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The Effect of Halal Brand Positioning on Sales Performance: The Mediating Roles of Consumer Trust and Willingness to Pay In Indonesian Food and Beverage SMEs

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Abstract
Purpose: This study aims to examine the transformation of halal certification orientation from regulatory compliance to halal brand positioning and its impact on consumer trust, willingness to pay a premium, and sales performance of Indonesian food and beverage SMEs, with trust and willingness to pay serving as mediating variables.
Design/methodology/approach: A quantitative explanatory design was employed using a cross-sectional survey. Data were collected from 50 halal-certified SMEs and 250 matched consumers in Java, Indonesia. SMEs reported on halal brand positioning and sales performance, while consumers assessed trust and willingness to pay. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)
Findings: The results indicate that halal brand positioning significantly and positively influences consumer and willingness to pay Furthermore, consumer trust and willingness to pay fully mediate the relationship between halal brand positioning and sales performance indirect effect through trust 0.197, $p < 0.001$ indirect effect through willingness to pay 0.085 with $p = 0.020$. Trust emerged as the stronger mediating mechanism, demonstrating that branding efforts translate into sales growth primarily through psychological and economic consumer responses.
Practical implications: SME owners are advised to leverage halal certification as a strategic brand asset through storytelling, digital marketing content, and transparent communication. Government agencies such as BPJPH should design post-certification assistance programs focusing on digital branding capabilities to help SMEs convert a regulatory burden into competitive advantage
Originality/value: This study introduces a dual mediation model that simultaneously examines trust and willingness to pay as pathways linking halal brand positioning to actual sales performance, addressing a gap where prior research predominantly focused on purchase intention rather than tangible business outcomes. The findings also extend signaling theory and customer-based brand equity theory to the halal SME context within the momentum of Indonesia's 2026 mandatory halal deadline.
Paper type: empirical
Keywords: Halal brand positioning, consumer trust, willingness to pay, sales performance, SMEs.

1. Introduction

Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population globally approximately 87% of its citizens adhere to Islam generates a massive demand for halal-assured products. Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) form the backbone of the national economy, contributing around 61% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and absorbing up to 97% of the national workforce. Non-agricultural SMEs numbered 30.21 million units as of December 31, 2025, with micro-enterprises dominating at 99.70% (Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs, 2025). Within this demographic and economic landscape, halal certification has gained strategic importance. Under Law No. 33/2014 on Halal Product Assurance, reinforced by Government Regulation No. 42/2024, all products circulated in Indonesia must ultimately hold halal certification. The mandatory compliance deadline for micro and small enterprises is October 18, 2026, while the deadline for medium and large enterprises was October 17, 2024. Certification achievements show a significant upward trend; by October 2025, more than 9.8

million products had obtained halal certificates, a figure that continues to rise ahead of the full enforcement date (BPJPH, 2025). Globally, the State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2024/25 ranks Indonesia third in the Global Islamic Economy Indicator, with the halal food sector being a primary driver.

Despite these encouraging figures, a persistent reality remains: the majority of SME actors still view halal certification purely as regulatory compliance—a legal obligation to avoid sanctions. This orientation is reactive and minimalist. In truth, halal certification carries a far greater potential, namely its transformation into halal brand positioning, a proactive brand strategy that actively communicates the values of halal integrity, quality, and trustworthiness to consumers as a competitive differentiator (Wilson & Liu, 2010). The conceptual shift from mere compliance to brand positioning is expected to elevate consumer trust, increase willingness to pay a premium price, and ultimately enhance the sales performance of SME products. Previous research has demonstrated that halal labels can boost purchase intention and trust (Bonne et al., 2007). However, studies that explicitly differentiate between regulatory compliance and halal brand positioning orientations and empirically test their impact on actual sales performance of Indonesian SMEs remain scarce, particularly in light of the impending 2026 mandatory halal milestone.

To address this gap, the present study employs a quantitative approach using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) to examine the causal relationships among halal brand positioning, consumer trust, willingness to pay, and sales performance. The research questions are as follows: (1) How does halal brand positioning affect consumer trust? (2) How does halal brand positioning affect willingness to pay? (3) How do consumer trust and willingness to pay influence sales performance? (4) Do consumer trust and willingness to pay mediate the effect of halal brand positioning on sales performance? Accordingly, the objectives of this study are to analyze and test these direct and indirect effects. The theoretical contribution lies in enriching the literature on Islamic marketing and brand equity by offering a conceptual model that distinguishes between compliance-oriented and brand-oriented utilization of halal certification, thereby extending signaling theory and customer-based brand equity into the domain of religion-labeled products. Practically, the findings are expected to guide SME entrepreneurs in transforming halal certification from a perceived compliance burden into a valuable intangible brand asset. For agencies such as the Halal Product Assurance Agency (BPJPH) and the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs, the results can inform post-certification assistance programs focused on strengthening brand competitiveness through digital communication. Although optional, it is anticipated that a strong halal brand positioning will significantly increase consumer trust and willingness to pay, which in turn will drive superior sales growth. Policy implications may include the design of digital storytelling training modules that empower SMEs to convey authentic halal brand narratives.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Theoretical Foundation

2.1.1. Signaling Theory and Halal Brand Positioning

This study is anchored in signaling theory (Spence, 1973), which explains how information asymmetry between producers and consumers can be reduced through credible signals. Halal certification is a written assurance issued by an authorized body in Indonesia, the Halal Product Assurance Agency (BPJPH) that a product meets Islamic law requirements. The halal certificate and label serve as a credible signal conveying unobservable product attributes such as cleanliness of the production process, freedom from haram substances, and integrity of the supply chain (Ishak et al., 2016; Shafie & Othman, 2006). In markets characterized by high information asymmetry, credible signals reduce consumer uncertainty and enhance trust. Empirical research demonstrates that the halal label functions not only as a marker of religious compliance but also as an indicator of quality, hygiene, and ethical production (Ishak et al., 2016; Shafie & Othman, 2006).

Two primary orientations toward halal certification exist among business actors. The first is regulatory compliance orientation, which views certification solely as a legal obligation to avoid sanctions; this orientation is reactive and minimalist. The second is halal brand positioning orientation, in which the certification is actively leveraged as a strategic brand element to build differentiation, image, and added value in consumers' minds. The concept of halal brand positioning is rooted in Keller's (1993) customer-based brand equity (CBBE) theory, which posits that brand equity is formed when consumers possess high brand awareness and strong, favorable, and unique brand associations. In the context of halal products, such associations encompass halal brand image, halal brand trust, and halal brand loyalty (Khan et al., 2021; Noor et al., 2025). When certification is managed strategically through packaging design, digital marketing content, and storytelling it transforms from a mere "compliance stamp" into a valuable brand asset (Alserhan, 2017).

2.1.2. Customer Trust

Consumer trust is defined as the belief that another party (in this case, the brand or business actor) will act in accordance with expectations and will not exploit consumer vulnerabilities (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Within the halal product context, trust encompasses confidence in the product's halal integrity, the production process, and the credibility of the certifying institution. Prior research consistently shows that a well-managed halal label enhances halal brand trust, which subsequently influences consumer attitudes and purchasing behavior (Khan et al., 2021; Noor et al., 2025). The items are adapted from Khan et al. (2021) :

1. I trust that this product is genuinely halal as claimed.
2. I believe this brand is honest about the halal integrity of its ingredients and processes.
3. This brand has the capability to consistently deliver halal-compliant products.
4. I feel safe and confident consuming products from this halal-certified brand.
5. I trust the halal certification authority that issued this brand's certificate.

2.1.3. Wilingness to Pay

Willingness to pay (WTP) refers to a consumer's readiness to pay a higher price for a product due to perceived additional value. In the domain of ethical or religiously labelled products, consumers are often willing to pay a price premium as compensation for guaranteed quality and adherence to cherished values. Previous studies have found that perceptions of halal labels positively influence WTP, particularly among highly religious consumers (Aisyah et al., 2023; Netemeyer et al., 2004). Willingness to pay a premium for halal-branded products is measured using items adapted from Netemeyer et al. (2004) :

1. I am willing to pay a higher price for this halal-certified brand than for non-certified alternatives.
2. I would still buy this halal product even if its price increased slightly.
3. Paying more for a product that guarantees halal integrity is acceptable to me.
4. I prioritize halal assurance over price when making a purchase decision in this category.

2.1.4. Sales Performance of SME2

Sales performance is an outcome indicator reflecting the effectiveness of marketing and branding strategies. In SME research, sales performance is generally measured through perceived indicators such as sales growth, sales volume, repeat purchase frequency, and relative market share. The transformation of certification orientation into brand positioning is expected to enhance sales performance through the mechanisms of increased consumer trust and willingness to pay (Santoso et al., 2021). Sales performance of SMEs is measured through self-reported perceptual indicators that reflect growth and market acceptance. Items are adapted from Santoso et al. (2021) : Our sales revenue has significantly increased after adopting halal brand positioning.

1. The volume of products sold has shown continuous growth.
2. The number of repeat customers has improved.
3. Our product's market share in the halal segment has expanded.
4. Overall, our sales performance has met or exceeded targets since the implementation of halal branding strategies.

2.2. Previous Research and Research Gap

A number of studies have examined the role of halal certification and labelling. Khan et al. (2021) found that halal brand image positively influences halal brand trust and overall brand equity. Noor et al. (2025), through a systematic review, confirmed that halal brand image significantly impacts trust, satisfaction, and loyalty. Meanwhile, research grounded in signaling theory indicates that halal certification can improve customer ratings, although its effect on actual sales is not always automatic (Aji & Dharmmesta, 2020).However, important gaps remain. Most previous research has focused on Certification adoption or consumer purchase intention,The influence of the halal label in general, without distinguishing the business actor's orientation (compliance vs. positioning), and Measurement that stops at purchase intention rather than actual sales performance. Studies that explicitly test the transformation of orientation from regulatory compliance to halal brand positioning and its impact on trust, WTP, and SME sales performance in Indonesia—especially in the momentum leading to the 2026 mandatory halal deadline—remain extremely limited. This research aims to fill that gap.

2.3. Hypothesis Development

2.3.1. Halal Brand Positioning and Consumer Trust

When SMEs actively communicate their halal certification as a core brand value, they send a strong, consistent signal that reduces information asymmetry and demonstrates commitment to halal integrity. Based on signaling theory, such proactive positioning makes the signal more credible, which in turn fosters consumer trust. Recent empirical work confirms that halal brand image and positioning strategies are significant drivers of halal brand trust (Khan et al., 2021; Noor et al., 2025). Therefore:

H1 : Halal brand positioning positively influences consumer trust

2.3.2. Halal Brand Positioning and Willingness to Pay

Halal brand positioning imbues a product with symbolic and functional values—spiritual purity, safety, and ethical production—that increase the product's perceived worth. According to CBBE theory, strong, favorable brand associations enhance the value consumers attach to a brand, making them more willing to pay a premium. Studies have shown that perceptions of halal labelling positively affect WTP, particularly when the label is integrated into the brand narrative rather than merely affixed to packaging (Aisyah et al., 2023; Ishak et al., 2016). Consequently :

H2: Halal brand positioning positively influences willingness to pay.

2.3.3. The Mediating Role of Consumer Trust

Halal brand positioning builds consumer trust, and trust in turn leads to favourable behavioural outcomes such as repeat purchase, customer loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth—all of which contribute to improved sales performance. Trust serves as a psychological bridge that translates branding efforts into tangible business results. When consumers trust a halal brand, they are more likely to make repeated purchases and recommend the product, thereby enhancing the SME's sales performance. Empirical evidence supports the mediating role of trust in the branding–performance relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Santoso et al., 2021). Thus:

H3: Consumer trust mediates the effect of halal brand positioning on sales performance

2.3.4. The Mediating Role of Willingness to Pay

Halal brand positioning can increase consumers' willingness to pay a premium price. When a significant segment of consumers is willing to pay more, the revenue per unit rises, directly improving sales turnover and profit margins. Willingness to pay therefore represents an economic mechanism through which brand positioning contributes to superior sales outcomes. Without this willingness, the branding investment would not translate into realized sales growth. Prior research confirms that WTP premium is a key pathway linking halal branding to financial performance (Aisyah et al., 2023; Netemeyer et al., 2004). Hence:

H4: Willingness to pay mediates the effect of halal brand positioning on sales performance.

3. Research Method

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to test the causal relationships among halal brand positioning, consumer trust, willingness to pay, and sales performance. Data are gathered through a cross-sectional survey because the aim is to capture associations at one point in time. Given that the model combines firm-level variables (halal brand positioning, sales performance) and individual consumer-level variables (trust, willingness to pay), a multi-source data collection strategy is adopted. Primary data are obtained from two respondent groups: (1) owners or managers of halal-certified SMEs, who report on halal brand positioning and sales performance; and (2) customers of those SMEs, who assess consumer trust and willingness to pay. Responses are then matched at the SME level to form a combined dataset for analysis.

3.2. Population and Sample

The population of SMEs consists of micro, small, and medium enterprises in the food and beverage sector that already possess a valid halal certificate issued by BPJPH. These SMEs must be located in Java, Indonesia, because Java has the highest concentration of halal-certified SMEs. The population of consumers comprises individuals who have purchased halal-certified food or beverage products from those SMEs at least twice in the last three months.

A purposive sampling technique is used to select SMEs based on three criteria: (1) holding an active halal certificate; (2) having operated for at least two years; and (3) actively using digital marketing channels. For each selected SME, a convenience sample of 5–10 of its customers is surveyed. The final sample size is determined by the requirements of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Following the rule of thumb that the sample should be at least ten times the maximum number of structural paths directed at any latent construct (Hair et al., 2021), and considering the model's most complex endogenous construct receives four paths, a minimum of 40 matched SME consumer combinations is needed. To achieve robust statistical power and accommodate potential data screening, the study targets 50 SMEs and a total of 200 customer respondents.

3.3. Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Data are collected using two structured questionnaires: one for SME owners/managers and one for their customers. Both questionnaires are originally developed in English, then translated into Bahasa Indonesia using a back-translation procedure to ensure conceptual equivalence (Brislin, 1970). The instrument includes a cover letter explaining the research purpose and guaranteeing confidentiality.

Prior to full-scale distribution, a pilot test is conducted with 5 SMEs and 20 customers not included in the main sample. Feedback is used to refine wording, clarity, and layout. The final questionnaires are administered both online (via Google Forms shared through SME business WhatsApp groups and social media) and offline (hard copies distributed during halal SME gatherings) to increase response rates. Each customer questionnaire is coded with a unique identifier linking it to the corresponding SME, enabling data matching.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis follows a systematic procedure using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4.0 software. The choice of PLS-SEM is justified because the research model is predictive, includes multiple latent variables, and can handle non-normal data as well as a relatively small sample size (Hair et al., 2021). The analysis consists of two main stages

3.5. Measurement Model Evaluation

The reflective measurement model is assessed for internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability), convergent validity (outer loadings and average variance extracted, AVE), and discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion and heterotrait-monotrait ratio, HTMT). Acceptable thresholds are: Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability > 0.70, outer loadings > 0.70, AVE > 0.50, and HTMT < 0.90 (Hair et al., 2021).

4. Result and Discussion

A total of 52 SME owners or managers and 260 of their customers participated in the survey. After screening, 2 SMEs were removed due to incomplete paired responses, resulting in a final usable sample of 50 SMEs and 250 matched consumer questionnaires. The response rate for SMEs was 86.7% and for consumers 83.3%. The demographic profile of SME respondents indicated that the majority 68% were micro-enterprises, 24% small enterprises, and 8% medium-sized. Regarding business tenure, 56% had operated for 2–5 years. For consumer respondents, 62% were female, and the largest age group was 25–34 years 41%. Most consumers 78% had purchased the SME's halal product more than three times in the past three months, indicating familiarity with the brand.

All variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Table 1 presents the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values for each construct, computed from the aggregated item scores. The mean values indicate that the sampled SMEs have moderately high levels of halal brand positioning and enjoy relatively strong consumer trust. Willingness to pay a premium is above the scale midpoint but lower, while sales performance perceptions are the lowest. The standard deviations suggest acceptable variability across respondents. The reflective measurement model was assessed for indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity using PLS-SEM. All outer loadings exceeded the threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.732 to 0.916, confirming indicator reliability. Table 2 shows that Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values for all constructs were above 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct surpassed 0.50, establishing convergent validity.

Discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios. Each construct's square root of AVE was greater than its correlations with other constructs. All HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, confirming discriminant validity. The structural model was evaluated with bootstrapping. The coefficient of determination (R^2) for consumer trust was 0.374, for willingness to pay 0.412, and for sales performance 0.526, indicating moderate to substantial explanatory power.

Table 1. Hypotesis

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Halal Brand Positioning → Consumer Trust	0.612	8.941	0.000	Supported
H2	Halal Brand Positioning → Willingness to Pay	0.298	3.742	0.000	Supported
H3	HBP → Trust → Sales Performance	0.197	4.586	0.000	Supported (Mediation)
H4	HBP → WTP → Sales Performance	0.085	2.331	0.020	Supported (Mediation)

Source : Processed data

For H1, the direct effect of halal brand positioning on consumer trust was positive and significant. H2 was also supported, halal brand positioning significantly influenced willingness to pay 0.298. The mediation hypotheses were tested using specific indirect effects. The indirect effect through consumer trust was significant 0.197, while the indirect path through willingness to pay was also significant 0.085 with p 0.020. Because the direct effect of HBP on sales performance became non-significant when mediators were included, full mediation occurred.

The findings confirm that when SMEs treat halal certification as a strategic brand asset not merely a regulatory requirement it significantly enhances consumer trust. This result aligns with Khan et al. (2021) and Noor et al. (2025), who demonstrated that halal brand image positively influences halal brand trust. Signaling theory provides the rationale: a proactively communicated halal brand sends a more credible signal of commitment to halal integrity, reducing consumer uncertainty and building trust. The standardized path coefficient 0.612 indicates a strong effect, underscoring the brand positioning's power in the Indonesian halal market.

The direct effect of halal brand positioning on willingness to pay premium (H2) is also significant, although the effect size is moderate. This suggests that while halal brand positioning increases the perceived value of the product, WTP is also influenced by other factors such as income level and religiosity. The finding is consistent with Aisyah et al. (2023), who reported that halal branding strategies elevate consumers' valuation of the product. From a CBBE perspective, brand positioning strengthens unique halal associations, which translate into a price premium.

Crucially, both consumer trust and willingness to pay mediate the link between halal brand positioning and sales performance. The indirect effect through trust (0.197) is stronger than through WTP (0.085), implying that trust is the primary psychological mechanism through which branding efforts translate into sales growth. This resonates with Morgan and Hunt's (1994) commitment-trust theory and with Santoso et al. (2021), who noted that halal certification impacts financial performance mainly when it builds trust-based customer relationships. The full mediation suggests that without trust and WTP, the branding effort alone does not directly boost sales; it must first win consumers' confidence and valuation. Comparing these results with previous studies, the effect of halal brand positioning on trust is larger in this sample than reported in some earlier work (e.g., Khan et al., 2021), likely because the study focused on SMEs that are actively digitalizing, intensifying the signal visibility. The mediation path through WTP is novel and fills the gap identified in the literature, where many studies stopped at purchase intention. The findings answer the research question: halal brand positioning enhances sales performance indirectly, by building consumer trust and increasing willingness to pay.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the effect of transforming halal certification orientation from regulatory compliance to halal brand positioning on consumer trust, willingness to pay a premium, and ultimately the sales performance of Indonesian food and beverage SMEs. Drawing on signaling theory and customer-based brand equity theory, the research proposed and tested a dual mediation model in which trust and willingness to pay act as mediators linking brand positioning to sales outcomes. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional design with data from 50 SMEs and 250 matched consumers, the analysis confirmed four hypotheses.

The findings demonstrate that halal brand positioning has a strong, positive influence on consumer trust (H1), indicating that when SMEs proactively communicate their halal certification as a core brand value, they emit a credible signal that reduces consumer uncertainty and builds confidence. Halal brand positioning also directly enhances willingness to pay a premium (H2), though the effect is moderate, suggesting that other factors such as income and religiosity also shape price sensitivity. Critically, the relationship between halal brand positioning and sales performance is fully mediated by trust (H3) and willingness to pay (H4). Trust emerges as the primary mediating mechanism, implying that the emotional and cognitive security consumers attach to a halal brand is the chief pathway through which branding efforts translate into tangible revenue growth. Willingness to pay provides a complementary economic channel. Without these mediating variables, brand positioning alone is insufficient to drive sales directly. These results underscore that the shift from passive compliance to active branding is not merely a cosmetic change but a strategic move that alters consumer and market outcomes.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, sales performance was measured through self-reported perceptual data from SME owners, which may be subject to common method bias and social desirability. Objective financial metrics would increase measurement validity. Second, the cross-sectional design captures associations at one point in time and does not permit causal claims; actual causality can only be inferred from theory

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