

BETWEEN HARMONIZATION AND FRAGMENTATION: CONSTRUCTING GLOBAL HALAL NORMS THROUGH SMIIC

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the harmonization and fragmentation of global halal norms through SMIIC (The Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries), which serves as the main instrument of the OIC in harmonizing halal standards across the Muslim world. Using literature studies and a constructivist approach (the norm diffusion framework) by Finnemore & Sikkink (1998), this research examines how SMIIC functions as a socializing agent of global halal norms through three stages: norm emergence, norm cascade, and norm internalization. This article finds that the agent of socialization of global halal norms in the Islamic world is not only SMIIC which stands alone, there is a role for Turkey in the process of norm emergence. Turkey is not only a norm entrepreneur, but more deeply, a norm stimulator (constructing the architecture of global halal standards, including financing, drafting initial standards, and structuring the SMIIC organization). Furthermore, the study describes that in the norm cascading stage there are various training programs, exhibitions, scientific forums, and international agreements. Meanwhile, at the norm internalization stage, this can be seen from the increase of OIC member countries in ratifying SMIIC. Although participation has increased significantly (with 45 out of 57 OIC member states ratifying SMIIC), there remain ideological fragmentations among Islamic schools of thought (Sunni, Shia, Wahhabi) and political-economic rivalries that challenge harmonization efforts. The halal standard is also used as a tool for protectionism in trade. Thus, the socialization of halal norms through SMIIC is not entirely linear but is filled with negotiations, resistance, and the reconstruction of sectarian identities and market interests within the Muslim world.

Keywords: Global halal norms, SMIIC, harmonization, fragmentation

INTRODUCTION

The global halal market is currently a potential new growth sector for the global economy. The global halal industry is valued at USD 2.3 trillion and has the potential to grow by 20% (approximately USD 460 billion) annually. According to the Dinar Standards Report (2022), the halal food market is the largest consumer market in the world.

Despite its enormous economic potential, however, the global halal industry has not been fully leveraged by Muslim-majority countries. A study by (Melissa Wan-Hassan et al., 2009) found that global exporters of halal food products are predominantly non-Muslim countries such as Australia, Canada, Brazil, France, and New Zealand, which have small Muslim populations. Similarly, the International Trade Center (2015) stated that

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Brazil, India, Australia, and New Zealand are the main suppliers of halal meat and dairy products to Muslim member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

The limited participation of Muslim-majority countries in the global halal export market can be attributed to several factors. First, many member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) are classified as Least Developed Countries (LDCs) (Bayraktar, 2002), which often face structural constraints in developing competitive and high-quality halal industries. Second, the level of public awareness regarding halal consumption remains uneven, encompassing not only religious convictions but also understanding of halal certification and the health implications associated with halal products (Ambali & Bakar, 2014). Third, significant differences in halal standards exist among OIC member states due to the diversity of Islamic legal schools (*madhāhib*) in interpreting the concept of halal (Akbar et al., 2023; Al-Teinaz et al., 2020; Azam & Abdullah, 2021; Kamil et al., 2025). Variations in jurisprudential approaches inevitably lead to differing interpretations and implementation of halal principles across Muslim countries.

The issue of divergent Islamic legal schools (*madhāhib*) as a source of fragmentation in halal standards has, however, been interpreted differently by Florence B. Blacker. While Blacker acknowledges that the establishment of a universally accepted international halal standard remains a complex challenge, she disputes the argument that such difficulties primarily stem from differences among Islamic legal schools. Instead, she argues that the principal obstacle to the universalization of halal standards lies in market dynamics and commercial interests, where competition among certification bodies, national regulatory frameworks, and economic considerations have generated multiple halal standards rather than a single globally recognized system (Bergeaud-Blackler et al., 2016).

In line with this idea, (Suryawan et al., 2022) found that the criteria within halal standards are no longer determined exclusively by the underlying Islamic dietary laws. The involvement of various stakeholders in formulating halal standards has paved the way for non-religious considerations—namely meat production shortages and the protection of the poultry sector—to enter the process and play a significant role in shaping these standards, particularly regarding pre-slaughter stunning and the prohibition of mechanical slaughter. Halal standards serve not only operate as a tool for economic development and the facilitation of international trade but also as a safeguard to address food security issues and a mechanism to protect the national economy from the adverse effects of the global market. Consequently, the harmonization of international halal standards requires not only theological convergence but also stronger institutional cooperation, regulatory alignment, and mutual recognition mechanisms among countries.

In response to the diversity of Islamic legal schools (*madhāhib*) and the need to strengthen the halal market among Muslim countries, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) established the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Coun-

tries (SMIIC) in 2010. The primary objective of SMIIC is to harmonize halal standards across the Muslim world by providing a common framework for standardization among OIC member states. Such harmonization is expected to reduce regulatory disparities, enhance mutual trust, and facilitate the cross-border trade of halal products.

According to Ihsan Ovut (2021), Secretary General of SMIIC, the institution pursues four principal objectives. *First*, it develops harmonized halal standards for OIC member states. *Second*, it promotes the harmonization of standardization, metrology, testing, and laboratory practices among member countries. *Third*, it provides technical assistance to member states that have not yet established national halal certification bodies or supporting conformity assessment infrastructure. *Fourth*, SMIIC develops conformity assessment schemes aimed at facilitating the exchange of halal products among member states through the implementation of mutual recognition of halal standards and certification systems. Through these initiatives, SMIIC seeks to establish a credible, transparent, and internationally recognized halal quality infrastructure that enhances both consumer confidence and the competitiveness of halal products in the global market.

Ovut argues that the standards developed by SMIIC should be understood as documents formulated through consensus and approved by a recognized body for the common benefit of OIC member states. These standards are designed to be applied repeatedly and are voluntary rather than legally binding. The voluntary nature of SMIIC standards, however, has created a significant dilemma in the harmonization of the global halal system. To understand the dynamics of SMIIC's global halal norms, it is crucial to examine the key actor within SMIIC and how these norms diffuse among the agencies (OIC member states). To what extent does fragmentation persist in the harmonization of halal standards across the Islamic world? This study seeks to address this question by examining the socialization and dynamics of halal standard harmonization among Islamic countries.

METHODS

Against this background, the present study examines the process through which global halal norms are socialized through the institutional framework of SMIIC. It further investigates the dynamics and fragmentation among OIC member states in responding to the harmonization of halal standards across the Muslim world. The study employs a descriptive qualitative research design using content analysis technique and critical discourse analysis by analyzing primary data obtained from the official SMIIC website, SMIIC annual reports, General Requirements for Halal Food OIC/SMIIC 1:2019. To highlight the fragmentation of SMIIC's global halal standards, the study presents data from halal standard documents of member countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Iran, and Gulf states (GCC). The countries were selected because they are permanent members of SMIIC and share the different Islamic school of Jurisprudence. General Requirements for Indonesian Halal Food SNI 99004:2021, Malaysian Halal Food Standards MS

1500:2019, General Guidelines – Halal Food, ISIRI 12000:1992, General Guidelines GSO 2055-1, subsequently became part of the primary data. Meanwhile secondary data is taken from relevant articles published in reputable academic journals. To strengthen validity, we applied source triangulation (cross-checking claims across legal texts, agency reports, academic analyses), rules of precedence (primary legislation and formal clarifications from the competent authority take priority) and chronological tracing (Creswell, 2018).

The data are analyzed using a constructivist approach, drawing upon Finnemore & Sikkink's theory of norm diffusion (Norm Life Cycle). This theoretical perspective is employed to examine SMIIC as an institutional structure that promotes and disseminates halal norms to its agents, namely the OIC member states. Norm Life Cycle framework conceptualizes norm diffusion as a three-stage process consisting of norm emergence, norm cascade, and norm internalization. This framework provides an analytical lens for understanding how global halal standards are introduced, gain broader acceptance among states, and eventually become embedded within national regulatory systems.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SMIIC and the Harmonization of Global Halal Norms in the Muslim World

The Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC) is an intergovernmental organization (IGO) established under the auspices of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to develop and promote a common halal standard for implementation across OIC member states. As the principal institution responsible for halal standardization within the OIC framework, SMIIC seeks to harmonize halal standards by providing a unified reference for halal certification, conformity assessment, and accreditation among its member countries.

More specifically, SMIIC's harmonization initiative aims to eliminate technical barriers to trade (TBT) arising from differences in national halal standards and certification systems. By promoting regulatory convergence and facilitating the mutual recognition of halal standards, SMIIC efforts to strengthen intra-OIC trade and enhance the competitiveness of halal products in the global marketplace. Consequently, halal standard harmonization is not merely a technical standardization process but also a strategic instrument for fostering economic integration, strengthening institutional cooperation, and expanding the global halal economy among OIC member states.

SMIIC's vision is

"to establish a quality infrastructure that enhances economic development, promotes prosperity, and safeguards the interests of its Member States."

SMIIC's mission is

"to develop a quality infrastructure by fostering harmonization in standardization, metrology, accreditation, conformity assessment, and quality assurance activities in order to facilitate trade, support sustainable economic growth, enhance consumer

welfare, protect the environment, and promote innovation among Member States." (SMIIC Mission, <https://smiic.org/en/smiic>)

Within the SMIIC framework, a standard is defined as a document developed through consensus, approved by a recognized body, and intended for common and repeated use by relevant stakeholders. The development of such standards is expected to reflect broad consensus through the active participation of diverse stakeholders, including chambers of commerce, private-sector organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), large enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), consumer associations, and research institutions. As reflected in SMIIC's vision and mission, the harmonization of halal standards is ultimately intended to strengthen trade integration and stimulate sustainable economic growth across OIC member states.

According to the SMIIC Annual Report 2012, the idea of harmonizing halal standards among OIC member states dates back to 1984, during the First Meeting of the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (COMCEC), which was chaired by the President of Turkey. During the meeting, Turkey emphasized the need for national standardization bodies within OIC member states to align their national standards in order to eliminate technical barriers to trade (TBT) and thereby facilitate greater intra-OIC trade and economic cooperation. This initiative laid the institutional foundation for the subsequent establishment of SMIIC as the principal organization responsible for promoting harmonized halal standards across the Muslim world.

Following the 12th COMCEC Meeting, OIC member states were invited to submit their comments and recommendations on the draft SMIIC Statute to both the Turkish Standards Institution (TSE) and the OIC General Secretariat. The central role of the Turkish Standards Institution in this process reflected Turkey's leadership in initiating the harmonization of halal standards within the OIC. Notably, the first draft of the proposed halal standard circulated among OIC member states was based on Turkey's national halal standard developed by the Turkish Standards Institution (TSE). This national standard subsequently served as the initial reference for drafting the SMIIC Statute. After a series of consultations and revisions, the statute was formally approved and signed by OIC member states during the 15th COMCEC Meeting, held in Istanbul-Turkey, from 4–7 November 1999. This milestone represented a significant step toward establishing an institutional framework for harmonized halal standardization across the Muslim world.

Subsequently, during the 23rd COMCEC Meeting in 2007, SEG-OIC was formally mandated to develop halal food standards and related procedures. In fulfilling this mandate, the Expert Group prepared three draft halal standards through a consensus-based process involving extensive collaboration among key stakeholders, including OIC member states, the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA), and representatives of the four major Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*Hanafi*, *Maliki*, *Shafi'i*, and *Hanbali*).

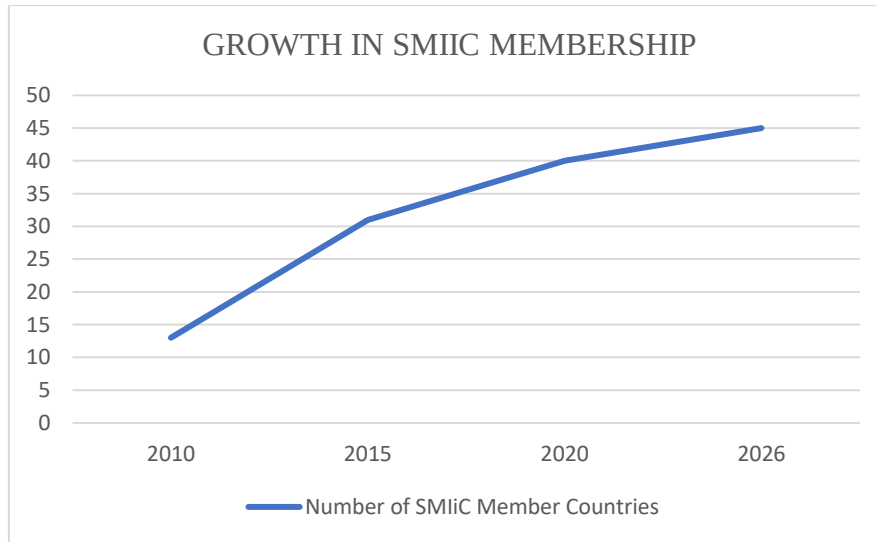
This inclusive consultative process sought to ensure that the proposed standards would be both technically robust and religiously acceptable across the diverse jurisprudential traditions of the Muslim world. Consequently, SMIIC emerged as a treaty-based, technical intergovernmental organization operating under the institutional framework of the OIC.

SMIIC was officially established in 2010, following the entry into force of its Statute after obtaining the required ratification by ten OIC member states in May of that year. By the time the Statute became effective, thirteen member states had completed the ratification process, namely Algeria, Cameroon, Guinea, Jordan, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. In 2011, the SMIIC General Secretariat officially commenced its operations in Istanbul-Turkey. During the same period, the SMIIC Information System was launched, while the Conformity Assessment Council (CCA) and several new Technical Committees (TCs) were established to support the Institute's standardization and conformity assessment activities.

The institutional expansion of SMIIC continued steadily over the following years. In 2012, seven additional countries—Gabon, The Gambia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Senegal, Egypt, Lebanon, and Afghanistan—joined the organization, increasing total membership to twenty. By 2014, SMIIC membership had grown to 31 members, consisting of 29 Party Members and 2 Observer Members. During this period, Malaysia, represented by the Department of Standards Malaysia (DSM), officially became a member of SMIIC, further strengthening the organization's technical capacity and regional influence in halal standardization.

SMIIC continued to expand both its institutional capacity and technical outputs in subsequent years. By 2019, membership had increased to 42 member states, while thirteen new OIC/SMIIC standards and a revised edition of the SMIIC Directives were published. During the same year, the OIC/SMIIC Halal Standards Series 1, 2, and 3 underwent comprehensive revisions, and OIC/SMIIC Standard No. 9 on Halal Tourism Services was introduced. In 2020, the number of Technical Committees (TCs) increased to 17, and the total number of published OIC/SMIIC standards reached 38. During the same period, the SMIIC Strategic Plan 2021–2030 was formally adopted, providing the organization's long-term strategic direction. At the time of writing, SMIIC comprises 45 member states, including 42 Party Members and 3 Observer Members, reflecting its growing institutional legitimacy and expanding influence in the governance of global halal standardization.

Figure 1. Growth in SMIIC Membership (2010-2026)



Source: <https://www.smiic.org/en/members>

The growing number of SMIIC Party Members has strengthened the organization's institutional presence and enhanced its legitimacy within the Muslim world. In translating its vision and mission into a more operational framework, SMIIC formulated the Strategic Plan 2021–2030, which broadly outlines three principal strategic priorities:

1. Developing high-quality standards that are recognized and used worldwide;
2. Supporting the needs of member states and ensuring the effective participation of relevant stakeholders; and
3. Promoting the development of quality infrastructure and strengthening interconnectivity among member states.

By examining SMIIC's vision, mission, and strategic plan, this study conceptualizes SMIIC as an agent of global halal norm socialization that was deliberately established to promote the realization of a unified halal system. Drawing on Finnemore & Sikkink's theoretical framework (1998), international organizations may act as agents of socialization by encouraging target actors to adopt new policies and legal provisions, ratify international agreements, and demonstrate compliance with international standards.

Finnemore & Sikkink divide the process of norm diffusion into three stages. The first stage is norm emergence. At this initial stage, the emergence of a norm cannot be separated from the role of a norm entrepreneur. A norm entrepreneur is an agent that possesses a strong conception of an ideal condition for a particular community and actively promotes that vision. The term refers to an actor that introduces particular ideas and norms into international debates and attempts to influence the behaviour of other international actors.

In this context, states and international organizations generally possess greater opportunities to act as norm entrepreneurs than individuals or non-state organizations, particularly within multilateral forums such as the OIC. States enjoy considerable

authority and bargaining capacity in multilateral negotiations. This study identifies Turkey as the principal norm entrepreneur in the emergence of global halal standardization. The available evidence indicates that Turkey played a dominant role in initiating discussions, conducting institutional studies, and exploring the feasibility of harmonizing halal standards throughout the Muslim world. A more detailed examination of Turkey's role in promoting the harmonization of halal standards will be presented in the following subsection.

In addition to identifying the principal actor, the analysis of norm emergence must also consider the motivations and driving forces underlying norm promotion. Finnemore & Sikkink categorize such motivations into three broad models: empathy, altruism, and ideational commitment. Empathy refers to the capacity of an actor to understand and identify with the experiences, interests, or ideas of others. Altruism occurs when an actor undertakes actions intended to benefit others, even when such actions may entail risks or costs to its own welfare. The third model is ideational motivation, which reflects the norm entrepreneur's strong commitment to the ideals and values embodied in a particular norm. These ideas and values are perceived as having substantial significance for the broader collective interest.

Based on the empirical findings, this study identifies ideational commitment as the dominant motivation underlying SMIIC's promotion of global halal norms. As reflected in its vision and mission, SMIIC presents the harmonization of halal standards as a means of strengthening economic development and improving the welfare of its member states. The principal mechanism through which this objective is pursued is the formulation, adoption, and dissemination of halal standards and technical guidelines across various sectors. These include, among others, the General Requirements for Halal Food (OIC/SMIIC 1:2019), standards for halal cosmetics, and standards for halal pharmaceutical products.

To facilitate a clearer understanding of the norm-emergence stage in SMIIC's norm-diffusion process, the main actors, motivations, mechanisms, and expected outcomes are summarized in the following table.

Table 1. SMIIC's Global Halal Norm Harmonization at the Norm Emergence

Analytical Dimension	Norm Emergence
Actors	Turkey and SMIIC function as norm entrepreneurs, promoting global halal norms to OIC member states.
Motives	The harmonization of halal standards across the Muslim world is intended to promote economic development and improve the collective welfare of OIC member states.
Dominant Mechanism	Norm entrepreneurs successfully persuade OIC member states through the formulation, negotiation, and adoption of a series of

	halal standards and technical guidelines within the SMIIC framework.
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Source: Adapted from Finnemore & Sikkink (1998); elaborated by the authors.

The second stage of the Norm Life Cycle is norm cascade. At this stage, norms that have reached a tipping point begin to diffuse more rapidly and are increasingly accepted by other actors within the international system. According to Finnemore & Sikkink, a tipping point can be identified through two principal indicators. First, norm tipping occurs when approximately one-third of the states within a given international system have adopted the promoted norm. Second, a tipping point may also be reached when one or more critical states formally endorse the norm, thereby encouraging broader acceptance by other states. Once either or both of these conditions are satisfied, the diffusion process enters the norm cascade stage.

As discussed earlier, at the time this article was written, 45 of the 57 OIC member states had become members of SMIIC. This means that approximately 79 percent of all OIC member states had joined SMIIC as either Party Members or Observer Members, while 42 states held the status of Party Members. This level of participation substantially exceeds Finnemore & Sikkink's threshold of one-third of states required for a norm to reach the tipping point. From the perspective of the Norm Life Cycle, therefore, the diffusion of global halal norms through SMIIC has clearly entered the norm cascade stage, where the harmonization of halal standards has acquired broader institutional acceptance throughout the OIC community.

During the norm cascade phase, efforts to promote the adoption of newly established norms become increasingly intensive and are generally met with limited domestic resistance. In the case of SMIIC, the cascading of global halal norms is reflected in a wide range of activities, including technical training programs, international exhibitions, academic forums, and intergovernmental cooperation agreements. These initiatives are specifically designed to encourage OIC member states to adopt and implement SMIIC's global halal standards (SMIIC Training, <https://smiic.org/en/training>).

Among the most prominent initiatives are the Basic Training on OIC/SMIIC 1:2019 Halal Food Standards, delivered in English, and capacity-building programmes conducted in French for Francophone member states. In addition, SMIIC regularly organizes specialized training on OIC/SMIIC 2:2019, which governs the requirements for halal certification bodies, and OIC/SMIIC 3:2019, which addresses conformity assessment for halal certification. Through these programmes, SMIIC not only disseminates technical knowledge but also strengthens institutional capacities for the implementation of harmonized halal standards across the Muslim world.

According to Finnemore & Sikkink, the diffusion of norms during the norm cascade stage is driven by a variety of actors, including international organizations, states, and transnational networks acting as agents of socialization. These actors encourage and, in

some cases, exert pressure on target states to adopt new policies, legal frameworks, and international agreements while promoting compliance with internationally recognized standards. The cumulative effect of multiple actors adopting the same norm generates what Finnemore & Sikkink describe as peer pressure, whereby the increasing acceptance of a norm by one group of actors encourages its adoption by others.

This mechanism is clearly observable in SMIIC's efforts to harmonize halal standards. At the time this study was conducted, SMIIC comprised 45 member states, of which 42 were Party Members and 3 were Observer Members. Consequently, forty-two OIC member states had formally ratified the Statute of the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC), demonstrating a broad institutional commitment to the organization's objectives.¹ From the perspective of norm diffusion theory, this widespread ratification reflects the operation of peer pressure and indicates that global halal norms have entered the norm cascade stage.

The third and final stage of the Norm Life Cycle is norm internalization. At this stage, international norms become widely accepted, institutionalized, and taken for granted as legitimate standards of appropriate behaviour. Within the SMIIC framework, the OIC/SMIIC 1:2019 Halal Food Standard has become one of the principal references for halal regulation among member states. Indonesia, for example, as a Party Member of SMIIC, explicitly refers to OIC/SMIIC 1:2019 in its national halal standard, SNI 99004:2021, thereby demonstrating the incorporation of global halal norms into its domestic regulatory framework.²

The influence of SMIIC standards extends beyond OIC member states. They have also been adopted as reference documents by international halal certification organizations, including the World Halal Trust, a global certification body specializing in the certification and inspection of halal product manufacturing.³ The acceptance and application of SMIIC standards by both state and non-state actors indicate that these standards have acquired substantial normative legitimacy within the global halal governance regime. Viewed through Finnemore & Sikkink's Norm Life Cycle framework, these developments demonstrate that the diffusion of SMIIC's global halal norms has progressed beyond the stages of emergence and cascade to reach the stage of norm internalization, where the standards are increasingly institutionalized and regarded as authoritative references within the international halal system.

Turkey: A Norm Entrepreneur or A Norm Stimulator?

Finnemore & Sikkink (1998) define norm entrepreneurs as actors that play a pivotal role in introducing and promoting new norms through particular organizational platforms. As they argue:

¹ <https://smiic.org/en/members>

² See General Requirements for Indonesian Halal Food SNI 99004:2021 in the bibliography section.

³ See the World Halal Trust Quality Manual 2021

"Norm entrepreneurs are critical for norm emergence because they call attention to issues, or even 'create' issues by using language that names, interprets, and dramatizes them. Social movement theorists refer to this reinterpretation or renaming process as 'framing'."

They further emphasize that:

"Norm entrepreneurs attempt to convince a critical mass of states (norm leaders) to embrace new norms."

These propositions suggest that the primary role of a norm entrepreneur is to persuade a critical mass of states to accept and institutionalize emerging international norms. This process is achieved through framing, agenda-setting, norm promotion, and the strategic dissemination of ideas that ultimately become embedded within domestic institutions and international governance frameworks.

In the context of global halal standardization, Turkey assumed this role by framing the diversity of Islamic jurisprudential schools (*madhāhib*) as a practical obstacle to the development of an integrated halal market among Muslim countries. According to this framing, differences in halal standards derived from varying jurisprudential interpretations could generate regulatory fragmentation, increase transaction costs, and impede the free circulation of halal products across OIC member states. Consequently, Turkey promoted the universalization of halal standards as a mechanism for establishing a common conformity assessment system capable of facilitating the exchange of raw materials, manufactured goods, and halal-certified products through mutual recognition.

This study identifies **Turkey as norms entrepreneur** because it played the leading role in initiating discussions, conducting technical studies, and promoting the feasibility of harmonizing halal standards throughout the Muslim world. However, a closer examination of the empirical evidence suggests that Turkey's role extended beyond that of a conventional norm entrepreneur. The findings indicate that Turkey also functioned as **norms stimulator**. In addition to introducing and promoting the idea of global halal harmonization among OIC member states, Turkey actively stimulated the institutional development of SMIIC by providing sustained political leadership, technical expertise, and financial support during its formative years.

From this perspective, Turkey did not merely advocate a new international norm but also invested in building the institutional capacity required for that norm to diffuse and become operational. By supporting SMIIC's organizational development and facilitating the implementation of its technical programs, Turkey created the structural conditions necessary for the diffusion and institutionalization of global halal standards within the OIC framework. Therefore, this study argues that Turkey's contribution exceeds the conventional role of a norm entrepreneur as conceptualized by Finnemore & Sikkink. Turkey functioned simultaneously as a norm entrepreneur, by framing and promoting halal harmonization, and as a norm stimulator, by mobilizing the institutional, financial, and political resources necessary to sustain the diffusion of global halal norms.

The identification of Turkey as a norm stimulator in the effort to universalize halal standards across the Muslim world is supported by several arguments. First, this role can be traced to the historical background of SMIIC's establishment. As previously discussed, the idea of harmonizing halal standards among OIC member states first emerged in 1984 during the inaugural meeting of the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the OIC (COMCEC), which was chaired by the President of Turkey. At that meeting, Turkey emphasized that the national standardization bodies of OIC member states should align their domestic standards in order to eliminate technical barriers to trade and promote greater commercial exchange among Muslim countries.

This historical evidence demonstrates that Turkey did not merely participate in the institutionalization of halal standardization after SMIIC was established. Rather, it played an initiating role by introducing the issue into the OIC agenda, framing regulatory diversity as a barrier to intra-OIC trade, and encouraging member states to pursue harmonization. Turkey thus created the initial political and institutional momentum for the emergence of a common halal standardization framework (SMIIC Annual Report 2012).

Second, Turkey's role as a norm stimulator is also evident in the financial provisions of the SMIIC Statute. Article 9, under the section on finance, stipulates that:

*"The Turkish Standards Institution will cover the expenses of the Institute for the first three years of its establishment."*⁴

This provision indicates that Turkey, through the Turkish Standards Institution (TSE), assumed responsibility for financing SMIIC during the first three years of its institutional operation. Such financial support illustrates the magnitude of Turkey's contribution to the establishment and early consolidation of SMIIC. Turkey did not simply promote the idea of halal standard harmonization; it also provided the material resources necessary to transform that idea into a functioning international institution.

On this basis, Turkey's role may be understood as extending beyond conventional norm entrepreneurship. While a norm entrepreneur introduces, frames, and promotes a new norm, a norm stimulator additionally supplies the institutional, financial, political, or technical resources required to accelerate its diffusion and operationalization. Turkey therefore functioned as both a norm entrepreneur and a norm stimulator: it promoted the universalization of halal standards at the ideational level while simultaneously financing and facilitating the institutional infrastructure through which those standards could be developed and disseminated.

Third, the first halal standard proposed within the COMCEC-OIC framework was Turkey's national halal standard, developed by the Turkish Standards Institution (TSE). This draft subsequently became the basis upon which OIC member states were invited to provide comments and recommendations during the preparation of the SMIIC Statute.

⁴ See Statute for SMIIC 2017, article 9 (2), <https://smiic.org/mysql/upload/files/201706/594389f66d48b-1497598454.pdf>

Following a series of consultations and revisions, the draft was formally approved and signed by OIC member states at the 15th COMCEC Meeting, held in Istanbul, Turkey, from 4 to 7 November 1999. This process demonstrates that Turkey's national standard served as the primary normative reference during the formative stage of SMIIC's institutional development.

Fourth, Turkey's influence is further reflected in the leadership of SMIIC. İhsan Övüt, who previously served as Director of Agreements and Foreign Relations at the Turkish Standards Institution (TSE), was elected Secretary General of SMIIC during the 7th General Assembly, held in Istanbul on 20 November 2014. He was subsequently re-elected for the 2025–2027 term at the 18th SMIIC General Assembly, convened in Istanbul on 13 November 2024, and continues to serve in this position.⁵ The continuity of leadership by a senior official with extensive experience in Turkey's national standardization authority highlights the country's sustained institutional influence within SMIIC and its ongoing commitment to advancing the harmonization of halal standards across the Muslim world.

Fifth, SMIIC's headquarters is permanently located in Istanbul, Turkey, reinforcing Turkey's central role as the institutional hub of global halal standardization within the OIC framework. The organization's permanent secretariat and administrative infrastructure are based in Istanbul, providing the operational center for coordinating standard development, conformity assessment, accreditation, technical committees, and capacity-building activities among member states.

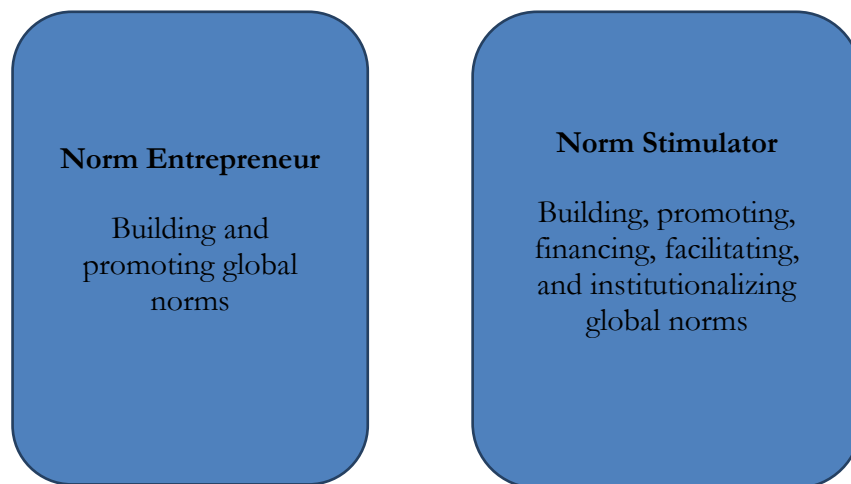
Taken together, these five strands of evidence support the argument that Turkey should be understood not only as a norm entrepreneur, but also as a norm stimulator in the diffusion of global halal norms. Turkey's contribution extends well beyond initiating and promoting the idea of halal harmonization. It has consistently provided the institutional leadership, technical expertise, financial support, organizational infrastructure, and normative reference necessary for the establishment, consolidation, and continued expansion of SMIIC. Consequently, the harmonization of halal standards within the OIC cannot be adequately explained without recognizing Turkey's pivotal role in stimulating and sustaining the institutional mechanisms through which global halal norms have emerged, diffused, and become increasingly internalized across the Muslim world.

From a theoretical perspective, this study therefore proposes norm stimulator as an extension of Finnemore & Sikkink's concept of norm entrepreneur. Whereas a norm entrepreneur primarily frames, introduces, and promotes new international norms, a norm stimulator additionally mobilizes and sustains the institutional, financial, organizational, and political resources necessary for those norms to diffuse effectively and become

⁵ Biography of İhsan Övüt, <https://congress.halal.ba/speakers/ihsanovut>

embedded within international governance structures. In the case of SMIIC, Turkey performed both roles simultaneously, thereby making a distinctive contribution to the institutionalization of global halal governance.

Figure 2. Differences between Norm Entrepreneur and Norm Stimulator



How, then, does Turkey operationalize its role as a norm stimulator? To answer this question, this study continues to draw upon the analytical logic of Finnemore & Sikkink (1998), who identify three principal strategies through which norm entrepreneurs promote and diffuse international norms. *First*, norm entrepreneurs may internalize a norm within their own foreign policy and employ it as a guiding principle of external engagement. *Second*, they may advocate new norms through diplomatic persuasion and coalition-building among states. *Third*, they may utilize international institutions and organizations as organizational platforms through which norms can be disseminated more effectively to a wider community of actors.

This study argues that Turkey adopted the third strategy. Rather than relying primarily on unilateral diplomacy or bilateral persuasion, Turkey promoted the universalization of halal standards through the institutional framework of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), particularly the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC). Through this organizational platform, the idea of harmonized halal standards gradually evolved into a formal institutional project, culminating in the establishment of the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC). SMIIC subsequently became the principal mechanism through which global halal norms were developed, institutionalized, and disseminated among OIC member states.

Accordingly, this study contends that Turkey's norm stimulator model consists of four interconnected elements: (1) generating and framing new international norms, (2) mobilizing political and diplomatic support within international organizations, (3) establishing and sustaining an organizational platform for norm diffusion, and (4) providing the institutional and financial resources necessary to ensure the long-term

diffusion and institutionalization of those norms. These four elements distinguish the concept of norm stimulator from the conventional understanding of norm entrepreneur, which primarily emphasizes norm promotion rather than the sustained construction and maintenance of institutional mechanisms for norm diffusion.

Dynamics and Fragmentation of SMIIC's Global Halal Norms

Despite the significant progress achieved through SMIIC, the harmonization of halal standards across the Muslim world continues to face considerable challenges. The diversity of Islamic legal schools constitutes one of the principal challenges to regulatory harmonization (Ahmed & Akbarzadeh, 2021; Atalan-Helicke, 2015; Erol, 2021; Miele, 2016). Across the Muslim world, Islamic jurisprudence is broadly represented by three major traditions: Sunni Islam, Shi'a Islam, and Ibadi Islam. Within Sunni Islam, four classical schools of jurisprudence predominate Shāfi'ī, Ḥanafī, Mālikī, and Ḥanbalī, each of which has developed distinct legal interpretations concerning halal-related issues, including slaughtering methods, ingredients, processing practices, and conformity assessment. These doctrinal variations have contributed to differences in national halal regulations and certification systems.

The geographical distribution of these jurisprudential traditions further illustrates the complexity of harmonization. In Southeast Asia, countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam predominantly adhere to the Shāfi'ī school. By contrast, Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and several Central Asian states primarily follow the Ḥanafī tradition. In North Africa, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Mali, and Senegal are predominantly associated with the Mālikī school, while Saudi Arabia officially adopts the Ḥanbalī school as the foundation of its legal system (Okon, 2012). These jurisprudential differences have shaped national halal governance frameworks and, in some cases, generated divergent interpretations of halal requirements, thereby complicating efforts to establish a universally accepted halal standard within the OIC.

The following jurisprudential tradition within the OIC is Shi'a Islam, which constitutes the religious majority in Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, and parts of Yemen. In Iran and Iraq, the dominant tradition is Twelver Shi'ism (Ithnā 'Asharī), whereas Zaydi Shi'ism is predominantly practiced in Yemen. The third and smallest jurisprudential tradition represented within the OIC is Ibadi Islam, which is primarily concentrated in Oman.

Beyond jurisprudential diversity, regional political influence has also contributed to the fragmentation of halal standards within the Muslim world. As one of the most influential members of the OIC, Saudi Arabia has played a prominent role in shaping halal governance by promoting regulatory approaches rooted in the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence. This influence is particularly evident in the establishment of the Gulf Standardization Organization (GSO) in 2001, which developed a unified halal standard for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states, namely Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (Abdallah et al., 2021).

Under the GSO framework, national standardization bodies are required to adopt GSO halal standards as mandatory national standards while eliminating conflicting domestic regulations. Consequently, GSO standards have become the official halal standards across the Gulf region.

In practice, the GSO halal standards reflect legal interpretations that are strongly influenced by the conservative Hanbali-Wahhabi tradition promoted by Saudi Arabia. This jurisprudential orientation has generated important differences between the GSO standards and the OIC/SMIIC 1:2019 Halal Food Standard, which was developed under substantial technical leadership from Turkey and therefore reflects, to a significant extent, the Hanafi legal tradition.

One of the clearest examples concerns the method of halal slaughter. GSO 993:2015 explicitly prohibits the use of a sawing action during slaughter. By contrast, OIC/SMIIC 1:2019 permits a sawing motion provided that the knife remains in continuous contact with the animal's neck and is not lifted during the cutting process. This difference is closely associated with the jurisprudential foundations of the respective standards. Within the Hanafi school, a valid slaughter generally requires the severance of the trachea, esophagus, both carotid arteries, and both jugular veins (*al-wadajayn*). Because multiple anatomical structures must be cut, a controlled sawing motion is considered permissible as long as the knife is not removed from the incision. In contrast, the Hanbali tradition, which substantially informs the GSO standard, regards the severance of the trachea and esophagus as the essential legal requirement, while cutting the carotid arteries and jugular veins is recommended but not obligatory. Consequently, the use of a repeated sawing motion is generally discouraged or prohibited under the GSO standard (Abdallah et al., 2021).

Another jurisprudential tradition that has expressed reservations regarding the SMIIC halal standards is Shi'a Islam, particularly as represented by Iran. Although Iran is a member of SMIIC, it has repeatedly called upon the COMCEC and SMIIC to ensure that the development of halal standards does not exclusively reflect Sunni jurisprudential perspectives. Iranian representatives have argued that Shi'a legal interpretations should also be accommodated, at least in areas where jurisprudential diversity significantly affects halal regulations.

These concerns arise from substantive differences between Shi'a and Sunni interpretations of Islamic dietary law. One notable example concerns the permissibility of aquatic animals. Under the Twelver Shi'a tradition, only fish with scales and shrimp are considered halal, whereas other aquatic species are generally regarded as impermissible for consumption.⁶ Consequently, Iran's national halal standards recognize only scaled fish and shrimp as halal seafood products. By contrast, the majority of Sunni

⁶ See Halal Food – General Guidelines, ISIRI 12000:1992

jurisprudential schools generally consider all aquatic animals to be permissible, except for those that are poisonous or harmful to human health. These differing legal interpretations have produced divergent national halal standards and illustrate the continuing challenge of achieving a universally accepted halal framework within the OIC.

The fragmentation of halal standards becomes even more complex when examining the practices of Sunni-majority SMIIC member states themselves. The findings of this study indicate that even countries adhering to the same Shāfi'ī school of Islamic jurisprudence, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, have developed halal standards that differ in several respects from the OIC/SMIIC 1:2019 Halal Food Standard. This suggests that jurisprudential similarity alone does not necessarily result in regulatory convergence. Instead, national legal traditions, regulatory preferences, and institutional contexts continue to shape the localization of global halal norms.

A comparison of the Indonesian and Malaysian halal standards with OIC/SMIIC 1:2019 reveals differences in at least three areas: (1) the definition of animal carcasses (*al-maytah*), (2) the regulation of alcohol in food and beverages, and (3) the requirements for halal production facilities. Regarding the definition of animal carcasses (*al-maytah*), OIC/SMIIC 1:2019 provides a relatively concise definition:

*“Dead animals (al-Maita) – animal which has died prior to slaughtering or the pieces cut from the animal before it is slaughtered.”*⁷

Indonesia, despite being a Party Member of SMIIC, adopts a more detailed formulation in SNI 99004:2021 (General Requirements for Halal Food). The Indonesian standard classifies *al-maytah* as animals that die without proper slaughter, animals slaughtered without invoking the name of Allah, animals killed by beating (*al-mawqūdhah*), animals that die from falling (*al-mutaraddiyah*), and animals that die from goring or violent impact (*al-naṭīḥah*).⁸ These provisions reflect a broader incorporation of Qur'anic terminology and detailed Islamic legal classifications into the national halal standard.

By contrast, Malaysia's MS 1500:2019 adopts a considerably more concise approach by defining prohibited animals simply as:

*“Animals forbidden to be eaten in accordance with Shariah law and fatwa.”*⁹

A second area of divergence concerns the regulation of alcohol in food and beverage products. OIC/SMIIC 1:2019 adopts a strict prohibition on the use of alcohol, stating that:

*“All products and beverages containing alcohol are prohibited according to Islamic Rules even for cooking purposes or in filling in candies.”*¹⁰

⁷ See General Requirements for Halal Food OIC/SMIIC 1:2019

⁸ See General Requirements for Halal Food SNI 99004:2021

⁹ See Halal food - General Requirements (Third Edition), MS 1500:2019

¹⁰ See General Requirements for Halal Food OIC/SMIIC 1:2019

This absolute prohibition, however, is not fully reflected in Indonesia's national halal standard. SNI 99004:2021 permits the use of ethanol that is not derived from the *khamr* industry as an ingredient in halal food products, provided that the residual ethanol content does not exceed 0.5 percent. Indonesia therefore adopts a more differentiated regulatory approach by distinguishing between intoxicating alcoholic beverages (*khamr*) and non-*khamr* ethanol used for technological or industrial purposes.

Malaysia adopts a different regulatory position. Under MS 1500:2019, *khamr* and products contaminated with or containing *khamr* are classified as *najis* (ritually impure) and are therefore prohibited for consumption. Although both Indonesia and Malaysia prohibit intoxicating alcoholic beverages, their regulatory approaches differ in the treatment of industrial ethanol and alcohol-derived ingredients.

A third area of divergence relates to the requirements for halal production facilities. Malaysia's MS 1500:2019 requires halal manufacturing premises to provide prayer facilities for Muslim employees as part of the halal management environment. Indonesia's SNI 99004:2021 does not impose such a requirement. By contrast, OIC/SMIIC 1:2019 places greater emphasis on internationally recognized food safety and quality management systems by requiring halal production facilities to comply with internationally accepted standards, including the Codex Alimentarius and ISO 22000.

The preceding discussion demonstrates the complexity of the dynamics and fragmentation involved in the universalization of halal standards across the Muslim world through SMIIC. The evidence shows that fragmentation does not occur only between different schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Divergence also emerges among countries that adhere to the same school. Indonesia and Malaysia, for example, are both SMIIC members and predominantly follow the Shāfi'ī school, yet they maintain different interpretations and regulatory provisions concerning halal food. This finding confirms that shared jurisprudential affiliation does not automatically produce uniform halal standards.

In principle, Islamic norms concerning halal food should not constitute fundamentally contested norms, since Islam provides universal guidance requiring Muslims to consume food and beverages that are lawful, wholesome, safe, and beneficial (*halal and ṭayyib*) in accordance with the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Although patterns of food production and consumption vary considerably across countries, the determination of what is halal or prohibited can, in principle, be grounded in the universal normative categories established by Islamic revelation.

Nevertheless, institutions such as the OIC appear to function not only as arenas for resolving jurisprudential differences but also as sites in which rivalries among Islamic legal traditions are reproduced (Phillips & Gause, 2020.). A similar dynamic is evident in the discourse surrounding the harmonization of halal standards. Jurisprudential diversity becomes even more complex when it intersects with economic interests and market competition. Halal standards are no longer merely religious or technical instruments; they

have become central regulatory mechanisms in international trade. Since cross-border halal commerce requires predictable and mutually recognized rules, differences in jurisprudential interpretation and certification standards may create market uncertainty, increase compliance costs, and disrupt trade flows.

Market-based fragmentation among OIC member states can be observed in the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries. States such as Bahrain, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates have accepted the application of GSO standards promoted by Saudi Arabia, partly because Saudi Arabia represents a major regional market. Regulatory alignment with GSO standards therefore provides greater certainty and facilitates access to the Saudi market.

At the same time, although Saudi Arabia is a member of SMIIC, it continues to require halal products entering its market to comply with national regulations and standards administered by the Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA). Gulf countries whose national systems have already been harmonized through the GSO framework can trade more easily with Saudi Arabia. By contrast, OIC member states outside the GSO system must demonstrate equivalence or adjust their halal certification and production standards before their products can enter Saudi Arabia and other Gulf markets (Kamil et al., 2025).

This situation reveals that competing halal standards may function as instruments of regulatory protectionism. Jurisprudential differences can be translated into technical requirements that protect domestic or regional markets, privilege particular certification systems, and restrict the entry of foreign halal products. Consequently, the fragmentation of halal governance cannot be explained solely in terms of religious interpretation. It must also be understood as the outcome of interactions among jurisprudential authority, state regulation, regional power, and commercial interests. From this perspective, halal standardization constitutes an arena of both norm contestation and market competition. States and regional organizations do not merely debate the substantive meaning of halal; they also compete to determine whose standards will be recognized as authoritative in the global halal economy.

This fragmentation has prevented SMIIC's harmonization agenda from producing a single, universally implemented halal standard across the Muslim world. Although SMIIC has developed common technical guidelines, their implementation remains inconsistent because halal regulation continues to be highly localized. Each state operates under its own religious authority, domestic legal framework, regulatory institutions, and school of Islamic jurisprudence. As a result, the establishment of a single halal certificate recognized throughout the OIC remains difficult to achieve.

Consequently, SMIIC's aspiration to facilitate and expand intra-OIC halal trade has not yet been fully realized. In practice, a halal certificate recognized in the Gulf states may be rejected or subjected to additional verification and documentation requirements when presented in Indonesia, and the same problem may occur in the opposite direction.

Hakim and Amaliyah refer to these supplementary arrangements as Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs). In the Indonesian case, the number of bilateral and institutional MRAs has continued to increase despite Indonesia's membership in SMIIC. This development indicates that SMIIC has not yet succeeded in establishing a single halal standard and a universally recognized certification system throughout the Muslim world (Hakim & Amaliyah, 2024).

Differences among Sunni legal schools, as well as between Sunni, Shi'a, and Wahhabi-oriented interpretations, should not necessarily constitute insurmountable obstacles to harmonization. However, political actors may construct, reinforce, and instrumentalize sectarian and jurisprudential distinctions as mechanisms of social control, political influence, and geopolitical expansion. This process creates a strong interaction between religious identity and political-economic strategy. Religious identity, including the fragmentation of Islamic legal schools, may therefore be mobilized as an instrument for pursuing commercial, regulatory, and geopolitical objectives.

In this context, Blackler acknowledges that the establishment of an international halal standard is extremely difficult. However, she does not attribute this difficulty primarily to differences among Islamic schools of jurisprudence. Instead, the principal obstacle lies in market logic, particularly the economic interests of states, certification institutions, standard-setting bodies, and industry actors seeking to preserve regulatory authority and market advantage (Bergeaud-Blackler et al., 2016). From this perspective, jurisprudential differences may provide a religious vocabulary through which disputes are articulated, while the underlying drivers of fragmentation are often competition for market access, certification revenues, institutional authority, and regulatory influence.

This argument represents a major challenge for SMIIC. The organization is required not only to accommodate the jurisprudential interests and religious sensitivities of its member states but also to address the political-economic logic underlying their respective halal markets. Effective harmonization therefore requires more than agreement on Islamic legal principles. It also demands mechanisms for regulatory equivalence, mutual recognition, institutional trust, transparent conformity assessment, and the management of competing national and regional economic interests.

CONCLUSION

The dominance of a single member state in the establishment of SMIIC presents a distinct challenge for the harmonization of halal standards within the Islamic world. This study develops Finnemore and Sikkink's idea about the norm entrepreneur. At the norm emergence stage, the establishment of SMIIC cannot be separated from Turkey's role, not only as norm entrepreneur, but also as norm stimulator. Operationalization of norm stimulator can be seen primarily from providing sustained political leadership, technical expertise, and financial support during its formative years.

The findings therefore demonstrate that norm diffusion is neither linear nor uniform. Although SMIIC has achieved broad institutional acceptance, its standards are

frequently localized, adapted, or contested within national regulatory environments. The internalization of global halal norms does not necessarily produce a single and fully uniform halal regime. Instead, it generates a pattern of adaptive regulatory convergence, in which shared international principles coexist with national legal, religious, and economic variations.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author was responsible for developing the study concept, defining the research problem, designing the methodology, collecting and processing the data, conducting the analysis, interpreting the results, drafting the original manuscript, validating the findings, revising the manuscript, and preparing the final version. The second author contributed to the validation process, critically reviewed and revised the manuscript, and participated in preparing and approving the final version of the article.

AI USAGE STATEMENT

The authors utilized ChatGPT solely to support English-language editing, including grammatical corrections and improvements in writing style during the drafting and revision of the manuscript. The tool was not used for substantive intellectual work. All analyses, interpretations of the results, development of arguments, and final editorial judgments were independently conducted, reviewed, and verified by the authors. The authors assume full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the published article.

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