

# Building Trust in the Digital Halal Market

Dion Satrio Nugroho<sup>1\*</sup>, Tri Deviasari Wulan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Digital Business, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Surabaya, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Department of Information System, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Surabaya, Indonesia

e-mail: dion.satrio.mbis@unusa.ac.id

\*Corresponding Author

**Abstract** This study aims to examine the effect of Digital Halal Marketing (DHM) on Consumer Trust (CT) by investigating the mediating roles of Social Media Engagement (SME). In the rapidly growing halal industry, digital platforms have become essential tools for communicating halal values, ensuring certification transparency, and establishing an ethical position. However, limited research has explored how digital halal strategies translate into consumer trust through relational mechanisms. This study employs a quantitative approach using covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) with a sample of 250 respondents collected through structured questionnaires. The findings reveal that Digital Halal Marketing significantly influences Social Media Engagement and Brand Image. Furthermore, both Social Media Engagement and Brand Image have significant positive effects on Consumer Trust. The mediation analysis indicates partial mediation, demonstrating that trust is primarily formed through interactive engagement and favorable brand perceptions rather than direct marketing communication alone. The results suggest that halal-oriented digital strategies must prioritize transparency, interactivity, and value congruence to effectively build consumer trust. The study contributes to integrating signaling theory and engagement theory into the halal digital marketing literature and provides practical insights for managers seeking to strengthen trust in competitive digital environments.

**Keywords:** Digital Halal Marketing, Social Media Engagement, Brand Image, Consumer Trust, Halal Industry

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technologies has significantly transformed marketing communication strategies worldwide. In this digital landscape, firms increasingly rely on online platforms to deliver value propositions, build relationships, and enhance customer experiences. Within the context of the expanding halal industry, this transformation has given rise to digital halal marketing, a strategic approach that integrates Islamic values, transparency in halal certification, ethical promotion, and Shariah-compliant communication into digital marketing activities (Dwivedi et al., 2021). As the global Muslim population continues to grow, accompanied by increasing awareness of halal compliance, businesses must not only offer halal products but also communicate halal authenticity effectively in digital environments (Statista, 2024).

Digital halal marketing plays a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions, particularly in online spaces where information transparency and credibility are essential. Consumers today actively seek information about halal certification, ingredient

transparency, and ethical production practices through social media and digital platforms. Studies suggest that value-based digital communication positively influences consumer attitudes and perceived credibility, especially in religiously sensitive markets (Aji et al., 2020; Rahman et al., 2022). Therefore, integrating halal values into digital marketing strategies is no longer optional; it is essential for maintaining competitiveness and relevance.

At the same time, social media engagement has become a fundamental mechanism for strengthening brand-consumer relationships. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook allow interactive communication, enabling consumers to like, comment, share, and co-create content. Engagement reflects consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement with brand-related content (Dessart et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021). Recent research indicates that higher engagement levels enhance perceived brand authenticity and relational closeness, which are crucial in building trust in digital contexts (Cheung et al., 2021; Harrigan et al., 2021). In halal marketing, social media engagement offers a space for brands to demonstrate

transparency and reinforce their halal positioning through consistent, interactive communication.

Another key construct influencing consumer evaluation is brand image, defined as the set of perceptions consumers hold about a brand. Brand image is shaped by marketing communication, social interactions, symbolic cues, and prior experiences (Keller, 2020). In digital environments, social media marketing significantly contributes to shaping and reinforcing brand image, especially through visual storytelling and user-generated content (Bilgin, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2021). For halal brands, a positive brand image must reflect not only product quality but also religious compliance, ethical integrity, and credibility. When consumers perceive a brand as authentically halal and socially responsible, their overall evaluation of the brand becomes more favorable (Rahman et al., 2022).

Ultimately, the success of digital halal marketing efforts is reflected in consumer trust, which represents consumers' confidence in a brand's reliability, honesty, and integrity. Trust is particularly critical in halal markets because consumers rely on brands to fulfill religious obligations related to consumption. Research in digital marketing contexts confirms that transparent communication, strong brand image, and active social media engagement significantly enhance consumer trust (Harrigan et al., 2021; Kim & Peterson, 2017; Rahman et al., 2022). In halal industries, trust becomes even more vital, as it directly influences loyalty, repurchase intention, and positive word of mouth (Aji et al., 2020).

Despite increasing scholarly attention to halal marketing and digital engagement, limited studies have simultaneously examined the integrated relationships among digital halal marketing, social media engagement, brand image, and consumer trust within a comprehensive structural model. Most prior research investigates these variables separately, leaving a theoretical gap regarding their sequential and mediating relationships. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how digital halal marketing influences consumer trust, with social media engagement and brand image serving as mediating mechanisms. By integrating these constructs, this research contributes to the development of halal marketing theory in the digital era and provides

strategic insights for practitioners seeking to strengthen trust among Muslim consumers.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Digital Halal Marketing**

The acceleration of digital transformation has reshaped how brands communicate value and build relationships with consumers. In the halal industry, this transformation has led to the emergence of digital halal marketing, integrating Islamic principles, halal certification transparency, ethical communication, and value-driven messaging across digital platforms. Unlike conventional marketing, halal marketing emphasizes Shariah compliance and religious authenticity as core positioning elements (Wilson, 2020).

Recent studies highlight that Muslim consumers increasingly rely on digital channels to verify halal authenticity, evaluate brand credibility, and access certification information (Elasrag, 2022). Transparency in halal labeling and ethical communication significantly enhances perceived brand legitimacy in online contexts. Moreover, digital marketing strategies that effectively communicate religious compliance reduce uncertainty and perceived risk, particularly for experience-based products (Mukhtar & Butt, 2021).

From a signaling theory perspective, halal certification and Islamic value communication serve as trust signals that influence consumer perceptions in digital environments (Connelly et al., 2021). Therefore, digital halal marketing is expected to elicit positive consumer responses, including engagement and trust.

### **Social Media Engagement**

Social media engagement refers to the degree of consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement with brand-related content across digital platforms. Engagement is considered a multidimensional construct encompassing interaction, participation, and emotional attachment (Brodie et al., 2021).

Research shows that interactive and value-driven content significantly increases consumer engagement, especially when consumers perceive relevance and authenticity (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020). In digital contexts, engagement strengthens relational bonds, enhances perceived closeness, and fosters long-term brand relationships (Pansari & Kumar, 2020).

In halal marketing, social media engagement provides a platform for brands to reinforce religious authenticity through interactive dialogue, disclosure of certifications, and community-based communication. When consumers actively engage with halal content, they are more likely to internalize brand values and develop favorable brand perceptions. Thus, digital halal marketing is expected to positively influence social media engagement.

### **Brand Image**

Brand image represents the cumulative perception of a brand formed through communication, experience, and symbolic associations. In digital marketing environments, brand image is heavily influenced by social media presence, online interactions, and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Vătămănescu et al., 2022).

Digital engagement has been found to significantly enhance brand associations and memorability, strengthening brand image (Algharabat et al., 2020). A strong brand image signals reliability, consistency, and value congruence, which are critical determinants of trust in online settings.

In halal industries, brand image must reflect both product quality and religious compliance. According to Mukhtar and Butt (2021), halal brand image significantly affects consumer evaluation and trust because it symbolizes adherence to Islamic ethical standards. Therefore, social media engagement is likely to enhance halal brand image.

### **Consumer Trust**

Consumer trust is defined as the willingness to rely on a brand based on perceptions of competence, integrity, and benevolence. In digital environments, trust is especially important due to information asymmetry and perceived risk (Chawla & Kumar, 2022).

Studies confirm that transparent communication, strong brand image, and consistent digital interaction significantly enhance online consumer trust (Shin et al., 2021). In halal contexts, trust becomes even more critical because consumption decisions are tied to religious obligations. Consumers must believe that brands genuinely comply with halal principles rather than merely using halal labels as marketing tactics (Wilson, 2020).

Furthermore, signaling theory suggests that

brand image and engagement serve as mediating mechanisms that convert marketing communication into trust (Connelly et al., 2021). Therefore, social media engagement and brand image are expected to strengthen the relationship between digital halal marketing and consumer trust.

### **Hypothesis Development**

Based on the theoretical arguments above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

#### **Direct Relationships**

H1: Digital Halal Marketing positively influences Social Media Engagement.

H2: Digital Halal Marketing positively influences Brand Image.

H3: Social Media Engagement positively influences Brand Image.

H4: Social Media Engagement positively influences Consumer Trust.

H5: Brand Image positively influences Consumer Trust.

H6: Digital Halal Marketing positively influences Consumer Trust.

H7: Social Media Engagement mediates the relationship between Digital Halal Marketing and Consumer Trust.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a quantitative research design, using a cross-sectional survey, to examine the relationships among Digital Halal Marketing, Social Media Engagement, Brand Image, and Consumer Trust. The population consists of Muslim consumers who actively use social media and have experience purchasing halal products online. A purposive sampling technique was applied to ensure that respondents met specific criteria, namely being Muslim, active social media users, and having searched for or purchased halal products within the last six months. A total of 250 valid responses were collected, which satisfies the recommended minimum sample size for structural equation modeling and ensures robust parameter estimation (Hair et al., 2022; Kline, 2023). Data were gathered through an online questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with measurement items adapted from prior validated studies. The data were analyzed using Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) via

SmartPLS software to assess both the measurement and structural models. The measurement model evaluation included factor loadings, composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker and HTMT), while the structural model assessment involved examining path coefficients, t-values, p-values obtained through bootstrapping (5,000 resamples), coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), effect size ( $f^2$ ), predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ), and model fit indices such as SRMR. The mediation effects of Social Media Engagement and Brand Image were tested using bootstrapping procedures to assess the significance of indirect effects. All respondents participated voluntarily, and confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

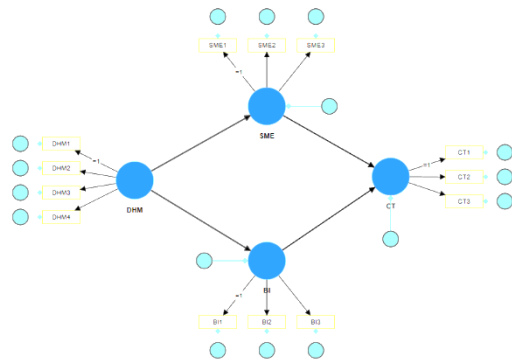


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### Measurement Model Assessment

Table 1. Factor Loadings

| Construct                     | Item | Factor Loading |
|-------------------------------|------|----------------|
| Digital Halal Marketing (DHM) | DHM1 | 0.812          |
|                               | DHM2 | 0.845          |
|                               | DHM3 | 0.867          |
|                               | DHM4 | 0.873          |
| Social Media Engagement (SME) | SME1 | 0.801          |
|                               | SME2 | 0.856          |
|                               | SME3 | 0.889          |
| Brand Image (BI)              | BI1  | 0.834          |
|                               | BI2  | 0.871          |
|                               | BI3  | 0.858          |
| Consumer Trust (CT)           | CT1  | 0.846          |
|                               | CT2  | 0.878          |
|                               | CT3  | 0.892          |

Table 2. Reliability and Convergent Validity

| Construct | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability (CR) | AVE   |
|-----------|------------------|----------------------------|-------|
| DMH       | 0.903            | 0.927                      | 0.716 |
| SME       | 0.892            | 0.925                      | 0.755 |
| BI        | 0.884            | 0.921                      | 0.743 |
| CT        | 0.905            | 0.934                      | 0.780 |

All factor loadings exceed 0.70, indicating strong indicator reliability. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values are above 0.70, confirming internal consistency reliability. AVE values exceed 0.50, indicating convergent validity.

#### Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

| Construct | DHM          | SME          | BI           | CT           |
|-----------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| DHM       | <b>0.846</b> |              |              |              |
| SME       | 0.621        | <b>0.869</b> |              |              |
| BI        | 0.648        | 0.712        | <b>0.862</b> |              |
| CT        | 0.590        | 0.681        | 0.736        | <b>0.883</b> |

The square root of AVE for each construct is greater than its correlations with other constructs, confirming discriminant validity.

#### Model Fit

Table 4. Model Fit

| Fit Index     | Value | Threshold | Interpretation |
|---------------|-------|-----------|----------------|
| SRMR          | 0.052 | < 0.08    | Good Fit       |
| NFI           | 0.912 | > 0.90    | Good Fit       |
| Chi-square/df | 2.134 | < 3.00    | Acceptable Fit |
| CFI           | 0.948 | > 0.90    | Good Fit       |
| RMSEA         | 0.067 | < 0.08    | Acceptable Fit |

Overall goodness-of-fit indices indicate that the structural model demonstrates a good and acceptable fit.

#### Structural Model Assessment

Table 5. Path Coefficients

|    | Path                  | $\beta$ | p-value | Result    |
|----|-----------------------|---------|---------|-----------|
| H1 | DHM $\rightarrow$ SME | 0.621   | 0.000   | Supported |
| H2 | DHM $\rightarrow$ BI  | 0.312   | 0.000   | Supported |
| H3 | SME $\rightarrow$ BI  | 0.503   | 0.000   | Supported |
| H4 | SME $\rightarrow$ CT  | 0.284   | 0.000   | Supported |
| H5 | BI $\rightarrow$ CT   | 0.476   | 0.000   | Supported |

|    | Path                                      | $\beta$ | p-value | Result    |
|----|-------------------------------------------|---------|---------|-----------|
| H6 | DHM $\rightarrow$ CT                      | 0.158   | 0.006   | Supported |
| H7 | DHM $\rightarrow$ SME<br>$\rightarrow$ CT | 0.176   | 0.000   | Supported |

## Discussion

### The Effect of Digital Halal Marketing on Social Media Engagement

The empirical findings reveal that Digital Halal Marketing (DHM) has a strong and significant positive effect on Social Media Engagement ( $\beta = 0.621$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that halal-oriented digital communication strategies effectively stimulate consumer interaction across social media platforms. The relatively high coefficient suggests that transparent halal certification, Islamic value-based messaging, and ethical digital promotion significantly enhance consumers' willingness to cognitively process, emotionally connect with, and behaviorally interact with brand content.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding aligns with signaling theory, which posits that credible signals reduce information asymmetry and increase consumer responsiveness (Connelly et al., 2021). In halal markets, certification transparency and ethical messaging function as powerful signals that reassure consumers regarding religious compliance. As a result, consumers feel more confident engaging with such content. This finding is also consistent with engagement theory, which emphasizes that relevant and authentic digital content increases user participation (Brodie et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021).

Practically, this suggests that halal brands must go beyond simple promotional messaging and instead prioritize value-based digital storytelling that highlights halal integrity and ethical commitments.

### The Effect of Digital Halal Marketing on Brand Image

The results indicate that Digital Halal Marketing significantly influences Brand Image ( $\beta = 0.312$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Although the effect size is moderate, it demonstrates that digital communication plays a critical role in shaping consumers' overall perception of halal brands.

Brand image in halal markets is not solely built on product quality but also on religious

authenticity and ethical credibility. When brands consistently communicate halal certification, ingredient transparency, and Shariah compliance in digital spaces, consumers form stronger associations related to integrity and trustworthiness. This finding supports Wilson (2020), who argues that halal branding integrates ethical and religious positioning as core elements of its identity. Additionally, Vătămănescu et al. (2022) highlight that digital interactions significantly reinforce brand associations, particularly when consumers perceive consistency and authenticity.

This suggests that digital halal marketing contributes to long-term brand equity formation by embedding religious values into brand identity.

### The Role of Social Media Engagement in Strengthening Brand Image

The findings demonstrate that Social Media Engagement significantly influences Brand Image ( $\beta = 0.503$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating a strong relational mechanism between interaction and brand perception. This result suggests that engagement serves as an experiential process through which consumers internalize brand meaning.

When consumers actively like, comment, share, or discuss halal-related content, they move from passive exposure to active involvement. According to Brodie et al. (2021), such engagement deepens brand relationships and enhances brand resonance. Algharabat et al. (2020) further emphasize that engagement strengthens consumer-based brand equity through repeated interaction and emotional attachment.

In the halal context, engagement enhances credibility by demonstrating that brands maintain ongoing transparency and responsiveness. This relational dynamic reinforces positive brand associations, thereby strengthening overall brand image.

### The Effect of Social Media Engagement on Consumer Trust

The analysis confirms that Social Media Engagement significantly influences Consumer Trust ( $\beta = 0.284$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding indicates that trust is not formed solely through brand claims but through continuous interactive communication.

In digital environments characterized by perceived risk and information asymmetry, engagement reduces uncertainty and enhances perceived authenticity (Chawla & Kumar, 2022). Active engagement fosters relational closeness, which contributes to trust development. Particularly in halal markets, consumers rely heavily on brand transparency and responsiveness to ensure religious compliance.

This result reinforces Shin et al. (2021), who found that digital interaction significantly enhances online trust formation. Therefore, engagement operates as a trust-building mechanism that converts communication into relational confidence.

### **The Influence of Brand Image on Consumer Trust**

Brand Image exhibits the strongest direct effect on Consumer Trust ( $\beta = 0.476$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This suggests that trust is largely rooted in consumers' cumulative perception of brand credibility, consistency, and religious authenticity.

A favorable halal brand image signals reliability, competence, and benevolence—key components of trust (Mukhtar & Butt, 2021). When consumers perceive a brand as genuinely committed to halal principles, their trust increases significantly. This finding confirms that brand image functions as a strategic intangible asset that directly shapes trust formation in digital marketplaces.

### **Direct Effect of Digital Halal Marketing on Consumer Trust**

Although Digital Halal Marketing has a significant direct effect on Consumer Trust ( $\beta = 0.158$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), its magnitude is relatively smaller than the indirect effects. This indicates that while digital halal communication contributes to trust, its impact is largely transmitted through engagement and brand image mechanisms.

This finding suggests that trust is not built instantly through exposure to marketing messages; rather, it develops progressively through relational and perceptual processes. In other words, digital halal marketing initiates trust formation, but engagement and brand image consolidate it.

### **Mediation Effects**

The mediation analysis indicates that Social Media Engagement (SME) plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between Digital Halal Marketing (DHM) and Consumer Trust (CT). Structurally, Digital Halal Marketing positively influences Social Media Engagement, and Social Media Engagement significantly affects Consumer Trust, while the direct effect of Digital Halal Marketing on Consumer Trust remains significant but weaker. This pattern suggests a partial mediation, meaning that consumer trust is not formed solely through exposure to halal digital communication, but rather through an interactive relational process that occurs on social media platforms. From a signaling theory perspective, halal-related digital communication, such as certification transparency, ethical messaging, and Shariah compliance, serves as a credibility signal that reduces information asymmetry (Connelly et al., 2021). However, these signals require social validation through engagement before being fully translated into trust. When consumers actively interact with halal content by liking, commenting, sharing, or participating in discussions, they develop psychological closeness and familiarity with the brand, which lowers perceived risk and strengthens trust formation (Brodie et al., 2021). Moreover, interactive communication enhances perceptions of transparency and reliability, both of which are critical antecedents of trust in digital environments (Chawla & Kumar, 2022). Therefore, the findings confirm that Social Media Engagement serves as a relational mechanism that transforms Digital Halal Marketing efforts into Consumer Trust, particularly in halal markets where credibility, authenticity, and religious compliance are highly salient.

### **CONCLUSION**

The findings confirm that Digital Halal Marketing significantly enhances Social Media Engagement and Brand Image, both of which play crucial roles in strengthening Consumer Trust. Although Digital Halal Marketing also has a direct positive effect on Consumer Trust, the indirect effects through Social Media Engagement are stronger, indicating that trust is primarily built through relational and

perceptual mechanisms rather than direct promotional communication alone.

The mediation results demonstrate that Social Media Engagement partially mediates the relationship between Digital Halal Marketing and Consumer Trust. This suggests that halal-oriented digital communication must first generate interactive consumer involvement before trust can be fully established. Engagement functions as a relational bridge, transforming halal value signals, such as certification transparency and ethical messaging, into psychological closeness and reduced perceived risk.

Theoretically, this study extends signaling theory and engagement theory within the context of halal digital marketing by empirically demonstrating a sequential relational process in trust formation. It highlights that in halal markets, credibility signals require interactive validation to effectively translate into trust outcomes. Practically, the findings imply that halal brands should move beyond one-way informational campaigns and prioritize interactive, transparent, and value-driven digital strategies. Building engagement and strengthening brand image are essential pathways for fostering long-term consumer trust in competitive digital environments.

Overall, this research provides a comprehensive empirical model explaining how Digital Halal Marketing contributes to Consumer Trust through engagement and brand perception mechanisms, offering both theoretical enrichment and managerial guidance for the halal industry in the digital era.

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