

Gen Z as Halal Consumers: Omani Scope

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Abstract

This study aimed to describe knowledge, attitudes, perception and behavior of Gen Z (born in between 1997-2012) group towards Halal concept in Oman. The study has been designed as survey to collect quantitative data from primary sources via questionnaire. Non-probability sampling methods were employed due to COVID-19 restrictions at data collection stage. Findings of the study are supporting to earlier studies which have reported low knowledge, awareness, consciousness, attention about Halal product among Muslims especially in Islamic Law compliant countries. Halal concerns of Gen Z were averagely recorded and Halal consumer behaviors have not been significantly differentiated by gender, education level, marital status, income, habitat, source of personal income, knowledge level about Halal, shopping mode, and shopping frequency in Omani context.

Keywords: Halal, Gen Z, lifestyle, consumer behavior, Oman

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1. Introduction

“Islamic economy” as “sectors comprising core products/services that are structurally affected by Islamic ethics and law.” Islamic law, underlying the notion of “Halal” or permissible, directly impacts the core products and services offered in a number of economic sectors, including food, finance, clothing, tourism, media and recreation, pharmaceuticals, and cosmetics. According to Global Islamic Economy Report 2020/2021, Muslims spent \$2.02 trillion in 2019 across the food, pharmaceutical, cosmetics, fashion, travel and media/recreation sectors, all of which are impacted by Islamic faith-inspired ethical consumption needs. This spending reflects a 3.2% year-on-year growth from 2018 (DinarStandard., 2020). The Table-1 shows the rank of Oman in Global Islamic Economy Indicator Scores (GIEI). The GIEI is a composite weighted index that measures the overall development of the Islamic economic sectors by assessing the performance of its parts in line with its broader social obligations.

Table 1. Global Islamic Economy Indicator Score Ranks by Sectors

Country	Global Islamic Economy Index	Halal Food	Islamic Finance	Muslim Friendly Travel	Modest Fashion	Pharma & Cosmetics	Media Recreation
1. Malaysia	290.2	209.8	389	98.3	43.7	80.2	59.9
2. Saudi Arabia	155.1	51.1	234.2	36.8	22.1	33.4	34.7
3. UAE	133	104.4	142.5	78.3	235.6	72.1	125.3
4. Indonesia	91.2	71.5	111.6	45.3	57.9	47.5	43.6
5. Jordan	88.1	39.6	124.6	43.3	18.5	39.1	31.6
6. Bahrain	86.9	42.2	121.9	31.9	16.7	33.5	42.3
7. Kuwait	73.3	42.2	99.2	27.1	17.5	33.3	40.8
8. Pakistan	70.9	54.7	91.1	23.6	30.6	32.5	12.9
9. Iran	64	60.5	74	28.8	33.5	55.9	26.6
10. Qatar	63.1	44.3	80.1	36.7	20.3	32.1	40.2
11. Oman	60	47.1	73.4	33.2	28.7	33.5	35.3

Source: DinarStandard, (2020). 2020/21 State of the Global Islamic Economy Report, Thriving in Uncertainty, p.15

Although, Oman is the 11th ranked country by Global Islamic Economy Index, emerging market for Halal-certified products/services yet. The Halal certification ratio is quite low when compared to other countries. Even if this phenomenon is infant, it is trending up and likely to develop in Oman.

With micro perspective, Halal is an Islamic accreditation brand to satisfy expectations of consumer who priorities Halal lifestyle. The branding and sale effects of Halal commodities were demonstrated through perceptions and religious convictions. Halal Marketing is the understanding of satisfying clients' wishes with the purpose of achieving worldwide spiritual and material prosperity (Hasan, 2019; Wilson, 2014).

Arab countries are considered to be the most important Halal markets in the Muslim world as the population of these countries comprises about 20% of the total Muslim population of the world with good disposable income (Alhariri & Al-Mazeedi, 2020). As mentioned by Bouzenita et al. (2019), different Muslim countries are prepared to accept different ‘compromises’ to the Sharia and, with many Halal Certification Organizations privately run, these compromises can seriously challenge the trust and confidence of the Muslim Halal food seeking consumer. The majority Muslim countries are net Halal food importers, making the issue a very important one even for Muslims assuming themselves ‘safe’ within a Muslim majority context.

There are many studies conducted about Halal awareness and consumer behaviors in multicultural local markets such as Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia etc. Although there are many studies on Halal consumer behavior in multicultural countries, rare research concern in countries where Islam is declared as the official religion of the nation. In this context, individual awareness level, proactive and reactive behaviors, purchase intention of the consumers

living in Islamic countries, seem to be worthy to research even if it would be very tough to examine the influence of consumer perceptions on protective and regulatory functions of government.

Oman is known the country which has Islamic Legislation/Justice System and Governance, besides conservative social understanding and practice of Islam. Besides Oman, Gen Z, with their expectations, perceptions, intentions and actions is another unique research concern also. Since there is no study explicitly designed to describe/explain Halal consumer behaviors while purchasing products in Oman, this study aimed to describe and explain Halal consumer behaviors of Gen Z (between 16-25 years old in 2021) in Oman.

2. Literature Review

The Halal is the Islamic reference of lifestyle which is conceptualized and framed methodologically and systematically by Islamic Studies. Halal works as a benchmark for Muslims when they observe their everyday behaviors. Consumers may consider buying or consuming products that do not violate or conflict with their beliefs. In this context, faith/religion dominates consumer to behave by the religious values in which he/she believes. The concept of religiosity can be interpreted as the extent to which a person is committed to his/her religion (Said et al., 2014). On the other hand, people have different levels of religiosity, including high, moderate or low levels. Thus, a person's consumption behaviour tends to reflect their level of religiosity (Dali, et al, 2019). The studies concluded that religion has a significant impact on a person's behaviour in areas as diverse as their food consumption (Abd. Rahim & Junos, 2012; Razzaque & Chaudhry, 2013; Aisyah, 2014; Simanjuntak & Dewantara, 2014; Sukesti & Budiman, 2014; Jamal & Sharifuddin, 2015; Yener, 2015; Varinli et al., 2016; Khan et al., 2017), cosmetics (Majid et al., 2015), life insurance (Souiden & Jabeur, 2015) and banking (Amin et al., 2014).

Halal awareness and purchasing behavior one of the well-focused research concerns by many researchers. Many studies (Golnaz et al., 2010; Ardyanti et al., 2013; Aziz & Chok, 2013; Ambali & Bakar, 2014; Jamal & Sharifuddin, 2015; Parhan & Ismail, 2015; Briliana & Mursito, 2017; Amarul et al., 2019; Basri & Kurniawati, 2019; Setyaningsih & Marwansyah, 2019; Jannah & Al Banna, 2021) reported that Halal awareness is a determinant which leads consumers to purchase Halal products. On the other hand, some others (Salman & Siddiqui, 2011; Nusran et al., 2018) claimed that the effect of Halal awareness among Muslims is not conclusively explained yet.

A Muslim consumer's level of knowledge regarding Halal food indicates the extent of their awareness of the importance of consuming Halal food (Mutmainah, 2018; Shaari & Shahira, 2010). Jannah & Al Banna (2021) reported that Halal certification and knowledge are the determining factors of consumers' Halal awareness, while religiosity is insignificant.

Intention is assumed to be a motivational factor that can influence a person's behaviour (Ajzen, 1985; Briliana & Mursito, 2017; Rahman et al., 2017). However, the attitude toward Halal product cannot be ignored. The positive attitude towards Halal products will effect on intention to buy Halal products (Lada et al., 2009; Shah & Sayuti, 2011; Aziz & Chok, 2013; Marmaya et al., 2019). Halal awareness, Halal certification and Halal-expressed promotion campaign significantly influence on purchasing intentions of consumers (Aziz & Chok, 2013). Halal traceability was found to be capable of directly influencing Halal awareness and consumer purchase intention (Jannah & Al Banna, 2021).

Halal certification logo of accredited organization is generally more trusted to show that the manufacturer follows the Islamic standards (Dali et al., 2007), as a guideline (Muhamad et al., 2017) refers to something that safe and fit (Ghadikolaei, 2016) can be consumed by Muslims (Henderson, 2016), and covers not only food but also all aspects of products and services (Rejaini & Arianfar, 2016). Halal certification is a crucial factor that can raise consumer confidence that the products being consumed are Halal, safe and clean (Ambali & Bakar, 2014). Shafie & Othman (2006) and Omar et al. (2008) emphasized the attitudes of Muslim consumers towards Halal foods and concluded that the attitudes of consumers to the Halal food product are interrelated with components, ownership, marketing considerations and the Halal logo certified. The food industries are also becoming more aware of the production and procurement of Halal items (Majid et al., 2015). Many food-manufacturing companies are now adopting Halal

certification from accredited certifying organizations (Jannat & Islam, 2019). On the other side, marketers' statements about Halal are not always trustworthy for customers due to lack of Halal traceability (Ahmad et al., 2015).

Although, current technological advances, web browsing and searching, and online platforms can facilitate to obtain information about Halalness of a product today (Luna-Reyes et al., 2014; Sayogo, 2018), Halal traceability, one of the challenges for Muslim consumers due to asymmetric information yet (Verbeke et al., 2013, Sayogo, 2018), is the ability to trace a product from the production process to its distribution. Halal traceability covers suppliers, producers, logistics and end-users (Ab Rashid & Bojei, 2019). Various studies have proven that Halal traceability creates many benefits for Halal-seeking consumers (Aung & Chang, 2014; Mattevi & Jones, 2016; Rahman et al., 2017). Halal traceability is useful not only for consumers but also the business actors (Girish & Barbuddhe, 2020; Poniman et al., 2012). Halal traceability can be considered to be the result of awareness of the importance of the concept of Halal (Halal awareness), both for entrepreneurs in the context of producing a product and also for Muslim consumers in terms of consuming a product (Jannah & Al Banna, 2021).

Lada et al (2009) reported that subjective standards and intra-personal religiosity positively influence on the attitude toward Halal items. The subjective standard was also associated positively to the position on the choice of Halal items. While According to Mukhtar & Butt (2012), the most important predictor in the product selection is subjective. Their results confirmed that the TRA (Ajzen and Fishben`s Theory of Reasoned Action, 1980) is a valid model for anticipating the intention of selecting Halal products. on the other hand, Salehudin & Luthfi (2011) concluded that Theory of Planned Behavior which is revised and expanded version of TRA by Ajzen (1985), is not fully applicable to explain the behavioral intention of Muslim consumers.

The earlier studies have reported low knowledge (Kamaruzaman, 2008), awareness (Patton 2009), consciousness (Teng & Jamaliah, 2013), attention (Rajagopal et al., 2011) about Halal product among Muslims especially in Islamic Law compliant countries. Muslim consumer market has commonalities with other quality assured product demands, however Sharia criteria have been confirmed in some studies (Hanzaee & Ramezani, 2011) Afendi et al (2014) have found significant relationships between concern about Halal food and some demographic factors (the level of education, age, origin etc.).

It does not mean that only Muslims pay attention and give priority Halal lifestyle. Numerous studies (Golnaz et al, 2010; Mathew et al, 2014; Izberk-Bilgin & Nakata, 2016) showed the importance of the Halal concept in the non-Muslim groups and societies also. Golnaz et al. (2010) evaluated the consciousness and attitudes of non-Muslim consumers towards Halal food products on the basis of several social and economic considerations and found highly productive results. The study of Mathew et al. (2014) revealed that non-Muslim consumers eagerly follow the Halal concept.

Hassan et al. (2009) clarified perceptions of consumers about Halal certification as a quality assurance mark for a multicultural society. Hashim & Othman (2011) have reported that the non-Arab Muslim consumers are more concern about the Halal product while purchasing the food products. Surely, the Arab Muslims' and non-Arab's Muslims ways of thinking and acting are anthropologically and sociologically different. But, Gillani et al (2016) explained this phenomenon as Halal certification body was less optimal because of the assumption that every food product produced in the Muslim-majority country is Halal. While there is no empirical study on Halal awareness and/or Halal consumer behavior in Oman, Rehman, (2020) reported a lack of general awareness on Halal tourism in Oman.

3. Research Design

As seen in literature review, although there are many studies on Halal consumer behavior in multicultural countries, rare research concern in countries where Islam is declared as the official religion of the nation. In this context, individual awareness level, proactive and reactive behaviors, purchase intention of the consumers living in Islamic countries, seem to be worthy to research even if it would be very tough to examine the influence of consumer perceptions on protective and regulatory functions of government. This study was designed to understand and explain

the extent to which Halal consumer behaviours of the Gen Z population (born in between 1997-2012). However, younger than 16-years-old elements in research population were not included into sampling frame due to unmatching assumptions of the study below:

- Gen Z is able to make decision individually while purchasing.
- Gen Z is financial literate.
- Gen Z has personal income even if from various sources.
- Gen Z is able to respond individually while surveying.
- Gen Z is frequently using online platforms while obtaining information and/or purchasing
- Gen Z is convenient sampling unit to collect data in the restrictions of Covid-19 pandemic period

The Figure-1 illustrates six various but related Halal consumer behaviors. Those behaviours have been derived from the Halal Awareness indicators –like knowledge, Halal certificate, Halal traceability, and purchase intention- exempt religiosity. In Muslim majority and Islamic-Law compliant countries, religiosity is the challenging concept to operationally define and measure via survey methods.

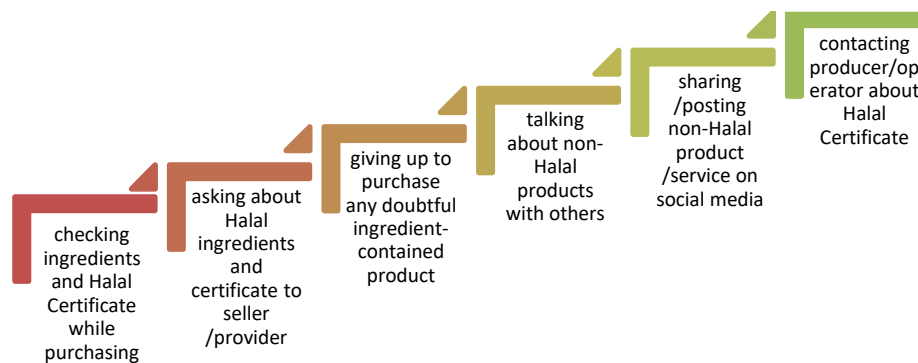


Figure 1. Halal Consumer Behaviors

3.1. Research Questions

The study has been addressed to answer following questions:

In Oman, Gen Z age group (in between 16-25 years old in 2021) how frequently:

- i. to check ingredients and Halal Certificates of products
- ii. to ask about Halal ingredients and Certificate to seller/provider
- iii. to give up to purchase any doubtful ingredient contained product/service
- iv. to talk about Halal Products with others
- v. to share/post about non-Halal products on Social Media
- vi. to contact with Producer/operator about Halal Certificates/ingredients of Product

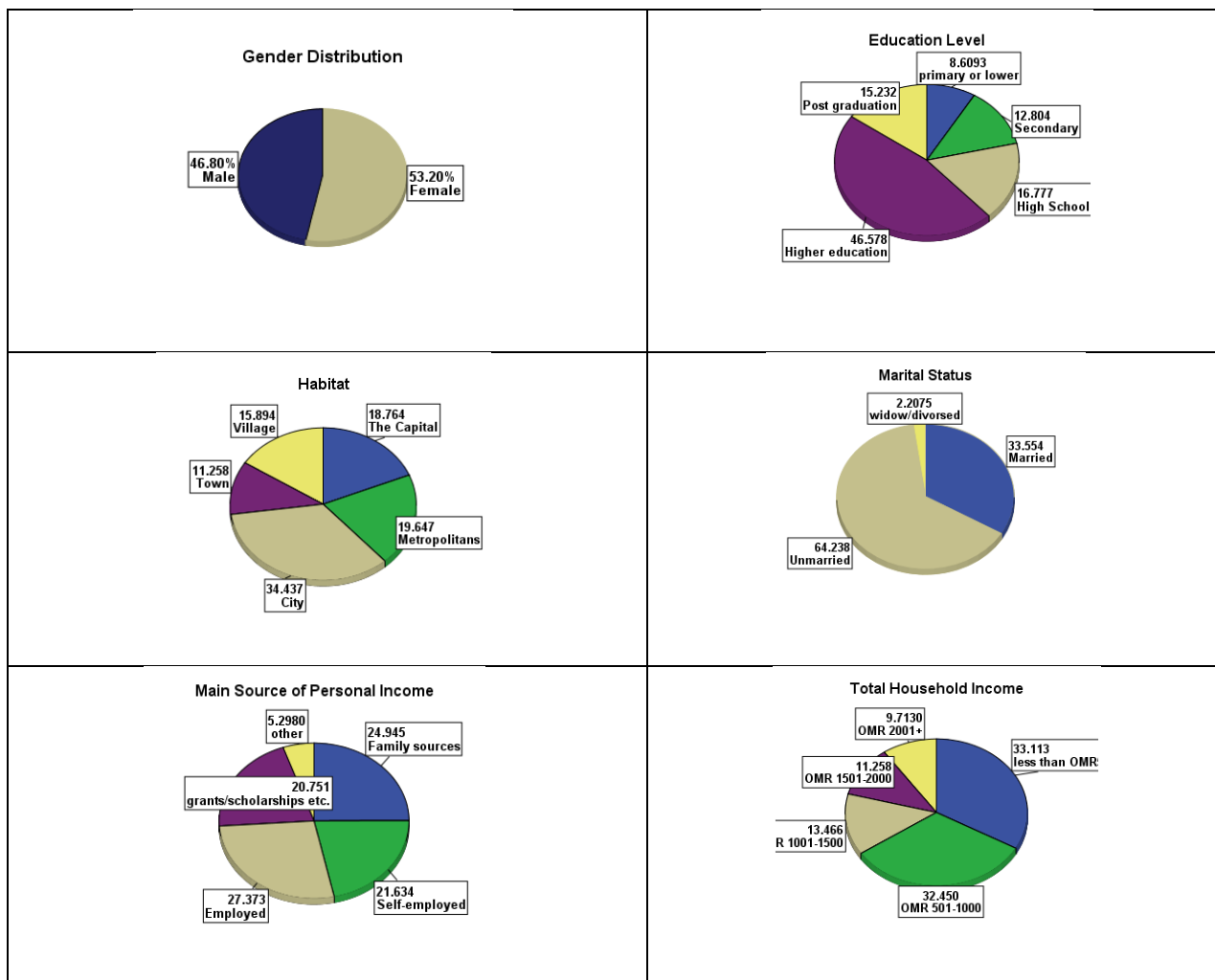
On the Table-2, independent and dependents variables of the study are seen. At the data analysis stage, probable associations will be tested to find whether if any significant differences by independent variables or not.

Table 2. Probable Associations between Independent and Dependent Variables

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables
Gender	<p>How often do you Halal/non-Halal product/service/ingredient/component/process?</p> <p>How often do you Halal Certificate?</p> <p><i>read about</i></p> <p><i>give up to purchase</i></p> <p><i>talk about</i></p> <p><i>ask for</i></p> <p><i>contact to seller/ producer</i></p> <p><i>warn to seller /producer</i></p> <p><i>share/post via social media</i></p>
Education level	
Marital status	
Income level	
Habitat	
Source of Personal Income	
Knowledge level about Halal	
Shopping mode	
Shopping frequency	

3.2. Research Method

The study has been designed as analytical survey to collect quantitative data from primary sources by questionnaire. Non-probability sampling methods (Quota, Convenience and Snowball) were selected due to COVID-19 conditions during data collection.



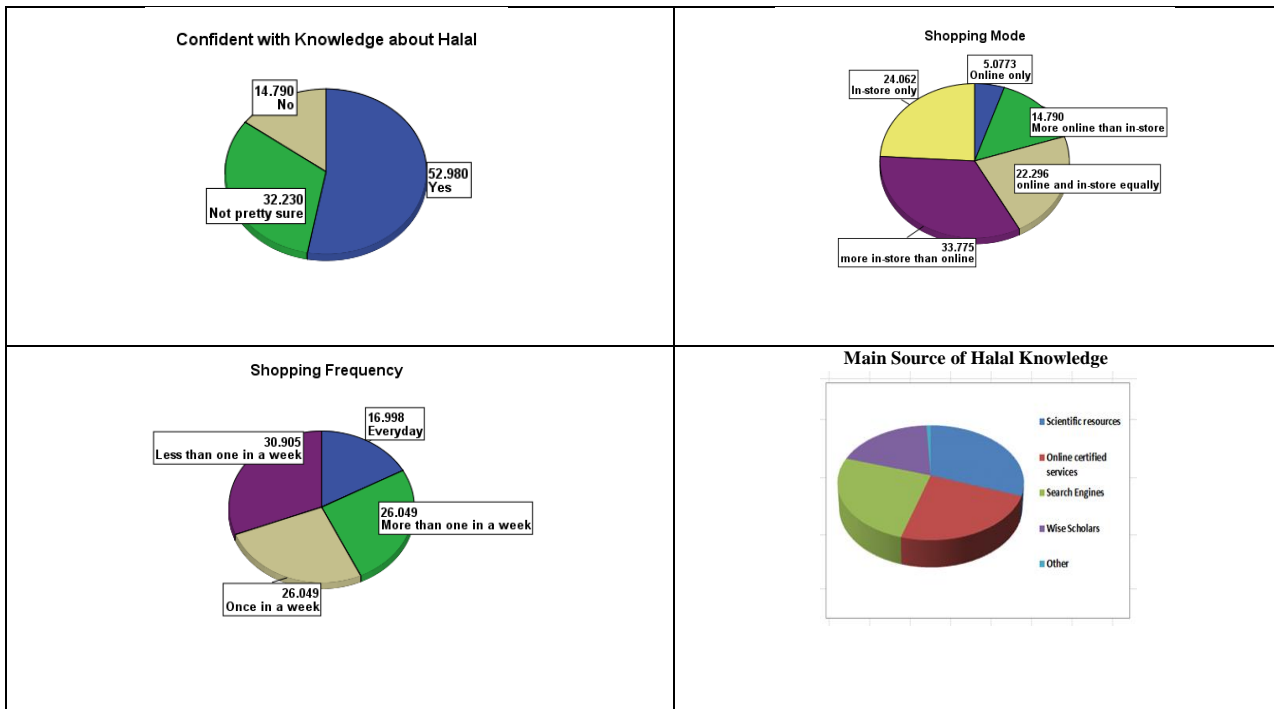


Figure 2. Dashboard of Independent Variables

4. Data Collection and Analysis

The data has been collected via questionnaire administrated in Arabic by 7 interviewers from different regions of Oman in between March-April 2021. Planned sample size was 450. The research population, 16-25 years range was roughly 450000 (NCSI, 2021), has been disproportionately broken down by gender (50-50) and region (50 respondents from each region) in quota sampling. At second stage, the subjects for sample have been selected by convenient (from HEIs in that particular region) and snowball sampling from other educational levels. The IBM SPSS 25 was the software for data analysis.

5. Findings

5.1. Descriptive Statistics

The percentages of independent variables -gender, education level, marital status, income level, habitat, source of personal income, knowledge level about Halal, shopping mode, and shopping frequency- of the study are given in Figure 2. In most questions distributions of responses are fair enough to observe the differences, if any. Some surprising results says more than 52% of respondent confidently believe in that they have well-enough knowledge about Halal/Haram. On the other hand, unsurprising results show that 50% weighted main data sources are online either credible or general search engines. Income distribution relatively skewed due to the studentship of majority of respondents. Besides, marital status was also asymmetrically observed among respondents due to early stage of career or studentship.

5.2. Halal in Daily Life of Gen Z in Oman

The respondents have been asked to select product and services which they always check ingredients/process/components and Halal certificate while purchasing. The responses are seen on the Table 2. It can be seen that the Top 3 categories for both questions are same and other ranks are quite similar except health care services. Although the respondents are checking components of healthcare services by meaning of Halal, they are not looking for Halal certificate in this category.

Table 3. Checking Ingridents/Components and Halal Certificate by Product/Service Category

Always checking while purchasing					
Ingredients of Product and/or process, components of service			Halal Certificate		
Rank	Category	%	Category	%	
1	Foods	83.7	Foods	78.3	
2	Drinks	56.2	Drinks	55.7	
3	Pharmaceuticals	45.9	Pharmaceuticals	53.5	
4	Restaurants, cafeteria	41.2	Hygiene and self-care	35.1	
5	Clothes, shoes, garments	25.7	Restaurants, cafeteria	34.2	
6	Financial Services	23	Clothes, shoes, garments	29.8	
7	Hygiene and self-care	22.8	Cosmetics and beauty care	22.4	
8	Hotels	19.9	Hotels	20	
9	Cosmetics and beauty care	19.5	Financial Services	19	
10	Healthcare services	19	Perfume Products	19	
11	Perfume Products	15.2	Other	0.4	

5.3. Halal Consumer Behaviors of Gen Z in Oman

Table-4 summaries responses of participants for the questions related Halal consumer behaviors. The scale used for these questions was 5 points-scale -1 for never and 5 for always- The scale reliability has been confirmed by Cronbach`s Alpha (0.876 for dependent variable questions and 0.666 for all questions).

As seen on Table-4, the lowest arithmetic mean is computed for *contacting producers about Halal Certificate* while the highest arithmetic mean is computed for *giving up to purchase a product/service, if it is doubtful as Halal*.

In order to examine whether if any significant difference on Halal awareness among respondents by the independent variables or not, Chi Square and Fisher Exact Tests have been conducted within the frame given in the Table-2. There is no significant difference caused by any independent variables at the .05 level.

Table 4. Descriptives of Halal Consumer Behaviors

How often	%					Descriptives		
	Never	Rare	Sometimes	Often	Always	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Talking about Halal products/services with others	16.1	29.4	33.6	17.2	3.8	2.6313	1.0616	453
Reading/searching about Halal related concerns	17.0	18.8	33.6	23.0	7.7	2.8565	1.1784	453
Giving up to purchase a product/service if it is doubtful	15.5	23.4	29.6	18.5	13.0	2.9029	1.2460	453
Asking sellers about Halal Certificate	17.9	29.8	31.8	15.5	5.1	2.6004	1.1018	453
Asking to seller about Halal ingredients	15.2	29.4	34.2	15.9	5.3	2.6667	1.0794	453
Contacting with producer/operator about Halal Certificate	26.3	27.8	27.6	14.1	4.2	2.4216	1.1430	453
Contacting with producer about Halal ingredients	24.5	27.6	29.8	14.6	3.5	2.4503	1.1152	453
Warning contacts about non-Halal ingredients/products/services	16.6	27.4	37.5	14.6	4.0	2.6203	1.0483	453
Posting via social media about non-Halal products/services	20.5	25.8	34.7	14.6	4.4	2.5651	1.1024	453

6. Conclusion

Islamic Law compliant regime and highly conservative social norms make Oman as unique research phenomenon to understand and explain Halal consumer behaviors. Besides Oman, Gen Z, with their expectations, perceptions, intentions and actions is another unique research concern also. In this context, individual Halal awareness (knowledge, Halal Certificate, Halal traceability) proactive and reactive behaviors, purchase intention of the Omani Gen Z, have been surveyed and analyzed in this study.

The responses for dependent variables which are purposively asked to obtain data about Halal awareness, proactive and reactive consumer behaviors, and purchase intentions have lower arithmetic mean than expected. On one side, this is strength of the study, which means biased-free responses have been collected. It seems, the participants have not been influenced by any socially-accepted attitude. On the other side, in the context of conservative social environment, Halal awareness and individual proactive behaviors were poorly found among Omani Gen Z.

Findings of the study are supporting to earlier studies have reported low knowledge (Kamaruzaman, 2008), awareness (Patton 2009), consciousness (Teng & Jamaliah, 2013), attention (Rajagopal et al., 2011) about Halal product among Muslims especially in Islamic Law compliant countries. One of the challenge to conduct research about Halal consumer behaviors in Islamic Law compliant regimes, is to eliminate or examine the influence of consumer perceptions on protective and regulatory functions of government.

Limitations of the study are employing non- probability sampling methods due to Covid-19 and excluding Non-Omani residents in research population due to language barriers. In further researches, the comparison would be inspirable between Omani and Non-Omani participants. And, surely, we need conclusive evidence to compare and conclude various generations' data in Oman.

Declaration: Before the data collection stage, the research proposal and data collection plan have been submitted to and approved by the Scientific Research Department (SRD) at University of Technology and Applied Sciences - Ibri, Sultanate of Oman on January 20, 2021.

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