

Scholarly Representations of MTA's Interpretations of Halal and Haram Food: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Academic studies of Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA) have discussed dietary rulings, scriptural interpretation, and religious authority, but their findings remain dispersed across publications with different objects and evidentiary value. This article examines how the selected literature represents four interrelated dimensions of MTA's theology of lawful and prohibited food: scriptural foundations, interpretive methodology, the construction of *halal* (lawful), *haram* (prohibited), and *ṭayyib* (wholesome or good), and religious authority. It employs a qualitative literature review of academic publications identified through Google Scholar, Scopus, Crossref, Dimensions, Garuda, and DOAJ. The sources were analyzed thematically while distinguishing studies that directly examine MTA from contextual scholarship on Qur'anic food concepts. Direct evidence represents MTA as grounding dietary classifications primarily in the Qur'an and Hadith. Other MTA-specific studies describe its approach as text-oriented while also identifying interpretive revision, limited forms of legal reasoning, institutional publications, and organizational authority. Contextual scholarship broadens the meaning of *ṭayyib*, but does not establish that MTA adopts all its ethical, health-related, or environmental dimensions. The review integrates the four dimensions into a bounded account of how academic literature has represented MTA's dietary theology. Its conclusions remain limited by the small and heterogeneous body of MTA-specific food research.

Keywords: *Islamic Dietary Theology; Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an; Qur'anic Interpretation; Religious Authority; Literature Review*

A. Introduction

Islamic discussions of food distinguish between *halal* (lawful) and *haram* (prohibited) while also considering whether permitted food is *ṭayyib*, or wholesome and beneficial. These categories connect dietary practice with Islamic law, scriptural interpretation, ethical responsibility, and spiritual discipline. Studies of Islamic dietary principles have examined prohibited sources, food processing, and Qur'anic interpretations of *halal* and *ṭayyib* (Hussain, Ahmad, and Ali 2024; Kashim et al. 2015; Poni et al. 2025; Syahputra et al. 2023). Structured reviews further show that halal-food scholarship spans legal, industrial, ethical, and consumer-related concerns, although these fields do not

share the same theological focus (Secinaro and Calandra 2020). Qur'anic studies also demonstrate differences between textual and contextual interpretive approaches (Ridho et al. 2025), while comparative exegetical research documents varying constructions of *halal*, *haram*, and *ṭayyib* (Syaifullah, Sulthoni, and Saputra 2025). This literature provides the broader interpretive context for examining MTA without treating general Islamic dietary concepts as MTA doctrine.

Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA) provides a specific Indonesian context in which these questions have been examined. MTA is generally associated with close reliance on the Qur'an and Hadith in formulating religious positions. Nashirudin's (2016) study of MTA's views on lawful and prohibited food analyzes this orientation through *uṣūl al-fiqh*, particularly the sources and reasoning used to determine dietary rulings. Research on MTA has also examined its preaching and religious mobilization (Sunarwoto 2012), organizational and socio-religious development (Sugiyarto 2012; Faddad SZ 2019), and interactions between adherents and surrounding communities (Hasim 2014). These studies clarify MTA's institutional setting but do not constitute direct evidence of its dietary doctrine. Broader Qur'anic studies provide further comparative context through semantic-historical and comparative interpretations of *halal* and *ṭayyib* (Khairunnisa and Ahmad 2023; Syahputra et al. 2023).

The literature assembled for this review therefore consists of two related but analytically distinct bodies of scholarship: studies that directly examine MTA and studies that provide contextual discussions of Islamic dietary concepts and Qur'anic interpretation. Previous discussions have addressed particular concepts, verses, and methods of legal reasoning, but their relevance to scholarly representations of MTA has not been organized into a clearly differentiated synthesis. An analysis of this literature must distinguish claims based directly on MTA-focused research from comparisons drawn from broader scholarship on *halal*, *haram*, and *ṭayyib*. This distinction is necessary to avoid attributing general interpretations of Islamic dietary law to MTA without adequate evidence.

Accordingly, this article examines how existing academic literature has represented MTA's theological understanding of lawful and prohibited food and identifies the dominant interpretive patterns emerging from that scholarship. It synthesizes representations of four interrelated dimensions: scriptural foundations, interpretive methodology, the construction of *halal*, *haram*, and *ṭayyib*, and religious authority. The article does not reconstruct MTA doctrine from the organization's complete corpus of primary texts; rather, it organizes and critically evaluates how existing academic publications have described these dimensions. Its contribution is therefore limited to clarifying the relationships

among the four dimensions and identifying where direct evidence about MTA can – and cannot – support broader conclusions.

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative literature review to examine how academic publications have represented Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA)'s theological understanding of lawful and prohibited food. This design was appropriate because the study did not reconstruct MTA doctrine directly from the organization's complete corpus of primary texts. Instead, it analyzed the arguments, interpretations, and findings reported in academic studies concerning MTA's dietary rulings, interpretive methodology, and religious authority. The review followed a thematic approach in which publications were compared according to their contribution to the research objectives (Snyder 2019).

The literature search was conducted between May and July 2026 using Google Scholar, Scopus, Crossref, Dimensions, Garuda, and DOAJ. Search terms were used individually and in combination, including "Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an," "MTA," "halal food," "haram food," "halal and *ṭayyib*," "Islamic dietary law," "Qur'anic interpretation," "religious authority," and "Indonesian Islamic movements." The search prioritized publications issued between 2021 and Early 2026. Earlier studies were retained when they directly examined MTA, constituted important references on its interpretive history, or provided evidence unavailable in more recent publications.

Eligible sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books or book chapters, conference proceedings, and institutional theses relevant to MTA's dietary interpretation or interpretive practices. Sources were included when they addressed at least one of three areas: MTA's understanding of *halal* (lawful), *haram* (prohibited), or *ṭayyib* (wholesome or good); MTA's interpretive methodology or religious authority; or Qur'anic dietary concepts needed to contextualize the MTA-specific literature. Publications concerned exclusively with certification, marketing, consumer behavior, food technology, or biomedical issues were excluded unless they contained a clearly relevant theological or interpretive argument. Duplicate records, nonacademic opinion pieces, inaccessible publications, and sources without sufficient information for evaluating their relevance were also excluded.

Table 1.
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication type	Journal articles, scholarly books or chapters, conference proceedings, and institutional theses	Blogs, popular articles, anonymous materials, and unpublished opinion pieces

Publication period	Priority given to 2021–Early 2026; earlier sources retained when directly relevant to MTA	Older sources without a clear historical, methodological, or substantive function
Subject	MTA’s dietary theology, interpretation, legal reasoning, religious authority, or relevant Qur’anic food concepts	Certification, marketing, technology, or consumer studies without theological relevance
Evidence relationship	Direct MTA studies and clearly identified contextual literature	Sources cited as evidence about MTA despite not examining MTA
Accessibility	Sufficient metadata and accessible content for relevance assessment	Sources whose identity, content, or attribution could not be verified

Source: Authors’ review criteria.

The selected publications were read and coded according to four thematic categories derived from the study’s original focus: (1) scriptural foundations; (2) interpretive methodology; (3) the construction of *halal*, *haram*, and *ṭayyib*; and (4) religious authority. For presentation, the first and third categories were discussed together, as were the second and fourth, followed by a section synthesizing the relationships among all four categories and identifying gaps in the available literature. During analysis, the review also distinguished studies directly examining MTA’s dietary views, MTA-specific studies of other interpretive or institutional issues, and contextual studies of Qur’anic food concepts. This distinction prevented general halal scholarship from being treated as direct evidence of MTA’s position.

Within each domain, arguments and findings were compared to identify recurring representations, disagreements, and limitations in the available evidence. Interpretations were checked across publications by different authors and disciplinary perspectives. The analysis did not determine whether MTA’s theological conclusions were correct. It synthesized how academic literature described and evaluated those conclusions.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

The analysis identified four interrelated dimensions in scholarly representations of MTA: scriptural foundations, interpretive methodology, the construction of *halal*, *haram*, and *ṭayyib*, and religious authority. For clarity, these dimensions are presented in two paired thematic sections, followed by an integrated synthesis of their relationships and the principal gaps in the available evidence.

Table 2.
Synthesis of the Core Literature

<https://journal.ar-raniry.ac.id/index.php/jsai>

Source	Primary focus	Relationship to MTA	Principal finding relevant to this review	Function in the synthesis
Salamah (2015)	MTA's interpretation of Qur'anic verses on lawful and prohibited food	Direct – food	MTA's materials give priority to the Qur'an and Hadith in explaining dietary rulings.	Supports the identification of MTA's scriptural foundation.
Nashirudin (2016)	MTA's position on lawful and prohibited food	Direct – food	MTA identifies scripturally prohibited food categories and uses Hadith to explain Qur'anic provisions.	Provides direct evidence of dietary classifications and legal reasoning.
Asif (2015)	Historical development of <i>Tafsir</i> MTA	Direct – interpretation	MTA's interpretation developed through correction and revision rather than remaining static.	Qualifies descriptions of MTA as practicing fixed literalism.
Sunarwoto (2014)	MTA exegesis and ideology	Direct – interpretation	MTA's exegetical production is connected with its broader religious orientation.	Relates textual interpretation to institutional positioning.
Nashirudin and Mudofir (2018)	MTA fatwas and Sunday morning brochures	Direct – method and authority	The brochures function as institutional religious guidance; limited uses of <i>ijmā'</i> and <i>qiyās</i> are also identified.	Shows that MTA's reasoning involves more than scriptural quotation.
Muhsin and Ghufon (2018)	MTA as a puritan Islamic movement	Direct – organization	Scriptural resources, leadership, preaching, and organizational structures contribute to	Explains the institutional dimension of authority.

			MTA's mobilization.
Umami (2020)	Sources used in MTA interpretation	Direct – interpretation on	The study questions the consistency between MTA's stated principles and some sources used in its commentary.
Maimun (2021)	Movement from NU affiliation to MTA	Direct – authority and reception	Scriptural clarity and certainty are reported among the considerations attracting participants to MTA.
Nihayati (2023)	Hermeneutical analysis of an MTA fatwa	Direct – method, nonfood issue	An MTA ruling may differ from positions generally regarded as traditional or majoritarian.
Sukron et al. (2025)	MTA's reasoning about women's Friday prayer	Direct – method, nonfood issue	The study describes MTA as reading Qur'an 62:9 textually while also using Hadith analysis and contextual reasoning in addressing women's Friday prayer.
Khairunnisa and Ahmad (2023)	Comparative Qur'anic interpretation of lawful food	Contextual – not MTA-specific	The relationship between <i>halal</i> and <i>ṭayyib</i> may involve ingredients, acquisition, cleanliness, and individual suitability.
Syahputra et al. (2023)	Semantic-historical	Contextual – not	Lawful consumption is
			Represents scholarly disagreement about MTA's methodology.
			Clarifies the reception of MTA's scriptural authority.
			Demonstrates the limitations of a single literalist label.
			Provides contemporary comparative evidence about interpretive practice.
			Supplies comparative context, not evidence of MTA's position.
			Clarifies the wider field of

	analysis of Qur'an 2:168	MTA-specific	situated within legal, ethical, and historical meanings.	Qur'anic dietary interpretation .
Takami and Aghwan (2024)	Conceptual framework of <i>halalan tayyiban</i>	Contextual –not MTA-specific	<i>Halalan tayyiban</i> combines legal permissibility with goodness or wholesomeness.	Provides conceptual comparison without establishing MTA doctrine.
Poni et al. (2025)	Lawful and wholesome food in <i>Tafsir al-Misbah</i>	Contextual –not MTA-specific	Food may be lawful but unsuitable for a particular person because of its condition or effects.	Illustrates a contextual interpretation that cannot automatically be attributed to MTA.
Firdous and Yasin (2026)	Islamic food ethics and sustainability	Contextual –not MTA-specific	Islamic food ethics can encompass ecological responsibility and social justice.	Identifies a comparative research direction, not a finding about MTA.

Source: Authors' synthesis of the literature reviewed.

1) Theological Foundations and Dietary Categories

The most direct studies represent MTA as grounding dietary rulings in the Qur'an and Hadith. Nashirudin (2016) identifies four principal prohibited categories in the MTA sources examined: carrion, blood, pork, and animals slaughtered in a name other than that of God. Hadith is used to explain and specify the relevant Qur'anic provisions. Salamah (2015) likewise finds that MTA's interpretive materials give priority to Qur'anic verses and Hadith when discussing lawful and prohibited food. These publications provide the strongest direct evidence for characterizing MTA's dietary theology as scripturally grounded.

The contextual studies describe a wider relationship among *halal*, *haram*, and *tayyib*. They associate *tayyib* with cleanliness, safety, nutritional suitability, ethical acquisition, and human well-being (Khairunnisa and Ahmad 2023; Syahputra et al. 2023; Takami and Aghwan 2024; Poni et al. 2025). These findings clarify the broader Qur'anic discourse surrounding food, but they do not establish that MTA adopts every dimension identified in those studies. The evidence therefore supports a limited conclusion: scholarship directly represents MTA's position through scriptural classifications of lawful and prohibited food,

whereas MTA's institutional treatment of the wider ethical, health-related, and environmental meanings of *ṭayyib* remains insufficiently documented.

2) Interpretive Methodology and Religious Authority

MTA is commonly represented as text-oriented, but the reviewed studies do not support reducing its methodology to mechanical literalism. Nashirudin and Mudofir (2018) find that MTA's Sunday morning brochures function as institutionally produced sources of religious guidance and identify limited uses of *ijmā'* (scholarly consensus) and *qiyās* (analogical reasoning). Asif (2015) also shows that *Tafsir MTA* underwent correction and revision. MTA's interpretive practice therefore involves textual selection, explanation, legal reasoning, and institutional authorization.

Scholars differ in their evaluation of this process. Sunarwoto (2014) examines the relationship between interpretation and ideology, while Umami (2020) questions the consistency between MTA's declared principles and some sources used in its commentary. Nihayati (2023) and Sukron et al. (2025), although examining nonfood rulings, indicate that MTA-specific conclusions must be evaluated case by case and cannot always be predicted from a general literalist label. These publications support conclusions about interpretive methodology, but they do not constitute direct evidence about MTA's dietary rulings.

Studies of MTA's preaching, leadership, membership, and organizational communication add an institutional dimension. Muhsin and Ghufon (2018) describe scriptural resources, leadership, preaching activities, and organizational structures as interconnected elements of MTA's movement. Maimun (2021) identifies the perceived clarity and certainty of Qur'anic and Hadith-based reasoning as part of MTA's appeal. The literature consequently represents authority as arising not only from scriptural citation but also from the processes through which interpretations are formulated, circulated, and accepted.

3) Research Gaps and an Integrated Synthesis

The distribution of studies in Table 2 reveals an evidentiary imbalance. Publications directly examining MTA's understanding of lawful and prohibited food are fewer than studies discussing its general interpretive practices or Qur'anic food concepts more broadly. These bodies of literature are related but do not have the same evidentiary status. MTA-specific dietary studies support claims about food rulings, other MTA studies support claims about methodology and authority, and general halal studies provide conceptual and comparative context.

Across the MTA-specific literature, four dimensions form the integrated representation identified in this review. The Qur'an and Hadith provide the scriptural foundations for dietary classification. These sources are interpreted through a predominantly text-oriented methodology that may also involve limited forms of established legal reasoning. The resulting interpretations

construct the relationships among *halal*, *haram*, and *ṭayyib*, while institutional publications and organizational processes contribute to the formation and circulation of religious authority. These dimensions are analytically distinct but interconnected within the scholarship reviewed.

The evidence does not support every dimension equally. Scriptural foundations and classifications of prohibited food are documented more directly than MTA's application of *ṭayyib* to health, sustainability, or contemporary food ethics. The integrated synthesis therefore organizes how the literature represents MTA's dietary theology without treating broader contextual interpretations as MTA doctrine.

2. Discussion

The synthesis indicates that scholarly representations of MTA's dietary theology rest on a narrower evidentiary foundation than the breadth of the *halal* literature might initially suggest. The most defensible point of agreement is that MTA gives primary authority to the Qur'an and Hadith when classifying lawful and prohibited food. This pattern corresponds with broader Islamic dietary scholarship that treats revelation as the normative basis of food regulation (Kashim et al. 2015; Prasetyo 2020; Hussain, Ahmad, and Ali 2024). The correspondence does not, however, make general *halal* research evidence of MTA's institutional position. It establishes a shared conceptual context within which MTA-specific findings can be interpreted.

This distinction is particularly important for the concept of *ṭayyib*. Broader Qur'anic scholarship associates *ṭayyib* with cleanliness, safety, nutritional suitability, ethical acquisition, and, in some studies, ecological responsibility (Khairunnisa and Ahmad 2023; Syahputra et al. 2023; Takami and Aghwan 2024; Firdous and Yasin 2026). The direct MTA literature examined in this review provides substantially clearer evidence about legal classification than about these extended dimensions. Consequently, the article cannot conclude that MTA has incorporated health, sustainability, or contemporary food ethics into an integrated dietary theology. These dimensions are better treated as comparative questions for future MTA-specific research.

The second finding complicates the recurring description of MTA as simply literalist. The organization's emphasis on the Qur'an and Hadith supports its characterization as text-oriented, but interpretive revision, limited reliance on *ijmā'* and *qiyās*, and the institutional production of teaching materials indicate that its reasoning is not reducible to the direct reproduction of scriptural wording (Asif 2015; Nashirudin and Mudofir 2018). Critical studies also identify disagreements over the consistency and authority of particular interpretations (Umami 2020; Nihayati 2023). Within the limits of the reviewed literature, MTA's approach is more accurately described as text-oriented and institutionally

mediated: scripture remains primary, while its practical meaning is selected, explained, authorized, and circulated through organizational processes. This description is a synthesis of scholarly representations rather than a designation adopted by MTA itself.

The institutional dimension also explains why scriptural authority functions as more than an interpretive preference. Studies describe MTA's religious interpretations as being communicated through organized preaching, leadership structures, websites, and television-based religious programming (Muhsin and Ghufon 2018; Kusuma and Asmorowati 2021; Fabriar and Muhajarah 2021). Research on MTA's determination of Eid al-Adha similarly illustrates how scriptural interpretation operates through institutional decision-making outside dietary questions (Qusthalaani 2018). Maimun (2021) reports that perceived clarity and certainty in Qur'an- and Hadith-based reasoning formed part of MTA's appeal among the participants studied, while Rohmah (2019) documents how MTA's preaching and religious positioning may also shape its relations with surrounding communities. Religious authority is therefore represented as emerging from the relationship between scriptural justification and the institutional capacity to formulate and disseminate authorized interpretations. In dietary matters, this relationship helps explain how legal classifications may acquire communal significance even when evidence about their everyday application remains limited.

D. Conclusion

The reviewed literature represents MTA's understanding of lawful and prohibited food as primarily grounded in the Qur'an and Hadith. The most direct MTA-specific studies identify scriptural classification as the basis for determining prohibited food and describe Hadith as explaining Qur'anic dietary provisions. Broader interpretations of *ṭayyib* encompass health, safety, ethics, and sustainability, but the available evidence does not justify attributing all these dimensions to MTA.

Scholarship also portrays MTA's interpretive approach as text-oriented but institutionally mediated. The review integrates this representation through four interrelated dimensions: scriptural foundations, interpretive methodology, the construction of *halal*, *haram*, and *ṭayyib*, and religious authority. Scriptural texts provide the normative basis, while interpretation, limited forms of legal reasoning, teaching materials, and organizational processes shape how dietary positions are explained and authorized. This synthesis organizes the principal themes of the original literature without treating contextual halal scholarship as direct evidence of MTA doctrine.

The article's contribution is limited to organizing and clarifying scholarly representations of MTA; it does not reconstruct MTA doctrine directly or

establish how its adherents apply dietary teachings in everyday life. The small and heterogeneous body of MTA-specific food research also limits broader conclusions. Further research should analyze MTA's primary interpretive materials systematically and, where appropriate, compare those texts with institutional explanations and adherents' practices. Such evidence is necessary before stronger conclusions can be reached about MTA's treatment of *ṭayyib* and contemporary food-related questions.

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