

Examining the engagement of young consumers for religiously sanctioned food: the case of halal food in India

Yusuf Hassan and Jatin Pandey

Abstract

Purpose – Religion plays an important role in promoting and inhibiting consumption of goods and services. Halal food, for instance, represents one such food permitted by Islam. Within a broader category of consumers for religiously sanctioned products such as halal food, young consumers represent an important segment, as they have a high lifetime value, thereby requiring special attention. This study aims to identify and examine individual and social factors that can foster young consumer's engagement for halal products.

Design/methodology/approach – An inductive research approach using the Gioia method has been used to develop broader themes for discussion. The authors have also proposed a model for engaging young consumers for religiously sanctioned dietary products.

Findings – The paper provides empirical insights into the interplay of identities and value sources that encourages or forbids consumer engagement for halal products.

Practical implications – Globally, the halal food industry has been estimated to be worth \$580bn, and it is growing at an average rate of 7 per cent annually. Marketers, thus, need to be aware of diverse consumers' needs to provide a customized offering; they have to cater to adherent customers of these religiously sanctioned products by being sensitive to intricacies that make such food items consumable. The study will help marketers to better align their promotional strategies with the needs and requirement of young consumers.

Originality/value – In this paper, the authors have operationalized repeated interaction and associated consumption in the context of halal food to understand how religion and other factors play a role in strengthening or weakening consumer engagement. To the best of the authors' knowledge, no study has been done to understand young consumer's engagement for halal food products in the Indian context. India being a land of multi-religion and multi-culture, such studies can provide rich insights.

Keywords Young consumers, India, Halal, Consumer engagement, Gioia method, Religiously sanctioned food, Repeated consumption

Paper type Research paper

Yusuf Hassan is a doctoral student and Jatin Pandey is an Assistant Professor at the Indian Institute of Management Indore, Indore, India.

Introduction

Consumer engagement has been primarily defined in relation to an individual's repeated interaction that invariably strengthens his or her psychological or physical investments for a product, service or a brand (Chaffey, 2007), and it forms the central theme of discussion in this paper. Religion has both sociological and psychological mechanism to affect individual behavior (Pandey and Gupta, 2019; Pandey and Singh, 2019). Religion has unexpectedly evolved as an important element of consumer engagement for marketers (Miller and Miller, 2005) probably because of its instinctual nature, as religions and societies have been inextricably intertwined as ages. Religions influence the way societies behave (Yinger, 1957). One example to illustrate this intertwined relationship is, perhaps, the consumer

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products, such as food items because religion has been shaping the choice of food in many societies (Dindyal and Dindyal, 2003).

Halal foods are among the hundreds of other products whose purchase and consumption are believed to be largely determined by religion (Islam in this context), as it sanctions its use (Bonne *et al.*, 2008). The term *halal* is derived from the teachings of Quran, which means “being lawful or permitted” (Mathew, 2014). Further, it refers to the dietary standards set in Quran, thereby serving as a guiding principle for millions of Muslims across the world. Hence, the halal food has become a global symbol of quality and lifestyle (Lada *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, Islam comprises a quarter of the global population today. Within India, over 172 million people are followers of Islam (Census, 2011). Therefore, the global population of the community has made halal food a highly lucrative and promising field for marketers. Apart from the growing Muslim population, the changes in individual choices and preferences along with the demand for healthy and tasty food products have further expanded the marketplace for halal products (Burgmann, 2007). It is also believed that with the passage of time, people have become more tolerant in accepting culturally diverse societies and their habits; this has helped in the acceptance of halal food even among the non-Muslims (Shah Alam and Mohamed Sayuti, 2011).

Consumers hailing from diverse backgrounds have varied needs; hence, a marketer has to be aware of these needs so as to cater to their requirements with care. Particularly, young consumers (i.e. individuals below the age of 24 years) seem to be more lucrative in terms of their high lifetime value and relatively higher purchasing power as compared to others (Emerald, 2019). The vast opportunity that young consumers offer, especially in the context of halal food, can be understood from the fact that India alone is home to 80.84 million Muslims, who are below the age of 20 (Verma, 2016). Surprisingly, limited attempts have been made by scholars and practitioners to understand the behavioral aspects of consumption among this segment of consumers (Goyal and Singh, 2007). One possible reason could be the difference in their perception of things such as a consumable item compared to their previous generations. Young consumers are smart, intelligent and updated about products and services available to them (Rageh Ismail and Spinelli, 2012), which implies that marketers have to face more challenges for positioning their products and services intended for these consumers. Furthermore, the understanding and usage of products and services have undergone several changes. For example, halal products are no longer limited to the food segment alone. Concepts such as halal tourism (Chandra, 2014), halal supply chain (Tieman *et al.*, 2013), halal banking and halal insurance are booming (Rammal and Zurbruegg, 2016).

In this paper, we have operationalized repeated interaction and associated consumption in the context of halal food to understand the crucial role of religion and other factors in strengthening or weakening consumer engagement. Here, repeated consumption has not been assumed to be limited only to the physical purchase-related activities; rather, we are considering the repeated physical and psychological association of individuals with products or services. Although studies (Gupta *et al.*, 2015; Gupta and Pandey, 2018; Pandey and Nagesh, 2013) on engagement in academic and work settings have been conducted in the Indian context, no study has been carried out to understand the young consumer’s engagement for religiously sanctioned halal food products in the Indian setting. India being a land of many religions and multiple cultures, studies focusing on the role of religion and culture can provide rich insights. We performed an *Ebsco* search for the keyword “halal” and found over 1,800 hits for articles (written in English) published in the peer-reviewed journals (appendix) and only one article was on the Indian context. Further, a significant number of studies (Gonaz *et al.*, 2010; Mukhtar and Mohsin Butt, 2012; Lada *et al.*, 2009) on halal food in the marketing literature has discussed halal consumption from the perspective of the existing behavioral theories such as the theory of planned behavior and theory of reasoned action.

Studies examining the interplay of different factors that encourage consumers' engagement or proposing a new theoretical model for predicting such behavior are absent. Therefore, we have tried to fill the existing gap in the literature by proposing a model for young consumers' engagement for halal food. The implications of this study would provide valuable insights for marketers so that they can better align their business strategies for targeting young consumers in the emerging markets.

Review of literature

Consumer engagement as a broader concept

We stated earlier that the common definition of consumer engagement is repeated interaction (or consumption) with a product or service that involves the psychological and physical investment of a consumer. This definition has been commonly used in marketing literature. However, a close observation of the concept reveals that the concept has been defined differently in other areas of study such as organizational behavior, strategy or higher education research. For example, [Muir et al. \(2019, p. 263\)](#) suggested three contextual definitions of consumer engagement in relation to higher education. The behavioral aspect of the concept describes engagement as involvement in activities such as academic, extracurricular, and others. The emotional aspect defines engagement as "affective reactions to teachers, classmates, and the institution in which the learning occurs." Finally, the cognitive aspect delineates engagement as the willingness and thoughtfulness to stimulate the passion for developing expertise in a subject matter.

In organizational behavior literature, the concept of consumer engagement has been understood from the perspective of an individual's integration with their role activities ([Bhuvanaiah and Raya, 2014](#)). Similarly, researchers such as [Richman \(2006\)](#) and [Saks \(2006\)](#) stated that engagement with a subject can be intellectual and emotional, wherein the subject can be anything ranging from an entity such as a firm to an object or human. These studies have argued that engagement, in general, connotes some passion, involvement and focused effort. It has both the attitude and behavioral components that make the definition more complicated and contextual ([Macey and Schneider, 2008](#)).

In our study, the focus on engagement is similar to the argument presented in the marketing literature. [Van Doorn et al. \(2010, p. 254\)](#) defined consumer engagement as "an individual's behavioral manifestation toward a brand or a firm, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers." Similarly, [Vivek \(2009, p. 7\)](#) defined consumer engagement as "the intensity of consumer's participation and connection with the organization's offerings, and/or organized activities." Researchers have ascertained that the attitude toward the brand or firm can be both positive and negative. Further, this behavior is not only limited to a brand or firm but also it can go beyond these subjects and may include employees, current and former customers, products, suppliers, and others, thus focusing on this broader understanding of the concept by including age or generation as an important evaluation criteria in the study.

Young consumers, religion and food consumption

Multiple studies have suggested that several factors influence the choices and preferences of young consumers. For example, [Vermeir and Verbeke \(2008\)](#) examined the role of confidence and value in predicting the sustainability of food consumption among the youth. [Grant and Stephen \(2005\)](#) also studied the role of communication in influencing purchase decisions for fashion products.

The influence of factors like religion on young population probably varies from one society to another; hence, it is contingent upon an individual's value, belief and practice ([Saroglou and Galand, 2004](#)). It has been observed that religious sanctions strongly influence food

choices in the collectivists' societies such as Asia and Africa (Khalek, 2014). Contrary to this, in the individualistic societies, such as Europe, the population has been more focused on the health and hygiene-related aspects of food over religious values (Frewer *et al.*, 2001). Within the section of religiously sanctioned foods, Halal, Kosher, Jain and Sikh food form the major categories; however, halal and Jain foods form a significant choice within this category, especially in India. The reason is that majority of the Indian young populous practice either of the three religions, i.e. Islam (47 per cent), Hinduism (40 per cent) and Jainism (29 per cent). Therefore, it is important to understand the nested identity of factors influencing the consumption behavior of this population. Today, young consumers are not only a growing consumer segment but also will form the future market for companies. Therefore, a conscious effort to understand the different factors influencing the youth's decision is necessary to position right products for this segment of consumer.

Halal in Islam and halal brand

The term halal means lawful or permissible (Shah Alam and Mohamed Sayuti, 2011) has been discussed earlier. The rules prescribed by Quran (holy text for Muslims) and hadith provide guidelines to know whether a food, service or anything is halal. Hadith is a record of words, actions and stories of prophets, which is compiled in different forms over many years. Halal is often misunderstood for being a consumption-related concept limited only to food. However, Islam in general and religious text is particular have not limited the concept of halal only to food items (Al-Bukhari and Sahi, 1976). Mukhtar and Mohsin Butt (2012) observed that in case of permissibility, Muslims are least confused about it. However, the preparation and the ingredient can always be a matter of concern for them. Further, certain products cannot be exclusively categorized as halal or haram and their categorization is largely dependent on the consultation of Islamic scholar; these products are called Mubah (Derun *et al.*, 2010).

The usage of halal in the field of marketing is no longer restricted to particular food products or accessories. Wilson and Liu (2010) argued that the concept of halal exists in both brand and product theory; hence, it can be defined as a co-brand with distinct characteristics features. One distinct characteristic of halal is that it is a concept that cannot be encapsulated only within the domain of branding; rather, it stretches across several disciplines such as operations, banking, and others owing to the philosophy it is associated with. Studies (Borzooei and Asgari, 2013; Hassan and Sengupta, 2019) have considered halal as a brand for the following reasons. Firstly, the concept of halal fits well in the different consumer branding framework, for instance, Keller's (1993, 2003) brand equity model. The framework helps us to understand how a brand moves from salience toward brand resonance. Halal products have been found to successfully achieve the resonance (Wilson and Liu, 2010). Secondly, de-territorialization has further helped in the usage of term "halal" as a quasi-brand in industry such as banking and insurance (Ahmed and Jan, 2015). Thirdly, marketing theories have profound emphasis on the causal relationship between trust and branding (Willmott, 2003). Halal has been found to build trust, create emotional appeal and enhance consumers' commitment toward halal products (Ali *et al.*, 2018).

Food consumption, engagement and young consumers

Consumer engagement refers to the psychological and physical investments that foster repeated interaction with a product or service. In this study, we have operationalized the concept of consumer engagement as repeated interaction (both physical and psychological) and subsequent consumption of halal food. Over the past 15 years, the concept of engagement has been studied by scholars from several fields of studies such as sociology, organizational behavior, marketing, strategy, and others (Brodie *et al.*, 2011). Some studies in marketing literature have examined consumer engagement from the context of food (Bowden, 2009; Acharya and Gupta, 2016). A review of literature shows that

majority of these studies have focused on consumer engagement from the perspective of a firm or brand, which is dedicated toward strategies for engaging the consumers and understanding the value that an engaged consumer holds for the brand (Javornik and Mandelli, 2012). Surprisingly, the view of the other side, i.e. consumers' value for a product or brand has not been studied in detail. The religiously sanctioned foods have evolved as a brand of their own. For example, halal is now considered as a brand or co-brand (Wilson et al., 2013). Therefore, there is a need to explore the concept of consumer engagement for this newly evolved brand, which has strong social and religious acceptance that fosters psychological and physical engagements of consumers. In this study, we have examined young consumers, who form one of the segments of the population.

We conceptualize engagement in our study as repeated consumption of halal food. The primary objective of this study is to address two important research questions: What are the factors that influence the intention and choice of young consumers for repeated consumption of and sustained engagement toward halal food products? How the factors affect the engagement of young consumers?

Methodology

Sample

We used theoretical sampling along with the grounded theory in the study (Thomas, 2006). The saturation of answers dictated the number of participants chosen for the study (Charmaz, 2006). In the grounded theory, the theoretical sampling plays a vital role in theory construction. The purpose of this sampling is to develop the properties of theoretical categories as was evident in our case. While engaging in theoretical sampling, we gathered information on the basis of certain questions pertaining to the properties of the theoretical categories designed by the researcher (Charmaz, 2015). The theoretical sampling technique gave researchers the freedom to ascertain the range of variation of categories or processes.

The initial question for all the participants was to know whether they have ever consumed halal food. For final sampling, the participants who had consumed halal meat or other halal products were chosen. A total of 21 participants in the age group from 18 to 24 years were interviewed for the purpose (see Appendix for demographic details). Participants interviewed belonged to different regions of the country and had different educational backgrounds. The educational qualification of the participants ranged from undergraduate in humanities to engineering, dental science, MBA, and others. Further, the work experience of participants ranged from 0 to 36 months. The participants reported Islam as their religion in the demographic details of the form given to them. Participants' consent was taken prior to every interview and their names were not recorded to maintain confidentiality. Moreover, the participants were informed that they have the right to refuse or deny answering any question with which they are not comfortable. Further, the interviews were conducted at the locations preferred by the participants and through their suggested mode of communication for their comfort. The mean age of respondents was 22.04 years with a standard deviation of 1.74 years.

Data analyses

The research questions of the study contribute naturally to inductive qualitative approaches, wherein the findings that emerge from the analysis of raw data is not restrained through the prior theoretical lenses (Thomas, 2006). There is sparse research on engagement toward halal products, especially in the Indian context. Hence, there is ample scope for the development of indigenous constructs and newer theories explaining consumption of religiously sanctioned products in a secular but deeply religious country such as India, thus facilitating an inductive approach as opposed to a deductive one (Pandey, 2018).

Therefore, a variant of grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 1990) popularly known as Gioia method has been used to uncover what enhances and inhibits the consumption of halal products among the Indian young consumers.

The Gioia method is well-accepted as an approach because this method balances the needs for new concept development through inductive approaches and incorporation of rigorous standards (Gioia et al., 2013). The method has been extensively used in strategic management, marketing and organizational behavior literature (Bettis et al., 2015; Arino et al., 2016). However, the use of Gioia method in consumer research is relatively new. The method assumes both the subjects and the researchers as knowledgeable agents, who are capable of articulating and analyzing socially constructed realities (Gioia et al., 2013). Corley and Gioia (2004) stated that this approach uses three orders of analysis. The first-order concepts are the voice of the respondents. The second-order themes are grounded in theory and the third-order aggregate themes show a higher-order concept. Prior experiences of researchers related to interviewing participants and publishing qualitative studies based on the Gioia technique were very useful while conducting interviews for this study as in past studies in Indian settings (Pandey et al., 2018; Pandey and Varkkey, 2017). During the interviews, participants were asked several questions pertaining to their personal experiences as consumers. For example, they were asked what is your understanding of halal food. How often do you go out to have halal food in a restaurant or shop? What facilitates or restricts the purchasing or consuming of halal food? How similar or different are the food choices of your family and yours?

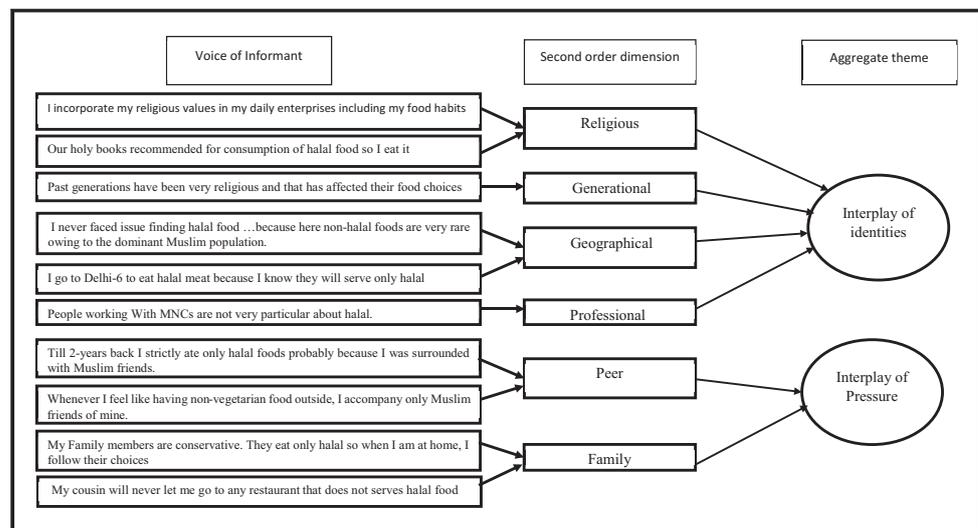
Interview questions were designed after reviewing studies on halal food or products and consumer engagement that have used similar approaches in the past. The questions were aligned with the existing scales that have been used for consumer behavior, consumer engagement and purchase intention (Dessart et al., 2016).

Results

Interplay of identities

The respondents were found to associate their choice for halal food with their religious identity. The idea of halal was reflected as an integral or core value of Islamic teaching. Individuals were found to legitimize their choices through religious upholding (Figure 1). For

Figure 1 Interplay of identities and pressure for consumption



example, P4 (male, 24 years) stated that “Our holy books have recommended the consumption of halal food, so I eat only halal food.”

Religion helps in shaping our attitude and perception about everything including the choice for food. For instance, P1 (male, 23 years) mentioned that “We learn everything from religion such as our food habits. Islam is another name for life.” Similarly, the religious sanction also motivates individuals to make efforts for maintaining the religious identity of self. For example, P20 (female, 21 years) said, “We (Muslims) go out of their way to eat halal food only because of our faith in our religion.”

Although the majority of the participants upheld the consumption of halal food as their right based upon their religious identity, not all of them reflected this in their actual consumption. One possible reason expressed by the participants was the generational differences. Past generations were perceived to have a strong religious identity, which was cited as a possible reason for their preference for halal food. P4 (male, 24 years) said, “Past generations have been very religious, which has affected their food choices [...] like their choice for halal foods.”

Young consumers were found to be less concerned whether their consumed foods are halal. The discussion reflects that generational identity is stronger than religious identity for consumption behavior among young consumers. For instance, one of the participants (P11-male, 20 years) shared that, “We really do not ask whether the food is halal? However, this is unlike our previous generations, who are consciously aware of it.” The geographical identity and availability can also strongly influence one’s intention to repeatedly consume halal food. The proximity to halal shops and locations, which are perceived to be largely dominated by Muslim population, becomes the most preferred destination for halal food. Young consumers identify geographical aspects as a critical factor that influences their intention to buy halal food. Participant (P9-female, 24 years) expressed that, “I never faced issue finding halal food [...] because here the non-halal foods are very rare owing to the fact that the dominant population here is Muslims.” Participants were confident about the preferred location for consuming halal food probably owing to the existing social assumption about halal and Islam.

The geographical identity was in conformity with religious identity of the young consumers. Participant P9 (female, 24 years) also shared that “I go to Delhi-6 to eat halal meat because I know they will serve only halal” Delhi-6 refers to the old city of Delhi, which is a popular destination for non-vegetarian foods. Majority of the non-vegetarian shops and residential areas in the locality are dominated by Muslim population. Further, this location has some world-famous restaurants such as *Kareem’s* that attracts thousands of consumers every year. On further probing, the participants revealed that professional identity is also a determinant of food preferences. White collars used with multinationals were apparently less infatuated for halal products. For example, according to one of the participants (P18-male, 20 years), “[...] People like me who works with MNCs are not very particular about halal.” It was observed that professional identity is stronger than religious identity in shaping the consumption behavior for halal food.

Interplay of pressure

Our study shows that individuals experience consistent pressure from different sources, which, in turn, increases their psychological investment for halal consumption. We identified peer and family as the two major sources of pressure that shape the choice of food among the participants. Among these two sources, the peer group was found to exert pressure on participants for promoting and discouraging halal consumption (Figure 1). For example, one participant (P5-male, 24 years) said, “Two years back, I strictly ate only halal foods probably because I was surrounded by Muslim friends.” Similarly, one of the young

consumers (P3-female, 24 years) shared that, "When I prefer having non-vegetarian food, I accompany only Muslim friends."

The respondents' families, in general, were found to be more inclined toward consuming halal food. Hence, the respondents were under consistent pressure to consume only halal. This also confirmed the effect of generational identity discussed earlier. Stating about her siblings, P14 (female, 20 years) said, "I have a cousin who lives with me [...] She will not let me go to any restaurant that does not serve halal food." Similarly, another participant (P10-female, 23 years) explained that owing to family pressure, her intention to eat halal food gets intensified during her homestay, as is evident from her words, "My Family members are conservative. They eat only halal, so when I am at home, I follow their choices."

Further, we also observed that family pressure is not only limited to halal food but also it includes all consumer goods that come under the ambit of halal. For example, a participant (P7-female, 19 years) stated that "My mother keeps asking me to use only halal products [...] she even orders halal cosmetics for us." The sense of embarrassment and guilt prevents the participants to go against the family will. Participants assume that even though they are not living with their parents currently, it is their social obligation to practice family norms. For instance, a participant (P9-female, 24 years) said, "I don't consume non-halal food because my family sentiments would be hurt somewhere."

Values fostering repeated consumption of halal products

Through the interviews, we identified four major value sources that encourage halal food consumption among young consumers. These value sources include trust, visual artifacts, technology and availability of halal product, i.e. proximity (Figure 1). Let us try to understand the responses received for all the four value sources.

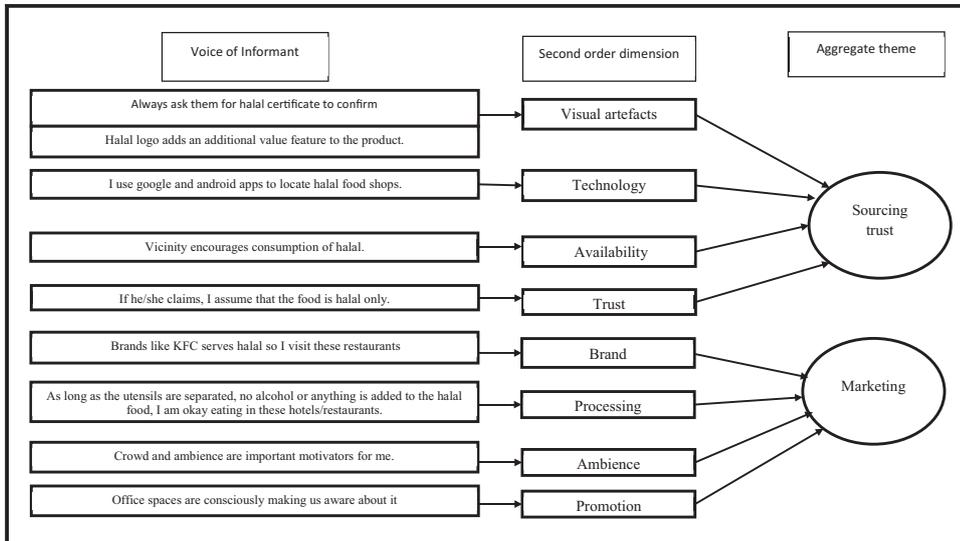
We observed a common understanding about the role of visual artifacts in labeling or recognizing a shop, restaurant or even a seller as a halal food supplier. Young consumers were found to associate some signs, symbols, logos and languages with halal. For example, the respondents were of the opinion that use of Arabic names and halal logo by the restaurant help them to assume that the shop is a halal shop. To illustrate this, a participant (P13-male, 21 years) said, "I always ask shop owners for halal certificate to confirm whether the food is halal." We also found that respondents perceived halal logo and signs as the source of not only authenticity but also superior quality and value for food products. For instance, one participant (P21-female, 19 years) stated that "If I go to a mall and find a product with halal logo, I believe it would add an additional value feature to that product [...] at least to my perception about the product."

Upon further probing, it is revealed that technology and trust are the factors that facilitate consumption of halal food. For example, participants shared that they often rely on the internet to search for a halal meat shop or restaurant. The frequent use of technology for the purpose increases especially while traveling to new places, which is evident from the words of a Participant (P9-female, 24 years), who stated that "Whenever I am out of the town or traveling, I use Google and android apps to locate halal food shops in my proximity." (Figure 2)

Similarly, a few participants told us that they regularly used android applications such as Zomato and Food Panda to order halal food. One participant (P8-male, 22 years) said, "I use android apps to order food [...] but only those shops that serve halal food are selected for ordering through these apps."

We also came to know that the decision to purchase food products from a particular shop or restaurant is also contingent upon its proximity and trust factor. The trust factor is basically the information communicated to the buyers upon enquiring about halal food from the shop owners. Participants mentioned that whenever the shop owner or the supplier is a Muslim,

Figure 2 Sourcing and marketing for consumer engagement



they require no confirmation related to the availability of halal food. The participants said they believe that halal being an integral part of Islamic teaching, a Muslim seller is expected to adhere to it. The participants also mentioned that the appearance of owners or suppliers, i.e. having beards, skull caps, and others also help in trusting them to be honest with the kind of food they serve. Oral confession or assurance by shop owners, waiters, and others for serving halal food has been found to be highly influential in shaping the intention to purchase food from that particular shop. It is evident in the words of a participant (P17-male, 23 years), who said, “If the shop owner says that the food he serves is halal, I assume that he or she is serving halal.”

Furthermore, the proximity of a shop serving halal also encourages its consumption among young consumers. Participants expressed that due to their hectic schedule and workload, it is not always possible for them to travel far for consuming halal food. Therefore, the nearby location of the shop becomes more convenient and motivating for them to order food only from those shops or restaurants. For instance, according to one participant (P5-male, 24 years), “Vicinity is very important. It encourages consumption of halal.” We also received responses from some young consumers, who mentioned that they are readily putting efforts to find halal food. Upon failing to do find halal food, they prefer to avoid non-vegetarian food only because they are unsure about the food is halal. For example, a participant (P11-male, 20 years) said, “I put additional effort to find a halal food shop, in case if I am unable to find, I avoid eating at that point of time.”

Marketing of halal food

An interesting outcome of our interviews was the participants’ response regarding their perception about marketing of the halal food products. We received a wide range of views, which have been summarized below. Our understanding is that marketing of halal products is also an important motivator for its consumption. In other words, factors such as branding, presentation, promotion of health and nutritious value, and other strategies can help marketers expand the business share of halal food in the overall food consumption pattern of young consumers.

Our study identified branding, promotion, ambience and preparation or processing as the four major marketing strategies that instigate the intentions of young consumers in

devouring halal food. We found that consumers are aware of certain brands, which provide halal certificates or label their products as halal. KFC is one such brand, as we found during our discussion. For example, one of the participants (P8-male, 22 years) said, "Brands such as KFC serve halal, so I visit these restaurants." Another participant (P1-male, 23 years) concurred that "I know some brands and restaurant chains, which serve halal food [...] I buy food from those brands only."

While we enquired from participants about their experience of visiting those hotels and restaurants that serve both halal and non-halal food, most of them stated that they focused on the processing and preparation part of the food more than other factors. We observed that in case of reputed hotels and restaurants, young consumers are more concerned about the separation of halal food from non-halal than the ownership (Muslim or non-Muslim). One participant (P3-female, 24 years) illustrated this by stating: "As long as the utensils are separated, no alcohol or anything is added to the halal food, I am okay eating in these hotels/restaurants irrespective of the fact that they serve non-halal items too".

Similarly, young consumers are found to be even more particular about the kind of ambience offered by the particular shop or hotel, and not only the factor of halal but also alone. For example, one participant (P15-female, 22 years) stated that "Crowd and ambience are important. For example, the crowd of a Dhaba would be absolutely different from the crowd in a 5-star hotel [...] My preference would be for the latter." Our participants were also asked a few questions on their prior experience, workplace, and professional engagements. The discussion revealed some interesting opinions on the promotion of halal food that are relevant for our study. The participants expressed that at times, signs, promotional activities, and segmentation of products can make them conscious about certain food such as halal food products. For example, one participant (P3-female, 24 years) said, "The office where I work has places that clearly promote halal food. So, they are consciously making us aware about it."

Basing on the above responses of participants, it can be deduced that the presence of separate counters for halal and non-halal food or tags on food items make them conscious about the presence of halal food and their consumption of such products, thereby reconfirming the positive influence of the brand and its proximity.

Discussion

There is growing awareness about the concept of halal and the rapidly growing halal industry. However, there is a necessity to further empirically examine the factors determining the young consumers' behavior ([Aziz and Chok, 2013](#)). Our findings throw light on the phenomenon by engaging young consumers toward halal food, thus showing the interplay of identities that affect their engagement to halal food. Identity forms the basic foundation for modern social psychology ([Simon, 2008](#)). It helps in defining an individual's sense of self, his or her group affiliations, achieved and ascribed status, power, positions, etc. ([Peek, 2005](#)) The development of an identity is largely attributed to the reflection of self and perceptions, and it is largely an evolving process of "becoming" ([Peek, 2005](#)).

One such form of identity is religion. Religion can assume a critical role in defining the self and group affiliations ([Peek, 2005](#)). It acts as a salient buttress of who we are and what we ought to be ([Verkuyten and Yildiz, 2007](#)). Some studies have shown that for culturally and ethnically diverse geographies (for example, India), religion may help in bringing together the different groups of people through shared worship (Sullivan, 2000). Religious identity influences our daily enterprises including our dietary habits ([Wright, 2015](#)). The influence of religious identity on food choices is pertinent to individuals' interpretation of religious teachings and rules ([Bonne et al., 2007](#)). Halal food is one such food choice that can derive its values from Islamic jurisprudence. The results indicated that the religious identity associated with Islam fosters engagement with halal food. Further, we observed that

religious identity is more dominant over other forms of identity and can influence the intention and attitude for repeated halal food consumption. The results for religious identity were consistent with the psychological investment dimension of consumer engagement as discussed in the marketing literature (Javornik and Mandelli, 2012).

Other than religious identity, the generational, geographical and professional identities may also significantly influence ones' choice for food. Geographical identity can be understood in terms of "landmarks"; some locations or areas are considered as landmarks for certain products such as sweet shops, meat shops, wholesale market, etc. Similarly, some designated areas are expected to serve halal food items. Hence, the actual distance of the halal food joint from the consumer's residence or place of stay plays a crucial role. Therefore, the closeness or proximity becomes a motivator for repeated consumption of halal food, but the increase in distance discourages repeated consumption of halal. Further, food joints located in places that are associated with or famous for halal food also encourage the engagement of young consumers.

Generational identity has been defined in literature as "an individual's awareness of his or her membership in a generational group and the significance of this group to the individual" (Urlick, 2012). The generational identity has three major dimensions. The first dimension is a coherent-based identity that refers to individuals experiencing some events or activities at the same time. The second dimension is based upon age-related factors, wherein experience is defined based on age rather than any other parameters. The third dimension shapes identity based on one's skills, attitude, experience, abilities and knowledge. In our study, the third dimension of generational identity has been a dominant feature of the respondents. Limited studies have been conducted to understand the intergenerational differences in food consumption. Further, these studies have largely focused on intergenerational consumption similarities rather than the disparities that may have occurred over the generations (Epp and Price, 2008). It has been found that the younger generations are less particular about the social and religious values of food (Bezerra *et al.*, 2018). Studies have examined the generational differences in food consumption based on age (Khan and Hackler, 1981) and suggested that older generations display a significantly different food preference owing to factors such as health, religious values and spirituality. Studies in Indian context have shown an intertwined relationship between spirituality and religiosity (Pandey, 2019). Our study is possibly the only study that has addressed intergenerational consumption from the perspective of halal food.

The results also demonstrated that professional identity influences the choice of food among young consumers, which is similar to prior studies that have found a strong correlation between professional identity and food choices (Bisogni *et al.*, 2002). Studies on identity theory state that individuals more often define themselves through their ability to economically sustain their families and occupational achievements (Marsiglio *et al.*, 2000), which also means holding more power in terms of decision-making and choices. Thus, young consumers with a professional career are expected to have more autonomy in terms of choice and preferences. We found that the respondents with strong professional identity wanted to be known as non-religious, and hence, they did not prefer consumption of Halal. With the development of new identities, such as professional identity, individuals seem to bring about changes in their value system that result from newer forms of relationships, interactions, education, roles, and responsibilities. It is, indeed, interesting to note that individuals change their eating habits with developing new identities in different phases of their life; for instance, in case of "professional identity," a person tends to define his/her food choices. Individuals tend to compare or associate themselves with some salient reference points such as colleagues or even the nature of profession (Bisogni *et al.*, 2002). Young and educated consumers working in MNCs are less concerned about the halal food.

Our study showed that the family and peer group are the two pressure groups influencing the consumption of halal food among young consumers. Studies have offered strong

evidence to support the role of family on child outcomes (Maccoby, 2002), including the food choices and preferences among the young generation. Generally, an authoritarian parenting is expected to strongly influence food choices among the young generations (Parsons *et al.*, 1953). Researchers have studied the role of family communication in fostering consumer buying behavior among adolescent family members (Moschis, 1985). A family adopts different mechanisms to communicate such behaviors to the younger ones, which can either be in the form of unsaid-rules or norms or some other means. Younger ones tend to learn by imitating their parents. McLeod and O'Keefe (1972) argued that such imitation or copying of behaviors are shown by youngsters because it is the most salient alternative available to them. They imitate to be like their parents. The degree of family's influence on an individual is highly dependent on the adopted source of the family communication (parents, relatives, etc). The induction of such behaviors in the youngsters, the reinforcement of such behavior, the individual's exposure to other environmental factors, etc., are the different aspects that impact the degree of family's influence (Bassett *et al.*, 2008). Here, the role of reinforcement is very important.

Young consumers acquire certain attitude, behavior and values based on the manner those facets have been reinforced by their family members in their life (Contento *et al.*, 2006). We observed that family is a strong "pressure" source with regard to halal consumption among young consumers; this may be attributed to two major reasons that are religious identity of family and respondent's attitude toward accepting and adopting their family norms. Religious identity in the form of religion sanctions could be the foremost important factor that induces halal consumption behavior among the family members. Subsequent to this is the second-order of variables such as young consumer's acceptability and influence. Our respondents were found to be greatly influenced by their family values and norms, which generally encourage halal consumption at home. However, after traveling outside, getting education at distant places, and exposing themselves to new social groups such as classmates and co-workers, the degree of the family's pressure on individuals' consumption behavior outside their home varies (Bassett *et al.*, 2008).

Peer pressure is generally a de-motivator for halal consumption among the young consumers. Our respondents came from the culturally and academically diverse backgrounds, having different jobs, peer groups, and workplace. Therefore, the degree to which they were influenced by the peer group also varied. It has been found that the family's influence gradually reduces as the child grows and becomes an adult (Bassett *et al.*, 2008). The individual tries to seek conformity with the peer group he or she belongs to Chapman and Maclean (1993). It has been found that these tendencies are more explicit in the context of food consumption among young consumers (Bassett *et al.*, 2008).

It is evident from our discussion with the respondents that the unavailability of halal shops in locality, presence of members from different religious and cultural background in the peer group, and staying away from the family are the primary factors that result in effectively diminishing the influence of family or religious identity over peer pressure for halal consumption behavior. Finally, it is important to understand that we mostly consume food in the presence of others (family or friends). The influence of social facilitation can predict the amount of food consumption that would take place depending upon the encouragement from others in relation to the consumption of that food (Nestle *et al.*, 1998).

Although we have not examined the causal relationship between identity and pressure in our study, it is relevant to understand the relationship between the two concepts. One set of studies (Lagaert *et al.*, 2017) have advanced the identity theories to understand the role of pressure in ensuring conformity with the identity in the social context. These studies hold that identity activation of an individual is dependent upon the situation. Upon contradiction of his or her identity with the value of the group, community or the social context, the individual would aspire to achieve a more salient identity in the situation. Every individual thrives for a social identity other than his or her own personal identity (Scheepers and

Ellemers, 2005). Pressure in the form of threat of exclusion enforces individuals to conform with the social norms. Studies in the psychology and sociology literatures have examined the complexity that exists in this causal relationship. However, there is a dearth of such studies in the marketing literature. This study leaves scope for examining the causal relationship by providing a theoretical model that encompassed both the two concepts in the context of consumer engagement.

Moreover, the third aggregate theme that emerged from our discussion with young consumers was the values that foster halal consumption. Within these values, we identified four sources, i.e. trust, visual artifacts, technology and availability. The concept of availability has been discussed with geographical identity. Different individuals may perceive availability in different ways. In our study, we found immediate availability as the major factor that discourages halal consumption. Immediate availability is understood as the convenience or readiness of food; this implies issues such as storage, requirement for cooking, preparation time, readiness to consume and packaging (Shopping for health, 1997). An interesting example related to the influence of technology on consumption behavior could be that of Twitter, which have been mentioned earlier. Additionally, food purchase through the internet is one of the fastest-growing businesses today (Johnson *et al.*, 2003). Internet has been found to encourage the tendency of ordering food online (Grunert and Ramus, 2005). One possible reason from the extant literature is the shaping of perception, which takes place through the Internet sources. Internet acts as an effective tool to generate consumer behavior orientation toward certain products or services. Sindhav and Balazs (1999) discussed about three major factors – the company, the environment and the benefits offered to the consumers – that affect the growth of online business such as food delivery or others.

Theoretical contribution

Apart from the theoretical model conceptualized in the discussion section, an important contribution of this study is the extension of our understanding of the generational theory. The theory has been extensively used in marketing literature (Lazarevic, 2012). The generational theory propagates that generational cohorts are responsible for differences in the way people behave. Generational cohorts create or share varied life experiences, which systematically shapes similar attitude and beliefs of members of the same generation (Lazarevic, 2012). Scholars have suggested that the generational cohort is not only about the differences in age but also about the values, beliefs and attitude (Berkowitz and Schewe, 2011). One important aspect of the generational theory discussed by researchers is the dissimilarities within the same generation. The theory leaves enough space to accommodate the variation existing within the same generation (Griffin, 2004). It posits that the generational similarities or differences are not only created by age, but also by culture, peer and social context, which shape these changes (Berkowitz and Schewe, 2011). Hence, there is scope for examining the important social aspects such as social, environment, family and geographical factors in the context of consumer behavior.

The findings of this study showed that within the same group, there may be variation in identity, attitude, perception, and others, which is in line with previous studies such as Twenge and Campbell (2008). Other studies have suggested that peer group, parents, and popular culture together shape the generational characteristics among the youth. Our study showed that young consumers as a generation are characterized by a complex engagement behavior. This engagement behavior is highly dynamic and depends upon the current and past socio-political environment to which the consumer has already been exposed. Further, the dynamic of their engagement with a product, service or brand is not consistent over a very long period of time. Our study also showed that even the physical factors such as geographical location or social factors such as peer pressure are not always a standalone consistent factor that shapes our behavior. These factors work in

nexus and their effectiveness depends upon the combination of their actions upon the focus individual. Upon examining the definition of consumer engagement by Erat (2007), it is suggested that consumer engagement is characterized by an exchange of knowledge among the consumers.

Our study demonstrated that young consumers do exchange information regarding the halal products, which facilitate or restrict their engagement with such products. Apart from the religious values, there are other sources that influence halal consumption among the young consumers. The fostering of halal consumption is shaped through an exchange of information between the consumer and his or her peer group, family, brand or product. The exchange may be or may not be continuous. Further, the effectiveness of this exchange would depend upon the intensity on which such exchanges are taking place.

In general, marketing literature has emphasized on general consumption variations among the young consumers. Studies on the consumption and engagement for religiously sanctioned products are still limited. However, the growing demands for such products have become a reasonable factor that encourages the researchers to further explore this matter. Studies have shown that generation Y (which includes young consumers as per our definition) are more educated, well-aware, and more conscious about the brands. The generation is more consumption-oriented compared to their previous ones. Specifically, the generation perceives the importance of consumption. According to [Wattanasuwan \(2005\)](#), young consumers attribute consumption as an expression of their identity. They are conscious about building their image in the community they belong to, and therefore, engage in a repeated consumption of products or service with an expectation for a desirable consequence ([Lee et al., 2009](#)).

Our study highlighted the implications of generation differences that exist in the consumption of religiously sanctioned products – a subject that has not been examined in much detail in the past. The context of emerging economies further adds value to the implications because emerging economies are the thriving market and experimental ground for MNCs looking for an expansion beyond the developed nations ([London and Hart, 2004](#)). To summarize the above discussion, the interplay in the results shows the existing tussle. The generation examined in the study is in limbo or transition state, which demonstrates the characteristics of both the older generation and that of the newer ones.

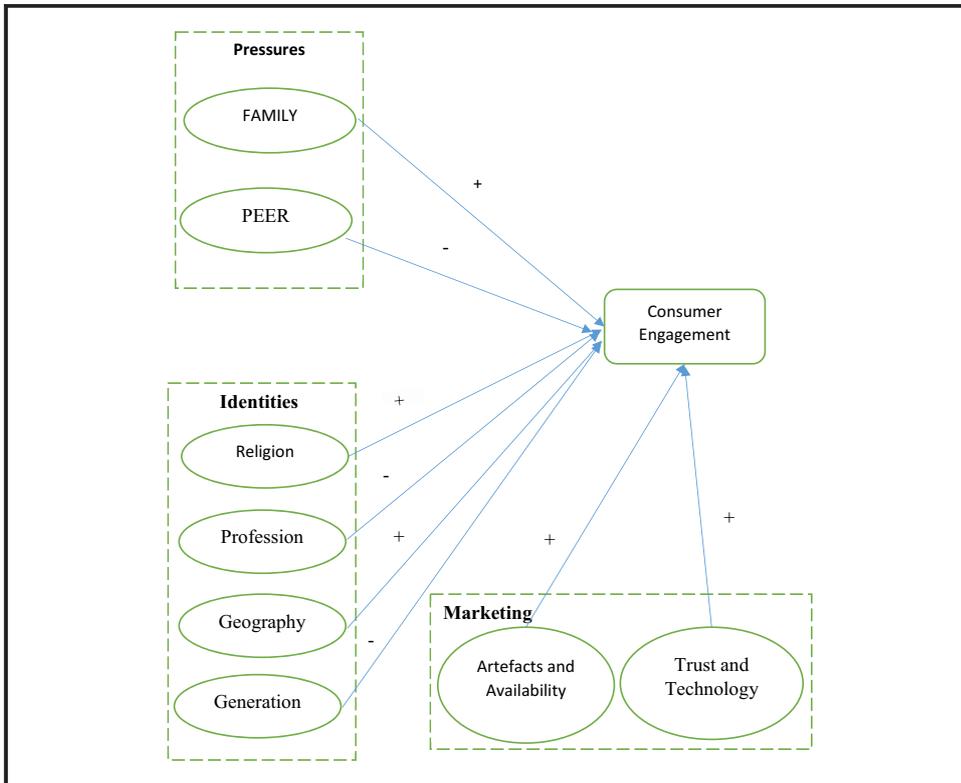
We now present an emerging model of engaging young consumers as is evident from the discussion above. [Figure 3](#) explains the proposed model for engagement of young consumers for halal products.

The model highlights the twin effects of identities and pressures on the impacts of their individual components, whereas marketing has unilateral effect in terms of its components.

Marketing has evolved by exploring and adopting new constructs, which are unique to certain demographics ([Sheth et al., 2000](#)). Emerging economies such as India are one such context, which has drawn the attention of scholars and practitioners alike ([Hoskisson et al., 2000](#); [Burgess and Steenkamp, 2006](#)). One important reason that makes the context more relevant for our study is the fact that countries such as India have been growing rapidly over the past three decades, which has attracted huge investments for the country ([Budhwar and Varma, 2010](#)) and translated voluminous consumption and newer forms of consumer engagement. The 129 million young consumers form the future of the Indian food industry. Further, the degree to which society and religion influence business is greater in countries such as Indian than some other countries (William, 1999). The findings of studies on consumer engagements will help the marketers to effectively promote religiously sanctioned products to a larger consumer base ([Sachs, 2016](#)).

It is important to understand that having a large population of a particular religion alone is not a determinant of predicting purchase behavior. In other words, religious sanctions do not necessarily mean that the particular food is not being consumed by individuals from

Figure 3 Proposed model for engagement of young consumers for halal food



other religion. To illustrate this, [Yang \(2017\)](#) found that over 80 per cent of the kosher food in USA are consumed by the non-Jewish population. As the younger generation has been found to be religiously more tolerant and open to experience, the possibility that they can have preferences over religiously sanctioned food is very high ([Kosmin, 2009](#)).

Practical implications

A clustering system to categorize young consumers can be proposed. It is evident from the above discussion that religious identity and family pressure foster halal consumption among young consumers. On the contrary, generational identity and peer pressure interdict such consumption behavior among young ones. Young consumers under constant pressure of family and religious identity are expected to strictly follow the norms. They are expected to display a strong inclination toward halal food because it would bring more conformity and social acceptance. Individuals having a strong peer pressure owing to socially and culturally diverse social arena along with a professional identity are less particular about halal food. In the scenario where professional identity exists along with family pressure to consume halal and religious identity exists with peer pressure to not consume halal, the attitude of individuals toward halal can be changed through an offering, wherein they perceive value.

Our study showed that young consumers were using android applications and internet to gather information about the availability of halal food in their locality, to order food or to verify whether a particular shop or restaurant is serving halal food. Further, some respondents were found to use these applications to gather information about the ambiance and consumers visiting those places. Therefore, it is clear that the above three factors are equally effective among young consumers. Some scholars such as [Liang and Huang \(1998\)](#) have

found that the internet acts as a beneficiary for the products with high information intensity; food is one such product because of two major reasons: one is its nutritional values and properties, and the other is related to its targeted segment. As halal is one such food product that primarily targets the Muslim consumers (who can associate halal with religious sanctions), it is evident that internet would shape halal consumption behavior positively.

Visual artifacts such as signs, logos, calligraphy, designs, language and other constituents can also influence consumer purchase behavior. Empirical studies on halal consumption have largely agreed to the argument that halal logos, Arabic signs and Islamic symbols can encourage halal food consumption among the consumers (Fischer, 2016). We also observed a similar behavior among the young consumers. Our respondents strongly agreed to the fact that such visual artifacts help them to effectively decide whether to eat food in a particular food joint. For instance, halal logo as quality labeling helps gives credibility to a food product for the young consumers (Grunert, 2002).

Consumers are exposed to uncountable messages that can be contradictory in nature (Pieniak *et al.*, 2007). Thus, consumers face a hard time to choose any specific information over the other. It is the trust about the information source that helps consumers to make an appropriate purchase decision. Trust acts as a catalyst to reduce cognitive effort in purchase decisions (Young *et al.*, 2010) and has been defined as “the extent to which a person believes that others will not exploit his or her vulnerability” (Morrow *et al.*, 2004). It forms a critical factor prompting halal consumption behavior among young consumers. We found that our respondents perceived the halal-related information sourced from a Muslim shop owner or attendant as correct and trustworthy, and it eventually facilitates their decision-making process (Thiede, 2005). One possible reason behind respondents trust in these individuals is their religious identity that gets reflected through their language, dressing and looks, etc. However, there can be other possible reasons as well. Consumers' knowledge forms an integral part of purchase decision behaviors; it predicts the ways of collection and scrutinization of information that ultimately influence purchase-related decisions (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987).

It is a fact trust helps in shaping our subjective and perceived knowledge to hasten this process (Park *et al.*, 1994). Past studies on socio-demographic differences with respect to the use of trust in purchase behavior have revealed that factors such as gender, age and education could strongly influence the “trust factor” on information sources (Pieniak *et al.*, 2007). In case of halal food consumption, we found that the religious identity and visual artifacts associated with a shop or restaurant were the two sources upon which consumers reposed their trust for information processing.

Brand image can either motivate or discourage consumers from making a purchase decision (Reza Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012). The image of a shop in terms of its reputation, service quality, ambiance, perceived risk and price have been found to strongly influence an individual's choice of purchasing a product from a particular food establishment (Wu *et al.*, 2011). Store image or reputation of an establishment is the perception that consumers hold about that establishment based on multiple attributes of that shop (Grewal *et al.*, 1998).

Scholars have found that a consumer develops this perception based on the quality of product, its packaging, ways of serving the product and readiness to deliver the product and behavior of the salesperson or shop owner. In our study, we found that young consumers are very particular about these characteristics, which helps them in deciding whether they should buy food from a particular restaurant. We also found that local halal shops and establishments have been successful in establishing themselves as a brand, which, in turn, has created a positive attitude among consumers regarding purchase of food only from these establishments. Keller (1993) found that the dimensions of quality and effectiveness are the two primary aspects based on which an establishment creates its brand image. It is clearly visible among young consumers in the case of halal food

establishments. The processing aspect can be understood by examining the extant literature on perceived risk. The literature on consumer behavior defines perceived risk as “any action of a consumer will produce consequences that he or she cannot anticipate with anything approximating certainty, and some of which are likely to be unpleasant” (Bauer, 1960). In the case of young consumers, we found that the perceived risk is not the fear of consuming non-halal food unintentionally, but hygiene and appropriate labeling. Young consumers are particular about the cleanness and hygiene factors while making any purchase decision. A similar behavior has been observed in studies done in other contexts (Rezai *et al.*, 2012).

Limitations and direction for future research

There are certain limitations to our study. We had only examined engagement among the young consumers who fall below the age of 24. Participants from different age groups may provide more valuable insights on engagement with halal products. Further, consumption usually happens in group, but we have examined consumption only at the individual level. Future studies may also consider the individual level consumption pattern to understand the engagement for halal. Another limitation of our study is that we did not examine consumers’ engagement with non-consumable halal products such as insurance, banking, and others. The same can be explored in future studies. One more limitation of this study is that we have not examined the causal relationship between pressure and identity. Future studies can look into these aspects in more detail. Finally, the level of engagement may change due to change in factors such as gender, and others. Future studies may examine the gender-based differences of young consumers’ engagement.

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Corresponding author

Yusuf Hassan can be contacted at: f17yusufh@iimdr.ac.in

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