

## Islamic Brand Resonance: A Study of Pakistan's Muslim Consumer Market

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### Abstract

*This study is focused on the creation of brand resonance in the Muslim consumer market through the construct of Islamic Branding. The empirical study is conducted on the Muslim consumers in Pakistan. The Muslim consumer market is a growing opportunity for brand managers all over the world. The research framework explores the influence of Islamic Branding Antecedents, namely Religiosity, Islamic Brand Knowledge, and Islamic Corporate Social Responsibility (ICSR), on Islamic Branding and the subsequent impact of Islamic Branding on the Brand Resonance of an Islamic Brand. The research framework is based on Keller's Model of Consumer-Based Brand Equity and the Theory of Self-Congruity. The analysis is conducted through IBM SPSS and SMART PLS. The findings revealed the significant influence of Islamic Branding antecedents on Islamic Branding and the influence of this branding ideology on the Brand Resonance of an Islamic Brand. The study identifies significant tools for brand managers and policymakers for the creation of brand resonance of Islamic brands. Currently, limited studies have been done in the area of Islamic Branding and Brand Resonance.*

**Keywords:** Islamic Branding; Brand Resonance; Islamic Brand Knowledge; ICSR; Religiosity; Muslim Consumer

### 1. Introduction

The evolution of branding revealed a gradual transition from brands serving as a provider of utilitarian benefits, such as information regarding the manufacturer, origin, and quality of the product, to the addition of more dynamic and complex brand concepts that transformed through time (Moore & Reid, 2008). In the second half of the twentieth century, the field of branding grew both academically and practically. Stimulated by the work of (D. A. Aaker, 1992) and Keller (Keller, 1993, 2001, 2003b), researchers directed their attention to consumers' perceptions and developed the

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ideology that 'people buy things not only for what they can do but also for what they mean to them' (Bastos & Levy, 2012).

Brand image is the accumulation of the various brand perceptions as depicted by the brand associations created and stored in the consumer's memory. The favorability, strength, and uniqueness of the brand associations created a differential brand image in the consumer's mind (Chekalina et al., 2018; Tanveer et al., 2023). Successful brands created brand associations that matched the competitor's differentiating associations by converting them into point-of-parity and at the same time, achieving competitive advantage through creating strong and favourable point-of-differences. Managers started appreciating the totality of their brand's image and started looking for methods to create a positive brand image (Keller, 2016).

This school of thought was the beginning of the humanization of a brand. It was realized that 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). The most important branding concept developed during the last few decades is the concept of brand equity. It is attained through the synergistic blend of the marketing efforts attributed to the development of a brand (Duman et al., 2018). Thus, strong brands were perceived as insurance cover for organizations, any information that may pose a threat to the brand's Consumer-Based Brand Equity (C.B.B.E). The presence of brand resonance can protect the brand during a crisis (Keller, 2009). This research proposes Islamic Branding as a means of creating brand resonance among Muslim consumers. The strength of the brand associations influences the consumer's belief in the brand's claims and promises. The consumers are loyal and emotionally attached to the brand when they believe that the communicated brand personality is congruent with the consumer's ideal/desired personality (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

## **2. Literature Review**

One of the major differences between Islam and other religions is that Islam influences all aspects of its followers' everyday life. The doctrine of life for Muslims has been provided in the form of the Holy Book "Quran" and the sayings and practices of the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H). The Holy Book of Muslims has preached Islam as a way of life that is ingrained in every aspect of a Muslim's life (Wilson & Liu, 2011). Islamic branding is an ideology that is developed to appeal to the Muslim consumer market. It is in line with the Shariah values and offers Shariah compliance in all aspects of a brand's personality, brand elements, brand development stages, behaviour, and communications (Ogilvy Noor, 2012). Researchers have identified the need to develop brands based on the consumer's needs and religious beliefs. Such brands result in greater brand loyalty and consumer satisfaction (Hartani, Ridwan, & Asnawi, 2020).

According to the teachings of Islam, the majority of the things created and taught to human beings are halal, with some exceptions of prohibited things or acts called

haram. In Islam, 'halal is the norm and Haram is the exception'. The concept of halal is often misunderstood by the manufacturers of brands targeting Muslim consumers. The term is often confined to edibles that are free from alcohol, have no pork or derivatives of pork, and the animals are slaughtered according to Islamic principles (Izberk-Bilgin & Nakata, 2016). In Islam, certain food products may be prohibited (haram) due to the ingredients. But in some cases, even when ingredients are the same, the process of preparation may make certain food items haram for Muslim consumers (Maison et al., 2019).

Islamic brand managers may focus on developing trust and credibility of the Islamic brand associations since the Muslim consumers define their self-concept with the Islamic brands. Islamic branding can be done by focusing on both the functional and emotional aspects of branding. The brand's tangible Shariah-compliant attributes, such as halal supply chain or halal logo, should be communicated to the Muslim consumers to create congruence with their self-concept (Liu & Minton, 2018). Islamic branding is a broader concept than the halal logo or halal supply chain processes. If a brand obtains halal certification for its product, processes, or premises, it alone does not make it an Islamic brand until it associates itself as an Islamic brand in the minds of the Muslim consumers. Branding includes not only the physical but also the emotional aspects of a product or service marketing. Based on this philosophy, Islamic branding is not only the halal assurance of the tangible attributes of a product but also includes the development of an emotional brand attachment with the Muslim consumers. The associations are formed through the communication of Islamic brand knowledge, associating the brand with the Muslim community, Islamic advertising and promotion, ICSR activities, Islamic financing, and other brand resonance-building activities (S. N. Z. Bukhari & Isa, 2019). The creation of Islamic brands through the brand-building process will result in the development of brand resonance for the Islamic brand.

Brand resonance has been identified as the highest level of the C.B.B.E. pyramid, without which a brand cannot retain the desired target market in the long run. Brand resonance is the strength, durability, and effectiveness of the consumer's psychological, emotional, behavioral, and social connection with the brands they buy (Raut, Brito, & Pawar, 2020). This step involves the development of brand relationships. Brand resonance is dependent on the type of relationship the target consumer has developed with the brand and the degree to which consumers feel that they are in sync and connected with the particular brand (Burgess, Spinks, & Sharma, 2017).

### **3. Research Framework**

The study's research framework is based on the Theory of Self-Congruity and Keller's C.B.B.E. Pyramid. The theory of self-congruity posits that consumers assess the alignment between the brand and their own identity through an inferential process, where they relate the brand's attributes to their personal characteristics (Fu et al., 2020). Research indicates that when a brand embodies values and traits that

resonate with its target audience, it can successfully foster brand resonance, thereby safeguarding itself against various threats. For Muslims, their connection to their faith is both rational and emotional, necessitating an evaluation of brands on both cognitive and emotional dimensions. This underscores the importance of cultivating an emotional bond between Muslim consumers and the brands aimed at them (Ahmadova & Aliyev, 2019). Social identity is a strong influencer of consumer behavior (Tabassum & Rahman, 2023). The theory of self-congruity has been utilized in numerous studies examining brand-consumer congruence, particularly in relation to the influence of religion on brand alignment (S. N. Z. Bukhari & Isa, 2019; Butt et al., 2017; Suhartanto et al., 2019; Surya & Saragih, 2019). Consequently, it is proposed that Islamic Corporate Social Responsibility (ICSR), Islamic Brand Knowledge, and Religiosity positively impact Muslim consumers' perceptions of Islamic brands by forming the foundational elements of the Customer-Based Brand Equity (C.B.B.E.) pyramid.

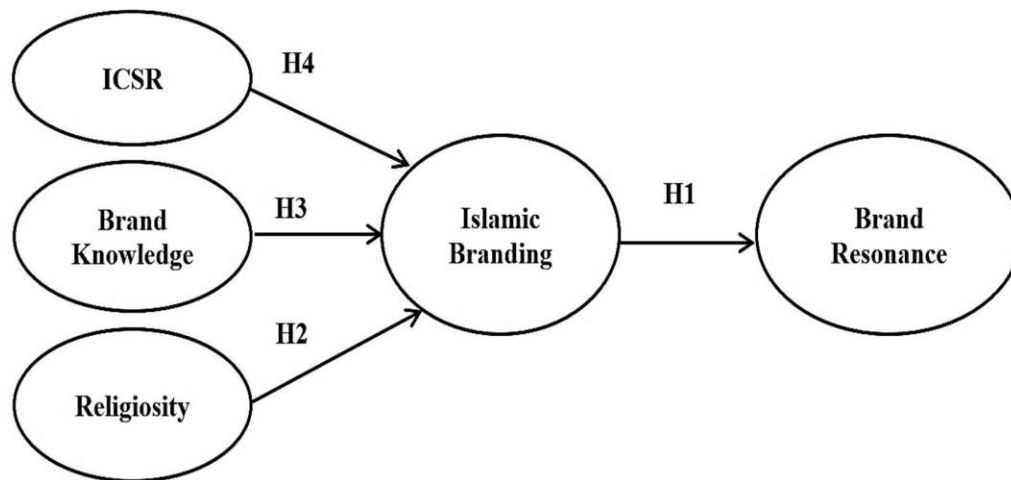


Figure 1: Research Framework

#### 4. Hypotheses Development

The following hypotheses are formulated based on the research framework.

##### 4.1 Islamic Branding and Brand Resonance

Based on the theory of self-congruity, it is hypothesized that if a consumer perceives a brand to have the same personality as his/her perceived self-image, they will have a greater level of loyalty, attachment, sense of community, and engagement with that brand (Akgun et al., 2013). Brand-self-congruence has a positive influence on a consumer's pre-purchase and post-purchase behaviour. When consumers perceive their self-concept to be congruent with the brand personality, they engage in brand advocacy and positive word-of-mouth (Sirgy, 2018). The greater the congruence between the consumer image and the brand image, the greater will be the positive influence on the brand's equity (Frias et al., 2019). Researchers have proposed Islamic branding elements, such as halal certification, for the formation of an Islamic brand. The brand targeting Muslim consumers must be perceived as credible and in

congruence to the Islamic principles. A brand will only be able to create brand resonance in the minds of Muslim consumers if it can inculcate and communicate the adoption of Islamic branding effectively. The creation of brand resonance requires the implementation of Islamic principles in all the aspects of a brand's marketing mix, including product, price, place, promotion, people, processes, physical evidence, promise, and patience (Abuznaid, 2020; Al-Hajla et al., 2018). It is hypothesized that:

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

#### **4.2 Religiosity and Islamic Branding**

For Muslim consumers with a high level of religiosity, consumer behaviour will be either pleasing or displeasing to Allah. For such consumers, their faith cannot be separated from any aspect of their lives, including their purchase decisions (Alserhan, 2010b). Muslim consumer markets with a high level of religiosity will be more conscious of the connection between their religious beliefs and their consumption behaviour (Temporal, 2011). Muslim consumers with a high degree of religious intensity will act more favourably towards brands that integrate Islamic values. Halal certification causes Muslim consumers to repurchase and recommend the Islamic brands to other consumers as well (Suhartanto et al., 2020). In the majority of instances, Muslim consumers' boycotts and anti-consumption behaviour towards various brands is rooted in issues of religious sensitivities. Muslim consumers with a high level of religious intensity will react more strongly against brands they perceive to be against their religious values. Muslim consumers can be more sensitive towards the presence of Islamic branding elements in the brands they use or consume, depending on the importance given by them to their religion (Uysal & Okumuş, 2019). Research reveals that the same consumer may behave differently towards the same brand at different times due to underlying emotions (Ding & Tseng, 2015). Therefore, the study hypothesizes that:-

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

#### **4.3 Brand Knowledge and Islamic Branding**

One of the key challenges of Islamic branding has been identified as the creation of the desired brand knowledge in the presence of Western brands. The global Muslim consumers vary in terms of their knowledge of Islamic values and principles (Ashraf, 2019; M. Yusof & Jusoh, 2014). Knowledge about a brand or product category has been stated as the necessary precursor to consumer intention and, ultimately, consumer behaviour (Awan et al., 2015). The absence of brand knowledge results in dilution of the Islamic brand's value in the consumer's mind. The creation of brand awareness regarding various Islamic branding components, such as halal logo and certification, has been proposed as an antecedent of Islamic branding (W. R. W. Ismail et al., 2020). Brand awareness about halal products has been proposed as an important influencer of Muslim consumers' positive attitude towards Islamic branding (Aziz & Chok, 2013; Hartani et al., 2020). Empirical research on Muslim consumers reveals the need to create Islamic brand knowledge among consumers through advertisement and promotion. It indicates the need for the presence of brand knowledge in the

consumer's mind as an antecedent for the consumer to realize the importance of Islamic branding (Jumani & Sukhabot, 2020). Based on this discussion, the next hypothesis states:

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

#### **4.4 ICSR and Islamic Branding**

ICSR is proposed as an Islamic branding antecedent since an organization's socially responsible activities are an important part of the brand's Halalan Toyyiban status. For a brand to be considered Halalan Toyyiban, the organization should practice good moral values, fairness in business conduct, compassion for all living organisms, social justice, community welfare, and assurance of product safety. It requires the integration of environmentally and socially responsible activities in daily operations. These are the values required by Muslim consumers to be displayed by brands they consume (Elasrag, 2015; Haleem et al., 2020; S. Khan et al., 2019; I. A. Latif et al., 2014). A study of global halal certification authorities revealed that the Islamic brand's employee rights, health and safety standards are part of certification assessment criteria. Thus, a brand needs to inculcate ICSR practices to be certified as Halalan Toyyiban (Latif et al., 2014). If consumers perceive a brand to be irresponsible and not fulfilling its social responsibilities, it will negatively influence the brand reputation and consumers' brand attachment (Japutra et al., 2019). ICSR has a broader spectrum as compared to CSR, thus making it more relevant and effective as a branding strategy for Muslim consumers. ICSR standards do not include brand elements that are prohibited in Islam, such as dealing with prohibited products or services. This makes it related to the philosophy of Islamic branding, which is based on similar grounds (Elasrag, 2015). Therefore, it is proposed that:-

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

### **5. Methodology**

Survey research was conducted under the quantitative methodology. The sample was collected from the capital cities from the provinces (administrative units) of Punjab, Sindh, and Federal territory. The provinces/federal territory of Pakistan with the highest GDP per Capita and population were selected for the study (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The selected cities had been used as a sampling frame for other empirical research conducted in Pakistan (Awan et al., 2015; S. A. A. Bukhari et al., 2020; S. N. Z. Bukhari, Isa, & Yen Nee, 2020; Javeed, Khan, Rehman, & Khurshid, 2020; M. Khan et al., 2019). Data analysis was conducted through IBM SPSS and SMART PLS. The measurement items of the constructs were adapted from existing literature.

### **6. Results**

The measurement model and structural model analysis was conducted in the data analysis. The results are discussed below.

#### **6.1 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 through assessing convergent validity, internal consistency reliability, and

discriminant validity. The results are shown in Figure 2. The measurement model results depicted adequate reliability and convergent validity.

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

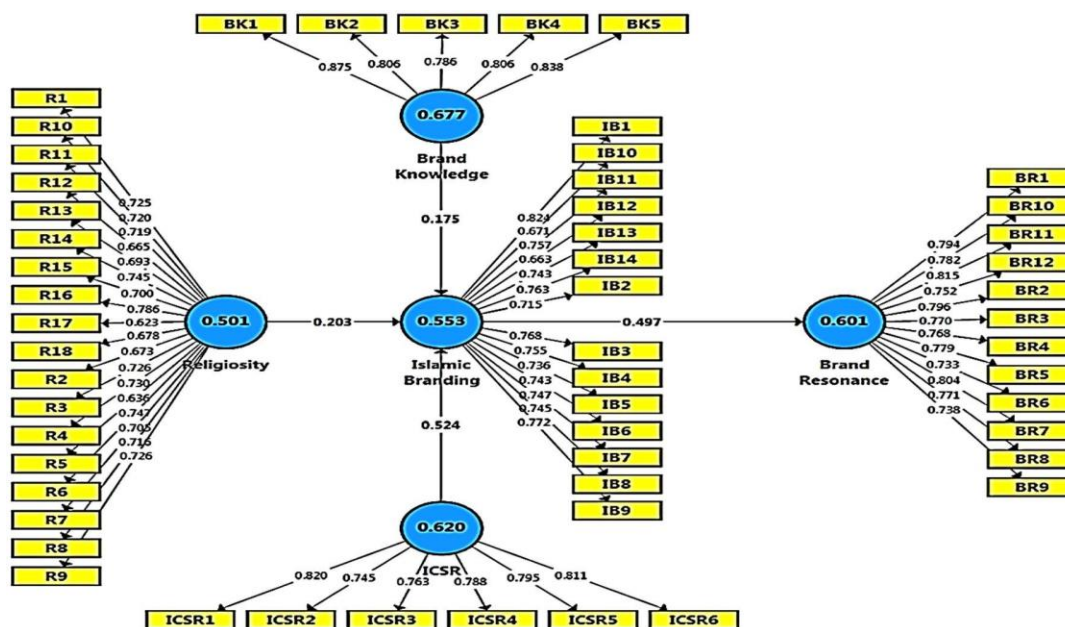


Figure 2: Measurement Model Analysis

### 1.1 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 H1 and H4 supported with a p-value < 0.01 and t-value > 2.33 and H2 and H3 are supported with p-value < 0.05 and t-value > 1.645. It shows that exogenous variables are positively influencing the respective endogenous variables.

The research framework encompasses two endogenous constructs: Islamic branding and brand resonance. The adjusted R<sup>2</sup> for brand resonance reflects the extent of variation in brand resonance attributable to Islamic branding, while the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> for Islamic branding indicates the overall predictive relevance of the three antecedents. An adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of 0.245 indicates that 24.5% of the variation in brand resonance among Muslim consumers in Pakistan can be attributed to Islamic branding. The R<sup>2</sup> for Islamic branding illustrates the variation in Islamic branding

resulting from the three antecedents: brand knowledge, ICSR, and religiosity. In Pakistan, an  $R^2$  value of 0.51 indicates a strong predictive accuracy of these three antecedents, demonstrating that 51% of the variation in Islamic branding is due to them.

Table 1: Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Relationships	Std Beta	Std Error	t-value	p-value	Confidence Interval Lower Limit	Confidence Interval Upper Limit	Decision
H1	Islamic Branding → Brand Resonance	0.497	0.083	5.954	0.000	0.339	0.617	<i>Supported</i>
H2	Religiosity → Islamic Branding	0.203	0.095	2.133	0.017	0.063	0.384	<i>Supported</i>
H3	Brand Knowledge → Islamic Branding	0.175	0.091	1.910	0.028	0.024	0.323	<i>Supported</i>
H4	ICSR → Islamic Branding	0.525	0.113	4.629	0.000	0.328	0.698	<i>Supported</i>

While  $R^2$  reflects the collective influence of all exogenous variables,  $f^2$  assesses the individual contribution of each exogenous variable in explaining an endogenous variable in terms of  $R^2$ . The data analysis reveals a robust  $f^2$  value of 0.892, indicating that Islamic branding has a substantial effect on brand resonance. The  $f^2$  values for the antecedents—religiosity, brand knowledge, and ICSR—are 0.063, 0.055, and 0.439, respectively. In the case of the three antecedents of Islamic branding, brand knowledge has the weakest effect on Islamic branding in Pakistan. Religiosity also has a weak effect size, but consumer perceptions of ICSR show substantial effects on their perceived Islamic branding importance.

## 7. Discussion

The results of this study are in congruence with its theoretical foundations and previous literature. The hypotheses were proposed based on the theory of self-congruity. It states that a consumer will be more emotionally attached to a brand when the brand depicts a personality that is similar to the consumer's actual or ideal self (Sirgy, 1990, 2018). The research framework was developed based on the C.B.B.E. pyramid, which theorizes that the branding strategy should be aligned and synchronized with the values and personality of the target market (Keller, 2001). The results of this study support its theoretical basis. It proves that Muslim consumers in Pakistan, who perceive various Islamic branding activities to be important in their purchase decisions, are emotionally attached to Islamic brands.

Past research has shown religiosity to be a strong predictor of consumption behaviour. Previous research reveals that approximately two-thirds of the world's population considers religion to be an important indicator of their consumption

behaviour. This study's findings support the existing literature pertaining to the relationship between more religious Muslim consumers and Islamic branding (Islam & Chandrasekaran, 2020; Muslichah et al., 2019; Suhartanto et al., 2019; Ul-Haq et al., 2019). Furthermore, past research has shown religiosity to be a strong predictor of consumption behaviour. Previous research reveals that approximately two-thirds of the world's population considers religion to be an important indicator of their consumption behaviour. This study's findings support the existing literature pertaining to the relationship between more religious Muslim consumers and Islamic branding (Islam & Chandrasekaran, 2020; Muslichah et al., 2019; Suhartanto et al., 2019; Ul-Haq et al., 2019).

ICSR had the strongest influence on the consumers' perceptions regarding Islamic branding. According to research conducted by the Stanford Social Innovation Review, the charitable contributions of people in Pakistan amount to more than 1% of the country's GDP. This is greater than the percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contributed by developed nations like the USA or the United Kingdom. Approximately 98% of the people in Pakistan donate to charitable causes through various organizations (The Express Tribune, 2018). Pakistan is among the most charitable nations in the world, with the Muslim population contributing to various socially responsible activities on an individual basis. Approximately 98% of the population in Pakistan practices some form of social responsibility due to religious beliefs and values. This makes the country more charitable at an individual level as compared to developed countries like the USA, UK, and Canada (Amjad & Ali, 2018).

However, the research on Pakistan reveals that in the presence of high individual socially responsible activities, organizations lag in the implementation and disclosure of ICSR practices. The history of the country reveals that the Government of Pakistan has relied on individual philanthropy and charity to help the nation in times of various natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, or during the COVID-19 pandemic (S. A. A. Bukhari et al., 2020; Kabir, 2020). This can be the cause of the high level of importance placed by consumers on the need for Islamic brands to inculcate ICSR practices in their business operations.

## **8. Conclusions**

Islamic branding is a strategy created for the development of Islamic brands for the global Muslim consumers. The Muslim consumer market has emerged as a substantial target market for brands due to its increasing size and purchasing power. Heterogeneous consumer markets need a customized branding strategy. The C.B.B.E. pyramid of brand development explains that to create brand resonance, a brand should first develop brand salience, followed by brand meaning and afterwards brand response based on the earlier developed strategies. Without the development of these brand-building blocks, the brands targeting Muslim consumers cannot generate brand resonance. Up until now, a brand-building framework has not been proposed for the development of Islamic branding. Based on the theory of self-congruity and the C.B.B.E. pyramid, this study proposes Islamic branding as the strategy to create brand resonance in the minds of the Muslim consumer. Furthermore, three antecedents, i.e., religiosity, brand knowledge, and ICSR, are proposed as the building blocks of Islamic

branding. It is proposed that a brand inculcating these antecedents will be able to create brand resonance in the minds of the Muslim consumers and protect itself against anti-consumption behaviors.

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