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Brands as Good Deeds? Islamic Brand Personality, Credibility, Trust, and Loyalty in Halal Markets

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Abstract
This study reconstructs Islamic branding by placing conventional brand personality and brand-equity logic in dialogue with Islamic branding, halal assurance, trust, loyalty, and ethical marketing scholarship. A critical integrative review and thematic synthesis was conducted across a curated corpus of branding books, conceptual papers, empirical studies, and halal-market research. The findings show that Islamic branding cannot be reduced to religious symbolism, a halal logo, or the addition of Islamic traits to conventional brand-personality scales. Moral character becomes strategically meaningful only when it is supported by Shariah eligibility, operational evidence, credible assurance, and consistent stakeholder experience. The article therefore qualifies the influential notion of "brands as good deeds": brands are not moral agents capable of deeds; rather, they can function as accountable moral promises through which organizational actors enable trustworthy and permissible exchange. The study proposes an Islamic Brand Moral Credibility Architecture linking normative eligibility, moral personality, evidentiary credibility, relational trust, and accountable loyalty. This framework clarifies how Islamic brand meaning becomes defensible market value.

INTRODUCTION

Branding occupies a central place in contemporary marketing because it condenses product meaning, organizational promises, perceived differentiation, and accumulated customer experience into a recognizable market asset. In the managerial architecture of Kotler, Keller, and Chernev (2022), brands help firms organize value propositions, reduce choice complexity, differentiate offerings, and build customer-based value over time. Brand-equity logic therefore depends not only on visual identity but on the meanings and associations that customers attach to an offering and to the organization responsible for it. Aaker's (1997) brand-personality framework extended this logic by showing how consumers attribute human characteristics to brands, creating symbolic resources through which brands can appear sincere, competent, exciting, sophisticated, or rugged. In conventional branding, such personality characteristics matter because they can facilitate self-expression, relationship formation, preference, and loyalty.

Islamic branding adds a problem that conventional anthropomorphic branding does not fully resolve. When a brand claims to be Islamic, halal, Shariah-compliant, or morally aligned with Islamic teachings, attributes such as trustworthiness and moral character are no longer only symbolic associations designed to make the brand attractive. They become claims about how the organization actually conducts exchange. Ahmed and Jan (2015) recognized this distinction when they revised Aaker's model and incorporated dimensions such as moral character and trustworthiness into an Islamic brand-personality framework. Borzooei and Asgari (2013) likewise linked halal brand personality to brand trust and purchase intention, suggesting that religiously

resonant personality can contribute to commercial outcomes. Yet the theoretical question remains unresolved: should moral traits be treated as additional brand associations, or do they create obligations that fundamentally change what credibility means?

The distinction is consequential because Islamic branding is vulnerable to symbolic overreach. Alserhan (2010a) showed that Islamic branding includes different relationships among product origin, target market, Shariah compliance, and brand Islamization; a conventional multinational brand can seek acceptance in Muslim markets, but religious acceptance cannot be created through naming and imagery alone. Wilson and Liu (2010) similarly asked whether halal can simply be "shaped into a brand," highlighting the conceptual complexity of converting a religiously governed category into a marketing signifier. Consumer research reinforces the concern. Mohd Yusof and Wan Jusoh (2014) found that consumers associate Islamic brands with Shariah compliance and expect authorization bodies and producers to implement strict procedures, while halal-certification studies show that confidence depends on trustworthy institutions and credible implementation rather than the mere visibility of a logo.

A second problem concerns the relationship between brand meaning and consumer heterogeneity. Islamic branding can easily be theorized as if all Muslim consumers interpret religiosity, halal, Islamic symbolism, and moral identity in the same way. Sandıkcı (2011) warned against simplistic understandings of Islamic markets, while Jafari and Sandıkcı (2015) argued that the Muslim consumer should not be reduced to a homogeneous theological category. Islamic branding therefore operates in a difficult space: it must take religious normativity seriously without assuming deterministic consumer response. Elseidi (2018), for example, showed that halal purchase intentions are shaped through a constellation of attitudes and social influences rather than a single religious variable. Studies of halal consumption among non-Muslims further demonstrate that halal-related meanings can travel through quality, safety, cleanliness, and trust, not only through religious obligation (Haque et al., 2015).

A third problem is the relationship between trust and loyalty. In conventional branding, loyalty is commonly treated as an outcome of favorable experience, satisfaction, commitment, and differentiated brand value. Islamic branding adds a stronger claim: loyalty may be supported by perceptions that the brand is ethically reliable and religiously credible. Polas et al. (2018), using data from halal-product consumers in Malaysia, found that halal product characteristics and corporate image were positively associated with Islamic brand loyalty and that Islamic brand loyalty was positively related to customer retention. Their findings are important because they connect Islamic brand meaning to behavioral continuity, but they also indicate that corporate image by itself did not directly explain retention. This suggests that symbolic image and relational commitment should be analytically separated.

The most provocative formulation in the corpus is Alserhan's (2010b) proposition of "brands as good deeds." The concept seeks to move Islamic branding beyond a narrow halal–haram checklist by connecting consumption and branding to intention, religious meaning, and moral accountability. It is theoretically productive because it reminds marketers that Islamic markets cannot be understood only through material utility and commercial persuasion. At the same time, the formulation creates an unresolved ontological issue. A brand is a market institution, sign, and bundle of organizational promises; it is not a human moral agent that forms intentions or performs deeds. If the metaphor is taken literally, marketing may appropriate religious reward as a commercial positioning device. If it is dismissed entirely, however, Islamic branding loses an

important insight: market exchange can be evaluated within a moral horizon that exceeds customer satisfaction and firm profitability (Alserhan, 2010b; Saeed et al., 2001).

This article addresses these tensions by asking: How should Islamic brand personality, credibility, trust, and loyalty be integrated without reducing moral character to a symbolic brand attribute or turning the notion of "good deeds" into a commercial claim? The article makes three contributions. First, it distinguishes moral personality from moral credibility: a brand may communicate trustworthiness, sincerity, or Islamic identity, but those traits become credible only when supported by verifiable organizational conduct (Ahmed & Jan, 2015; Wilson & Liu, 2010). Second, it reconceptualizes "brands as good deeds" as brands as accountable moral promises, locating moral agency in organizational actors and consumers rather than in the brand symbol itself. Third, it proposes an Islamic Brand Moral Credibility Architecture (IBMCA) that links normative eligibility, moral personality, evidentiary credibility, relational trust, and accountable loyalty. The model positions loyalty as the outcome of sustained credibility rather than religious symbolism alone.

METHODS

This study used a critical integrative review combined with thematic synthesis. The method is appropriate because Islamic branding literature contains conceptual papers, normative arguments, branding frameworks, empirical consumer studies, books, and sector-specific research that cannot be combined meaningfully through statistical meta-analysis. The review logic followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) recursive approach to theme development and drew on Thomas and Harden (2008) for thematic synthesis across heterogeneous sources. Trustworthiness was strengthened by maintaining a distinction between descriptive codes—such as personality, trust, certification, loyalty, and Islamic identity—and interpretive themes concerning the status of moral claims, evidence, and accountability (Nowell et al., 2017).

The master corpus consisted of the two archives assembled for the wider Islamic marketing research programme. For this article, sources were selected when they addressed at least one of six domains: conventional brand personality and branding logic; Islamic-brand conceptualization; the "brands as good deeds" proposition; halal brand personality and trust; Islamic brand loyalty and retention; or operational and institutional conditions affecting brand credibility. The analytical core included Aaker-derived Islamic brand-personality work, Alserhan's Islamic-branding formulations, Wilson and Liu's analysis of halal branding, empirical work on Islamic brand loyalty, consumer perceptions of Shariah-compliant brands, halal-certification research, and book-length treatments of Islamic branding and marketing (Temporal, 2011; Melewar & Syed Alwi, 2018; Alserhan et al., 2022).

Kotler et al. (2022) were used as the external managerial entry point rather than as evidence of Islamic branding. Their branding logic provided the baseline questions: how does a brand differentiate, create associations, establish credibility, and generate durable customer value? Aaker

(1997) provided the personality construct against which Islamic extensions could be assessed. The Islamic marketing corpus was then used to evaluate where these concepts remain transferable and where normative claims alter their meaning. This comparative strategy prevents two opposite errors: treating Islamic branding as entirely detached from accumulated branding theory, or assuming that Islamic branding is simply conventional brand management addressed to a religious segment (Alserhan, 2010a; Sandıkcı, 2011).

Coding proceeded in three passes. The first identified how personality and Islamic identity were constructed: religious cues, moral traits, halal status, corporate image, and symbolic differentiation. The second coded credibility mechanisms, including certification, Shariah compliance, organizational behavior, product characteristics, and the consistency between communicated and delivered values. The third examined relational outcomes: trust, purchase intention, loyalty, retention, advocacy, and boycott. Negative-case analysis was deliberately included. Sources that challenged homogeneous Muslim-consumer assumptions or showed weak and conditional relationships among image, trust, and behavior were used to prevent the framework from assuming that Islamic symbolism automatically produces loyalty (Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2015; Polas et al., 2018).

Five themes were retained because they recurred across source types and were necessary to answer the research question: (1) Islamic brand personality extends but also changes anthropomorphic branding; (2) Islamic identity requires normative eligibility before differentiation; (3) moral traits require evidence to become credible; (4) trust is relational and context-dependent rather than automatically generated by religious signs; and (5) loyalty carries both commercial and accountability implications. These themes were then synthesized into the IBMCA. The model is conceptual rather than causal proof, so its proposed relationships are presented as propositions for future empirical testing rather than as universally established effects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Islamic brand personality is more than an expanded list of human traits

The first theme concerns the status of brand personality. Aaker (1997) defined brand personality as human characteristics associated with a brand, providing marketers with a way to understand symbolic differentiation and consumer–brand fit. This framework is useful in Islamic markets because Muslim consumers, like other consumers, interpret brands through personality, identity, emotion, and social meaning. Ahmed and Jan (2015), however, found that an Islamic extension cannot be achieved simply by translating Aaker's five dimensions. Their proposed model renamed some established dimensions and added moral character and trustworthiness. The change is theoretically important because moral character is not merely another expressive style comparable with sophistication or excitement. It contains evaluative claims about what the brand and the organization ought to be.

This distinction separates personality attribution from normative character attribution. A brand described as exciting does not incur a moral duty to produce excitement in every encounter; failure may disappoint, but it is not necessarily an ethical contradiction. A brand described as trustworthy, honest, or Shariah-compliant carries a different burden because the claim implies standards of conduct. Saeed et al. (2001) argued that Islamic marketing ethics place honesty, justice, and responsibility within the structure of market exchange, while Saeed and Baig (2013) extended Shariah-compliant reasoning across product, pricing, promotion, and selling. In this context, "trustworthy" cannot be treated solely as a projected personality trait. It is partly a testable condition of how the firm behaves.

Borzooei and Asgari (2013) provide a bridge between symbolic personality and relational outcome by proposing that halal brand personality influences brand trust and purchase intention, with religious commitment as a moderating factor. Their model is valuable because it refuses to treat personality as an endpoint. Yet it also reveals a conceptual dependency: personality affects trust only if consumers believe that the characteristics attributed to the brand correspond to something real. A consumer may recognize Islamic aesthetics, terminology, or values while remaining uncertain about the organization's actual practices. The more moral the personality claim becomes, the more it invites verification. Islamic brand personality therefore requires a credibility layer that conventional trait models can leave implicit.

This finding also limits the temptation to construct one ideal Islamic personality and apply it across all Muslim markets. The critique developed by Jafari and Sandıkcı (2015) is relevant because consumers interpret religious meaning through specific histories, cultures, identities, and institutional contexts. What one market reads as modest, sincere, or authentically Islamic may be perceived elsewhere as ordinary, politicized, overly performative, or commercially instrumental. Sandıkcı and Jafari (2013) similarly emphasize that Islam is encountered through lived consumption rather than through an abstract consumer template. Moral personality can therefore provide a normative vocabulary, but its brand expression must remain empirically situated.

Islamic identity requires normative eligibility before brand differentiation

The second theme is that an Islamic brand cannot be defined only by the strength of its Islamic associations. Alserhan (2010a) differentiates among categories of Islamic brands and discusses how non-Muslim or international firms may seek acceptance through brand Islamization. This typology is useful because origin, ownership, market, and Shariah compliance do not always coincide. A product made by a non-Muslim multinational can be halal; a company based in a Muslim-majority country can sell products or employ practices that do not satisfy Islamic requirements. Islamic identity is therefore not a simple demographic label attached to producer nationality or consumer religion.

Mohd Yusof and Wan Jusoh (2014) found that consumers associated Islamic branding with products and services that meet Shariah requirements and expected serious implementation by firms and accreditation bodies. Their findings make normative eligibility a precondition of credibility. A logo can identify a claim, but it cannot independently establish that the claim is true. Wilson and Liu (2010) make a similar point by treating halal branding as a complex interaction among religious meaning, market signification, and organizational practice. In their analysis, the attempt to "shape halal into a brand" opens commercial opportunities but also creates a risk that marketers convert a religious assurance system into a symbolic shortcut.

This suggests that brand differentiation in Islamic markets should be sequenced

differently from ordinary positioning. In conventional branding, managers may begin with desirable associations and ask how to own a distinctive position in consumers' minds (Kotler et al., 2022). An Islamic brand should first establish normative eligibility: whether the offering and relevant processes are consistent with the requirements implied by the claim. Only then does differentiation become defensible. This sequence does not make every Islamic brand identical. Firms can still compete through quality, design, innovation, service, price, personality, community meaning, or convenience; the point is that Shariah legitimacy cannot be treated as an aesthetic association that substitutes for actual eligibility (Alserhan, 2011; Temporal, 2011).

The distinction becomes particularly important in categories where consumers face information asymmetry. Halal status is often a credence attribute because the consumer cannot directly observe ingredients, sourcing, slaughter procedures, contamination controls, logistics, or financial structures at the point of purchase. Tieman (2021) therefore treats halal excellence as a management problem involving processes and assurance, not simply marketing communication. When consumers depend on certifiers, retailers, manufacturers, and supply-chain partners, brand credibility is partly an institutional achievement. Islamic branding consequently extends beyond identity management into governance of the conditions that make identity believable.

Moral credibility is produced by evidence, not symbolism alone

The third theme is the centrality of evidentiary credibility. Conventional brands become credible through repeated consistency between promise and performance, but Islamic brands intensify this requirement because the promise may concern conduct that consumers cannot personally inspect. The corpus repeatedly links trust to compliance, accreditation, product characteristics, and corporate behavior. Mohd Yusof and Wan Jusoh (2014) emphasize strict procedures and authorization, while Polas et al. (2018) found that halal product characteristics and corporate image contribute to Islamic brand loyalty. Wilson and Liu (2010) caution against treating halal as a superficial signifier, and Tieman (2021) demonstrates how assurance depends on operational systems.

This evidence supports a three-level distinction. Symbolic credibility exists when a brand looks, sounds, or presents itself as Islamic. Process credibility exists when the firm has procedures designed to achieve compliance and ethical consistency. Evidentiary credibility exists when relevant stakeholders can obtain credible proof that those processes operate as claimed. The distinction explains why branding can succeed at recognition yet fail at trust. A halal logo may efficiently communicate category membership, but if the issuing institution lacks credibility or if the firm's practices contradict the symbol, recognition can amplify rather than reduce reputational risk.

The role of evidence does not mean that all brand meaning should be reduced to certification. Islamic branding includes emotional, experiential, and identity dimensions that cannot be captured by audit documents. Temporal (2011) emphasizes the strategic potential of Islamic brands as global value propositions, while Melewar and Syed Alwi (2018) show that Islamic branding involves theory and practice across sectors and cultural contexts. The argument here is narrower: whenever a brand uses moral or religious characteristics as reasons to trust it, those characteristics should have an evidentiary foundation proportionate to the strength of the claim. Emotional branding may enrich meaning; it should not replace proof.

This point reframes corporate image. Polas et al. (2018) found that corporate image was positively associated with Islamic brand loyalty but did not show a significant direct relationship

with customer retention in their model. The result suggests that favorable image is not identical to durable behavioral commitment. Image can create expectations, but loyalty requires the relationship to survive repeated encounters. When Islamic identity heightens expectations of fairness and integrity, gaps between image and conduct may be especially damaging because they can be interpreted as hypocrisy rather than ordinary service inconsistency. Thus, the value of Islamic corporate image is conditional on its alignment with experience and evidence.

Trust is the relational conversion mechanism between moral claims and loyalty

The fourth theme is that trust converts brand claims into relationship value. Borzooei and Asgari (2013) explicitly positioned brand trust between halal brand personality and purchase intention, while the wider Islamic branding literature repeatedly associates halal and Islamic identity with confidence, credibility, and reduced uncertainty. Trust is particularly important when customers cannot fully verify the quality or compliance of an offering before purchase. In such settings, the brand functions as a promise about future or hidden performance. The stronger the credence problem, the more consequential the trust mechanism becomes (Wilson & Liu, 2010; Tieman, 2021).

Trust, however, should not be treated as an automatic consequence of religiosity. Elseidi (2018) found that halal purchase intentions can be explained through a broader behavioral configuration, and Haque et al. (2015) showed that non-Muslim consumers may respond to halal products through perceptions not reducible to religious duty. This means an Islamic brand can be trusted for different reasons by different consumers. A Muslim consumer may value compliance, identity congruence, and spiritual reassurance; a non-Muslim consumer may infer cleanliness, process discipline, or quality. The brand's moral credibility can therefore have plural market meanings without losing its Islamic normative basis.

The heterogeneity of trust motives also limits manipulative religious segmentation. If marketers assume that visible religious cues guarantee trust, they may overuse Arabic names, Islamic symbols, religious language, or piety-signaling imagery while neglecting product quality and organizational behavior. Such strategies can create what might be called symbolic trust extraction: the firm attempts to capture the confidence associated with Islam without incurring the organizational obligations implied by the claim. Islamic marketing ethics rejects this asymmetry because persuasion should not depend on misleading representations or exploitation of consumer vulnerability (Saeed et al., 2001; Riaz, 2016).

Trust therefore has both psychological and governance dimensions. Psychologically, consumers develop confidence that the brand will deliver expected value. Institutionally, trust can be supported by certification, transparent information, complaint handling, traceability, service consistency, and credible third parties. These dimensions interact. A strong certification system can reduce uncertainty, but poor service can still erode trust; a warm brand personality can encourage attachment, but evidence of non-compliance can overwhelm that attachment. Islamic brand management should therefore treat trust as a cross-functional outcome rather than a communications metric.

Loyalty is legitimate only when it follows credible value rather than religious capture

The fifth theme concerns loyalty. Polas et al. (2018) provide empirical support for a positive relationship between Islamic brand loyalty and customer retention, which is consistent with the managerial objective of building durable customer relationships. In Islamic markets,

loyalty can also carry community and identity effects because consumers share recommendations, warn others, participate in boycotts, and interpret brands through collective moral narratives. Alserhan (2010b) used boycott cases to illustrate how brands can acquire powerful moral valence that extends well beyond functional product evaluation. This demonstrates that loyalty and rejection may both be socially transmitted.

Yet Islamic brand loyalty should not be defined as maximal attachment to a religiously coded brand. Loyalty becomes normatively problematic when firms exploit sacred meaning to discourage critical evaluation, exaggerate religious endorsement, or imply that purchasing a specific commercial brand is itself a religious obligation. Such tactics transform religious commitment into a switching barrier. Saeed and Baig (2013) emphasize that Shariah-compliant marketing constrains how firms pursue exchange, while Kadirov (2014) argues that Islamic marketing should consider the effects of marketing systems on wider welfare. A theoretically coherent Islamic brand cannot seek loyalty through means that undermine informed consumer agency.

The findings therefore suggest a distinction between faith-congruent loyalty and religiously captured loyalty. Faith-congruent loyalty arises when a consumer repeatedly chooses a brand because its value, conduct, compliance, and identity remain consistent with the consumer's preferences and commitments. Religiously captured loyalty arises when the firm uses sacred cues to create guilt, fear, status pressure, or a false sense of religious necessity. Both may produce repeated purchasing, but only the former is compatible with accountable Islamic marketing. Behavioral repetition alone is therefore an insufficient measure of Islamic brand success.

This distinction also clarifies the role of advocacy. Loyal consumers can become brand advocates, but advocacy in Islamic markets may quickly become moral endorsement. A consumer who recommends a halal brand is not only communicating satisfaction; the recommendation may be interpreted by others as testimony about trustworthiness and permissibility. Firms therefore benefit from advocacy while also carrying greater responsibility for the claims that advocacy amplifies. Loyalty should feed back into accountability: the more trust and moral authority a brand accumulates, the stronger its obligation to maintain the conditions that justified that trust.

DISCUSSION

From "brands as good deeds" to brands as accountable moral promises

Alserhan's (2010b) "brands as good deeds" formulation makes a valuable intervention because it rejects a purely material account of branding. It recognizes that consumption can be located within a moral horizon and that Muslim consumers may evaluate market choices in relation to religious commitments. The formulation also challenges marketers who approach Islamic markets as a commercial opportunity while failing to understand the meaning that halal, intention, and moral conduct hold for consumers. In this sense, the concept succeeds as a corrective to shallow "Islamization" of branding.

The concept becomes less defensible when the brand itself is treated literally as a deed. In Islamic moral reasoning, deeds presuppose moral agents, intentions, and accountable action. A logo, name, brand identity, or market sign cannot form intention. Organizations act through people, governance systems, contracts, incentives, and decisions; consumers likewise act through their own intentions and choices. The brand is better understood as an institutional

representation of those actions. This distinction matters because commercial actors should not be able to manufacture the appearance of religious merit merely by attaching a sacred narrative to an offering (Alserhan, 2010b; Saeed et al., 2001).

The article therefore proposes the formulation brand as an accountable moral promise. A brand can communicate that an organization intends to provide permissible, trustworthy, fair, and valuable exchange. That promise may enable consumers to act consistently with their commitments, but the moral status of the underlying actions depends on intention and conduct, not on the commercial symbol by itself. This reconstruction preserves the insight of "good deeds" while preventing a category error between moral agency and brand representation. It also makes the concept empirically researchable because promises, evidence, consistency, trust, and loyalty can be observed and measured.

Islamic Brand Moral Credibility Architecture

The synthesis yields a five-layer Islamic Brand Moral Credibility Architecture (IBMCA). The first layer is normative eligibility, which asks whether the offer and the relevant processes satisfy the requirements implied by an Islamic or halal claim. The second is moral personality encoding, in which the brand expresses traits such as trustworthiness, sincerity, competence, modesty, care, or moral character in forms meaningful to its market. The third is evidentiary credibility, which tests whether symbolic personality is supported by organizational conduct, assurance, and verifiable performance (Ahmed & Jan, 2015; Mohd Yusof & Wan Jusoh, 2014).

The fourth layer is relational trust. Here evidence and experience are converted into consumer confidence under conditions of uncertainty and heterogeneity. Trust may derive from religious congruence, product quality, certification, corporate behavior, service experience, or combinations of these factors. The fifth layer is accountable loyalty, in which retention and advocacy emerge from sustained value and credibility but feed back into greater organizational responsibility. The more moral authority a brand acquires, the more costly inconsistency becomes for consumers, firms, certifiers, and the wider halal ecosystem (Polas et al., 2018; Wilson & Liu, 2010).

Table 1. Islamic Brand Moral Credibility Architecture (IBMCA)

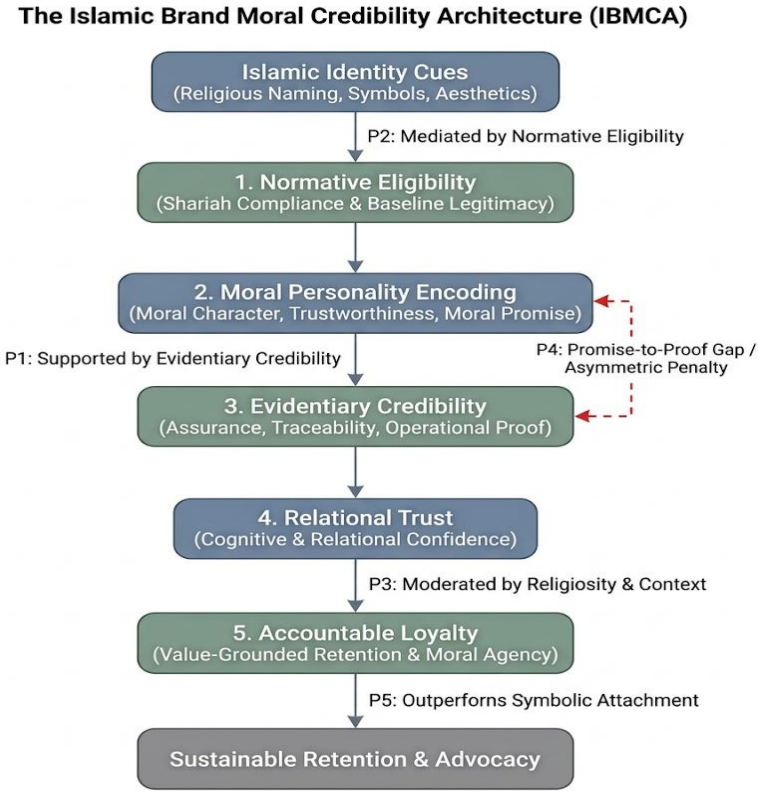
Layer	Core question	Conventional branding function retained	Islamic reconstruction	Primary failure mode
1. Normative eligibility	Is the brand entitled to make the claim?	Category membership and positioning	Shariah/halal legitimacy precedes differentiation	Islamic symbolism without substantive eligibility
2. Moral personality encoding	What character does the brand communicate?	Personality, identity, associations	Moral traits carry obligations, not merely expressive meaning	Piety signalling and stereotype-based personality
3. Evidentiary credibility	Can the claimed character be substantiated?	Brand credibility and consistency	Compliance, assurance, operations, transparency, and proof	Symbol–process gap; unverifiable claims
4. Relational trust	Why should consumers rely on the brand?	Risk reduction and relationship formation	Trust combines experience, evidence, religious congruence, and institutional confidence	Symbolic trust extraction or institutional distrust
5. Accountable loyalty	Why should loyalty persist and what obligations follow?	Retention, advocacy, brand equity	Loyalty must follow credible value and preserve consumer agency	Religious capture, moral lock-in, reputational contagion

Note. Developed from the integrative synthesis in this study.

IBMCA changes the causal intuition of Islamic branding. Instead of assuming Islamic identity → trust → loyalty, the framework proposes a qualified path: normative eligibility → credible moral personality → evidence → trust → accountable loyalty. Islamic cues may influence awareness or interpretation at any stage, but they cannot replace eligibility and evidence. This makes the model compatible with Muslim-consumer heterogeneity. Consumers can assign different weights to religious congruence, quality, social identity, and convenience while still responding to the same underlying credibility infrastructure (Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2015; Haque et al., 2015).

The structural relationships among these layers and the placement of the theoretical propositions are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Islamic Brand Moral Credibility Architecture (IBMCA) and Theoretical Propositions



Note. Figure 1 maps the sequential flow of the IBMCA framework and the placement of theoretical propositions (P1 – P5):

P1 (Evidentiary Moderation): The path from Moral Personality Encoding to Relational Trust is bounded and strengthened by Evidentiary Credibility.

P2 (Normative Mediation): Normative Eligibility mediates the link between superficial Islamic Identity Cues and durable brand credibility.

P3 (Relational Moderation): The translation of Relational Trust into Accountable Loyalty is moderated by consumer religiosity and market context (e.g., Muslim-majority vs. minority settings).

P4 (Asymmetric Moral Penalty): The incongruence/gap between communicated Moral Personality and verified operational conduct exerts an asymmetric negative shock on brand equity.

P5 (Accountable vs. Symbolic Loyalty): Accountable Loyalty demonstrates superior, enduring

predictive validity for long-term customer retention and advocacy compared to mere symbolic Islamic attachment.

What Islamic branding retains from Kotler and Aaker—and what it changes

The proposed model retains several central insights from mainstream branding. From Kotler et al. (2022), it preserves the importance of clear positioning, differentiated value propositions, consistent customer experience, and the cumulative value of brands as relationship assets. From Aaker (1997), it retains the insight that consumers humanize brands and use brand personality to interpret identity and relationship meaning. Islamic branding does not require abandoning either concept; indeed, without differentiation and recognizable personality, many Islamic brands would remain undistinguished commodity claims.

What changes is the status of moral traits. Conventional brand management can treat sincerity or competence as desirable associations whose strategic value lies in how consumers perceive them. Islamic branding must ask whether a moral association is merely perceived or substantively deserved. "Trustworthiness," for example, cannot be optimized only through tone of voice, spokesperson selection, visual identity, or storytelling. It must be connected to truthful communication, contract performance, product integrity, fair pricing, complaint handling, and other practices through which trustworthiness becomes observable (Saeed et al., 2001; Riaz, 2016).

The architecture also reconstructs brand equity. If Islamic brand equity is measured only as awareness, positive associations, preference, and loyalty, a firm could theoretically build high equity through effective religious symbolism despite weak operational integrity. IBMCA treats this as unstable or pseudo-equity. Sustainable Islamic brand equity should incorporate credibility reserves: accumulated confidence that the brand's moral and religious claims are supported by evidence and can survive scrutiny. A compliance failure can deplete these reserves more rapidly than an ordinary product disappointment because it damages both functional expectations and moral meaning (Wilson & Liu, 2010; Tieman, 2021).

Managerial implications: managing the promise-to-proof gap

For managers, the practical implication is that Islamic brand strategy should begin with a claim audit. Every religious or ethical association communicated by the brand should be mapped against the organizational processes needed to substantiate it. If the brand promises halal integrity, managers should identify who verifies ingredients, suppliers, processing, logistics, and retail handling. If it promises fairness, they should identify pricing, contract, labor, and complaint practices that make fairness credible. The stronger the moral claim, the stronger the evidence architecture should be (Mohd Yusof & Wan Jusoh, 2014; Tieman, 2021).

Brand-personality design should likewise move from trait selection to trait enactment. A firm may want to be perceived as trustworthy, caring, modest, or competent, but it should specify what each trait means behaviorally. Trustworthiness could imply transparent claims and dependable compliance; care could imply responsible service recovery; modesty could imply restraint in exaggeration and avoidance of manipulative religious superiority; competence could imply professional assurance and product performance. This approach prevents Islamic brand personality from becoming a vocabulary of attractive adjectives disconnected from operations (Ahmed & Jan, 2015; Temporal, 2011).

Managers should also avoid treating Muslim identity as a loyalty shortcut. Segmentation remains necessary because consumers vary in religious commitment, brand involvement, age,

culture, socioeconomic position, and interpretations of halal. A brand can maintain a clear Islamic normative identity while communicating different benefit structures to different segments. For some consumers, certification may be central; for others, quality, convenience, sustainability, or service may be more salient. The normative core should remain stable while the customer-value expression remains context-sensitive (Sandıkcı, 2011; Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2015).

Finally, firms need a moral recovery protocol. When an Islamic brand faces a compliance controversy, ordinary public-relations responses may be insufficient. Recovery should identify the violated promise, disclose what happened at an appropriate level of transparency, correct the operational cause, involve credible assurance actors where necessary, and communicate evidence of remediation. The purpose is not merely to protect image but to rebuild the basis on which trust was rationally placed. Evidence-based recovery is therefore part of brand management, not only crisis management (Wilson & Liu, 2010; Tieman, 2021).

Theoretical propositions and future research

The architecture generates five propositions. P1: Perceived Islamic brand personality will have a stronger positive relationship with brand trust when consumers perceive high evidentiary credibility. This proposition directly tests the distinction between symbolic moral character and substantiated moral character. It extends Ahmed and Jan's (2015) Islamic personality framework and Borzooei and Asgari's (2013) trust model by introducing proof as a boundary condition rather than assuming that personality associations convert directly into trust.

P2: Normative eligibility will mediate the relationship between Islamic identity cues and brand credibility. A brand may use strong Islamic naming, imagery, or storytelling, but those cues should produce durable credibility only when consumers believe the brand is substantively entitled to make the claim. This proposition could be tested experimentally by varying religious symbolism and independently varying certification, supply-chain evidence, or verified compliance. The design would help distinguish religious priming from credible Islamic branding (Alserhan, 2010a; Mohd Yusof & Wan Jusoh, 2014).

P3: The effect of Islamic brand trust on loyalty will be moderated by consumer religiosity and market context, but trust will remain meaningful across religious segments through different benefit interpretations. Muslim and non-Muslim consumers may trust halal brands for different reasons, and religiosity should not be assumed to determine behavior uniformly. Comparative studies could examine Muslim-majority and minority settings, product categories with different credence intensity, and consumer groups with different levels of halal knowledge (Haque et al., 2015; Elseidi, 2018).

P4: The gap between communicated moral personality and verified organizational conduct will have an asymmetric negative effect on Islamic brand equity. In other words, inconsistency should damage highly moralized Islamic brands more strongly than functionally positioned brands because the failure violates both performance and moral expectations. This proposition could be investigated through crisis scenarios, longitudinal reputation data, or natural experiments involving certification withdrawal, misleading claims, labor controversies, or supply-chain incidents (Wilson & Liu, 2010; Tieman, 2021).

P5: Accountable loyalty will predict retention and advocacy more robustly than symbolic Islamic attachment. Accountable loyalty can be operationalized as repeated preference supported by perceived value, verified credibility, and preserved consumer agency. Symbolic attachment can be measured through identification with Islamic imagery or brand-religion congruence. The

distinction would extend Polas et al. (2018) by testing whether loyalty grounded in credibility is more resilient than loyalty grounded primarily in image. Such work could also examine whether accountable loyalty reduces vulnerability to religiously manipulative marketing.

Future research should develop validated measures for normative eligibility, moral-personality enactment, evidentiary credibility, and accountable loyalty. Longitudinal designs are especially important because credibility is accumulated and depleted over time. Cross-sector comparison is also necessary: Islamic banking, halal food, modest fashion, tourism, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and digital services differ substantially in how easily consumers can verify compliance and performance. Finally, researchers should examine the institutional ecology of Islamic brand credibility, including certifiers, scholars, retailers, influencers, platforms, and consumer communities. Brand meaning is firm-managed but not firm-owned; in high-trust religious markets, credibility is collectively produced and contested (Melewar & Syed Alwi, 2018; Alserhan et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Islamic branding becomes theoretically distinctive when moral character is treated as an accountable market claim rather than as decorative personality. Conventional branding provides indispensable tools for differentiation, personality, positioning, relationship formation, and equity creation, but Islamic branding changes the evidentiary burden attached to traits such as honesty, trustworthiness, and Shariah compliance. The corpus shows that consumers expect more than Islamic symbols: they associate credible Islamic brands with substantive compliance, trustworthy institutions, product characteristics, and consistent organizational behavior (Ahmed & Jan, 2015; Mohd Yusof & Wan Jusoh, 2014; Polas et al., 2018).

The article therefore qualifies Alserhan's influential "brands as good deeds" proposition. Its core insight—that market exchange can be situated within a moral and transcendent horizon—should be retained, but the brand itself should not be treated as a moral agent. Brands are better conceptualized as accountable moral promises. Human and organizational actors form intentions and perform actions; the brand communicates, coordinates, and accumulates the meaning of those actions. This distinction protects Islamic branding from the commercialization of religious merit while preserving the field's normative depth (Alserhan, 2010b; Saeed et al., 2001).

Suggestion

The proposed Islamic Brand Moral Credibility Architecture links normative eligibility, moral personality, evidentiary credibility, relational trust, and accountable loyalty. Its central implication is that Islamic branding should move from looking Islamic to being credibly accountable for what Islamic identity promises.

Such a shift allows the field to remain in productive dialogue with Kotler's branding architecture and Aaker's personality theory while developing a stronger account of moral credibility, consumer agency, and long-term trust. In this formulation, loyalty is not extracted through sacred symbolism; it is earned through repeatedly verified value.

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