

Creation of Islamic Brand Equity: A Study of Malaysia

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Abstract

The study explores the relationship between Islamic Branding and Brand Resonance of an Islamic Brand. This study empirically examines the influence of Islamic Branding Antecedents, i.e., Religiosity, Islamic Brand Knowledge, and Islamic Corporate Social Responsibility (ICSR) on Islamic Branding and its subsequent impact on the Islamic Brand Resonance. The research framework is based on the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) pyramid and the Theory of Self-Congruity. The empirical study is conducted on the Muslim consumers in Malaysia. Survey research was conducted on a sample of 326 Muslim consumers from the cities of Kuala Lumpur, George Town, and Johor Baru. The results reveal a significant influence of Islamic Branding on the Brand Resonance among Muslim consumers in Malaysia. Furthermore, Religiosity, Brand Knowledge, and ICSR positively influence the perceptions of Malaysian Muslim consumers regarding Islamic Branding. Currently, research in the area of Islamic Branding is limited.

Keywords: Islamic Branding; Islamic Brand Knowledge; ICSR; Brand Resonance; Religiosity.

Introduction

In today's world, marketers want to develop an emotional brand attachment to the target market. This is done to provide the brand with an emotional insurance cover in case of any negative publicity faced by the brand. If a consumer is emotionally attached to a brand, they will be less susceptible to various anti-consumption behaviours (Hur et al., 2020). Studies indicate that a strong emotional bond between consumers and a brand leads to increased brand loyalty, ultimately enhancing the brand's financial success (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011). This marketing approach is rooted in the concept of self-congruence, which stems from the psychological idea that a person's self-image influences their behavior across different contexts (Sop, 2020). According to this theory, consumers are more likely to favor a brand that reflects values, norms, and characteristics they associate with themselves. This alignment can resonate with either their actual self or their ideal self (Sirgy, 1990).

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Consumers prefer brands not only for their material utilities but also for their symbolic values. In certain cases, a brand's symbolic value has more has a greater influence on consumer decision-making as compared to the brand's functional value (Islam et al., 2018). Consumers receive, gather, and decode information about the brand from various internal and external cues and experiences. They store the information and may even act as influencers for other consumers by communicating brand knowledge (France et al., 2015). Being perceived as congruent with the target market's religious values may cause consumers to perceive the brands as possessing high quality, high operating standards, strong moral brand philosophy, and ethical business behaviour (Liu & Minton, 2018).

Review of Literature

Brand information is retained in a consumer's memory in two primary ways: through logical data and emotional signals. The emotional experiences that are kept in a consumer's memory are theoretically referred to as 'emotion nodes' (Rinka & Pratt, 2018). When a consumer encounters a brand, it evokes an emotional node, causing the consumer to feel a variety of emotions stored through the respective brand associations. These emotions, if strongly connected with the brand, will in turn influence consumers' judgment and behaviour. This makes the emotional brand knowledge a strong precursor to consumer behavior. The totality of all the brand associations formulates the basics of Customer-Based Brand Equity (C.B.B.E) (Dwivedi et al., 2018).

Brand associations can evoke nostalgic and historical connections in the consumer's mind to the brand. The strength of the associations ensures that the consumer remembers certain past events or historical facts when he/she come in contact with the brand (Japutra, Ekinci, & Simkin, 2019). Various brands, such as Mecca Cola or Zam Zam Cola, have attempted to develop brand associations based on historical events or places (Justo & Cruz, 2009). Today, there are substantial markets that need brands to depict congruence with Islamic principles (Thomson & Dinar, 2019).

Islamic Branding

When a brand associates itself with another entity, it borrows its associations and converts them into secondary brand associations (Bergkvist & Taylor, 2016). This creates a connection between the brand and the external entity in the consumer's mind and produces indirect brand associations. Brand managers borrow established associations from secondary sources and utilize them to build their own brand's equity (Keller, 2020). Islamic brands are created on the same premise. Islamic branding is the process of giving an Islamic image and personality through strong and believable religious associations to a brand. Islamic brands are developed through the implementation of Islamic branding (Yusof & Jusoh, 2014).

According to researchers, one of the key differences between Islamic branding and other branding strategies is that, under the ideology of Islamic branding, manufacturers not only develop products but also create righteousness. Muslim consumers are not buying necessities and luxuries; they are either pleasing or displeasing Allah. Islamic branding is the blend of religious values with materialistic desires and the divine Islamic principles with worldly knowledge (Abuabdin & Junaidu, 2024; Alserhan, 2010). Consumer brand experiences include pre-consumption, consumption, and post-consumption experiences (Ding & Tseng, 2015). It encompasses the implementation of halal certification, halal supply chain management, halal packaging, a halal logo, Islamic advertising, promotional mediums, social and environmental responsibility practices of a brand, and Islamic modes of financing (Latif et al., 2014; Tieman et al., 2012).

Antecedents of Islamic Branding

On the theoretical premise of C.B.B.E. pyramid and Self-Congruity theory, the study proposes Religiosity, Islamic Brand Knowledge and ICSR as antecedents of Islamic Branding. ICSR inculcates the construct of religiosity in CSR. Research indicates that religiosity plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' expectations regarding corporate social responsibility (CSR) in developing nations. However, there is a scarcity of studies exploring the connection between religiosity and CSR expectations (Zaman et al., 2017). For a Muslim consumer, the aspect of religiosity cannot be separated from the understanding of CSR. Islamic principles are inherently built into the Muslim consumer's perceptions of the social responsibilities of an organization (Koleva, 2020). For an Islamic brand, the fulfilment of the socio-economic perspective of ICSR is deemed equally or sometimes even more important than other organizational objectives by the stakeholders (Khamlichi, 2024; Maulan et al., 2016).

Brands can provide consumers with key information for evaluating new products by providing religious associations alongside brand elements. Religious associations may work as signals of brand trust and credibility to individuals with high religiosity (Liu & Minton, 2018). Research shows a link between religious commitment and consumers' perceptions of various product attributes, such as quality, service quality, pricing, marketing strategies, and bargaining power. However, even within the same faith community, we cannot assume uniformity in how religiosity influences consumer behavior (Bukhari & Bukhari, 2025). Consumers' religiosity will vary depending on their commitment towards the religion and various external environmental factors at a particular time and place (Usman et al., 2017). Understanding a brand influences the thoughts and associations that arise in a consumer's mind when they consider that brand. It is a basic component of a brand which creates a strong relationship between the consumer and the brand (Çifci et al., 2016; Richards et al., 1998). Therefore, the right knowledge structures are imperative for the creation of a strong brand. Knowledge of a brand is one of the most pertinent

assets identified by marketers in increasing the brand's productivity (France et al., 2015). The synergistic blend of these antecedents creates a positive influence on the perception of Islamic Brands.

Brand Resonance

Brand resonance results in a harmonious relationship between the consumer and the brand. It occurs when all the brand-building blocks are synchronized with the target consumer's needs and wants. Brand resonance ensures intense and active loyalty from the target consumer (Badrinarayanan, Suh, & Kim, 2016). Brand resonance is created on the foundation of a clear and consistent brand identity. If a brand is successful in creating brand resonance in the minds of the consumer, it may achieve a large number of benefits, including long-term consumer loyalty and relationship building, ability to attain price premiums, increased profitability, increased acceptance of brand extensions, and sustained competitive advantage (Buil et al., 2013; Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Keller, 1993). Brand resonance is a key requirement in the success of a brand in modern times. It depicts the pinnacle of a brand's CBBE development (Ambedkar et al., 2018).

The next section discusses the study's research framework.

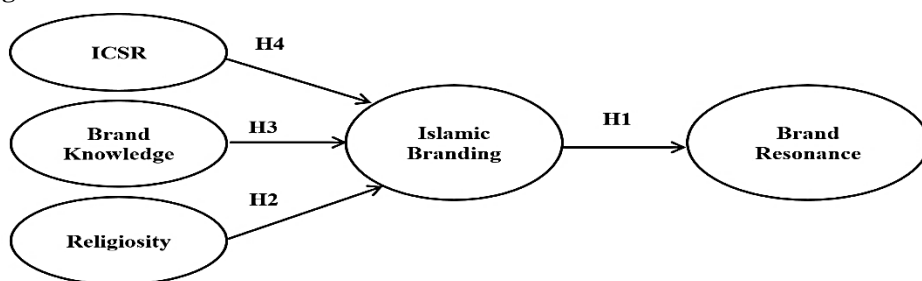
Research Framework

To achieve brand resonance, the brand must first lay down the foundations of resonance through the creation of the required brand identity, meaning, and response. The strong foundation of brand resonance ensures that the brand can reap the benefits of consumers' emotional brand attachment and save the brand from various threats (Keller, 2009; Moura et al., 2019). Applying the same assumptions on the attainment of brand resonance by an Islamic brand, it is proposed that attainment of brand resonance by an Islamic brand can be achieved through the development of the Islamic branding antecedents, i.e., the brand building blocks. The proposed Islamic Branding antecedents are based on the theory of self-congruity.

According to the theory of self-congruity, the consumers' perception of congruence between the brand and herself/himself is a result of an inferential process that takes place when consumers configure a brand's elements with his/her traits (Fu et al., 2020). research shows that if a brand inculcates values and personality similar to that of its target market, it can be successful in creating a brand resonance that can protect the brand against various threats. Muslims are connected to their religion on both logical and an emotional basis. This deep connection requires them to judge a brand on both mental and emotional levels. This creates a need to develop an emotional connection between Muslim consumers and the brands targeted towards them (Ahmadova & Aliyev, 2019). The theory of self-congruity has been applied in many brand-self-congruence studies to understand the role of religion in the determination

of brand and consumer match or mismatch (Bukhari & Isa, 2020; Butt et al., 2017; Suhartanto et al., 2019; Surya & Saragih, 2019). Therefore, it is proposed that ICSR, Islamic Brand Knowledge, and Religiosity positively influence Muslim consumers' perceptions about Islamic Brands by creating the brand building blocks of the C.B.B.E. pyramid.

Figure 1: Research Framework



Source: Author

Hypotheses Development

The following hypotheses are formulated based on the research framework.

Islamic Branding and Brand Resonance

The humanization of a brand by associating it with desired and relatable brand associations will increase the brand resonance in the target market. Consumers want the brand they use to hold similar values to themselves. A branding strategy that resonates with the self-image and values of its target audience can cultivate a strong sense of connection and loyalty to the brand, leading to a long-term relationship with consumers (Aw et al., 2019; MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). For a brand to resonate with Muslim consumers, it must effectively embrace and convey Islamic branding principles. Achieving brand resonance necessitates the integration of Islamic values across all elements of the marketing mix, which includes product, price, place, promotion, people, processes, physical evidence, promise, and patience (Abuznaid, 2020; Al-Hajla et al., 2018). This study proposes that if a Muslim consumer perceives higher importance of Islamic branding, he/she will have a greater level of brand resonance for an Islamic brand. Varying perceptions of Islamic branding may result in varying brand resonance for Islamic brands. Prior research has indicated that a consumer's engagement with a brand is positively correlated with brand affection and engagement (Algharabat et al., 2020; Bukhari et al., 2021). It is hypothesized that:

H1: Islamic branding positively influences the brand resonance of an Islamic brand.

Religiosity and Islamic Branding

Religion serves as a crucial and powerful social institution that shapes consumers' values, attitudes, and behaviors (Alam et al., 2011). Individuals who identify as religious often integrate the brands they choose into their self-identity, leading to a stronger emotional bond with those brands due to their religiosity. Consumers who exhibit a high level of religiosity tend to believe that they are under constant divine observation, which compels them to rationalize their purchasing choices (Xu et al., 2006). Religious beliefs guide what products or services are acceptable or unacceptable (Hartani et al., 2020; Jamal & Sharifuddin, 2015). Those with a strong religious commitment may experience an enhancement in self-esteem when they consume brands that align with their faith. This form of religious consumption fosters a sense of belonging to a larger religious community and deepens their connection with the brand (Agarwala et al., 2019; Liu & Minton, 2018). Therefore, the study hypothesizes that:

H2: Religiosity of a Muslim consumer will have a positive influence on their perceptions regarding Islamic branding.

Brand Knowledge and Islamic Branding

The foundation of successful brand creation lies in the effective development and communication of the required brand knowledge (Keller, 2003). Islamic branding focuses on utilizing religious brand associations to establish secondary associations for the Islamic brand. If consumers lack adequate understanding of Islamic principles pertinent to the product category, the brand will not benefit from these secondary associations. According to the C.B.B.E. pyramid, enhancing brand knowledge related to Islamic branding will subsequently elevate the significance of Islamic branding in the perceptions of consumers. The establishment of brand-self-congruence through the humanization of the brand relies on the cultivation of accurate brand knowledge. When consumers possess adequate information about a product category, they are more likely to evaluate the brand based on the desired personality traits (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). Brand knowledge concerning Islamic branding encompasses awareness of Islamic teachings regarding permissible and prohibited consumption behaviors. The halal knowledge among Muslim consumers positively affects their purchasing decisions (Hartani et al., 2020; Ibrahim, 2024; Muslichah et al., 2019; Pasha et al., 2019). Based on this discussion the next hypothesis states:

H3: Brand Knowledge of a Muslim consumer about an Islamic brand will have a positive influence on their perceptions regarding Islamic branding.

ICSR and Islamic Branding

The concept of ICSR incorporates the spirituality and religiosity of consumers into their expectations of brands (Alshammary, 2014; Jafar & Zafar, 2025). Both organizations and individuals are expected to adhere to these principles of responsibility and accountability. Consequently, Muslim consumers anticipate that the brands they choose will implement ICSR practices (Issalih et al., 2015; Zafar & Sulaiman, 2019). For these consumers, who have elevated expectations regarding ICSR, the compliance of a brand with Shariah law and its associations with God-consciousness play an important part in their purchase pattern (Bukhari et al., 2021; Maulan et al., 2016). ICSR is suggested as a precursor to Islamic branding, as an organization's commitment to socially responsible initiatives is a vital aspect of an Islamic brand. These values are essential for brands to demonstrate to the Muslim consumers they serve (Elasrag, 2015; Haleem et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2019; Latif et al., 2014).

H4: Muslim consumers' perceptions towards a brand's ICSR activities will have a positive influence on their perceptions regarding Islamic branding.

Methodology

This study was conducted on the Muslim consumers in three cities of Malaysia, i.e. Kuala Lumpur, George Town, and Johor Baru. Data was gathered using self-administered questionnaires available in both English and Malay. Before data collection, the questionnaire underwent pre-testing, which included expert evaluations, Q-sorting, and pilot testing. The study comprised a total sample size of 326 participants. Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS and SMART PLS.

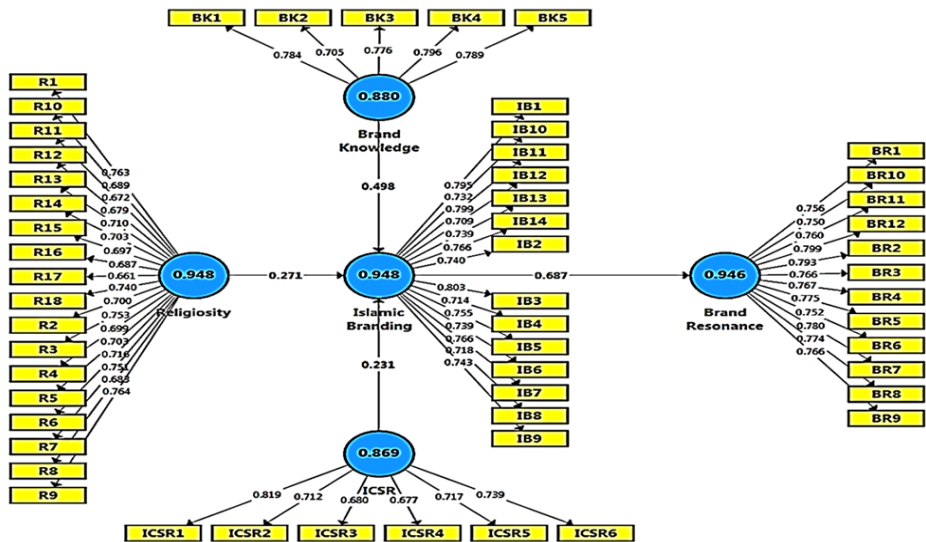
Results

Measurement model and structural model analysis were conducted in the data analysis.

Measurement Model Analysis

The research model in this study is a reflective measurement model consisting of reflective measurement items. Measurement model analysis was conducted on the data by assessing convergent validity, internal consistency reliability, and discriminant validity. The measurement model results depict adequate reliability and convergent validity.

Figure 2: Measurement Model Analysis



Source: Author

Table 1: Measurement Model Analysis

Constructs	Loadings	AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha
Brand Knowledge	0.784	0.594	0.880	0.830
	0.705			
	0.776			
	0.796			
	0.789			
	0.756			
Brand Resonance	0.750	0.593	0.946	0.938
	0.760			
	0.799			
	0.793			
	0.766			
	0.767			

	0.775			
	0.752			
	0.780			
	0.774			
	0.766			
	0.795			
	0.732			
	0.799			
	0.709			
	0.739			
	0.766			
Islamic Branding	0.740			
	0.803	0.565	0.948	0.941
	0.714			
	0.755			
	0.739			
	0.766			
	0.718			
	0.743			
	0.819			
	0.712			
ICSR	0.680			
	0.677	0.526	0.869	0.819
	0.717			
	0.739			
Religiosity	0.763			
	0.689	0.504	0.948	0.942

0.672
0.679
0.710
0.703
0.697
0.687
0.661
0.740
0.700
0.753
0.699
0.703
0.716
0.751
0.683
0.764

Source: Author

After the measurement model was passed, the structural model analysis was conducted for hypotheses testing.

Structural Model Analysis

This research presents four hypotheses concerning the latent constructs, labelled H1, H2, H3, and H4. Given that the data did not follow a normal distribution, the p-values and t-statistics for all pathways were calculated using the bootstrapping method in SMART PLS to assess significance levels. A complete bootstrapping procedure was conducted with 5000 sub-samples, focusing on one-tailed hypotheses. The findings in Table 2 indicate that all four relationships are statistically significant, with p-values less than 0.01 and t-values exceeding 2.33 for the one-tailed hypotheses.

Table 2: Hypotheses testing

Hypot heses	Relationships	Std Beta	Std Erro r	t- val ue	p- val ue	Confi dence Interv al Lowe r Limit	Confi dence Interv al Uppe r Limit	Decis ion
H1	Islamic Branding → Brand Resonance	0.687	0.067	10.216	0.000	0.558	0.785	Supp orted
H2	Religiosity → Islamic Branding	0.271	0.097	2.800	0.003	0.121	0.435	Supp orted
H3	Brand Knowledge → Islamic Branding	0.499	0.102	4.866	0.000	0.328	0.673	Supp orted
H4	ICSR → Islamic Branding	0.231	0.089	2.600	0.005	0.810	0.367	Supp orted

Source: Author

The research framework encompasses two endogenous constructs: Islamic branding and brand resonance. The adjusted R² for brand resonance reflects the extent of variation in brand resonance attributable to Islamic branding, while the adjusted R² for Islamic branding indicates the overall predictive relevance of the three antecedents. An adjusted R² of 0.47 signifies a considerable predictive accuracy of Islamic branding on brand resonance, indicating that 47% of the variation in brand resonance among Muslim consumers in Malaysia can be attributed to Islamic branding. This suggests a significant level of predictive accuracy for the Islamic branding construct (Cohen, 1988). The R² for Islamic branding illustrates the variation in Islamic branding resulting from the three antecedents: brand knowledge, ICSR, and religiosity. In Malaysia, an R² value of 0.675 indicates a strong predictive accuracy of these three antecedents, demonstrating that 67.5% of the variation in Islamic branding is due to them.

While R² reflects the collective influence of all exogenous variables, f² assesses the individual contribution of each exogenous variable in explaining an endogenous variable in terms of R². The data analysis reveals a robust f² value of 0.892, indicating that Islamic branding significantly impacts brand resonance. The f² values for the antecedents—religiosity, brand knowledge, and ICSR—are 0.154, 0.497, and 0.126, respectively. The results indicate that brand knowledge exerts the strongest effect size among the three antecedents. Data analysis also examined the predictive relevance (Q²) of the path model through blindfolding. In Q² analysis, a value larger than 0

shows that the exogenous constructs have predictive relevance for the endogenous constructs (Geisser, 1974; Hair et al., 2019; Stone, 1974). Brand resonance and Islamic branding have Q^2 values of 0.270 and 0.372, respectively. The values depict substantial predictive relevance of the endogenous constructs.

Discussion

The findings indicate a significant impact of Islamic branding on the brand resonance of Islamic brands among Muslim consumers in Malaysia. This effectiveness can be linked to the growth of halal industries within the nation and the evolution of Islamic branding itself. The Malaysian government is deeply committed to promoting Islamic branding. In 1974, it initiated the development of the country's Islamic branding sectors by issuing Halal certification letters for halal products through the Islamic Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's office (Safian, 2020). The Halal Malaysia Logo was introduced by the government in 1994 and revised in 2003, marking Malaysia as the first nation to establish a formal and systematic 'Halal Assurance System'. The progress of Malaysia's halal industries is largely due to governmental support in enhancing the halal certification process for various products and services (Ibrahim & Othman, 2014; Omar et al., 2013). To ensure adherence to Halalan Toyib standards, the government mandates that food manufacturers and producers comply with the requirements of 'Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point' (HACCP), 'Good Manufacturing Practices' (GMP), 'Good Hygienic Practice' (GHP), and 'ISO 9000' to achieve halal certification (Aziz & Chok, 2013).

Malaysia is one of the few nations globally where the government oversees halal certification across all sectors. The Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) is tasked with this responsibility, having been the exclusive halal certifying authority since 2011 (Ismail et al., 2020). Malaysia holds the top position in the 'Thomson Reuters Global Islamic Economy Indicator' ranking, signifying its status as a leader in the advancement of halal industrial sectors (Thomson & Dinar, 2019). It is recognized as a benchmark for global halal food standards, with the United Nations acknowledging Malaysia as the premier example in this regard. The country has established a standardized halal process nationwide, positioning itself as a reference point for the global halal food industry (Fathi et al., 2016; Hosseini et al., 2019).

The study's findings are corroborated by existing literature and the theoretical framework underpinning the research. The results yield significant insights for brand managers and policymakers. Factors such as religiosity, brand knowledge, and ICSR have been identified as strong indicators of Muslim consumers' perceived significance of Islamic branding. This research indicates that brands can integrate these elements into their branding strategies to foster brand resonance among Muslim consumers. In Muslim-majority countries with advanced Islamic branding, brand knowledge is

likely to significantly influence consumer behavior. Given the heightened religious sensitivity among Muslim consumers, there is a growing awareness among stakeholders regarding the concept of Islamic branding in Malaysia (Hashim & Shariff, 2016). Brands aiming to connect with Muslim consumers can leverage the antecedents of Islamic branding to enhance brand resonance.

Implications of the Study

The study provides three brand-building blocks for the development of an Islamic brand. The research framework provides the brand managers with Islamic brand-building strategies through the three proposed antecedents. The study contributes to the variables of religiosity, brand knowledge, and ICSR by proposing them as antecedents of Islamic branding. The variable of religiosity has been extensively studied in past consumer behaviour research; however, it has not been studied as a brand salience-building element for an Islamic brand. Limited research exists on the construct of ICSR, especially at the individual level. The study examines Muslim consumers' ICSR expectations as a determinant of their behaviour towards Islamic branding.

Conclusion

During the past few decades, Muslim consumers have emerged as a substantial consumer market segment in the global markets. Muslim consumers have a large population and purchasing power, with a majority of young consumers. As a realization of the growing buying power of Muslim consumers, a large number of brands have started targeting Muslim consumers. Muslim consumers are a heterogeneous market segment having their identity and consumer behavior anchored in the teachings of Islam. Muslim consumers want the brands they consume to be in congruence with Islamic principles, and the deviation from Shariah standards may result in various anti-consumption behaviors. The anti-consumption behaviors of the global Muslim consumers are rooted in the absence of emotional brand attachment and the lack of connectivity felt by consumers with the brand. These cannot be created without the formation of brand resonance in a brand. Brand resonance is the top brand-building block in the CBBE model of brand development. To develop a brand, all the stages of the brand-building pyramid should be completed. A brand that is created without following fundamental brand-building processes will struggle to achieve brand resonance, making it susceptible to numerous risks. This research addresses the existing gap in the literature regarding the establishment of brand resonance specifically for Islamic brands. Its findings hold significant implications for all stakeholders involved.

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