

PHENOMENOLOGY OF ISLAMIC IDENTITY IN BRAND POSITIONING STRATEGY OF ARABIAN FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS IN MAKASSAR CITY

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Abstract

This study aims to understand how Muslim consumers in Makassar experience and interpret Islamic identity in the *brand positioning* strategy of fast-food restaurants. Employing a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, twelve purposively selected informants participated in the study, all of whom were active Muslim consumers who had consistently interacted with Islamic-oriented fast-food brands for at least two years. The data were analyzed through verbatim transcription, open coding, clustering of essential meanings, and reflective thematic interpretation to reveal the authentic structure of consumer experiences. The findings identified four key dimensions that construct the meaning of Islamic identity in fast-food branding: (1) *serenity of the heart (sakīnah)* as a spiritual experience that provides inner peace and confidence in halal assurance; (2) *brand integrity (sidq and amanah)* as a moral reflection of honesty and responsibility; (3) *manners and service (akhlaq al-karimah)* as an Islamic relational value emphasizing politeness and respect; and (4) *gratitude and blessing (barakah)* as the existential meaning of halal consumption. These four dimensions form the structure referred to as The Anatomy of Islamic Brand Spirituality, where spirituality, ethics, and morality constitute the core of Islamic brand experiences. Theoretically, this research extends the concept of *Islamic branding* by positioning spirituality as the center of brand differentiation, while practically, it emphasizes the importance of honesty, courteous service, and the value of blessing (*barakah*) in building authentic and sustainable Islamic brand positioning.

Keywords: Brand Positioning, Fast-Food Restaurant, Islamic Identity, Phenomenology



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INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly competitive culinary landscape, fast food restaurants in Indonesia no longer serve solely as practical consumption spaces, but have evolved into spaces representing values, identity, and lifestyle. Urban Muslim consumers now demand more than just taste and speed of service; they expect experiences that align with their moral and spiritual values. In this context, restaurant preferences are no longer determined solely by functionality, but also by the religious and ethical meanings associated with the brand (Wardi et al., 2021). This shift in orientation indicates that consumption decisions among modern Muslim communities are expressions of religious and social identity that reflect values of honesty, purity, and spiritual responsibility.

These changes in consumption patterns align with growing global awareness of the halal economy. According to a 2024 report by DinarStandard, Indonesian Muslim spending on halal food reached USD 77 billion, making Indonesia one of the largest halal markets in the world (DinarStandard, 2024). This rapid growth has not only driven the emergence of halal-certified restaurants but has also given rise to a new phenomenon, Islamic brand positioning a branding strategy that emphasizes Islamic values as a form of competitive differentiation. In this context, halal certification is no longer simply an indicator of compliance with sharia law in the production process, but also a symbol of spirituality and inner purity, providing moral peace for Muslim consumers (Alserhan, 2021).

Within the framework of Islamic marketing, the concept of Islamic branding is not only limited to halal labels, but also to the integration of ethical values, morality, and spirituality into brand identity and behavior. Wilson & Liu, (2014) emphasizes that Islamic brands function as cultural meaning systems, representing faith identity through symbols, narratives, and organizational practices. The values of amanah (honesty), thayyib (purity), and barakah (blessings) serve as moral foundations that build emotional resonance and consumer trust in brands. Rahman & Reynolds, (2021) found that spiritual and emotional experiences with halal brands have a positive correlation with affective loyalty, as consumers feel a connection between their personal faith identity and the values embodied by the brand. In the context of fast food restaurants, Islamic branding is not simply a promotional strategy, but a form of value communication that instills religious meaning in every aspect of the dining experience.

Makassar City is a relevant context for exploring this phenomenon due to its religious and collectivist social dynamics. According to data from the Makassar City Central Statistics Agency (2024), 86.7% of the city's population is Muslim, while the food and beverage sector contributes 17.3% to the city's GRDP. GrabFood, (2024) Makassar also ranks among the five cities with the highest growth in halal fast food restaurant consumption. This phenomenon demonstrates that Islamic imagery is now a strategic dimension in shaping local consumer preferences. Arabian fast food restaurants such as Almaz Fried Chicken, Al Baldan Chicken, The Faza Authentic Arabic Food, and Emados Shawarma, not only selling practicality, but also communicating the values of purity, politeness, and social solidarity through visuals, services, and an Islamic atmosphere.

However, serious issues arise regarding the authenticity and depth of Islamic values communicated in fast food restaurant branding practices. Many brands display Islamic symbols such as Arabic calligraphy, hijab-wearing employee attire, or halal certifications merely as marketing gimmicks without consistent behavior that represents honesty and blessings (Mukhroni & Rialdy, 2024). This phenomenon creates brand dissonance, a discrepancy between the claimed image and the reality of the consumer experience. Dellby et al., (2024) research reveals that Muslim consumers are increasingly critical of symbolic Islamic claims and prefer brands that demonstrate Islamic values through tangible experiences, such as friendliness, honest transactions, and clean dining. Therefore, authentic Islamic brand positioning requires alignment between symbol, meaning, and behavior.

From a theoretical perspective, research on halal restaurants and Islamic branding is still dominated by quantitative approaches that emphasize the relationship between variables, such as the influence of religiosity on loyalty or purchase intention (Amalia et al., 2023; Wardi et al., 2021). This approach is indeed useful for measuring behavioral tendencies, but it is not yet able to explore the subjective meaning experienced by consumers in appreciating the Islamic values inherent in the brand. The phenomenological approach, as explained by Moustakas, (1994), allows researchers to reflectively understand consumers' lived experiences, namely how they perceive, interpret, and live out the values of faith in the context of consumption. Through this perspective, Islamic identity can be understood not as a mere marketing construct, but as a living and evolving experience of meaning within the consciousness of Muslim consumers.

The socio-cultural context of Makassar society also enriches our understanding of this phenomenon. Local culture upholds the values of mutual respect and dignity. These values are naturally integrated into consumer behavior and preferences for restaurants that are not only legally halal but also provide spiritual serenity. Hasanah & Lestari, (2022) found that for many Muslim consumers, eating at halal restaurants is not just a consumption practice, but a social act of worship that represents gratitude, togetherness, and obedience. In this context, fast food restaurants with an Islamic identity serve a dual role as providers of physical needs and a platform for expressing Islamic values in modern life.

Conceptually, the meaning of Islamic identity in brand positioning strategy involves three main layers: the symbolic, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. The symbolic dimension includes visual aspects such as logos, colors, and narratives that reflect Islamic values; the emotional dimension reflects a sense of security, comfort, and trust built through customer experience; while the spiritual dimension describes the inner closeness and moral serenity that arise from religious awareness when interacting with a brand (Rahman & Reynolds, 2021). These three dimensions are interconnected and shape consumer perceptions of the authenticity and credibility of Islamic brands. Understanding the interaction of these three dimensions is key to creating a meaningful and sustainable brand strategy.

Thus, this research has strong scientific and practical relevance. Scientifically, this study seeks to expand the theory of Islamic marketing and brand positioning through a phenomenological approach that places consumers' subjective experiences at the center of analysis. This approach is expected to uncover how the values of faith, ethics, and morality are internalized in the interactions between consumers and Islamic brands. Practically, this research is expected to provide strategic guidance for fast food restaurant industry players in building authentic, consistent brands rooted in the spiritual values of the Muslim community. Therefore, the main focus of this study is to understand how Muslim consumers in Makassar City experience and interpret Islamic identity in the brand positioning strategies of fast food restaurants, and how these experiences shape perceptions of the authenticity, credibility, and spiritual values of brands amidst the dynamics of the modern market.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, focusing on understanding the subjective experiences of Muslim consumers regarding Islamic identity within the brand positioning strategies of fast food restaurants in Makassar City. A phenomenological approach is considered most relevant for exploring individuals' awareness and in-depth reflection on their real-life experiences within the context of social and cultural life. According to Moustakas, (1994) phenomenology aims to uncover the essence of meaning that emerges from the interaction between humans and their world as they experience it, rather than simply describing surface phenomena. Therefore, in this study, Islamic identity is not

viewed as an external marketing attribute, but as a phenomenon experienced and interpreted spiritually, emotionally, and socially by consumers.

Research Target/Subject

The primary target of this study is Muslim consumers who interact with Islamic-themed fast-food restaurants. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Muslim consumers in understanding the Islamic identity promoted by fast-food restaurants in Makassar, interpret how brand symbols, narratives, and behavior reflect Islamic values, and explain how spiritual, emotional, and social meanings are formed from interactions between consumers and Islamic brands. Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of Islamic marketing and brand positioning studies, as well as serve as a practical guide for halal culinary industry players in building authentic and spiritually valuable brands.

The subjects of this study were Muslim consumers in Makassar City who have or regularly visit fast food restaurants that display an Islamic identity in their branding strategies. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which involves deliberately selecting participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The informant criteria include being Muslim and domiciled in Makassar City, having eaten at an Islamic fast food restaurant at least in the last 6 months, having an awareness of halal aspects and Islamic values in consumption, and being able to express personal experiences and reflections verbally and emotionally. A total of twelve informants participated in this study, with diverse backgrounds such as students, private employees, small business owners, educators, and professional workers. This variation is intended to allow researchers to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and strengthen the representativeness of phenomenological meaning.

Research Procedure

The research procedure was conducted through several systematic stages, starting with preparation and continuing through reflective analysis. In the initial stage, the researcher conducted a literature review related to Islamic branding, Muslim consumer behavior, and phenomenological methodology to strengthen the research's conceptual framework. Subsequently, field pre-observations were conducted to identify the social context and select relevant restaurant locations, such as: Almaz Fried Chicken, Al Baldan Chicken, The Faza Authentic Arabic Food, and Emados Shawarma, which actively promotes Islamic imagery in its brand strategy. The next stage is primary data collection through interviews and participant observation, followed by a reflective thematic analysis process to uncover the meaning structure of consumer experiences. This process concludes with a validation stage of the interpretation results with informants to ensure accuracy and consistency of meaning.

This research was conducted over two months, from September to October 2025, in Makassar City, South Sulawesi Province, chosen for its strong social and economic relevance to the research theme. The two-month study involved a series of stages, from pre-observation, data collection, transcription, analysis, and validation. All stages were conducted with the principle of methodological prudence to ensure that the research results were not only scientifically valid but also rooted in authentic experiential reality. Through this phenomenological method, the research is expected to illustrate the essence of Muslim consumers' experiences in interpreting Islamic identity as part of the brand positioning strategy of fast food restaurants, as well as to reveal how the values of faith, morality, and social togetherness become the spiritual foundation of modern consumption practices in Makassar City.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

The main instrument in this research is the researcher himself as a human instrument, who plays an active role in collecting, interpreting and reflecting on data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher served as an observer and interpreter, sensitive to the cultural context and religious values that emerged in interactions with informants. In addition, supporting instruments included a semi-structured interview guide, a voice recorder, field notes, and visual materials such as photos and promotional content of Islamic-identified restaurants to stimulate informants' memories and reflections during the interviews (visual elicitation). The interview guide was designed to be open and flexible, encompassing questions about first-time experiences visiting Islamic restaurants, perceptions of symbols and services that represent Islamic values, and spiritual or emotional feelings.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted using a reflective thematic approach as developed by Braun & Clarke, (2006), where the analysis process begins with repeated readings of interview transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the informants' narratives. Next, open coding is conducted to identify meaningful statements (meaning units) that describe the experience of Islamic identity. These codes are then grouped into conceptual themes such as the meaning of spirituality, brand honesty, cleanliness and purity, and pride in local values. These themes are reorganized into an essential structure that explains the relationships between dimensions of meaning to form a complete understanding of the phenomenon. The analysis is carried out iteratively until data saturation is reached, namely when no significant new meanings are found. The entire interpretation process is carried out with critical reflection to maintain a balance between scientific understanding and sensitivity to the religious context.

To ensure the validity and integrity of the data, this study applies the principle of trustworthiness according to Lincoln & Guba, (1985), which includes four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is strengthened by conducting member checking with informants, namely confirming the interpretation results to ensure they correspond to their actual experiences (Birt et al., 2016). Transferability is maintained by providing detailed contextual descriptions of informant characteristics, social settings, and research conditions, so that findings can be applied relevantly to similar contexts. Dependability is achieved by systematically documenting all stages of the research through an audit trail, while confirmability is maintained through researcher self-reflection on potential bias and peer debriefing to enhance objectivity of interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A phenomenological analysis of twelve informants yielded four dimensions that describe the structure of Muslim consumers' experiences with the Islamic identity of fast food restaurants in Makassar. The analysis process involved reflective steps, starting with verbatim transcription of interview results, open coding, grouping essential meanings, and identifying thematic dimensions. This entire process was carried out iteratively to ensure that emerging themes were truly derived from the informants' authentic experiences, not from the researcher's assumptions.

The research informants consisted of twelve Muslim consumers aged between 20 and 40 who had consistently visited and consumed Islamic fast-food restaurants in Makassar for at least six months. They represent an urban population with a high level of religious awareness and prioritize halal certification and Islamic values when choosing consumer products. Most of the informants work as students, private sector employees, small business owners, educators, and professionals in the creative and service sectors. They were selected purposively because

they were considered capable of reflecting on their emotional, spiritual, and social experiences with Islamic fast-food restaurant brands.

All informants met the established purposive criteria, namely: (1) active consumers of fast food restaurants that display an Islamic identity through brand image, service, and communication; (2) having religious awareness of the halal and ethical aspects of consumption; and (3) being able to articulate meaningful experiences reflectively and narratively. The variety of informants' backgrounds provided a diversity of perspectives ranging from functional consumption experiences to reflective experiences rooted in Islamic spiritual, moral, and social values.

The data analysis process follows the thematic reflective analysis approach as suggested by Braun & Clarke, (2006) each interview transcript was analyzed through repeated readings to identify consistent meaning units, then openly coded to identify common perceptions among informants. The coding resulted in 61 initial codes, which were then reduced to 14 aspects of experience and ultimately crystallized into four main dimensions that describe the structure of Muslim consumers' awareness of the Islamic identity of fast food restaurants, namely: (1) peace of mind (*sakinah*) as the spiritual meaning of Islamic consumption, (2) brand integrity (*ṣidq* and *amanah*) as a reflection of Islamic morals, (3) manners and service (*akhlaq al-karimah*) as an Islamic relational experience, and (4) gratitude and blessings (*barakah*) as the existential meaning of consumption.

Data saturation was reached in the 10th interview, when emerging themes began to recur without generating significant new meaning. Two additional interviews were conducted to ensure the stability and depth of the themes identified. Data validity was strengthened through member checking with informants to ensure accurate interpretation of meaning, as well as peer debriefing with two fellow researchers to minimize interpretive bias and maintain objectivity of reflection (Birt et al., 2016).

From the overall analysis process, it was found that Muslim consumers' experiences with Islamic fast food restaurants were not solely driven by considerations of taste, price, or speed of service, but more so by the spiritual, moral, and social values they felt during their interactions with the brand. For the informants, eating activities became a religious experience that brought a sense of peace (*sakinah*), moral trust in the brand's honesty and trustworthiness (*ṣidq* and *amanah*), respect and togetherness based on noble morals (*akhlaq al-karimah*), and an awareness of gratitude for the blessings of sustenance (*barakah*).

From this entire process, it appears that Muslim consumers' experiences with Islamic fast food restaurants are shaped not only by rational assessments of food quality, speed of service, or competitive prices, but also by the religious, ethical, and spiritual meanings attached to the brand. For consumers, the experience of dining at these restaurants evokes a sense of closeness to Islamic values, from the halal ingredients and the sanctity of the premises to the politeness of the service, which evokes spiritual and moral meanings.

Muslim consumers assess Islamic identity not only through visual symbols such as halal logos or Islamic-themed interiors, but through the presence of four dimensions that emerge to form the structure of Muslim consumers' awareness of the meaning of Islamic identity in modern consumption. *Sakīnah* describes the peace of mind that arises from belief in halalness and purity; *ṣidq* and *amanah* represent the brand's honesty and moral integrity; *akhlaq al-karimah* emphasizes the value of courtesy and respect in service; while *barakah* is the pinnacle of spiritual experience that gives rise to gratitude and the meaning of blessing in every act of consumption.

These findings demonstrate that the Islamic identity of fast food restaurants in Makassar City is not the result of a symbolic marketing strategy, but rather a construction of meaning that grows from consumers' religious experiences within the context of urban Muslim culture. Islamic fast food restaurants represent the harmony between faith, ethics, and modern lifestyle, where consumption is understood as part of social worship that brings inner peace and

blessings. These four dimensions then form the basis for a more in-depth theoretical interpretation of The Anatomy of Islamic Brand Spirituality, which will be discussed in the next section.

Table 1. Synthesis of Interviews of Informants in the Phenomenological Research on Islamic Identity in the Brand Positioning Strategy of Arabic Fast Food Restaurants in Makassar City

Informant Code	Meaning of Dominant Experience (Dimension)	Representative Narrative Quote (Verbatim)
R1	Peace of mind (sakinah) – Inner peace when consuming halal food in a clean and polite atmosphere.	<i>"When I eat at a place that's clearly halal and the staff are polite, my heart feels at ease. It feels like a small act of worship amidst a busy schedule."</i>
R2	Brand integrity (ṣidq and amanah) – Trust arises from honest service and keeping promises.	<i>"They're always on time and, if they make a mistake, they immediately apologize. That's what makes me believe it's very Islamic."</i>
R3	Manners and service (akhlaq al-karimah) – Polite service fosters a sense of respect and comfort.	<i>"The staff greeted me with a warm greeting, spoke softly, and took their time. I felt respected as a Muslim woman."</i>
R4	Gratitude and blessings (barakah) – The activity of eating halal food is seen as bringing peace and blessings to life.	<i>"I feel that this fortune is a blessing if I eat in halal places and with good intentions."</i>
R5	Peace of mind (sakinah) – Halal consumption fosters a sense of peace and spiritual satisfaction.	<i>"Eating in a place like this feels cool and peaceful, perhaps because everything is in accordance with Islamic values."</i>
R6	Brand integrity (ṣidq and amanah) – Honesty is considered a core value in Islamic branding.	<i>"I see they don't play with prices, the portions are honest, which I think is more Islamic than just having big halal signs."</i>
R7	Manners and service (akhlaq al-karimah) – Politeness and respect strengthen the brand's Islamic image.	<i>"The employees are polite, unhurried, and respectful. That's what makes me feel at home."</i>
R8	Peace of mind (sakinah) – An Islamic atmosphere brings a sense of security and spiritual confidence.	<i>"The place is clean, the waitresses wear hijabs, and the music is soft. It puts my heart at ease, no longer worrying about halal certification."</i>
R9	Brand integrity (ṣidq and amanah) – Consistency of service strengthens consumer trust.	<i>"I often order online, and they always deliver as ordered. That's a trust I appreciate."</i>
R10	Gratitude and blessings (barakah) – Halal consumption is associated with blessed sustenance.	<i>"I believe halal sustenance brings peace. So eating at an Islamic place feels more meaningful."</i>
R11	Manners and service (akhlaq al-karimah) – Polite relations and respect for customers are real Islamic values.	<i>"They not only serve but also respect their customers. That's the morality I expect from an Islamic business."</i>
R12	Gratitude and blessings (barakah) – Eating halal is interpreted as a form of	<i>"I'm grateful to be able to eat from a halal and clean business. I feel calmer"</i>

	worship and gratitude. <i>and blessed."</i>
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Source: Primary Data (Informant Interview)

These four dimensions form a complementary system of meaning and are referred to as “The Anatomy of Islamic Brand Spirituality.” This structure emphasizes that Islamic identity in fast food restaurant brand positioning is not only built through visual elements or halal certification, but through spiritual experiences (*sakīnah*), moral ethics (*ṣidq* and *amanah*), Islamic social interactions (*akhlaq al-karimah*), and existential awareness (*barakah*) that are directly felt by consumers.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding expands the concept of Islamic branding (Alserhan, 2021; Wilson & Liu, 2014) by placing spirituality and ethics at the center of brand meaning, not peripheral to communication. Practically, these results confirm that the strength of Islamic brands lies in authentic experiences that convey peace, trust, morality, and blessings, not merely in the symbolism of religiosity.

Table 3. Theoretical Synthesis: The Anatomy of Islamic Brand Spirituality

Thematic Dimension	Phenomenological Meaning (Essence of Experience)	Theoretical Interpretation (Relationship between Concepts and Literature)	Strategic Implications for Islamic Branding and Brand Positioning
Peace of mind (<i>sakīnah</i>)	A spiritual experience that creates a sense of peace, calm, and confidence in the halal and sanctity of the product. Consumption is perceived as a form of worship and alignment with religious values.	In line with the concept of faith-based consumption (Aji et al., 2022) and spiritual well-being (Wilson & Liu, 2014), where halal consumption becomes an expression of faith. Halal is not merely legal compliance, but a path to inner peace (<i>sakinah</i>).	Islamic brand positioning should emphasize spiritual values and a religious atmosphere—not just a halal logo, but an emotional experience that brings a sense of peace to consumers. The design of spaces, symbols, and services should reflect purity and serenity.
Brand integrity (<i>ṣidq</i> and <i>amanah</i>)	Islamic moral values emphasize honesty, responsibility, and the fulfillment of brand promises. A brand's Islamic identity is judged by ethical behavior, not merely symbolic attributes.	Strengthening the theory of Islamic business ethics (Alserhan, 2021) and brand authenticity (Napoli et al., 2014), that honesty and brand consistency are a form of faith that forms trust capital in halal business.	An Islamic branding strategy must emphasize integrity at every point of brand contact—from price transparency to service delivery. Brand communications need to be based on transparency and ethics, not just religious imagery.
Manners and service (<i>akhlaq al-karimah</i>)	The socio-religious meaning shows the importance of politeness, friendliness and respect as a manifestation of moral values in service.	In accordance with the concept of Islamic relational ethics (Ali et al., 2022) and service spirituality (Purnomo & Ananda, 2020), which places	Islamic fast food restaurants need to instill ethical values in employee training. Islamic branding must internalize Islamic service ethics, such as

		service as a social service. Morals become a means of building harmonious relationships between brands and consumers.	greetings, smiling, and gentle speech, so that the brand image is formed ethically and emotionally.
Gratitude and blessing (barakah)	The existential dimension that connects halal consumption with gratitude, inner happiness, and belief in the blessings of sustenance.	Strengthening the idea of barakah economy (Rehman et al., 2021) and reflective loyalty (Nurul & Yusoff, 2023), where blessing becomes the moral goal in consumption, not just material gain.	<i>Islamic brand positioning</i> It's best to emphasize messages of blessing and gratitude—for example, through spiritual narratives in promotions. Restaurants can build communications that emphasize the value of worship, charity, and collective blessings in every transaction.

The results of the study indicate that Islamic identity in the brand positioning of fast food restaurants, especially in Makassar City, is not something that is built through religious symbols alone, but is an experience of meaning that lives in the consciousness of Muslim consumers. Based on a phenomenological analysis of twelve informants, four main dimensions were obtained that form the structure of consumer experience towards the Islamic identity of the brand, namely: (1) peace of mind (sakīnah) as the spiritual meaning of Islamic consumption, (2) brand integrity (ṣidq and amanah) as a reflection of Islamic morals, (3) manners and service (akhlaq al-karimah) as an Islamic relational experience, and (4) gratitude and blessings (barakah) as the existential meaning of consumption. These four dimensions form an experience configuration called The Anatomy of Islamic Brand Spirituality, which places spirituality and ethics as the main foundation of Islamic brand identity.

The first dimension illustrates that consumption at Islamic fast food restaurants is perceived not merely as an economic activity, but as a spiritual experience that fosters inner peace (sakinah). Informants consistently stated that the assurance of halal certification, cleanliness, and an Islamic atmosphere provide a sense of peace, security, and connection to the values of faith. This demonstrates that Islamic branding is not simply a label or religious symbol, but a medium that provides spiritual comfort for Muslim consumers.

This finding strengthens the view Wilson & Liu, (2014) effective Islamic branding functions as a faith-based meaning system, connecting religious values with consumption behavior. In this context, sakīnah (sacredness) is the psychological result of the alignment between religious beliefs and consumption behavior. The sense of calm experienced by consumers reflects the fulfillment of the spiritual dimension in consumption behavior that aligns with Islamic teachings. Thus, the experience of sakīnah contributes to the formation of a strong emotional attachment between consumers and Islamic brands.

For brand managers, this suggests that Islamic brand positioning strategies should not only emphasize the halal image, but also create a calming spiritual atmosphere and experience through spatial design, service, and brand communication that reflect the purity and tranquility of Islamic values.

The second dimension highlights the importance of moral integrity as a core element of a brand's Islamic perception. Informants identified honesty, responsibility, and keeping promises

as tangible indicators of a fast food restaurant's Islamic identity. They valued honest and trustworthy brands more than those that merely displayed religious symbols like halal logos or Islamic clothing. Honesty in service, price transparency, and consistency in product quality were key aspects that built trust between consumers and brands.

This finding is in line with the principles of Islamic business ethics. Alserhan, (2021) which places *ṣidq* (honesty) and *amanah* (responsibility) as the foundation of spiritual values in business practices. Islam in the context of branding is not simply reduced to formal adherence to halal regulations, but must be implemented as ongoing ethical behavior. Religious Muslim consumers assess Islamic identity through behavioral authenticity, the alignment between a brand's words and actions.

Within the framework of brand positioning, the dimensions of *ṣidq* and *amanah* create brand authenticity, a key factor in building trust and spiritual loyalty. Therefore, an Islamic brand communication strategy must be rooted in real behavior, not just a superficial image. This can be translated into operational transparency, Islamic work ethic training for employees, and a consistent commitment to social responsibility.

The third dimension demonstrates that moral values play a crucial role in creating relational experiences that foster emotional closeness between consumers and brands. Informants identified politeness, friendliness, and respect in service as key characteristics they associate with the Islamic identity of fast-food restaurants. Service delivered with manners, greetings, smiles, and gentle speech is considered not merely professionalism, but a manifestation of noble morals, encompassing social worship values.

This phenomenon strengthens the concept of Islamic relational ethics, Ali et al., (2022), which emphasizes that Islamic ethics in business are not only oriented towards transactions, but also towards interpersonal relationships (*hablum minannas*). Civilized service serves as a nonverbal means of propagation, demonstrating the friendly and compassionate face of Islam. In the context of Makassar culture, which upholds the value of *sipakatau* (mutual respect and honor), Islamic service etiquette strengthens a brand's social identity in the eyes of consumers.

From a brand management perspective, this dimension has important strategic implications. Islamic fast-food restaurants need to make *akhlaq al-karimah* (good character) a core value in their employee training systems. Service delivered with the intention of worship and Islamic etiquette can be a key differentiator in a competitive marketplace. Thus, Islamic branding goes beyond symbolic communication but also encompasses organizational behavior that builds spiritual relationships with customers.

The fourth dimension reflects the deepest meaning of the Muslim consumer experience: gratitude and blessings (*barakah*) in every act of halal consumption. Informants described eating at Islamic restaurants as providing a meaningful feeling, not just of physical satiety but also of spiritual peace. They view halal consumption as an act of worship and an expression of gratitude for the blessings God has bestowed. The value of *barakah* symbolizes the existential awareness that business success and consumer satisfaction ultimately stem from God's permission and approval.

This concept strengthens the idea of *barakah* economy Rehman et al., (2021), which places blessing as a spiritual orientation in Islamic business activities. Blessing is not measured solely by profit, but by the benefits and moral balance it brings to society. In the context of Islamic branding, brands that instill the meaning of blessing will create reflective loyalty, where consumers feel connected to the brand not because of price rationality, but because of the moral and spiritual values they internalize.

For businesses, this dimension demands the integration of commercial and spiritual aspects into brand strategy. Brand communications should be directed toward messages that emphasize gratitude, charity, and collective blessings, for example by linking each transaction to communal social values. In this way, Islamic fast food restaurants can serve not only as economic entities but also as moral and spiritual agents in the lives of urban Muslim

Overall, these four dimensions illustrate how consumers interpret Islamic identity in fast-food restaurant brand positioning as a holistic spiritual experience. Sakinah serves as an emotional foundation that fosters inner peace, *shidq* and *amanah* shape moral trust, *akhlaq al-karimah* strengthens social relationships, and *barakah* serves as the pinnacle of spiritual reflection, giving existential meaning to halal consumption.

From a phenomenological perspective, these experiences demonstrate that Islamic identity is not a concept externally constructed by the brand, but rather emerges from a reflective interaction between consumers, religious values, and the organization's ethical behavior. These findings broaden the understanding of Islamic marketing by emphasizing that spirituality is at the core of Islamic brand differentiation. A brand's Islamicity is not simply determined by what it says about itself, but by how Islamic values are embodied in the consumer's concrete experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to deeply understand how Muslim consumers in Makassar City experience and interpret Islamic identity in the brand positioning strategies of fast food restaurants. Using a reflective phenomenological approach, this study reveals that the consumption experience at fast food restaurants with an Islamic identity is not merely an economic activity, but rather a form of expression of faith and morality that lives in consumers' consciousness. Islamic identity is not perceived as an external symbol, but rather as a spiritual and social value that is internalized through meaningful consumption experiences.

Analysis of twelve informants yielded four main dimensions that shape the phenomenological structure of Muslim consumers' experiences with the Islamic identity of fast food restaurants in Makassar. First, peace of mind (*sakīnah*) reflects the inner peace that arises from belief in the halal and sanctity of the product. Second, brand integrity (*ṣidq* and *amanah*) illustrates the importance of brand honesty and responsibility as a reflection of Islamic morals. Third, etiquette and service (*akhlaq al-karimah*) demonstrate the values of politeness, friendliness, and respect that shape the Islamic relational experience between the brand and the consumer. Fourth, gratitude and blessing (*barakah*) signify the existential meaning of consumption, where the act of eating is interpreted as an act of worship, gratitude, and spiritual awareness of the blessings of halal sustenance.

These four dimensions form a structure of meaning known as “The Anatomy of Islamic Brand Spirituality,” demonstrating that spirituality, ethics, and morality are at the core of Islamic brand identity. These findings broaden the understanding of Islamic brand positioning, emphasizing that Islamic identity is not merely a communication strategy based on religious symbols, but a spiritual and ethical experience experienced personally and socially by consumers. Therefore, an authentic Islamic brand is one that displays the integration of faith values in organizational behavior, services, and communications, not merely in visual aspects or halal certification.

Practically, this research provides implications for halal culinary industry players, particularly fast food restaurants, to develop brand positioning strategies rooted in substantive Islamic values. A credible Islamic brand must prioritize honesty (*ṣidq*), responsibility (*amanah*), politeness (*akhlaq*), and blessings (*barakah*) in every form of business interaction. Implementing these values not only strengthens consumer trust but also creates sustainable moral differentiation amidst the increasingly competitive culinary industry.

As a further research direction, this study could be developed by expanding the geographic context to other cities with different cultural characteristics, or using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to further explore the construction of symbolic meaning and religious identity in consumption behavior. A cross-method approach combining phenomenological data with quantitative brand image analysis could also enrich our

understanding of how Islamic spirituality and ethics influence brand loyalty and trust in the era of global halal marketing.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Methodology; Formal analysis; Investigation; Data curation; Writing – original draft; Writing – review and editing; Validation; Project administration; Visualization; Supervision.

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