

## SIGNIFIER OF BRAND NAME RELATED TO BRAND IMAGE FOR MUSLIM CONSUMER

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### ABSTRACT

Brand name is one of the bases in elaborative information processing in driving a positive consumer attitude by the cultural attribute, but the manipulation of consumer self-preferences can be deceiving and wrongly interpreted; especially to Muslim consumers in different societal backgrounds of Malaysia. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore brand names as a cultural value in Muslim consumer preferences, and to discuss the impacts of brand names to brand image. Qualitative study by interviewing six informants from maximum variation sampling were selected for this study; ranging from designers/art directors, academicians, and marketers. Thematic analysis was used to transcribe the dataset with the discovery of four main themes: target audience, emphasis, attention, and trust. The findings suggest that cultural values in brand names are complex but the usage is significant to be applied by all to represent the local marketplace and attention of the target audience. Brand name alone cannot be representative of brand image, but it has a distinctive impact on recognition. Culture has a great influence towards branding stimuli of Muslim consumers beyond the limits of the exchange of goods. Hopefully, this study will inform practitioners regarding options to reduce the noise of brand communication efficacy for the application of brand name. In addition, consumer side of view regarding the topic can be explore more to gain deeper insights into their expectations and preferences related to

brand image.

**Keywords:** Brand Name, Brand Image, Brand Trust, Muslim Consumer, Semiotic

## INTRODUCTION

In commercial markets, it is necessary for any products to be distinctive – which is often achieved through packaging and labelling. It allows the consumers to recognize any specific products and differentiate them from others. The consumers make their choices from the brands, especially from those that present personal stories related to them and their identities, as well as by positioning themselves in relation to the culture and society (Borzooei & Asgari, 2013). The creation of brand names is one of the most valuable assets for some companies. A good brand name should not be unique or distinct in terms of sound, pronunciation, or spelling, but must be meaningful, able to influence customers' choices, and able to elicit a mental image in the consumers' minds (Danesi, 2011). Shehzad, Ahmad, Iqbal, Nawaz and Usman (2014) stated that a brand name is set up by showcasing desirable properties as a part of the consumer-choice process based on a systematic process to sell an image, personality, relationship, or even value. On top of that, an appropriate brand name is also significantly important to define potential users by portraying their personal characteristics (Kara, Gunasti & Ross Jr., 2020). This is important to indicate who the product will be sold to, and project certain attributes of the targeted audience suggesting to the product's positioning.

Like humans, brands are usually described with adjectives, to describe features of a brand according to the perceptions of the consumers. To Muslim consumers, the concept of Halal branding is one of their major concerns simply due to the concept of lawfulness and wholesomeness (Ahmad, 2015) – as a part of their belief system. Thus, brand image develops a hypothetical construct of consumers on specific products starting from its brand name. According to Shahnazari (2018), religion plays a significant role in influencing social and consumer behaviours, as branding itself is a part of signs, and symbols that act as a communication vehicle in a given culture. It creates a certain level of awareness and bonds with consumers. By taking consumer psychology into consideration, branding helps people understand how a brand performs within the framework of customer values and expectations. According to Ali (2013), Halal certification is not considered the only criterion in choosing acceptable daily chores in consumer goods purchasing. It can be in a broader and more complex spectrum by the level of involvement that a consumer shows towards a purchase decision. However, there are times where brand names as parts of branding strategies are misled – projecting themselves as “Islamic” brands via their creative packaging and labelling work. There are even irresponsible producers who imitate the Halal logo to deceive Muslim consumers (Abdullah, Rahman, & Ismail, 2018).

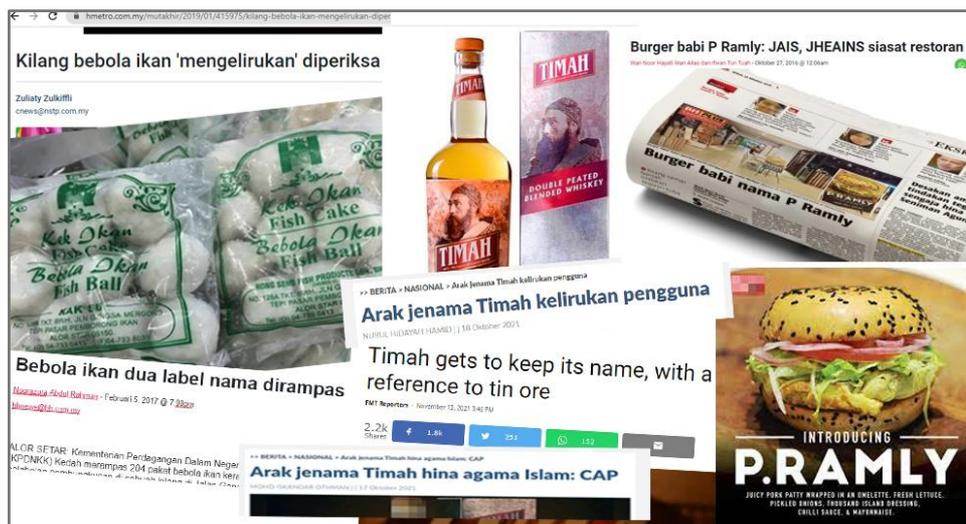
## PROBLEM STATEMENT

In this capitalist world, there are many brand choices, and each brand is fighting with each other using different strategies and personalities to get the attention of their target consumers. Akpan, Akpan, and Obukoadata (2013) stated that culture influence on product marketing is done to appeal consumers and brands, and they are conveyed using symbols, signs, and color perceptions as parts of nonverbal communications. This is how brands portray a particular group with certain images, opinions, or ideas about the targeted consumers. Consumer motivations become more complex too, whereby consumer seek experiences that deliver not just functionality, but also emotional engagement, symbolic meaning, and lasting memories that need be explore further (Lazauskienė & Žitkienė, 2019). In consumerism, signs and symbols are used to strategically facilitate meanings that contribute positively to brand images, satisfaction, and purchase likelihood,

other than product design, packaging, and advertising (Ranjan, 2010). With the brand name being a part of the strategy, it is important for the name to influence buyers and ensure that it helps shape consumer decisions (Lim & Cacciafoco, 2021). Indirectly, it includes cultural shadow and lets the readers negotiate, and share the cultural theme.

According to Ahmad (2015), cultural codes context affects attitude towards the brand, especially Muslims because Halal branding influences both their behaviors and attitudes. However, culture-related attributes through Malay names or symbols can be deceiving to make consumers believe, due to the branding nature. This unethical approach tries to manipulate consumers for reasons like maximizing profits, and this is shown from the case of fish ball products that are produced in two different packaging with one of them being named as “Kak Su Fish Ball” (Zulkifli, 2019) as reported in the mass media. Thus, this action offers a distinctive brand name to the Malays as a self-preference to gain their acceptance. “Timah” whiskey brand name issue went viral too, since the sign being transmitted through the word “Timah” as a brand recognition is being wrongly interpreted by the society (Hamid, 2021), due to the literal association of the sign with what it represents. This noise in communication confuses the community, especially the Muslims. Brand names seem to be targeted primarily towards influencing the product's desirability and behavior. There are a few examples of reported cases including “P. Ramly” brand name for a pork burger introduced by a local restaurant (Alias & Tuah, 2016) as shown in Figure 1.0 below:

**Figure 1:** Examples of brand name manipulations for marketing purposes as reported by the mass media



These are the examples of manufacturers that try to set explicit branding objectives by establishing a particular image as an attempt to induce a false interpretation towards their product. This unfair profitable practice is deployed to covers dishonest information even though brand is a tool that guiding consumer consumptive behaviors. In addition, with e-commerce platforms, consumers are now exposed to so many brands with different strategies that sometimes mislead the consumers (Nuseir, 2018), including giving a dishonest information and a deceiving brand image. Therefore, the objectives of this study are:

1. To explore brand name as a cultural value in Muslim consumers’ preferences.
2. To discuss the impacts of brand name to brand image.

The findings of this study are hopefully valuable with insights from both experts and consumers’

perspectives on the impacts of brand name in building the interpretation of brand image, specifically on Muslim consumers. Therefore, a better understanding on the shifting of cultural values to spot new opportunities or threats in branding can be explained, and relevant directions can be proposed since the commercial environment and consumer behavior keep on changing in diverse markets.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Branding*

Brands are stories (Brown, 2016), built on the product itself more than a name (or "mark") accompanied by other brand elements such as packaging and slogan, as well as a marketing activities like advertising. As a tool that can change the buyer's behavior, brand help to create an identity in selection of products. Brands come in many forms and perform several valuable functions for different types of consumers or markets (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019). Branding conveys credible information to consumers that identifies who or what will the product be in the consumer's mind (Kotler & Keller, 2015). According to Sarwar, Aftab and Iqbal (2014), branding explores various dimensions of consumer behavior from status, background, information, or creating a positive image in the mind of consumers. So, it can leave a great impact on consumer buying behavior. Therefore, the association between brands and emotions is significant in shaping better consumers' evaluations as a way to engage targeted audiences. These include cultural codes in a brand, which likely influences the perceived value of the product by providing a visual cue that shares the same or similar culture to the consumers as stated by Dirisu, Worlu, Osibanjo et al. (2018). Nonetheless, brand can also be deceiving by exaggerated or false claims about its products in order to attract customers (Khan, Saeed, Feroz et al, 2015). Any potential deceptions of a brand can be dangerous not just by its ingredient but poor quality and can be dangerous for consumers.

### *Brand Name*

A simple word can become a catch-all term for a specific product and blow their competitors right out of the water such as Pampers, Panadol, and Colgate. Brand name in a marketing equivalent refers to a registered trademark and is basically used to identify and distinguish a product from its competitors (Akpan, Akpan & Obukoadata, 2013). A great name ensures memorability and makes the product standing out from the crowd, through signs and symbols which (mentally) represent what they are supposed to signify. This can be referred to as visual identifying symbols. According to Brown (2016), other than brand name, the most common ones are trademarks, trade names or logotypes. Even with simple words or characters, they could express important information such as the type of products sold, the brand's target audiences, and markets (Lim & Cacciafoco, 2021). The strategy of brand name is to create and display a concrete or distinct image outwardly together with other brand appearances including packaging, advertising, web, and much more. Most importantly, brand name can influence consumers' decisions about the product and their purchase decision-making process (Hillenbrand, Alcauter, Cervantes & Barrios, 2013). Therefore, each product brand name is representing a specific social background of customers. Other than that, the goal is to identify an promote the brand, as well as the name that is targeted efficiently (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019) – a name that renders the values and ideology of the product. This so-called cultural reference includes the language spoken by the target market as a comprehensive strategy that intrigues the audience in a sensorial, emotional, and creative way. On the other hand, brand name is also influenced by the store image, brand image, customer satisfaction and by promotion for publicity to enhance their market portion, to attract as well as giving a positive brand image to consumer (Assali, 2016). Further, customers recognize the reputation of brand and prefer to purchase product based on brand name no matter the price is for its quality.

### ***Brand Image***

Brand image is more than a logo design that is pasted on a packaging or labeling. It is an impression based on various factors that interact with the consumers. Basically, brand image is the association and attachment of consumers' beliefs with the brand through a particular brand association that is held in the consumers' memories, that is organized in some meaningful ways (Kotler & Keller, 2015). This includes the adaptation and acceptance of the rules of the digital age as an engagement of a new era of digital communication to meet modern consumers (Boric, Stanisavljev, Kavalić et al.(2016). As part of branding, advertising, slogan or even brand name is act as a verbal message that convey material information about product or service attributes. Deceptive brand can be appeal with wrong conclusion or belief values about the product and they are more likely to be cheated (Khan, Saeed, Feroz et al, 2015). It is the consumer ability and incentive to evaluate deceiving brand image carefully and when customers fail to notice deceptive claims, they are more vulnerable.

This “association network” can be negative or positive not just to product visual appearances such as brand names and visual images, but to product attributes, benefits, values, places, and occasions of usage. Sarwar, Aftab and Iqbal (2014) stated that a good brand image is important in creating brand awareness that contributes to the brand knowledge which in turn affects the consumer's buying behavior. Furthermore, a positive brand image helps establish a unique and differentiated image in comparison with other competitors through the influence of social norms and people's expectations (Samita & Suki, 2015). This includes cultures, beliefs, and traditional elements as they can impact consumption patterns of individuals or groups (Yakup, Mūcahit & Reyhan, 2011) through messages and communication cues alongside attributes and features. Fortunately, a brand's image may not always reflect the reality of the brand or its products. According to Alam and Sayuti (2011), some brands are associated with Islamic values through their creative slogan, packaging, or labelling to catch the Muslim consumers' attention. This is done to create a positive image that is not entirely accurate and to reflect the consumers' symbolic meaning of consumption and identity in self-expression relationships as the brand image. The reason is to make the brand be coming much easier to recognize, and increase the credibility among the targeted consumers.

### ***Consumer Behaviour***

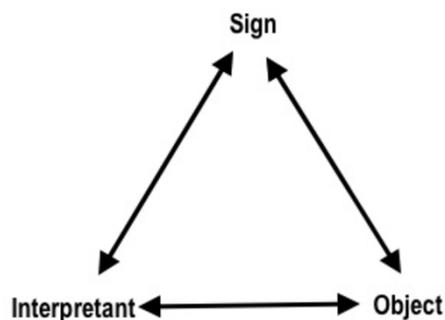
A brand represents a certain value in the minds of the consumers, that is used to influence consumer behavior; how consumers perceive the brand. Chovanová, Korshunov and Babčanová (2015) stated that brand is important for consumers to purchase a product alongside with quality in their decision-making process. Therefore, understanding the customer's perceptions is important for companies to determine the actions required to meet the customer's needs. A consumer's behavior offers brands that meet the consumers' values and desires through four major factors, as stated by Qazzafi (2020) namely: (i) cultural and social, (ii) economic, (iii) personal, and (iv) psychological. These are the means of persuasion that result either in some desired actions and how ideas, and messages spread among individuals or groups. As stated, culture and social are crucial as one of the factors when it comes to understanding the needs and behaviors of the consumers. According to Yakup, Mūcahit and Reyhan (2011), culture is a part of every society and it is an important cause of a person's wants and behavior. Even within the same geographic location, a rich diversity of ethnic and cultural backgrounds can exist among consumers, highlighting the need for brands to be culturally aware and inclusive (Shavitt & Barnes, 2020). Thus, contextual elements can trigger cultural notions that influence how consumer perceive, judge, and act. This cultural environment within the society teaches them values and preferences including common behaviors to their own culture. Thus, it helps producers to develop a product and brand preferences that play roles in the perceptions, habits, behaviors, or expectations of the

consumers (Ebrahim, Ghoneim, Irani & Fan, 2016). This will elicit reactions, and utilize imagery and word associations in tiding emotional responses as brand strategies. Therefore, it is important for brands to carefully manage their image and reputation by creating positive associations with their brand, and shape their image in a way that resonates with their target audience.

### ***Semiotic***

Marketers or producers have their own ways of transmitting messages in tackling the targeted audiences by establishing cultural values that are pertinent to their brandings' main themes. Among these portrayals is brand name that works as cultural code values, underlying semiotic signs, and denotations and connotations. Semiotic is a widely recognized system of meaning used much in the advertising field, interwoven major carriers in manipulating consumer behavior (Ranjan, 2010). Semiotic study helps to instantly create correlation interplay between a culture's values and the signs and symbols embedded in a brand (Nugroho, 2021). A functional attribute clarifies the product's purpose for easy recognition to potential audience. Similarly, to messages sent by advertisers, that can only be meaningful to consumers if they speak to them in recognizable 'signs' such as language, writing system, symbols, or images. A sign is the term used for a word, image, or sound that carries a meaning to represent or stand in for something else in the semiotic theory (Kettemann, 2013). Peirce's definition through the triadic concept of signs reveals how people interpret messages instinctively by capturing the importance of interpretation to signification whereby meaning is more random and based upon harmony, and experience. According to Yakin and Totu (2014), Peirce classifies signs into three facets: (i) sign or representation, (ii) object which is also referred to as a referent, and (iii) interpretant as shown in Figure 2.0 below:

**Figure 2:** Peirce's triadic sign (Yakin & Totu, 2014)



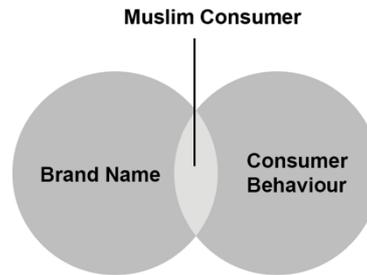
This is different from Saussure's concept of semiotic that only highlighted two components of signifiers: (i) the sign and the signified, and (ii) the concept or meaning (Ranjan, 2010). Signs and symbols are objects that are meaningful and unique to a particular group of people or culture. Therefore, social and cultural signs are significant in marketing because different groups may react differently to the presence of the same stimulus. Oswald (2015) stated that it is common for marketers to capture the interest of (potential) customers through emotional and symbolic appeals which mentally represent what they are supposed to signify. Every culture has specific meanings attributed to signs and symbols including words to achieve a maximum communication potential.

### **METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative case study facilitates the exploration of this study with the usage of brand name that is attached to cultural values specifically to Muslim consumers as the phenomenon of the subject. According to Yin, (2014), a case study allows the exploration and understanding of contemporary issues through empirical inquiries within its real-life context. Therefore, a case study could provide

an opportunity for the study to gain a deep holistic view of the contextual, in-depth knowledge, and may facilitate the describing, understanding, and explaining of the subject, which might not be captured using survey research. Conceptual framework is constituted by three main components which are brand name as signifier dimension with the association of cultural or religious symbol and brand association. Consumer behavior is also part of the framework in relation to the motivation made by the brand including emotions and cognitive evaluations, and finally Muslim consumer as the main targeted audience towards the product.

**Figure 3:** Conceptual framework for the study



Purposive sampling technique through maximum variation was chosen to ensure a wide variety of participants for this study. Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research especially for information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. The maximum variation sampling strategy is one, which is constructed by identifying a wide range of individuals or groups to provide a diverse range of cases relevant to a particular phenomenon or event (Creswell, 2016). Guest, Namey, and Chen (2020) mentioned that six to seven is an ideal number of samples to share insights and interests in the field of qualitative sample size estimation. Therefore, six informants participated in this study through specific characteristics' selections that are needed in this study, coming from academicians, designers, marketers, and consumers themselves. The purpose is to provide as many insights as possible into the event and to ensure the representativeness and diversity of individual practitioners in semi-structured interviews. This includes a blend of some structured and open-ended questions together, accompanied by follow-up “why” or “how” questions (Adams, 2015). The approach encourages a two-way communication for a comprehensive discussion regarding the issues by assist researchers in developing better question forms, and explores new areas of the research interest. The representative of the consumer was also selected based on their knowledge in advertising or marketing. All interview session were done separately in different days and being recorded other than taking brief notes on important details or keywords. Informants were asked a series of open-ended questions designed to explore the study topic which include brand perception, influence, cultural and brand message, symbol and meaning in branding, even their own personal experience.

## FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### *Analysis*

Qualitative research requires rigorous and trustworthy data to understand the study's phenomenon. Therefore, thematic analysis is relevant to the study, starting from paraphrasing to coding in summarizing important concepts, theming, and interpretation in order to identify patterns of data (Creswell, 2016). ATLAS.ti were utilised to organize and facilitate the systematic coding of transcripts, allowing for the extraction of key themes and sub-themes. Important steps

includes getting an initial understanding of the content before relevant segments of the data can be selected. As a result, four themes with nine sub-themes were identified to support the study's narratives as shown in Table 1.0 below: This section shall discuss about the data collected and data analysis. Figures and tables can be used to present the results wisely. All figures and tables should be shown in the text.

**Table 1:** Themes and subthemes for two different objectives

Objective 1			Objective 2		
Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Theme	Sub-theme	Description
Target audience	Religious alignment	Religious connotations with significant words or symbols in the brand name	Attention	Aesthetic appeal	Packaging & visual design
	Localization	Easy recognition for market specificity		Engagement	Emotional responses with the sense of belonging
Emphasis	Local identity	Distinctive, cultural relevance & traditional value	Trust	Marketing	appealing to and capturing specific market segments.
	Halal status	Indicates adherence to halal standards		Product	influences consumer perceptions of the product's quality.
				Reputation	establishing or enhancing the credibility of the brand.

Through this thematic analysis, subjective information such as the participant's experiences, views, and opinions are easily reported based on its patterns (Clarke & Braun, 2017) using the selected codes and constructed themes. These themes are important to reflect deep underlying meanings and insights that are significant or relevant in addressing the research questions.

## DISCUSSION

This study reveals several findings in the topic of brand name related to brand image towards Muslim consumers. Among the key findings of the sub-themes are religion, localization, and local identity – used to show halal values by showing brand image as one of the engagement factors to make the product believable. Emotions elicited by the brand name's stimuli optimizes the perceived Muslim brand in relationship between brands and users. Cultural value is a set of identity tailored to resonate the ideal basis of localization strategy to be significant and more accessible to the marketplace regardless of products or producers.

### *Brand Name As A Cultural Value In Muslim Consumers' Preferences*

Cultural value is indeed a popular approach in making a brand name as an effort in building imminent meanings, and guiding targeted or ideal consumers towards any products, especially in Malaysia. It was discovered that names given to brands are used as emphasizing symbols to direct the public through a certain identity-image to encourage them to believe in some associations of who the producer is, where it comes from, its halal status, or even the product itself. In other words, the given brand names are designed to guide in semiotically meaning-making other than to grab the public's attention. As a multi-racial country, Malaysia – with the Malay-Muslims being the biggest consumers and cultural values in brand names, this ensures the product lines being culturally relevant to them as the main consumers. It is interesting to note that to Muslim consumers, brand name is important to them as a first direction in making consumer evaluation, other than the halal logo itself. Therefore, brand names with unfamiliar words or terms – be it a foreign language or not written in Roman words, the halal logo is an important sign not just to indicate that it is safe to consume, but the quality status as well. All informants believed that any brand names with Malay-Muslim cultural identity as marketing strategies permits any products to be adapted easily in the market, as one of the competitive advantages that help to increase a product's value as being mentioned by one of the informant;

“All selected names for any brand are very important to fit within the market. Names that are very unfamiliar hardly accepted by buyer ... and this will affect their business” – *Informant B*

To the informants, the level of consumer acceptance can be much higher, that communicates an identity-image and linkage to the consumers. On top of that, the product also tries to convince people that the product is halal even though in some cases there are not. Therefore, linking consumerism with religious claims is a serious issue for Muslim consumers which dictates what goods and services to buy. The Malay identity is always associated with Islam, whereby the religion itself is manifested in all aspects of lives. Religion has always played an important role in shaping the Malay culture, which includes their beliefs, or even their cultural appearances in a society. This means, the Muslims may have to be more careful in choosing the right products for them due to Malaysia's open economy, which deals with the issue of halal not just for its own products which are primarily made by the non-Muslims, but also for imported goods (Tengku Abdullah & Ireland, 2022). Therefore, brand names with cultural influences might be attractive and able to motivate buyers, but they are not necessarily halal. It is highlighted that cultural values in brand names are used to anticipate a group's values within any specific countries, yet some are just done to manipulate the consumers' beliefs towards their product.

Cultural association in brand names may reflect the brand values, promises, or even expectations. However, how the product is marketed is the main communication to match the values and expectations of the target audiences. To all informants, even though names are important to any products, the focus of branding is much wider which include the packaging, color, or even visual use. Two of the informants also highlighted that cultural values in brand names may only be suitable for local segmented strategies due to the values that they focus on, but may be hard to compete with a much bigger open market in current days. It is discovered that brand names that do not reflect any cultural values are not the main concern to most of the informants, but developing brand image surrounding the product is the main priority as brand identification which is described as an intangible asset that can increase the product's value (Mindrut, Manolica & Roman, 2015). Other than brand name, brand image is a memorable factor to communicate any product, as in to distinguish it from the others. This may lead to consumer attitude, behavior, and purchasing decisions as mentioned by one of the informants. To explain further, brand name alone might not stand as the only cultural value that can be highlighted in branding, whereby the halal logo and the other information (especially in packaging) are still able to help the consumers pertaining to consumable products. The halal logo is not only recognized from its benchmark, yet it is also a global acceptance even without cultural values in the brand names. Thus, the application of the local cultures should not be a problem to be applied in any products including the non-halal goods. Two informants also added this matter, including 'sensitive' products such as whiskey or pork, as long as they do not directly touch the issue of religion in choosing their brand names. This approach is normal in Indonesia, or even in any middle east countries, where their brand names or writing styles (referring to Arabic writings) reflect the country's cultural identity. At the end of the day, consumers need to be wise in choosing halal products whereby brand name alone is just one piece from the visible branding elements in identifying the brands and their products.

### ***The Impacts of Brand Name To Brand Image***

Brand name is regarded as one of the core elements in building brand image. All informants believe that other than visuals, brand name helps building a product's first impression, which in turn influences customers' buying decisions. Through brand name, symbolic meanings can be

interpreted, and it influences how someone perceives the brand from its positioning, looks, values, messages, and many more. Most influential ones are the words/terms used, the language, or even the writing styles as mentioned by three of the informants. Brand name is significantly one of the dominant brand elements in creating customer relationships. The goal of an appealing brand name is to create attention, but it is not necessary to have cultural values. Informants believe that there are many ways in getting the targeted consumers to engage with the products, such as through their brand identity, visual, packaging or even quality that will eventually strengthen the brand image. Cultural values can be delivered in many ways too, and their application depend on the suitability of a product as emphasized by three of the informants. Cultural values in brand names may ease the audience to relate the audience with the brands, but without the right marketing image, they cannot help improve perceptions towards the products; be it the quality, trust, or even confidence from the public. Three of the informants also added that it is quite common for any brand image including cultural influence to be built upon the whole package of branding, and not in the brand name alone. However, two of the informants added that a brand name that cannot be the representative of its image is a failed strategy.

Engaging brands build trust on honesty and message consistency on their brand images. According to Syarifah and Ali (2020), brand trust is a reflection of a consumer's expectation towards a brand's product or service that matches the promises that a product has made, carrying a significant effect on customer satisfaction. The study showed that there is always an emotional attachment in the brand image which includes the brand name which directly or indirectly influences the consumers' purchasing decisions, as highlighted by three of the informants. Therefore, consumer acceptance depends much on the brand image, which is a “set of beliefs about a particular brand” for them to build confidence and trust in a particular brand. Four informants also noted that most brands do not describe their nature of products through brand names, but together with visual appearances such as brand colors, logos, taglines, and other elements to improve their brand messages to the consumers. Brand names may make a good entrance of appearance in front of consumers as an introduction of a brand, but brand image attributes and personalities are derivatives of all those aspects combined together. This shows that brand names are supposed to be hand in hand in portraying similar values and personalities with other brand elements for a strong marketing communication. This will strongly impact the consumer's emotional brand attachment and behavior as stressed out by two of the informants. One of the informants mentioned;

“yes names are important to make first impression..but overall image makes  
The brand personality stand out as the overall look..image, design,  
color and all that..” – *Informant A*

This is how products manipulate consumers' perceptions regarding a brand, including showcasing Islamic images or values to indicate their 'halal' status, even though it is not as what was mentioned by three of the informants. Research reveals that even though cultural values in a brand image is good to promote consumer acceptance to fit with their background and lifestyle, it might also mislead some consumers too. Therefore, it is not just important for any brand names to fit with the brand images, but the needs of the consumers too, which is the halal status – especially the ones with Islamic looks. The findings also discovered that the usage of Malay names to represent a brand also can be misleading to commodify the cultural values, as the names become commercial attractions to shift the attention of the other information towards the brand names as the main brand elements. Even though Muslims are cautious about their consumption behaviors, yet the lack of knowledge in Islamic branding makes Muslim consumers easily associate any

elements that personify the Islamic or their cultural values as 'halal'. This can happen when a consumer does not scan the whole information (especially in packaging/labeling) provided to them as noted by four of the informants.

“not everyone really know what halal branding..yes halal logo is important but people easily deceived with any Islamic elements in the packaging..including names..anything that sounds Arabic or Malay, they will think its halal already..” – *Informant E*

In addition to brand image, consumer experience will also lead to brand reputation and brand name as they are always the first things to be mentioned due to their memorability and meaningfulness as one of the transferability agents that encounter associations towards the brand. Brand reputation is the public's perception of a brand and it is largely driven by symbols (mainly logos) or visual aspects; and these logos include the brand names. According to Kim and Chao (2019), brand experience is a personal subject of sensations, feelings, and cognitions evoked by external stimuli of a branding. This is also highlighted by two of the informants whereby brand reputation is based on consumer experience that affects their rational judgment and emotional feelings toward brand image – whether they feel connected to the brand or not. This suggests that brand-building blocks are designed specifically customized according to the local cultural values to meet the marketplace, but they do not necessarily construct the Islamic branding strategy which goes beyond the brand elements.

## **CONCLUSION**

The strategy of cultural values in brand names can undoubtedly help many consumers relate the products with their personalities, and improve the Muslims' purchasing decisions. It is important to know that the use of brands helps consumers project their own images to the world, especially the Muslim consumers who prefer brands that match their perceived values. It is not only created on brand names, but through other brand elements too, that portray religious congruity that create emotional attachments. Brand names that carry the foundation of brand images will receive more positive responses and acceptance from consumers – more importantly building the consumers' trusts. The Malay's cultural values especially the use of words, terms and language are regarded as a national identity, and these elements are not exclusive for them alone. Therefore, they can be used by any other products for their brand names too, or even brand images as long as they do not violate the Islamic religious beliefs. However, without a proper knowledge on Islamic branding, this will make the consumers to interpret any Malay-Muslim cultural value elements (including brand names and visuals) as permissible products or halal. Cultural values are always seen as the association of religion in brand attributes, which create a constructive feeling in the branding, even though Muslims are supposed to trust the halal label found on food and consumable goods' packaging. Whether the use of cultural values is commodified or designed to be significant for the marketplace, halal logo is one of the important details to look at, to adhere to the ethical and religious principles of Islam. Therefore, although brand names are marked for the local market, other information and details are suggested to be visible to avoid confusion. Consumer should look beyond the branding and marketing to evaluate the actual value of the products. Names that are opposite to the producers' backgrounds should be avoided to reduce the confusion of product producers, as stressed out by the informants. Moreover, brand names have many options to choose from, and it is not necessary for them to carry cultural values. Other brand elements, especially visuals/images can also be localized and arranged to fit the cultural narratives of a target market, which eventually optimize the chances of the public to see, engage with, and share the brand messages.

This study is a detached opinion, and a narrative form of responses from the qualitative data. Therefore, the study has different perspectives of the quantitative survey, especially by the feedback from the public. Although the study explains the usage of brand names towards brand images to Muslim consumers, it can further analyze the public's responses regardless of any religious backgrounds to get a clearer picture of the relationships between brand names and purchasing decisions. Secondly, the study can also concentrate specifically on the topic of the relationships of brand names with brand trusts with many other religion-influenced terms used in many other products in the market.

## IMPLICATION

Both the marketer and Intellectual Property Corporation of Malaysia (MyIPO) has a big responsibility in the administration and management of more than just intellectual property rights, and trademarks. This include new formulation of policies and regulation compliance regarding consumer protection ensuring that brand names are not misleading or culturally insensitive. Thus, ensure brand names align with halal standards and Muslim consumer expectations, fostering more fair trade practices. Brand names that touch on religion, culture or even Malay-Muslim names but is produced by the non-Muslim is something that they need to take a serious concern as deceiving a brand name to a Muslim consumer can have serious implications, as many Muslims are very particular about the products they use. Muslims are often wary of companies that they perceive as being unethical or dishonest especially deceiving a brand name could also be considered a form of fraud or misrepresentation- especially halal status of the products they consume. In a long term, brand damage can also occur when consumer start to lose trust in a brand which lead to negative publicity and a tarnished reputation.

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