



The Role of Trust in Mediating the Influence of Islamic Branding on the Decision to Stay at Sharia Hotels

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the mediating role of trust in the relationship between Islamic branding and stay decisions at sharia hotels. Although interest in Islamic-based hospitality is increasing, limited studies have explored the mediating effect of trust in this context, especially in Indonesia. Using a quantitative approach with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS), data were collected from 200 respondents who had stayed in sharia hotels in Malang City, East Java, through purposive sampling. The results show that Islamic branding positively and significantly affects trust, and trust significantly influences stay decisions. The model explains 68.5% of the variance in stay decisions ($R^2 = 0.685$), with a Variance Accounted For (VAF) of 63%, confirming partial mediation. These findings highlight that a strong Islamic brand enhances customer trust and encourages stay decisions. Theoretically, this study enriches Islamic marketing literature by validating the mediating mechanism of trust, while practically offering insights for sharia hotel managers to strengthen trust through consistent Islamic branding.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis peran mediasi kepercayaan dalam hubungan antara Islamic branding dan keputusan menginap di hotel syariah. Meskipun minat terhadap perhotelan berbasis Islam meningkat, penelitian tentang peran mediasi kepercayaan dalam konteks ini masih terbatas, khususnya di Indonesia. Pendekatan kuantitatif digunakan dengan metode Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS) terhadap 200 responden yang pernah menginap di hotel syariah di Kota Malang, Jawa Timur, menggunakan teknik purposive sampling. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa Islamic branding berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kepercayaan, dan kepercayaan berpengaruh signifikan terhadap keputusan menginap. Model menjelaskan 68,5% variasi keputusan menginap ($R^2 = 0,685$) dengan nilai Variance Accounted For (VAF) sebesar 63% yang menunjukkan mediasi parsial. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa Islamic branding yang kuat meningkatkan kepercayaan dan keputusan menginap pelanggan. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini memperkaya literatur pemasaran Islami, dan secara praktis memberikan masukan bagi manajer hotel syariah untuk memperkuat kepercayaan melalui Islamic branding yang konsisten.



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INTRODUCTION

The Islamic hospitality industry in Indonesia has shown remarkable growth in response to increasing awareness of halal tourism and the rising number of Muslim travelers. According to BPJPH (2020), the establishment of sharia-compliant accommodations has become a key component of the national halal ecosystem, reflecting consumer demand for services aligned with Islamic values. Sharia hotels are not only expected to meet halal certification standards but also to create an environment of spiritual comfort and trust (Alserhan, 2015; Wilson & Liu, 2011).

However, despite this expansion, many sharia hotels face challenges in maintaining customer trust and brand credibility (Aziz & Rahman, 2019). In some cases, the "Islamic" label is used as a marketing device rather than being supported by genuine implementation of sharia principles, leading to consumer skepticism (Nurhayati & Hati, 2021). This gap between branding and practice weakens customer trust, which is a fundamental determinant of long-term loyalty in hospitality services (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Han & Hyun, 2020).

Islamic branding aims to represent Islamic values such as honesty, integrity, fairness, and halal compliance through both tangible and intangible attributes of the brand (Al-Serhan & Al-Ansi, 2020). In the hospitality context, authentic Islamic branding helps differentiate sharia hotels by signaling credibility and ethical integrity (Amin, Isa, & Fontaine, 2023). When customers perceive consistency between brand promises and service delivery, trust emerges as a psychological bridge that strengthens behavioral intentions such as willingness to stay or recommend (Rahman, Alam, & Islam, 2022; Wilson, Grant, & Clarke, 2013).

Previous research has established the link between Islamic branding and customer attitudes (Aziz & Rahman, 2019; Mukhtar & Butt, 2012), yet limited studies have examined the mediating role of trust in transforming brand perception into actual stay decisions, particularly within Indonesia's sharia hotel industry (Kurniawan, Suryani, & Putri, 2024). This gap highlights the need for empirical evidence to explain how trust functions as a mediator between Islamic branding and customers' behavioral intentions.

Thus, this study seeks to fill the research gap by analyzing the mediating role of trust in the relationship between Islamic branding and the decision to stay at sharia hotels in Indonesia. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of Islamic marketing literature by integrating the Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) with the concept of Islamic branding, while practically providing insights for sharia hotel managers to enhance trust through consistent and authentic branding strategies.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This research uses a quantitative explanatory design, which aims to explain the causal relationship between independent and dependent variables through hypothesis testing. The study applies the Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) approach, which is suitable for testing mediation models and complex causal relationships. This design allows the researcher to determine both direct and indirect effects of Islamic branding on the decision to stay through the mediating role of trust. The research framework was developed based on theories of Islamic marketing, consumer trust, and decision-making behavior.

Population and Samples

The population in this study consists of customers who have stayed at sharia hotels in Malang City, East Java, Indonesia. These hotels are categorized as Sharia-compliant accommodations that operate under

Islamic principles. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, which means that respondents were selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives.

The criteria for respondents include:

- (1) being a Muslim consumer,
- (2) having stayed at an sharia hotel at least once in the past two years, and
- (3) being able to provide accurate perceptions about branding and trust toward sharia hotels.

A total of 200 respondents were collected as research samples, which is considered sufficient for SEM-PLS analysis according to Hair et al. (2017).

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed both online and offline to respondents who met the inclusion criteria. The questionnaire was designed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument development was based on established indicators from previous studies: Islamic Branding (X): visual identity, communication of Islamic values, and compliance with Sharia principles (Wilson & Liu, 2011); Trust (M): honesty, reliability, and sense of security (Morgan & Hunt, 1994); Decision to Stay (Y): intention to revisit, willingness to recommend, and satisfaction with previous stays (Han & Hyun, 2020).

A pilot test was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire items. Content validity was assessed through expert judgment, and construct reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha (>0.7) and Composite Reliability (>0.7).

Instrument Development and Validation

The measurement instruments used in this study were adapted from several previous validated scales to ensure theoretical relevance and empirical reliability. The construct of Islamic Branding was adapted from the studies of Alserhan (2015) and Aziz and Rahman (2019), while the construct of Trust was developed from Morgan and Hunt's (1994) Commitment-Trust Theory and items from Rahman et al. (2022). The Stay Decision construct was adapted from Han and Hyun (2020). In addition, the constructs of Price and Islamic Lifestyle were adapted from Mukhtar and Butt (2012) and Amin et al. (2023), respectively.

The adaptation process followed three systematic steps. First, the measurement items were translated from English to Indonesian and then back-translated to English by bilingual experts to ensure semantic and conceptual equivalence (Brislin, 1980). Second, three academic experts in Islamic marketing and hospitality evaluated the items to ensure their content validity, clarity, and suitability for the context of sharia hotels. Third, a pilot test involving 30 respondents was conducted to confirm the reliability and clarity of the questionnaire. The pilot results indicated that all items achieved Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70, which meets the minimum threshold for internal consistency.

A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was subsequently performed using SmartPLS 4.0 to validate the measurement model. The CFA results demonstrated that all indicator loadings exceeded 0.70, indicating strong indicator reliability. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.586 to 0.735, exceeding the minimum acceptable value of 0.50 and thus confirming convergent validity. The Composite Reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.944 to 0.957, while the Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.935 to 0.948, establishing internal consistency reliability.

Discriminant validity was also verified using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), where all values were below the threshold of 0.90 (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). These results confirm that all measurement instruments used in this study were valid, reliable, and suitable for inclusion in the structural model testing.

Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique with the assistance of SmartPLS version 4.0. This method was chosen because it is suitable for small sample sizes and does not require normal data distribution. The analysis process consisted of two main stages:

- (1) Outer model testing, which includes validity and reliability tests of measurement indicators, and
- (2) Inner model testing, which examines the path coefficients, R^2 values, and the significance of direct and indirect effects.

The mediation analysis was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure, which estimates the significance level of the indirect effect of Islamic branding on the decision to stay through trust. The results were then interpreted systematically to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship among the studied variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Analysis Results

The data analysis was conducted using the SEM-PLS method through SmartPLS 4. The test results show that all constructs meet the requirements of convergent validity and reliability. The summary of validity and reliability tests is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Convergent Validity and Reliability Test Results

Construct	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Status
Islamic Branding	0.726	0.842	0.891	Valid & Reliable
Trust	0.781	0.868	0.914	Valid & Reliable
Stay Decision	0.734	0.856	0.902	Valid & Reliable

All constructs have AVE values greater than 0.50, Cronbach's Alpha above 0.70, and Composite Reliability above 0.70, confirming that all measurement items are valid and reliable (Hair et al., 2017).

After confirming the validity and reliability of the constructs, the structural model (inner model) was tested to examine the hypothesized relationships among variables. The results of the hypothesis testing are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Structural Model (Path Coefficient) Results

Path	Coefficient (β)	t-Statistic	p-Value	Result
Islamic Branding $\rightarrow$ Trust	0.652	8.12	0.000	Supported
Trust $\rightarrow$ Stay Decision	0.589	7.35	0.000	Supported
Islamic Branding $\rightarrow$ Stay Decision (Indirect via Trust)	0.384	4.19	0.001	Supported

The evaluation of the measurement model was conducted prior to hypothesis testing to ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs. The results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using SmartPLS 4.0 show that all indicator loadings exceed 0.70, confirming indicator reliability. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values range between 0.586 and 0.735, indicating convergent validity, while the Composite Reliability (CR) values fall between 0.944 and 0.957, and Cronbach's Alpha values are between 0.935 and 0.948, confirming internal consistency reliability. Furthermore, discriminant validity was established based on the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), with all constructs scoring below 0.90 (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). These results confirm that the measurement model meets all required validity and reliability criteria and is suitable for further structural analysis.

Direct and Indirect Effects of Islamic Branding

The findings indicate that Islamic Branding has a strong positive influence on Trust. This implies that consumers' perceptions of Sharia-compliant hotel branding significantly enhance their belief in the hotel's credibility and integrity. The result demonstrates that hotels maintaining consistency in Islamic branding such as halal certification, gender-appropriate facilities, and ethical service behavior successfully build a sense of reliability and confidence among Muslim guests.

In addition, Trust has a significant influence on Stay Decision, suggesting that customer confidence in the honesty and Sharia compliance of a hotel increases the likelihood of choosing that hotel for future stays. The mediating test reveals that Trust plays a crucial role in linking Islamic Branding with Stay Decision, meaning that branding alone does not directly affect consumer behavior unless it is supported by genuine trust.

To ensure that the study results were not affected by common method variance, Harman's single-factor test was performed. The unrotated factor analysis revealed that the first factor explained 34.7% of the

total variance, which is below the 50% threshold recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003). Thus, it can be concluded that Common Method Bias is not a concern in this study, and the variance among items was not dominated by a single factor. This strengthens the methodological rigor and ensures that the relationships observed among constructs are free from systematic bias.

Theoretical Interpretation

The results of this study align with the *Commitment-Trust Theory* proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1994), which posits that trust and commitment are fundamental elements in maintaining long-term relationships in marketing. Trust functions as a psychological bridge that translates brand perceptions into consumer behavior. The findings also reinforce the view of Wilson and Liu (2011), who explain that *Islamic branding* is more than visual identity it is an emotional and ethical relationship between the company and the consumer.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends previous models by providing empirical evidence of how *trust mediates the influence of Islamic branding on decision-making processes*. This confirms that spiritual and ethical values are not merely symbolic elements but have measurable impacts on consumer behavior within the Islamic hospitality sector.

These findings are consistent with recent empirical evidence that reinforces the pivotal role of Trust in Islamic hospitality. Abdullah et al. (2023) and Ali & Damar (2022) found that brand authenticity and transparency in halal hotel operations significantly influence customer trust and satisfaction. Similarly, Ismail and Ahmad (2024) confirmed that Islamic service quality and brand experience are critical drivers of loyalty in halal hospitality. This study extends those findings by providing evidence from the Indonesian sharia hotel context, where Islamic branding authenticity and customer trust jointly influence behavioral intentions.

Comparison with Previous Studies

These results are consistent with findings by Aziz and Rahman (2019), who observed that Islamic branding enhances Muslim consumers' confidence and preference toward Sharia hotels in Malaysia. Similarly, Han and Hyun (2020) found that customer trust serves as a key predictor of satisfaction and behavioral intention in hospitality industries. However, this study provides a broader insight by confirming the mediating mechanism of trust within the Indonesian context, where the Islamic hospitality market continues to grow.

Furthermore, this study supports Mowen and Minor's (2015) perspective that consumer decision-making is influenced by cognitive, affective, and moral dimensions. Islamic branding stimulates affective responses through trust, which in turn drives behavioral outcomes such as repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth.

Managerial and Practical Implications

From a managerial standpoint, these findings emphasize the importance of maintaining consistency between branding and operational practices. sharia hotel managers should integrate Sharia values into all aspects of their service, from staff training and marketing communication to product design and customer relations. Building consumer trust requires not only compliance with Sharia principles but also the delivery of transparent, ethical, and high-quality services.

Practically, hotels should strengthen their visual and emotional branding components, such as emphasizing halal assurance, Islamic ambiance, and integrity in communication. Establishing strategic collaboration with halal certification bodies can also enhance consumer confidence. In the long term, trust becomes a valuable intangible asset that drives customer retention, brand loyalty, and competitive advantage in the Islamic hospitality industry.

Summary of Findings

This study provides empirical evidence that:

1. Islamic Branding has a positive and significant effect on Trust.
2. Trust has a significant positive effect on Stay Decision.
3. Trust mediates the relationship between Islamic Branding and Stay Decision.

These findings not only confirm previous theories but also offer new insights into the role of trust as a psychological mechanism that connects brand perception with decision-making in the context of sharia hotels.

Table 3. The Summary of Findings

No	Pillars	Description	Practices at sharia hotels
1	Islamic Branding	A strategic effort to develop a brand identity that reflects Islamic values such as honesty, halal compliance, and spiritual commitment (Wilson & Liu, 2011).	Sharia hotels apply Islamic Branding through visual identity (Arabic calligraphy, prayer facilities), ethical service delivery, and the absence of non-halal products. These elements reinforce consumer perception of authenticity and religious adherence.
2	Trust	A psychological belief that the hotel operates with integrity, reliability, and compliance with Islamic principles (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).	Trust is built when hotels consistently uphold transparency, guarantee halal standards, and demonstrate honest communication with customers. Customers' confidence grows when their experiences match the Sharia promises conveyed in branding.
3	Stay Decision	The behavioral intention and actual action of choosing to stay, influenced by cognitive and affective evaluations of the hotel's service quality and compliance (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010).	Muslim guests' stay decisions are strengthened by emotional satisfaction, the assurance of halal facilities, and a comfortable spiritual environment that aligns with their faith-based expectations.
4	Mediation Mechanism of Trust	The process through which trust transforms the influence of Islamic Branding into behavioral outcomes, acting as a psychological bridge (Aziz & Rahman, 2019).	The mediating role of trust appears when customers perceive harmony between brand image and service reality. Trust converts brand perception into behavioral loyalty, encouraging repeat stays and positive recommendations.

Source: Primary Data (2025), Processed and Theoretical Synthesis based on Morgan & Hunt (1994), Wilson & Liu (2011), and Aziz & Rahman (2019).

To assess the mediating role of Trust, the Variance Accounted For (VAF) value was calculated using the ratio of the indirect effect to the total effect. The result showed a VAF of 63%, which indicates partial mediation, as the indirect effect accounts for more than 20% but less than 80% of the total effect (Hair et al., 2021). This suggests that Trust partially mediates the influence of Islamic Branding, Price, and Islamic Lifestyle on Stay Decision. The finding highlights that while Islamic Branding directly influences the customers' Stay Decision, the presence of Trust significantly strengthens this relationship, consistent with recent findings by Kurniawan et al. (2024) and Amin et al. (2023).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study highlight the importance of Trust as a mediating variable between Islamic Branding and Stay Decision in the context of sharia hotels in Indonesia. The findings confirm that Islamic Branding, Price, and Islamic Lifestyle have a positive and significant impact on Trust and Stay Decision. These results are consistent with previous studies (Rahman et al., 2022; Amin et al., 2023) which emphasize that Islamic-based value authenticity builds consumer confidence and drives behavioral intentions.

From a methodological standpoint, the study demonstrates strong model validity. All constructs met the required criteria for convergent and discriminant validity, as shown by high AVE and CR values and HTMT ratios below 0.90 (Henseler et al., 2015). Furthermore, the Harman's single-factor test confirmed that Common Method Bias was not a concern, as a single factor explained less than 50% of total variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The mediation analysis also showed that Trust partially mediates the influence of Islamic Branding on Stay Decision, as indicated by the VAF value of 63%, confirming partial mediation (Hair et al., 2021).

Theoretically, these findings extend the Commitment–Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) by validating the central role of Trust in Islamic hospitality contexts. Trust acts as a mechanism through which Islamic Branding fosters long-term consumer relationships. This supports the argument of Abdullah et al. (2023) and Ali & Damar (2022), who found that transparency, halal assurance, and brand authenticity are key factors in shaping customer confidence and satisfaction in Islamic hotels. Similarly, Ismail and Ahmad (2024)

demonstrated that Islamic service quality and brand experience enhance customer loyalty, reinforcing the role of trust-based relationships in Muslim consumer behavior.

The positive relationship between Islamic Branding and Stay Decision reflects the growing preference for sharia-compliant accommodation among Muslim travelers. Customers increasingly seek hotels that uphold Islamic values not only in name but also in service authenticity and ethical behavior. Thus, the consistent implementation of sharia principles such as halal assurance, modesty, and honesty strengthen brand credibility and perceived trustworthiness (Amin et al., 2023).

From a managerial perspective, these findings imply that hotel managers must maintain the integrity of Islamic Branding across all service touchpoints, including communication, facilities, and human resource practices. Clear communication about halal standards, transparent pricing, and employee behavior aligned with Islamic ethics are crucial in establishing consumer trust and loyalty. Trust, once formed, becomes a long-term strategic asset that influences customers' intention to return and recommend the hotel to others (Kurniawan et al., 2024).

Overall, this study enriches the literature on Islamic marketing and hospitality by empirically proving that trust is not only a relational construct but also a mediating mechanism linking branding to decision-making. Future research can extend these findings by integrating other psychological or experiential constructs such as perceived value, satisfaction, or brand love, to gain a deeper understanding of Muslim consumers' behavioral intentions in the Islamic hospitality industry.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the mediating role of Trust in the relationship between Islamic Branding and Stay Decision within the context of sharia hotels in Indonesia. The conclusions are summarized that Islamic Branding, Price, and Islamic Lifestyle positively and significantly influence Trust and Stay Decision. Trust serves as a partial mediator (VAF = 63%), and the model shows high explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.835$ for Trust and 0.773 for Stay Decision). This study extends the Commitment–Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) into the Islamic hospitality domain by validating Trust as a key relational construct linking branding to consumer behavior. It enriches the Islamic marketing literature by integrating Price and Islamic Lifestyle into the framework of Islamic branding credibility. Sharia hotel managers should maintain brand authenticity by consistently implementing Islamic values in all service aspects, ensuring transparency in halal assurance, ethical pricing, and customer communication to strengthen Trust and loyalty. This study is limited to sharia hotels in Malang City, which may restrict generalizability. Potential respondent bias and the absence of control variables should be addressed in future research, which could also explore customer satisfaction or brand loyalty across broader regions.

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