personal understandings are drawn from complex cultural systems and are articulated within specific sociocultural fields and that the role of culture and social structure cannot be ignored when understanding “individuals” or agency and emic meanings (Thompson et al., 2013). As Abdullah (2008) argued, this prevents the understanding of the complex ways Muslims negotiate their religious, racial, and ethnic identities. In line with Holt’s argument (1997), this thesis argues that meanings are formed by the way people act in particular social contexts, and it is wrong to assume meanings are formed prior to their expression in social life. Therefore, consumption pattern are structured by contextualised cultural frameworks and are socially and historically shaped.
6.6 Summary of Results

Throughout this analysis, a theme that was repeated by participants was the sense of individual agency in the interpretation of complex ethical, religious, and social concepts. The participants were active and thoughtful in engaging with the ideas, symbols, and meanings that made up their environment and, as consumers, they were highly selective as to the symbols they consumed and what it meant for their identity. The participants were able to identify fast food as a distinct category of food options and attributed similar characteristics to the category. In addition, they were able to discuss with great depth and clarity the social and economic motivations for consuming fast food in spite of their understanding of its negative health effects. This showed that the participants were actively balancing competing values, convenience/cost and health.

In discussing religion, the participants generally demonstrated a broad understanding of the role of religion in individual life and in society. They were generally accepting of other viewpoints and differing interpretations within Islam. They showed awareness of the substantial variability of belief and practice within their own Muslim community in Leicester. This reinforces the idea, discussed in the literature review, that Islamic consumers are a complex and dynamic group and cannot be conceived of as unified (see Section 2.8). In addition, it was clear from the interviews that religion and the extent of the participants’ religious convictions had an impact on their consumption choices, particularly with regard to their attitudes towards halal foods. Many participants noted how other members of their family or peer groups were more relaxed about adhering to halal and how that reflected their more relaxed interpretation of Islam.

The participants, while varied in their responses about how “Britishness” fitted into their identity, all discussed the apparent tension or contradiction between living in a Christian or secular society and being a Muslim. Many of the participants
talked about the flexibility that the multicultural environment of Leicester afforded them in constructing their own identities and interpretations of Islamic behaviour. The participants tended to conceptualise themselves, in one way or another, as navigating a broad array of cultural and social forces that came from the mass media, their communities, their families, and their friends. They demonstrated awareness and a clear understanding of the forces and the various sources of symbolic meaning surrounding them. The discussion of these topics, especially the notion of halal certification, indicated that the participants viewed themselves as active agents.

Clearly, from the interviews, religion plays a role in both identity construction and consumer behaviour for these Muslims living in Britain. One of the themes to come out of my study relates to and is supported by recent work by Yousaf and Malik (2013) and Razzaque and Chaudhry (2013) on the relationship between religiosity, consumer involvement and engagement in decision-making. The participants each thought about how their religion and their food consumption choices interacted. Some noted how less religious friends paid less attention to what food they consumed. This result directly supports these two studies and illustrates the diverse view of the Islamic food market in Britain amongst my respondents. Also, the active differentiation the participants offered between themselves and other Muslims shows that, instead of halal being a means of constructing an identity as a British Muslim, they used their particular interpretation of halal to construct their identities as individuals, distinguishing them both from non-Muslim Britons and from other Muslims in their community.

The next chapter is the final one of the thesis and summarises the key finding from my research and the analysis of my respondents experiences. The research questions will be reviewed and addressed in brief, before reflecting on the key findings of this study and major contribution to field. The thesis will end with a discussion on limitations of this thesis and directions for future work in this area of study.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Findings

The analysis conducted as a part of this research revealed a striking diversity in the understanding not only of halal, but of larger questions relating to Islam as well as concerning the orientation of the participants towards fast food in general. The study was able to identify common threads in the participants’ definitions of fast food. These definitions focused on elements like homogenous menus and processes, the low costs of food items, convenience and speed of service, and the general unhealthiness of fast food options. Most participants, however, acknowledged that fast food choices were becoming healthier, especially with the introduction of “fast casual” restaurants that straddle traditional fast food and more “sit-down” restaurants.

The analysis also revealed a limited sense of the symbolic nature of fast food among the participants. This was contrasted with the socio-cultural value of having dinner at home, with family or out at a nice restaurant with friends. Fast food was seen by the participants as a way of satisfying their physiological urges, rather than as a way of forging social bonds, identifying themselves through their choices, or reinforcing their cultural identities. Fast food consumption was seen as solitary and individual. This does not, by itself, mean that the individual who consumes fast food is an independent agent, but it does undermine the social aspect of food consumption for these Muslims.

The participants’ responses on the topic of religion and halal displayed a substantial diversity of opinion and interpretation. The diversity exists along two lines: the degree of religiosity or intensity of belief and practice, and the differences between doctrinal interpretations. While most of the doctrinal
differences could be ascribed to degrees of religiosity, there were instances where two participants held a similar doctrinal position but differed in terms of their religiosity. The participants demonstrated an awareness of the diversity of interpretations within Islam in general and also within their own communities. They tended to view the interpretation of Islam as an individual process and to emphasise the role of the individual when forming their own understanding of the religion and its requirements.

This diversity of religious interpretation was most clear in the participants’ discussions of halal and new offerings in halal fast food. They offered a variety of explanations for why an individual would choose to eat from a halal menu, from adherence to dietary guidelines to a desire to consume cleaner, healthier food, to a concern for animal welfare. Regarding the halal certifications, the participants exhibited differing levels of belief in the validity or reliability of the certification process, with some, especially the more religious, preferring to rely upon their own investigation and knowledge than to trust the certifier. One of the issues brought up by the participants about the certification process was the fact that halal certification is a financially motivated rather than a religiously motivated process.

7.2 Review of Research Questions

The study began with a series of questions designed to explore the complex relationship between religious identity, marketing, socio-cultural forces, and individual fast food consumption decisions, with a special focus on Muslim consumers and halal fast food. The research questions sought to understand:
1. How do British Muslims use fast food consumption in the construction of their individual and group identities?

As argued in chapter 3 food is a symbol of self and group identity, representing both individuality and a sense of group membership. Food consumption can represent ethnic identity and food consumption habits are key cultural expressions that are central to the processes by which people establish, maintain, and reinforce their (sub) cultural, ethnic, and individual identities.

The experiences of the British Muslims in this study highlighted that fast food in general did not seem to have symbolic meaning to them but their consumption choices of food and opting for fast food were impacted by economic and social change. It was the halal element of fast food that created a symbolic aspect to fast food consumption and affected their consumption choices and their identity construction.

2. What is the relationship between religiosity, consumption choices and identity construction for British Muslims? How does the understanding and experience of halal impact food consumption choices for British Muslims and how does the relationship between halal and fast food affect their identity construction projects?

This question builds on question 1 addressing the same key concepts of consumption choices and identity construction but focusing on the role of religiosity and the concept of halal. The experiences of my respondents showed halal fast food carried symbolic meaning to them and is used by the respondents in this study to belong to their religious group [Islam]. It was considered as key to their identity as Muslims and arguably provided them with a common factor and a feeling of being part of a group or community.
Religiosity played a key role because each respondent had their individual perception of what is needed to be part of that group, including different understanding of what is considered halal creating their own individual identity. Individuals made conscious choices on where to eat and where not to eat based on their individual belief of what is considered halal and the identity they wished to maintain that would lead them to be part of the community. However, beyond the multiple interpretations of what is considered halal, the differences between alternative halal certification authorities and the religious purpose of consuming halal meat, a deeper relevance for halal that emerged. Halal was considered for many as an important part of being a Muslim therefore it can be considered as part of their identity construction.

3. What constraints do British Muslims experience from the marketplace and from other elements of their social environment in their consumption choices and their identity construction projects?

On top of the constrains discussed in chapter 5 that impacted the respondents choice of food such as recession, working hours/commute and household structures, there were other constraints faced by these British Muslims. Constraints were based on several factors and at times driven by the individual's choices. The main one was limiting fast food choices due the individual interpretation of halal or their choice of approved halal certification. Also other social factors played a key role, for example the need for a sense of belonging and fear of isolation. Whether it was the need to belong to religious community and consuming food that fitted with their understanding of halal or possessed the right symbols attached to this group. Alternatively, for some it was limiting their choices of food on the menu and opt for vegetarian option or fish for example to attend work outings, a common element of British culture, but in places that are considered “not halal” for the individuals. In general, my respondents felt they had a lot of freedom in the form of availability of different halal options and/or the flexibility of Islam, however their in-depth experiences highlights that all of them worked within some sort of cultural framework.
All of these questions were formed within the framework of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), which emphasises the influence of socio-cultural contexts on individuals and their consumption choices. This study, by focusing on the influence of religion as a cultural force rather than an element outside of culture, has sought to integrate religion within the CCT framework. One of the consequences of this approach has been a valuation of individuality and individual agency above what is commonly seen in CCT research.

The following section of this chapter (section 7.3) reflects on the key findings of this study, starting with the effectiveness of the adopted research method of phenomenological interview and its effectiveness in achieving the research aims and objectives. The section will then reflect of symbolic/functional dichotomy in fast food consumption before discussing the analysis of the participant’s experiences of multiple identities and fast food vs. halal food in their identity construction. Finally, the section will reflect on the key element of his study, religiosity or religiousness including the key debate around religion and culture.

7.3 Reflections on the Study

The interviews conducted during this study contain a substantial amount of in depth data that may yet yield further insights into Muslim consumers, the idea of halal in fast food marketing, and other concepts. Within this study, the approach to these interviews and the analysis of the participants’ comments and contributions has produced a number of distinct results of significance to methodological, theoretical and practical concerns. This section will briefly discuss how this study addressed pertinent issues in the field of Islamic consumer behaviour and responded to the current literature on the subject. First, the efficacy of the core methodological approach taken by the study, the phenomenological interview (which has been the subject of substantial criticism), will be discussed in the light of the results it was able to obtain. Next, this section will address some of the more
directly applicable issues from the literature on consumption, such as the symbolic nature of food consumption, the concept of multiple identities, and the role of fast food and halal food in identity construction.

The discussion will then turn to more theoretical issues such as definitions of religiosity and the relationship of religion and culture in an interpretive framework. This will include a discussion of the importance of desacralizing Islam for the purpose of understanding its impact on consumer behaviour, drawing on the critiques of Orientalist analyses to present a situated, complex, and dynamic picture of my respondents as Muslim consumer in Britain.

7.3.1 The Effectiveness of the Phenomenological Interview

One of the core aspects of this study is the use of in-depth phenomenological interviews to gain insights into the individual consumers, their interpretations of key terms and concepts, and experiences of fast food and halal in their daily lives. This approach is in line with the methodological principles of CCT. The latter has been criticised by Moisander et al. (2009) and Askegaard and Linnet (2011) as using the individual interview too extensively, to the extent that it shifts the emphasis away from the stated aims of the approach, namely the sociocultural shaping of consumption, and focuses the studies on consumers as overly individualistic or agentic. These criticisms essentially rely on the presumption that using individual interviews as the primary source of data necessarily skews the analysis towards an individualistic interpretation of consumer behaviour.

Thompson et al. (2013) addressed these criticisms by demonstrating that there were many CCT studies that did analyse the social and historical contexts of consumption, as opposed to the criticised consumer identity projects. Additionally, the Thompson et al. (2013) paper argued that CCT projects took advantage of the insights to be gained from personal interviews while, at the same time, not losing
sight of the socio-cultural context of consumption behaviour. What the criticism by Moisander et al. (2009) failed to address was the fact that for some socio-cultural forces, the best way to gain an understanding of their effect is to use focused, in-depth, individual interviews. This study, in examining the role of religion and religiosity in the fast food consumption behaviour of British Muslims, demonstrated the value of the phenomenological interview by exploring the diversity of interpretations of Islam, specifically halal, within a relatively small sample of Muslim consumers. A more structured study, with researcher-defined constructs of halal, Islam, and other concepts, would have either missed these diverse understandings or would have misinterpreted the responses of the participants. Religion is a highly personal and individual experience, additionally, the degree of religious belief or fervour, which was an important factor in this study, is exceptionally difficult to measure in any systematic way (Wilson, 2013).

As a result, this study's use of the individual, phenomenological interview was justified by the nature of the concepts being investigated and the shortcomings of other instruments for the generation of a more systematic analysis. It is possible that the insights gained from this study may aid in the development of broader methods of investigation concerning the role of religion and religiosity in consumption and identity construction.

7.3.2 The Symbolic/Functional Dichotomy in Fast Food Consumption

The act of food consumption has long been seen as a symbolic act, as well as a practical necessity (Kniazeva and Venkatesh, 2007; Askegaard and Madsen, 1998). Historically, food consumption was a social act, involving family, friends, or other community members. Consumption literature, drawing on anthropological concepts, has tended to view food consumption as a complex interplay of cultural, economic, social, political, and technological forces. Studies by Feely-Harnik (1995), Fajan (1988), Bardhi et al. (2010), and Gumerman (1997) emphasise the importance of viewing food consumption as socially defined and symbolic.
This study, looking specifically at fast food, found that the participants explicitly focused on the functional aspects of fast food consumption. They cited its convenience, price, and ease of consumption on the go as reasons for making it their choice for meeting their hunger needs. However, despite the participants’ emphasis on the functional nature of fast food, they cited cultural and economic forces, namely their work pressures, lack of free time, and need to save money, as the reasons for choosing fast food. This reinforces, to a degree, the notion that even fast food consumption occupies a dual role as both a practical and a symbolic good. However, the clear differentiation that the participants made between fast food meals at home or at restaurants with friends demonstrated that the social bonding aspect of food consumption is absent from fast food consumption. Social or cultural forces in these Muslims lives may influence fast food, but their view is also emblematic of an increasingly disconnected and fragmented social environment (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Oswald, 1999; Jamal and Chapman, 2000).

### 7.3.3 Participant Experiences of Multiple Identities

For Muslims growing up and living in Britain, a primarily non-Muslim nation, a special issue comes up which has been referred to as “culture-swapping” (Oswald, 1999), ‘situational ethnicity’ (Stayman and Deshpande, 1989), or “multiple identities” (Jamal, 2003). The essence of this idea is that individuals living within ethnic or religious sub-groups maintain two or more co-existing identities informed by the different socio-cultural contexts within which they operate. Each of these identities interact and adapt to each other as the individual navigates their different cultural environments. Individuals’ identities differ depending on the context and this fluidity allows them to play with their identities or images of themselves (Jamal, 2003; Jamal and Chapman, 2000).

In this study, the participants mostly identified a multiple or double identity around their sense of themselves as Muslims and as British citizens. For the most part, the participants expressed that their identity as Muslims was a more central
or stable identity. However, each of the participants described their interpretation of Islam as accommodating their participation in and adoption of many British customs, behaviours, values, and other cultural attributes. Some of the participants saw their Muslim identity as being dominant or primary, while others denied the notion of a conflict between the identities. The role of the different contexts, whether religious and secular or national, seemed to promote an understanding of multiple identities and the clear lack of conflict felt by all of the participants demonstrated how they were able to – within the terms of their own identity construction project – resolve the apparent divergences.

7.3.4 Fast Food vs. Halal Food in Identity Construction

Related to the symbolic role of food consumption, the analysis from the study participants demonstrated a distinction between the way they conceptualised their fast food consumption, which was dictated by the demands of their schedule, and their consumption of halal foods (including halal fast food), which was a function of their religious practice. For the participants, the consumption of halal food was a core element of their identity as Muslims. However, despite the fact that each participant did consume halal food and followed the religious requirements of Islam regarding dietary issues, they each had different interpretations of what those requirements really were. Additionally, many participants identified friends or family members who adhered to even less strict interpretations, to the point that they simply said a prayer over the food before consuming it. The diversity in interpretation and the active role of each individual’s interpretation and behaviour clearly linked the participants’ consumption of halal food – however defined – to their identity construction project. This reinforces the notion of the symbolic role of food consumption when it is impregnated with meaning from another socio-cultural context (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995).
7.3.5 Religiousness/Religiosity

The analysis highlighted how individual participants have differing interpretations of halal, which could be related to the individual’s degree of religious belief or religiosity, as one of many socio-cultural factors. The term “religiousness” has not been satisfactorily defined, either by social scientists or by ordinary individuals (Clark, 1958; Scott, 1997; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Part of the challenge in creating a universally applicable definition is that, while religion and religious belief are widespread, and despite the immense institutions that guide and shape doctrine and dogma, religiousness is still a deeply personal and individual experience (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Jafari (2012) has argued that the search for a universal definition was a wasted effort and that researchers should look instead at how religion is enacted in people’s everyday lives.

Drawing upon this approach, this study allowed the participants themselves to provide the definitions for religiousness and to explain in practical terms their interpretations of religious doctrine and to describe their experience of religious practice. In this way, the study was able to situate religious belief and experience within the context of the participants’ non-religious socio-cultural environment. By not separating out religion from other cultural factors, the study was able to gain additional insights into how religious belief affected consumer behaviour, such as the relationship reported by some of the participants between religiosity and the degree to which they scrutinised or felt the need to investigate claims that food was halal. This supports recent work in the Journal of Islamic Marketing claiming a linkage between religiosity and brand involvement (Yousef and Malik, 2013; Razzaque and Chaudhry, 2013).
The relationship between religion and culture is a contentious issue in academic circles. Scholars such as Jacobson (1997) and Roy (2006) have argued that religion should be considered apart from culture because of the social control that religious leaders exert on their communities, the potential for a clash of civilisations (particularly among Muslims living in the West), and the universal applicability of religion vs. limited or focused ethnic identifiers. This position is rooted in several problematic assumptions, foremost among which is the idea that religion is important to Muslims above all other considerations or socio-cultural factors. This perspective is narrow and is based upon studies that look primarily at fundamentalism, which is an aberration within the Islamic world, not representative of it.

This study took the opposite approach, situating religion and religiosity within a broader framework of socio-cultural forces that shaped the participant’s food consumption choices. Following works such as O’Guinn and Belk (1989) and Lindridge (2005), the study viewed religion as an element of culture that, like other elements, exerts significant force in shaping and sustaining the overall mix that makes up the cultural environment. Religions offer a large set of norms and values, but as the participants in this study demonstrated, within a religion there is a great deal of diversity in terms of which norms or values are adhered to by believers and the degree to which they adhere to these. It is more useful to view religion as part of the broad range of images, symbols, and values that shape the socio-cultural environment within which the consumer enacts their identity project.

Finally, the results of the study clearly demonstrated the diversity of belief and interpretation among the participants. The finding of this diversity is one of the core insights gained from this study. As recent work by Jafari (2012) and others has noted, much of the scholarship on Islamic marketing treats religion in general
and Islam in particular as monolithic entities, therefore Muslim consumers can be treated as a single sub-group within the market. As Jafari (2011) and Jafari and Suerdem (2012) emphasised, the concept of a rigid differentiation between halal and haram foods oversimplifies and misrepresents the concepts. As this research has shown, the concept of halal is complex for these Muslims and is subject to substantial individual interpretation from them. The following section summarises some of the key contribution of this study to field centring around the symbolic nature of fast food for the respondents of this study and the refocusing the agency and individuality elements within the socio-cultural context.

7.4 Contribution of Research to the Field

The fixed view of Islam and halal produced an essentialist understanding of Muslims and Islamic Societies and their consumption experiences because it was ignored that other socio-cultural factors also play a big role in the fast food consumption choices and identity construction of Muslims. Furthermore, this also highlights how religion is part of culture and is one of many socio-cultural factors that affect British Muslims, critiquing the sacralisation of Islam by researchers. Finally, changing contexts in an individual’s life such as where they live, moving away from family or working life, can also result in changing interpretations and understandings of halal. Understanding Islam and Islamic societies cannot be achieved given inflexible margins that are time and context bound (Jafari, 2012).

This research contributes to the existing literature on consumer behaviour and marketing in a number of ways. First, by focusing on Muslim consumers, it explores a demographic area that has been understudied given the fast growing importance of the market segment. Second, by adopting a phenomenological interview technique, it side-steps many of the problems or issues identified by Jafari (2012) in his critique of the existing literature on Islamic marketing and Muslim consumers. Namely, the interviews allowed the definitions of halal, fast
food, religiosity, and other key concepts to be created by the participants themselves. This not only demonstrated a diversity of religious belief and interpretation, but also caused me, as the researcher, to reflect on my own preconceptions about these ideas and helped me to engage in a more reflective and nuanced manner.

By integrating religion within the larger context of socio-cultural factors, the study was able to gain a deeper understanding of the role that religion played in the lives of the participants instead of seeking merely to understand the abstract conceptualizations of doctrine. This approach is in contrast to academics like Roy (2006), who argued that religious communities are separate from larger socio-cultural contexts, specifically in religious minority communities such as those constituted by Muslims in western countries. This research revealed that many participants interpreted their religion in a way that allowed for integration within the socio-cultural context of Britain and that they did not sense the kind of conflict envisioned by Roy (2006) or Jacobson (1997). For the participants, religion was a part of a mix of cultural forces they navigated in the construction of their individual identities, not an externally-imposed communitarian force that created dichotomous conflicts with the other aspects of their social and cultural life. This interpretation is bolstered by the evidence from the interviews that each individual engaged in an interpretive process and engaged with their religion within the context of a broad range of social and cultural forces.

The criticism of current literature on Muslim consumers (Jafari, 2011, 2012; Jafari and Suerdem, 2012) focuses mainly on the need to resist oversimplifying Islam and Muslim consumers. This research took that criticism in mind when designing the study and the results have not only supported the criticism, but have provided the basis for expanding it in the following ways. Jafari (2012) argued that the term halal was oversimplified and misunderstood in marketing literature and that it needed to be understood alongside concepts of identity and consumer agency. However, as the evidence gathered in this study reveals, there is a substantial
amount of work to be done within the definition of halal itself, particularly related to the individual interpretation of Islamic doctrine. It is not enough to situate religion within a context of other marketing concepts, as suggested by the current critiques. The multiple interpretations of religion itself and the role of religion as a driver of individualism in consumption decisions needs to be addressed further.

This study also extends or expands upon recent work on the influence of religiosity on consumer behaviour. Where Yousef and Malik (2013) and Razzaque and Chaudhry (2013) focused on the relationship between religiosity and the level of involvement of Muslim consumers in their consumption choices, this study found that religiosity also influences the interpretation of religious restrictions or guidelines on consumption choices. These studies both used religiosity as a method of diversifying the concept of Muslim consumers and this study expanded upon that notion by utilizing not only religiosity but also the diversity in interpretation.

The research makes other contributions in relation to two other specific concepts, both detailed below.

7.4.1 Symbolic nature of fast food

One of the themes that emerged from the interviews was the perception among the participants that fast food was, in contrast to food eaten at home or in a restaurant, a purely functional item. Their responses contradicted the interpretation of food consumption as both a physiological and a metaphorical or symbolic act. Works by Kniazeva and Venkatesh (2007), Lalonde (1992) and Askegaard and Madsen (1998) emphasized the psychological and sociological aspects of food consumption and its symbolic content. The participants, while acknowledging that the time and financial constraints imposed upon them by their jobs tended to influence their decision to choose fast food, especially for lunch, they disclaimed explicitly any
symbolic role for their fast food consumption. It could be argued that they are unaware of the symbolic nature of their food consumption, but the participants made clear contrasts between the social and symbolic aspects of food consumption at home or with friends at nice restaurants, and the individualistic and functional aspects of fast food consumption. Within the context of fast food, it seems that the symbolic nature of food consumption may be overstated, although the socio-economic influences on fast food consumption may be substantial.

7.4.2 Re-focus on agency and individuality within the socio-cultural context

As argued by Shankar et al. (2009), the notion of agency in consumer research may have been overemphasised, and with this happening it meant that we were not able to fully understand Muslims, because society and human beings are too complex and subtle to conduct consumption research with pure agency or by using an “individualistic” approach (Cherrier and Murray, 2004). The assumption here is that structures are a product of individualistic and conscious behaviour. Studies have shown how individuals through their consumption behaviours collect past meanings, negotiate future meanings, and assemble present meanings of cultural constructs such as religion (Venkatesh and Meamber, 2008).

The literature review explored the concept of consumer freedom, as described by Firat and Venkatesh (1995) where the individual consumer would be able to make their own consumption choices, free from traditional socio-cultural and marketing structures. This study, while not adopting the notion of complete consumer freedom or agency, demonstrates that a degree of agency and individual interpretation of socio-cultural symbols should be taken into account in analysing consumer behaviour. The CCT framework adopted for this study emphasizes the social and cultural aspects of consumption behaviour instead of purely psychological or economic motivations (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). However, an acknowledgement of the influence of socio-cultural factors does not obviate the role of the individual in interpreting and implementing those forces within their
own life-world. While many CCT studies have addressed the co-constitutive nature of identity projects, where individuals work with the symbols and concepts created by the marketplace to shape their own identities and manage multiple identities at the same time (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Oswald, 1999; Jamal, 1998; Askegaard et al., 2005; Jafari and Goulding, 2008), this study’s focus on the role of religious interpretation as a means of individualizing the understanding of consumption behaviour moves CCT research further in the direction of individual agency.

7.5 Limitations and Directions for Future Work

This study, based around phenomenological interviews of twelve British Muslims from Leicester, is limited in terms of its scope and its generalizability. The specific findings regarding the participants’ interpretations of halal, their fast food consumption behaviour, and their religiosity cannot be extended to all Muslims in Leicester, let alone across Britain. In fact, one of the key findings of the study is the very diversity and differentiation of opinion and interpretation that limits the study’s generalizability.

However, the theoretical and conceptual contributions of the study will, hopefully, help to shape further research exploring the relationship between religiosity, religious interpretation, and consumption behaviour. Further studies are needed to expand these questions beyond halal fast food and into other areas of consumption. Additionally, further segmentation of the British Muslim population by age, gender, ethnic origin, or other differentiating factors, might lead to new insights regarding how British Muslims interpret their religion and how they use it when making consumption decisions.
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but-eks-current-economic-situation-is-more-bleak-than-thought-8676114.html


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### Appendix 1 – Functional and Substantive Definitions of Religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functional Approach</th>
<th>Substantive Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion is the serious and social attitude of individuals or communities toward the power or powers, which they conceive as having ultimate control over their interests and destinies. (Pratt, 1920: 2)</td>
<td>An institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings. (Spiro, 1971: 96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whatever we as individuals do to come to grips personally with the questions that confront us because we are aware that we and others like us are alive and that we will die. (Batson et al, 1993: 8)</td>
<td>A system of beliefs in a divine or superhuman power and practices of worship or other rituals directed towards such a power. (Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi, 1975: 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion is an attempt to get control over the sensory world, in which we are placed, by means of the wish-world, which we have developed inside us as a result of biological and psychological necessities (Freud, 1939)</td>
<td>By religion, then, I understand a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man, which are believed to direct and control the course of Nature and of human life. (Frazer, 1993: 50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion is a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them. (Durkheim, 1965: 8)</td>
<td>Religion is the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto. (James, 1945: 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion is a set of symbolic forms and acts, which relate man to the ultimate condition of his existence. (Bellah, 1970: 21)</td>
<td>Religion (subjectively regarded) is the recognition of all duties as divine commands. (Kant, 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Religion is] a set of rituals, rationalized by myth, which mobilizes supernatural powers for the purpose of achieving or preventing transformations of state in man or nature. (Wallace, 1966: 107)</td>
<td>Religion is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of our life. (Tillich, 1946: 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. (Marx, 1976)</td>
<td>I understand by religion any system of thought and action shared by a group which gives the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion. (Fromm, 1951)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For an anthropologist, the importance of religion lies in its capacity to serve, for an individual or for a group, as a source of general, yet distinctive conceptions of the world, the self and the relations between them on the one hand (Geertz, 1973: 123)</td>
<td>Religion is that system of activities and beliefs directed toward that which is perceived to be of sacred value and transforming power. (Livingston, 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion can be defined as a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with the ultimate problems of human life. It expresses their refusal to capitulate to death, to give up in the face of frustration, to allow hostility to tear apart their human aspirations. (Yinger, 1957)</td>
<td>Religion is the varied, symbolic expression of, and appropriate response to that which people deliberately affirm as being of unrestricted value for them. (Hall, 1986)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2

2.1 Belief in Allah and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

---

Belief in God and Muhammad Nearly Universal

Median % in region who believe in one God and the Prophet Muhammad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle East-North Africa</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>8,647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Asia</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>4,134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>4,877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>7,189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>9,233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern-Eastern Europe</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>4,111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N represents the number of Muslims interviewed in each region.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q43j.
2.2 Interpreting Islam

### Interpreting Islam’s Teachings

% who say ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Single Interpretation</th>
<th>Multiple Interpretations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Southern Eastern Europe</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia-Herz.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central Asia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Southeast Asia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand^</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South Asia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle East-North Africa</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestinian terr.</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Saharan Africa</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR Congo</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djibouti</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea Bissau</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data for all countries except Niger from “Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa.”

*Interviews conducted with Muslims in five southern provinces only.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q57.
2.3 Practicing Islam in Southern Europe and Central Asia

Muslims in Central Asia, Southern-Eastern Europe: Less Personally Engaged, But Many Observe Key Rituals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pray several times a day</th>
<th>Attend mosque once a week or more</th>
<th>Give alms annually (zakat)</th>
<th>Fast during Ramadan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Southern-Eastern Europe</strong></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia-Herz.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central Asia</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
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<td>77</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Median % for regions; total % for individual countries.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q61, Q34 & Q64e-f.
## 2.4 Importance of Religion

### How Much Religion Matters

% saying religion is very important in their lives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern-Eastern Europe</td>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bosnia-Herz.</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Liberia</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Niger</td>
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*Data for all countries except Niger from “Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa.”

*Interviews conducted with Muslims in five southern provinces only.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q36.
Appendix 3 – Qur’an and Hadith Text

_Holy Qur’an – Trans. Dr M.M. Ghali – Al-Azhar University: Faculty of Languages and Translation._

“O you mankind, eat whatever is in the earth lawful and good; and do not closely follow the steps of Ash-Shaytan; surely he is an evident enemy to you” (Surat Al-Baqarah, 2:168).

“O you who have believed, eat of the good things (only) which We have provided you, and give thanks to Allah, in case He only is (The One) Whom you do worship” (Surat Al-Baqarah, 2:172).

“Surely He has prohibited for you only carrion (dead meat) and blood and the flesh of swine, and whatever has been acclaimed to other than Allah. So, whoever is constrained, neither being inequitable nor aggressive, then no vice will be upon him; surely Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful” (Surat Al-Baqarah, 2:173).

“O you who have believed, fulfil your contracts. The brute of cattle (cattle, camel, sheep and goats) has been made lawful to you, except whatever is (now) recited to you without violating the prohibition against (game) hunting (making hunting lawful) when you are in pilgrim sanctity. Surely Allah judges (according to) whatsoever he will.”(Surat Al-Maidah, 5:1).

“Prohibited to you are carrion (dead meat) and blood and the flesh of swine, and whatever has been acclaimed to other than Allah, and the strangled, and the beaten (to death), and the toppled (to death), and the gored (to death), and that eaten by wild beasts of prey-excepting what you have immolated-and whatever has been slain on the altars (for idols), and that you adjure divisions (by gambling with arrows or in any similar way) by divining: that is immortality.
Today the ones who have disbelieved have despaired of your religion, so do not apprehensive of them and be apprehensive of Me. Today I have completed your religion for you, and I have perfected My favour on you, and I am satisfied with Islam for you as a religion. And whoever is constrained in scantiness (compelled by need), without unfairly (inclining) to vice, then surely Allah is Ever-forgiving, Ever-Merciful”. (Surat Al-Maidah, 5:3)

“Today the good things are made lawful for you, and the food of the ones to whom the Book (Christians and Jews) was brought is lawful to you, and your food is made lawful to them...” (Surat Al-Maidah, 5:5).

“They ask you what is made lawful for them. Say, “The good things are made lawful to you, and (such) hunting creatures as you teach, (training them) as hounds, teaching them (part) of what Allah has taught you.” So eat whatever they hold back for you and mention the name of Allah over it. And be pious to Allah, surely Allah is swift at the reckoning” (Surat Al-Maidah, 5:4)

“So eat of that over which the Name of Allah has been mentioned, in case you are believer in His ayat” (Surat Angham (Cattle), 6:118).

“And how is it with you, that you do not eat of that over which The Name of Allah has been mentioned-and He has expounded whatever He has prohibited to you except whatever you are constrained to? And surely many do indeed lead into error by their prejudices without (any) knowledge. Surely your Lord is He Who knows best the transgressors.” (Surat Angham (Cattle), 6:119).

“And do not eat of that over which The Name of Allah has not been mentioned, and surely it is indeed and immortality. And surely Ash-Shayatyn do indeed reveal to their patrons to dispute with you. And in case you obey them, (then) surely you are indeed an associators.” (Surat Angham (Cattle), 6:121).
“Say, “I do not find in what has been revealed to me anything prohibited to a feeder who feeds thereof except it be carrion (dead meat), or blood poured forth the flesh of swine, (for) then surely that is an abomination or an immoral thing that has been acclaimed to the that Allah. Yet whoever is constrained, without being inequitable or aggressive, then surely your Lord is Ever-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful.” (Surat Angham (Cattle), 6: 145).

“And the fleshy cattle, We have made them for you as among the waymarks of Allah; thelrn is charity for you. So mention The Name of Allah over them, (standing) in ranks. So, when their sides (flanks) are (properly) readied (or fall, collapse), then eat them, and feed then contended poor and the suppliant. Thus We have subjected them to you that possibly you would thank (Me).” (Surat Al-Hajj, 22:36).

“And of his signs is the creation of the heavens and earth and the differences of your tongues and colors…” (Surat Ar-Rum, 30: 22)

“And of mankind, beasts and cattle in like (manner) (are) different colors…” (Surat Fatir, 35: 28)

“O you mankind, surely We have created you of a male and a female, and We have made you races and tribes that you may get mutually acquainted…” (Surat Al-Hujurat, 49: 13)
Al-Bukhari Hadith --- The Sahih Collection of Al-Bukhari. Trans. Ustadha Aisha Bewley. Available at:
http://spl.qibla.com/Hadith/H0002P0000.aspx

IX. The Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, used not to eat anything until it was named for him so that he knew what it was

5076. It is related from Ibn 'Abbas that Khalid ibn al-Walid, who was called the Sword of Allah, informed him that he went with the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, to Maymuna. She was both his maternal aunt and the maternal aunt of Ibn 'Abbas. He found that she had a roasted lizard which her sister, Hufayda bint al-Harith, had brought from Najd. She offered the lizard to the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. He rarely stretched his hand towards food until he had been told about it and it had been named for him. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, reached for the lizard and one of the women present said, 'Tell the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, what you have offered him. It is lizard, Messenger of Allah.' The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, took his hand away from the lizard. Khalid ibn al-Walid asked, 'Is lizard haram, Messenger of Allah?' 'No,' he answered, 'but it is not found in the land of my people and I find that I dislike it.' Khalid said, 'I pulled it to me and ate it while the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, was looking at me.'"

XVI. That which has been slaughtered on altars and to idols

5180. Salim related that he heard 'Abdullah report that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, met Zayd ibn 'Amr ibn Nufayl at the bottom of Baldah before any revelation had come down on the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, offered him a dish with some meat in it, but he refused to eat of it. [This is also read, "The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, was offered...] Then he said, 'I do not eat from what you slaughter to your idols. I only eat from that over which the name of Allah has been mentioned.'"
XVII. The words of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, "Slaughter in the Name of Allah."

5182. It is related that Jundub ibn Sufyan al-Bajali said, "One day we sacrificed some animals with the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. Some people had sacrificed their animals before the prayer. When he finished [the prayer], the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, saw that they had slaughtered before the prayer. He said, 'Anyone who has slaughtered before the prayer should slaughter another in its place. Anyone who has not yet slaughtered should do so in the Name of Allah.'"

XXI. Animals slaughtered by desert Arabs and the like

5188. It is related from 'A'isha that some people said to the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, "Some people bring us meat and we do not know whether or not the Name of Allah has been mentioned over it." He said, "Mention the Name of Allah over it and eat." She said, "Those people had been unbelievers shortly before."

'Ali corroborated it from ad-Darawardi, and Abu Khalid and at-Tufawi corroborated it.

XXII. Animals slaughtered by the People of the Book and their fat, no matter whether they are the people of war or not

Az-Zuhri said, "There is nothing wrong in eating the animals slaughtered by the Christian Arabs. If you hear someone mention other than Allah, then do not eat it. If you do not hear that, then Allah has allowed you that and He knows their disbelief." The like of this is also mentioned from 'Ali.

Al-Hasan and Ibrahim said that there is nothing wrong in eating animals slaughtered by an uncircumcised person.
Ibn 'Abbas said that "their food" means their slaughtered animals.

5189. It related that 'Abdullah ibn Mughaffal said, "While we were laying siege to the fortress of Khaybar, someone threw a skin full of fat and I leapt to take it. I turned and there was the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and I was too embarrassed to do it."

XXIV. Slaughter performed by nahr and normal slaughtering (dhabh)

Ibn Jurayj said, "'Ata' said, 'There is no dhabh or nahr except in the place where dhabhor nahr is performed.' I asked, 'Is it permitted to use dhabh on that which is normally slaughtered by means of nahr?' 'Yes,' he replied, 'Allah mentions the dhabh of cattle. If you use dhabh on something which is normally slaughtered by nahr, that is allowed. I prefer nahr. Dhabh is cutting the jugular veins.' I asked, 'Should he go beyond the veins and cut the spinal cord?' He said, 'I do not think so.'"

Nafi' reported that Ibn 'Umar forbade cutting into the spinal cord. He said, "That is cutting less than the bone and then leaving the animal to die."

[Nahr is cutting the veins which are cut in dhabh, but below the neck by stabbing with a spear. Camels are slaughtered in this manner. Dhabh is cutting the veins at the top (in the neck) and is used for other animals.]

The words of Allah Almighty, "And when Musa said to his people, 'Allah commands you to sacrifice a cow (by dhabh).'" (2:67)

And His words, "So they sacrificed her [by dhabh] – but they almost did not do it." (2:71)

Sa'id said that Ibn 'Abbas said, "Dhabh is done by cutting the gullet and the throat."

Ibn 'Umar, Ibn 'Abbas and Anas said, "If one cuts off the head, there is no harm."