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Integrating Islamic Spiritual Entrepreneurship and Marketing Communication to Build Brand Equity in Halal MSMEs: A Participatory Action Research Study

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Islamic Spiritual Entrepreneurship (ISE) values *Amanah, Shiddiq, Ihsan,* Halal, and *Barakah* integrate with Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies to strengthen brand trust, brand equity, and competitive advantage among halal MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) in Regional Sumatera. Using a qualitative Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach across two implementation cycles, the research reveals that ISE values operate beyond behavioral and operational levels, serving as moral–spiritual differentiators that shape brand positioning. The findings interpretively show how IMC acts as a cohesive mechanism to translate ISE values into authentic brand narratives, visual identities, digital communication, and customer experiences across brand touchpoints. Through qualitative analysis, the integration of ISE and IMC is observed to foster brand trust, which interpretively links to enhanced brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty as essential elements of brand equity. A conceptual framework, the ISE–IMC–Trust–Brand Equity Competitive Advantage Framework, is proposed to illustrate how spiritual values evolve into strategic branding resources. The framework demonstrates that competitive advantage among halal MSMEs stems not only from product differentiation but also from spiritual capital consistently communicated via IMC. This study contributes theoretically to Islamic marketing communication and entrepreneurship ethics, offering practical insights for MSMEs, policymakers, and support institutions to develop authentic, spiritually grounded halal branding strategies. Overall, the research highlights that Islamic spirituality, when systematically embedded into communication strategies, can act as a transformative force in building resilient and value-based halal brands.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) have served as the backbone of Indonesia's national economy, contributing 61.9% to the national GDP and absorbing more than 97% of the productive labor force (Ratnaningtyas et al., 2025). Despite this substantial contribution, the sector has faced significant challenges, particularly during the initial stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, when nearly 77% of MSMEs experienced severe revenue loss and 88% suffered a sharp decline in product demand. Within this national landscape, Sumatra stands out as a region of strategic economic importance, hosting over 640,000 MSMEs distributed across its provinces (Simamora & Agusta, 2025). Provinces such as North Sumatra and Aceh dominate in terms of enterprise concentration, while others contribute through distinct local strengths in halal culinary products, Muslim fashion, handicrafts, and marine-based industries, reflecting the island's rich cultural and religious heritage (Salsabillah et al., 2023).

However, the economic significance of Sumatra's MSMEs has not been matched by their branding capacity or marketing communication effectiveness (Marlina et al., 2023). Existing studies indicate that many MSMEs outside Java still rely heavily on traditional word-of-mouth promotion, lack consistent product positioning as part of the growing halal lifestyle market, and underutilize halal certification as a strategic competitive asset (Frans Sudirjo et al., 2023). Moreover, weak business networks and fragmented marketing communication practices often limited to the use of a single social media platform have resulted in inconsistent brand messages and limited brand visibility (Mardianto et al., 2023). These limitations are increasingly consequential as global demand for halal products continues to surge, with worldwide halal consumption reaching US$2.29 trillion and Indonesia positioned as a key market and emerging global halal hub.

Within this context, the concept of Islamic Spiritual Entrepreneurship (ISE) offers a promising yet underexplored paradigm. Rooted in the values of amanah (trustworthiness), shiddiq (honesty), ihsan (professional excellence), halal compliance, and barakah orientation, ISE constitutes a deeply embedded cultural ethic among business actors in Sumatra. Nevertheless, previous studies have predominantly examined ISE from the perspectives of spiritual motivation and ethical behavior, without exploring its strategic role in branding or how these values might be integrated within a structured marketing communication system. At the same time, contemporary scholarship on Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) emphasizes message

consistency and channel integration but rarely incorporates spiritual values as the core of brand identity.

This disconnect reveals a critical research gap: existing literature does not adequately explain how ISE values can be embedded within IMC frameworks to strengthen product positioning, build cohesive halal communities, enhance brand trust, and ultimately elevate the brand equity of MSMEs at the regional level (Januari et al., 2024). Furthermore, the unique socio-cultural and religious dynamics of Sumatra despite being central to the region's economic identity remain insufficiently represented in studies of Islamic branding and regional MSME competitiveness (Mutmainah & Yulistiyani, 2023).

Despite the growing body of literature on Islamic branding and Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE), existing theoretical frameworks present three fundamental limitations. First, conventional Islamic branding research often reduces Islamic identity to mere symbolic compliance or formal regulatory attributes such as halal logos and Arabic terminology thereby overlooking the internal moral-spiritual capital embedded in Islamic Spiritual Entrepreneurship (ISE) values like Amanah, Shiddiq, Ihsan, Halal, and Barakah. Second, traditional CBBE models. rely heavily on cognitive-utilitarian assumptions, evaluating brand trust and equity primarily through functional and economic benefits while failing to capture the relational and transcendental dimensions that drive halal consumer devotion. Third, a strategic disconnect persists between internal spiritual values and external communication strategies; studies on Islamic business ethics frequently isolate the merchant's ethical virtues without offering systematic operational tools, whereas Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) frameworks remain spiritually neutral.

To bridge these critical gaps, this study advances the current literature by proposing a novel, integrative framework the ISE–IMC–Trust–Brand Equity–Competitive Advantage Framework developed through a qualitative Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach across two implementation cycles. Moving beyond the static, cross-sectional, and purely quantitative orientations of prior studies, this research explicitly demonstrates how internal ISE values act as core moral-spiritual differentiators rather than superficial promotional tools. Within this framework, IMC operates as a systematic translative mechanism that converts internal spiritual capital into coherent brand narratives, digital identities, and authentic customer touchpoints. By qualitative re-conceptualization, the integration of ISE and IMC fosters brand

trust as a foundational anchor, which interpretively reshapes the dimensions of brand equity awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty ultimately cultivating a unique, unimitable spiritual-based competitive advantage for halal MSMEs.

The deliberate selection of five key provinces across Regional Sumatra as the research locus provides a rich empirical and socio-cultural foundation essential for achieving the objectives of this PAR study. Sumatra represents a vibrant epicenter of Indonesia's halal economy, characterized by deep-rooted Islamic cultural traditions and philosophies that naturally intertwine with daily commercial practices. Engaging MSMEs across these five provinces captures a representative spectrum of enterprise maturity, product categories (ranging from culinary and fashion to craft and community services), and digital communication capacities. Furthermore, while these regional MSMEs possess strong inherent cultural and spiritual values, many continue to face strategic challenges in brand articulation and integrated marketing. Studying these five provinces through a PAR methodology allows for contextual, real-time action intervention and rigorous qualitative analysis, illustrating how spiritual capital can be systematically leveraged via IMC to build resilient, trustworthy, and competitive halal brands in diverse regional markets.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamic Spiritual Entrepreneurship is a business paradigm that positions Tawhid (the oneness of God) and prophetic ethics as the primary drivers of entrepreneurial activity. This framework asserts that business success is not merely measured by material profitability but also by Barakah (blessings) and Falah (holistic well-being) through the application of Shiddiq (truthfulness), Amanah (trustworthiness), and transparency(Siregar, 2023). In the context of MSMEs in Sumatra, where Islamic culture is deeply rooted, spirituality serves as intrinsic capital that shapes operational integrity and business resilience against market fluctuations(Salsabillah et al., 2023).

While literature on Islamic business ethics emphasizes the moral virtues of the entrepreneur such as Amanah (trustworthiness), Shiddiq (truthfulness), Ihsan (excellence), Halal (lawfulness), and Barakah (divine blessing) it frequently treats these values as static internal attributes without explaining how they are operationalized in competitive markets. Drawing on Signaling Theory, unobservable internal virtues cannot generate market value unless effectively communicated to reduce information asymmetry between sellers and buyers. Here, Integrated

Marketing Communication (IMC) functions as a crucial translative mechanism that converts raw spiritual capital into observable market signals. Through IMC, abstract moral values are systematically encoded into authentic brand stories, coherent digital identities, transparent supply-chain messaging, and consistent customer touchpoints, thereby evolving passive internal virtues into dynamic, market-oriented branding capabilities (Muamarah & Wahyudi, 2025). The integration of IMC allows Sumatran entrepreneurs to reach broader market segments through structured and professional narratives that maintain the essence of their halal identity (Ferdy & Muhammad Ali Fikri, 2024).

The synergy between spirituality and marketing communication creates an authentic Islamic Branding model, where the "halal" identity is not just a formal label but a representation of spiritual commitment. When the values of Spiritual Entrepreneurship are internalized into the IMC strategy, the resulting marketing messages resonate more deeply, both emotionally and spiritually, with Muslim consumers (Wilson, 1996). This is particularly crucial in Sumatra, where consumer preferences are significantly influenced by the alignment of products with Sharia principles and local wisdom (Al-Mubarak, 2021).

Brand Equity in this halal ecosystem is built upon four main pillars: brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty, all of which are anchored in Islamic values. Aaker's (1991) foundational theory, when applied to modern contexts, suggests that consumer trust in a producer's honesty and halal compliance significantly enhances the value of intangible brand assets. Halal MSMEs that demonstrate consistency between spiritual values and market communication enjoy more stable customer loyalty due to shared value systems(Morisson & Fikri, 2025).

To establish theoretical clarity within the proposed framework, this study strictly delineates Brand Trust from Brand Equity. Grounded in Trust-Commitment Theory, Brand Trust represents an affective and moral-relational bridge the customer's psychological confidence in the brand's integrity, moral intention, and benevolence. In contrast, Brand Equity constitutes an accumulated structural asset encompassing brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty. In the proposed sequential model, Brand Trust operates as an essential relational precursor: when internal ISE values are transparently signaled through IMC, they cultivate deep moral trust. This trust subsequently consolidates into Brand Equity, as

reassured consumers demonstrate heightened awareness, elevated quality perceptions, positive spiritual associations, and enduring brand loyalty.

Synthesizing the Resource-Based View, a sustainable competitive advantage arises from resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN). While physical product attributes and functional features in the halal market are easily replicated by competitors, spiritual capital embedded in organizational culture and articulated through integrated communications creates a unique, deeply embedded strategic capability. The sequential ISE–IMC–Trust–Brand Equity framework illustrates how intangible spiritual virtues are systematically leveraged into market differentiation. Ultimately, competitive advantage for halal MSMEs is achieved not through conventional price wars or superficial marketing claims, but through a resilient, trust-based brand equity anchored in moral-spiritual authenticity (Dulebohn, J. H., & Hoch, 2017).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative Participatory Action Research (PAR) design executed across two iterative four-month cycles over eight months (November 2025 – June 2026). Grounded in the action research paradigm (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005), the methodology integrated collaborative planning, interventional action, field observation, and participatory reflection. Cycle 1 focused on diagnosing baseline operational gaps such as content repetition, over-claiming, and sizing inconsistencies and co-designing initial Islamic Spiritual Entrepreneurship (ISE) and Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) interventions. Cycle 2 refined these action protocols, standardizing multi-channel IMC alignment, digital catalog overhauls, and Ihsan-based customer service SOPs.

To resolve participant metrics, the study engaged 50 Halal MSMEs (N = 50) across four sectors (halal culinary, Muslim fashion, craft, and herbal products) in five Sumatra provinces, involving 55 individual human participants (N = 55) comprising the 50 primary owner-operators and 5 key marketing/operations managers.

Data collection employed a multi-instrument triangulation approach across both PAR cycles to capture multi-perspective interventional evidence. Qualitative data were gathered through structured observation checklists during digital campaign rollouts, in-depth semi-structured interviews with all 55 participants at baseline and post-cycle milestones, document

and artifact audits of pre- and post-intervention brand materials (social media feeds, packaging insert cards, size charts, and financial logs), and customer feedback protocols administered to verified consumers (N = 150) alongside marketplace analytics (Miles et al., 2019). Qualitative data were systematically analyzed using Interactive Thematic Analysis integrated with action reflection cycles. The analytical process involved data condensation (coding transcripts and artifact logs based on ISE dimensions and IMC touchpoints), data display through comparative matrices mapping baseline gaps against observed behavioral changes, and iterative conclusion drawing. Interpretive findings were continuously refined through participant feedback loops during reflection sessions at the close of each cycle to track adoption rates and behavioral shifts.To ensure qualitative rigor, trustworthiness, and validity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), four validation strategies were strictly enforced. Member checking was systematically conducted by returning interview transcripts and coded themes to the 55 participants during reflection workshops. Methodological and source triangulation was achieved by cross-verifying owner reflections against customer feedback and brand artifact audits. Finally, peer debriefing with independent Islamic marketing scholars and a comprehensive audit trail of field notes, coding schemes, and action logs ensured complete procedural confirmability and dependability.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-Economic Profile of MSMEs in the Research Areas

The five provinces included in this study Aceh, North Sumatra, West Sumatra, Riau, and South Sumatra demonstrate strong socio-economic characteristics of MSMEs with a close linkage between Islamic values, spirituality, and entrepreneurial practices (Ferdy & Muhammad Ali Fikri, 2024). Across these regions, MSMEs function as the backbone of the local economy, contributing approximately 62–69% to regional gross domestic product (RGDP) and serving as the primary source of employment.

Aceh presents the most formal MSME model in terms of Sharia implementation, positioning spirituality as the foundation of business ethics. North Sumatra reflects the dynamics of a multi-ethnic MSME ecosystem that integrates the concept of economic jihad with social responsibility (Fitryani & Maulana, 2024). West Sumatra is distinguished by the integration of customary law and Sharia (adat basandi syarak), which strengthens culturally and spiritually based MSME brand identities. Riau stands out with its Malay-Islamic identity and strong potential

for halal product branding grounded in ethical reputation. Meanwhile, South Sumatra demonstrates the reinforcement of sincerity and justice values within MSMEs operating in halal culinary, herbal, and creative industries (Bagis et al., 2022).

Institutionally, all provinces have active Regional Sharia Economic and Financial Committees (KDEKS) and strong support from Islamic banking institutions, facilitating halal certification, murabaha financing, and MSME digitalization. However, key challenges remain, including uneven digital literacy, limited access to capital, insufficient product innovation, and urban–rural disparities. These conditions underscore the urgency of implementing Islamic spirituality-based Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) as a strategic approach to building trust, brand reputation, and sustainable consumer loyalty (Suginam et al., 2025).

Table 1. Socio-Economic Profile of MSMEs in the Research Areas

Province	Number of Active MSMEs	Contribution to RGDP	Dominant Sectors	Spiritual Value Characteristics	Main Challenges	Opportunities for Spiritual IMC
Aceh	± 424,850 units	± 69.11%	Halal culinary, Muslim fashion, services	Formal Sharia implementation; trust (*amanah*) & *barakah*	Low digital literacy, limited capital	Sharia-based halal branding
North Sumatra	± 1.2 million units	± 64.3%	Halal culinary, digital services, trade	Economic *jihad*, social ethics	High competition, innovation capacity	Ethical and inclusive digital IMC
West Sumatra	± 560,000 units	± 65.7%	Halal culinary, songket, embroidery	*Adat basandi syarak*	Product design, capital access	Cultural-spiritual story branding
Riau	± 480,000 units	± 62%	Trade, Muslim fashion	Malay-Islamic identity	Digital divide	IMC based on spiritual capital
South Sumatra	± 710,000 units	± 63.8%	Halal culinary, herbal, creative industries	Sincerity and justice	Digital literacy, branding	Ethical halal communication

Source: Processed by the researcher

Characteristics of Research Participants

This study included 50 Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) actors evenly distributed across five provinces in the research area: Aceh, North Sumatra, West Sumatra, Riau, and South Sumatra, with 10 MSMEs from each province (Batubara & Harahap, 2022). Participant

selection employed a purposive sampling technique to obtain relevant informants and information-rich in accordance with the research objectives.

The selection criteria included MSME actors who had been operating for at least three years, managed businesses oriented toward halal practices and Islamic values, and had experience participating in mentoring or training programs related to branding, entrepreneurship, or Islamic economics. In addition, participants were drawn from diverse business sectors, including halal culinary, processed food ingredients, Muslim fashion, handicrafts, halal herbal products, and creative services.

Demographically, the majority of MSME actors were within the productive age range of 30–45 years, with relatively strong educational backgrounds (mostly Diploma/Bachelor's degree holders). Gender composition indicated significant female participation, particularly in the halal culinary and Muslim fashion sectors. Most participants had been running their businesses for more than six years, reflecting business maturity and a solid understanding of market dynamics. These characteristics make the participants highly relevant for exploring the role of Islamic spiritual values in shaping brand trust and Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies among MSMEs.

Table 2. Characteristics of MSME Participants

Category	Data Distribution	Proportion (%)	Key Description
Number of Participants	50 MSME actors	100	10 participants per province
Gender	Male (28); Female (22)	56 : 44	Family-based MSMEs; women dominate culinary & fashion
Age of Business Actors	25–35 yrs (32%); 36–45 yrs (44%); 46–55 yrs (24%)	_	Dominated by productive age groups
Educational Background	High School (38%); Diploma/Bachelor (56%); Master's (6%)	_	Higher education supports managerial & digital skills
Length of Business Operation	3–5 yrs (30%); 6–10 yrs (52%); >10 yrs (18%)	–	Majority are business-stable
Type of Business	Halal culinary (30%); Muslim fashion (20%); Processed food (20%); Handicrafts (15%); Herbal (10%); Creative services (5%)	–	Represents Islamic value-based MSMEs
Province of Origin	Aceh, North Sumatra, West Sumatra, Riau, South Sumatra	Evenly distributed	Cross-provincial representation

Category	Data Distribution	Proportion (%)	Key Description
Value Orientation	Halal & Islamic values	100	Foundation of business ethics & branding
Training Experience	Branding / Entrepreneurship / Islamic Economics	100	Supports IMC understanding

Source: Processed by the researcher

Patterns of Participant Engagement in the Study

Participant engagement in this research was designed to be participatory and reflective, positioning participants not merely as data sources but as active subjects in the meaning-making process and the transformation of business practices. The engagement pattern unfolded through four interrelated stages, ranging from initial orientation to action and behavioral transformation in Islamic entrepreneurship.

Stage 1: Orientation and Initial Identification

At the initial stage, the researcher conducted preliminary meetings with MSME actors across the five provinces. This stage aimed to identify business characteristics, participants' spiritual backgrounds, and socio-economic contexts influencing their business practices. The method involved introductory discussions via Zoom Meetings attended by 55 participants, serving as a platform for aligning perceptions and introducing the research theme. This stage was essential for building trust (rapport) between the researcher and participants.

Stage 2: Exploration and Collective Reflection

The second stage focused on in-depth exploration of the internalization of Islamic spiritual values in daily business activities. Participants were engaged through in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and field documentation. This reflective process fostered collective awareness that spirituality functions not only as a moral guide but also as a strategic asset in branding and market trust-building.

Stage 3: Collaboration and Data Interpretation

After data collection, participants were re-engaged in the verification and interpretation of findings through reflective meetings in each province. The researcher presented preliminary

results and invited participant feedback (member checking) to ensure alignment between analysis and field realities. This stage strengthened the validity and credibility of qualitative data while enriching contextual understanding of Islamic spirituality in local business practices.

Stage 4: Action and Transformation

The final stage emphasized the practical dimension of the research. Researchers and participants collaboratively formulated recommendations for Islamic value-based branding and Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies. Several participants began implementing tangible changes, such as refining logos, embedding spiritual messages in digital promotions, and improving customer service with a more humanistic and worship-oriented approach. This stage demonstrates that the research generated not only knowledge but also transformations in awareness and Islamic entrepreneurial behavior.

Table 3. Patterns of Participant Engagement in the Study

Form of Engagement	Activity Description	Form of Collaboration
Intellectual Engagement	Sharing experiences, ideas, and reflections on business practices	Discussions, FGDs, value reflection
Emotional & Spiritual Engagement	Awareness of business as worship; sharing experiences of *barakah* and business trials	In-depth interviews and spiritual dialogue
Practical Engagement	Applying discussion outcomes to branding and services	Implementation and field documentation
Social Engagement	Cooperation among MSME actors within local communities	Halal networks and cross-business collaboration

Source: Processed by the researcher

Overall, the pattern of participant engagement reflects a participatory qualitative research approach, in which participants function not only as informants but also as partners in reflection and social change. Intellectual, spiritual, practical, and social engagement enhanced data depth and research relevance, particularly in examining the role of Islamic Spiritual Entrepreneurship within MSME Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies.

PAR Planning Phase (MSME Mapping)

This planning phase of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) focused on identifying the characteristics, spiritual values, and integrated marketing communication (IMC) practices of 50 MSME across five provinces in Sumatra (Aceh/NAD, North Sumatra, West Sumatra, Riau, and

South Sumatra). The MSME were classified into six main categories: Halal Culinary, Muslim Fashion, Processed Food, Handicrafts & Souvenirs, Herbal Products, and Creative Services.

Findings show that Islamic spiritual values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *halal thayyib* principles, honesty, gratitude, charity (*sedekah*), and dakwah-oriented business ethics are embedded in daily business practices and branding narratives. These values strengthen consumer trust and differentiate MSME brands, especially when communicated through transparent content, storytelling, and ethical marketing. However, several gaps remain: repetitive content in culinary businesses, inconsistent sizing in Muslim fashion, weak storytelling on craft packaging, excessive claims in herbal products, and the absence of written ethical standards in creative services. Strengthening spiritual-based copywriting, standardized branding, ethical guidelines, and value-driven IMC strategies is essential to enhance sustainability and competitiveness.

Table 4. Distribution of MSME by Category and Province

Province	Halal Culinary	Muslim Fashion	Processed Food	Handicrafts & Souvenirs	Herbal Products	Creative Services	Total
NAD (Aceh)	3	1	2	2	1	1	10
North Sumatra	2	1	2	1	1	3	10
West Sumatra	3	2	–	2	2	1	10
Riau	3	2	1	2	2	–	10
South Sumatra	3	2	–	3	–	2	10
Total	14	8	5	10	6	7	50

Table 5. MSME Category

Category	Main Strengths	Identified Gaps	Recommended Strengthening
Halal Culinary	Easy to show halal–thayyib, high trust	Repetitive content	Menu engineering, value-based storytelling
Muslim Fashion	Modesty as da'wah, strong women communities	Inconsistent sizing/materials	Honest size charts, amanah return policy
Handicrafts & Souvenirs	Strong cultural–Islamic narratives	Weak packaging storytelling	Story cards & motif meaning labels
Herbal Products	Strong "healthy as worship" value	Over-claiming health benefits	SOP for claims, educational labeling
Creative Services	IMC driver, value translation	No written ethical standard	Sharia-based code of ethics

Needs Analysis for Strengthening Spiritual Values and Brand Communication of MSMEs

The results of the analysis of 50 MSMEs across five provinces in the Sumatra region indicate that Islamic spiritual values are embedded in the identity and business practices of MSMEs; however, they have not yet been systematically internalized into brand communication strategies. Spirituality is generally present only at the symbolic level (business names, taglines, halal certification) and has not developed into a living and consistent brand narrative across communication channels.

From the perspective of business practices, MSMEs require strengthening in Islamic Spiritual Entrepreneurship (ISE), particularly in understanding business intention (niyyah) as an act of worship, formalizing ethical muamalah principles into transparent and fair Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and managing barakah (blessings) through planned, spiritually grounded social responsibility initiatives. Values such as trustworthiness (amanah), honesty, and charitable giving (sadaqah) are still personal and sporadic, rather than institutionalized as sustainable business systems.

From the brand communication perspective, key needs include strengthening spiritual narratives in branding through authentic storytelling, ensuring consistency of Islamic value–based visual identity, improving digital literacy and Islamic marketing ethics, and integrating online and offline communication channels. The reinforcement of an ecosystem-based Islamic Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) approach is essential so that the customer journey is not merely transactional, but also builds trust, loyalty, and barakah values.

Needs Analysis, Action Implementation, and Observation Results

The mapping of 50 MSMEs across five provinces in the Sumatra region reveals that Islamic spirituality is embedded in business identity and practices but has not yet been systematically articulated in business behavior or brand communication. Values such as halal, amanah, barakah, and worship are generally expressed symbolically (business names, taglines, certifications) rather than evolving into living narratives, ethical SOPs, and consistent communication strategies.

The needs analysis identified two primary areas for strengthening. First, in Islamic Spiritual Entrepreneurship (ISE)–based business practices, MSMEs require deeper internalization of business intention as worship, formalization of muamalah ethics into transparent SOPs, and structured management of barakah and spiritually based social responsibility. Second, in Islamic

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), there is a need to strengthen spiritual branding narratives, ensure consistency of Islamic visual identity, enhance digital literacy and Sharia-compliant marketing ethics, and integrate offline online communication channels within a value-based ecosystem.

To address these needs, the Action phase was implemented through ISE and IMC training modules across five provinces using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. Activities were conducted through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and interactive reflections, both online and offline. Researchers acted as facilitators and spiritual companions, creating a dialogical, reflective, and emotionally engaged process. The FGD in Aceh served as a strong example of how business was interpreted as worship and branding as da'wah, marked by the formulation of business intention statements, Islamic taglines, and participants' barakah-oriented action plans.

The Observation phase demonstrated tangible transformations across spiritual, social, economic, and brand communication dimensions. MSME actors experienced a shift in business intention from purely economic orientation toward worship, increased awareness of muamalah ethics, changes in promotional communication toward greater honesty and educational value, and growing customer trust. Spirituality extended beyond the personal domain, evolving into a source of social energy and collective ethics within the business community.

Table 6. Summary of MSME Strengthening Needs

Aspect	Initial Condition	Strengthening Needs
Business intention	Islamic symbols (name, tagline)	Spiritual storytelling & intention statements
Muamalah ethics	Personal values, unsystematic	Sharia-based SOPs (pricing, returns, transparency)
Barakah & CSR	Spontaneous charity	Planned, spiritually based CSR
Islamic branding	Halal symbols, non-narrative	Living Islamic brand narratives
Visual identity	Inconsistent across channels	Islamic Visual Identity Guidelines
Digital literacy	Active on social media, minimal ethics	Digital ethics & anti-hoax awareness
Communication channels	Separated online–offline	Ecosystem-based Islamic IMC

Table 7. Action Phase Implementation (Aceh FGD)

Session	Focus	Main Activities	Outcomes
Session I	Business intention & spirituality	Qur'anic reflection and intention contemplation	100% of participants wrote business intention statements
Session II	Ethics & Islamic	Caption and tagline analysis	New Islamic taglines

Session	Focus	Main Activities	Outcomes
	branding		developed
Session III	Action planning	Development of *barakah*-oriented action plans	Behavioral change commitments
Closing	Spiritual commitment	Collective prayer and pledge	Emotional and value reinforcement

Table 8. Summary of Observed MSME Transformations

Dimension	Indicators of Change	Key Findings
Individual spirituality	Intention, prayer, sincerity	Business perceived as worship
Business ethics	Fair pricing, transparency	More honest and calm promotion
Social community	Charity and collaboration	Spirituality as collective energy
Economic practices	Financial management	Simple bookkeeping and fund separation
Brand communication	Narrative and promotional tone	Shift from competitive to educative-spiritual
Customer relations	Satisfaction and trust	Increased trust-based satisfaction
Sharia transactions	Avoidance of *riba* and *gharar*	Transition to Sharia cooperatives/BMTs

Overall, the integration of Islamic Spiritual Entrepreneurship (ISE) and Islamic IMC not only improves the quality of MSME brand communication but also triggers spiritual, ethical, and social transformations that have tangible impacts on business behavior, customer trust, and economic barakah.

Concise Summary of Observation Results

This study employed qualitative descriptive observation to examine behavioral, spiritual, social, economic, and communication changes among MSME actors after participating in Islamic Spiritual Entrepreneurship (ISE) and Islamic Integrated Marketing Communication (I-IMC) training. Data were collected through triangulated instruments, including reflective field notes, digital observation, participant reflection forms, and documentation of online and offline business practices.

Findings across five provinces in Sumatra (Aceh/NAD, North Sumatra, West Sumatra, Riau, and South Sumatra) indicate that ISE values amanah, shiddiq, ihsan, halal, and barakah were internalized differently according to local culture, yet consistently manifested in daily business practices. In Aceh and West Sumatra, spiritual values appeared strongly in explicit religious rituals

and local traditions, while in North Sumatra and Riau they emerged more subtly through professionalism, ethical decision-making, and responsible digital conduct.

Across regions, participants demonstrated improved spiritual awareness, more empathetic social relations, more disciplined and ethical economic behavior, and a shift in promotional communication from aggressive, profit-oriented messaging to value-based, educative, and prayer-infused narratives. These transformations contributed to the formation of spiritual capital, which functioned as a moral filter in business decisions, a source of internal motivation, and a differentiating factor in Islamic brand identity. Ultimately, the integration of ISE values into IMC practices strengthened Islamic brand equity, reflected in increased trust, customer loyalty, perceived quality, Islamic brand image, and the pursuit of barakah as a non-material measure of success.

Table 9. Integrated Observation Table

Dimension	Key Indicators	Observed Practices (Cross-Province)	Reflective Meaning
Spiritual (ISE)	Niat ibadah, doa, amanah, kejujuran	Doa before production, captions with *bismillah*, refusal of non-halal partnerships, ethical restraint in promotions	Business perceived as worship; profit subordinated to obedience and barakah
Social	Empathy, solidarity, community orientation	Free food/drinks, sedekah programs, MSME halal communities, musyawarah with employees	Business as social service; ihsan and syura guide interactions
Economic	Financial discipline, fairness, halal compliance	Separate personal/business finances, fair pricing, avoidance of riba, transparent records	Economic behavior framed as moral responsibility to Allah
Communication (I-IMC)	Ethical messaging, Islamic symbols, tone of dakwah	Shift from "termurah" to "halal & berkah," soft visuals, Qur'anic quotes, prayerful customer responses	IMC becomes medium of value transmission, not mere promotion
Brand Outcome	Trust, loyalty, quality, Islamic image, barakah	Positive testimonials, growing engagement, calmer owner mindset despite fluctuations	Emergence of Islamic Brand Equity grounded in spiritual capital

Source: Processed Research Data

This table synthesizes the results of multi-aspect observations across all research locations, integrating spiritual, social, economic, and communication dimensions into a single analytical framework. It illustrates how Islamic Spiritual Entrepreneurship (ISE) values are internalized and translated into daily business practices, ethical economic behavior, and Islamic Integrated

Marketing Communication (I-IMC) strategies. The final dimension highlights the emergence of Islamic brand outcomes, showing that the consistent application of spiritual values contributes to trust, loyalty, and the pursuit of barakah as a holistic indicator of business success.

Discussion

Strategic Implementation of the Participatory Research Model

The strategic use of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) model in this study significantly enhanced the ability to understand how Islamic Spiritual Entrepreneurship (ISE) values are internalized and transformed into branding practices among MSME in Sumatra. Rather than viewing values such as Amanah, Shiddiq, Ihsan, Halal, and Barakah as merely doctrinal or moral prescriptions, the PAR approach enabled these principles to be observed as lived experiences embedded in everyday business decisions. Through iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, participants and researchers collaboratively articulated how these values shape entrepreneurial identity, ethical decision-making, and relational engagement with stakeholders. This collaboration fostered a process of collective meaning-making, where participants not only enacted ISE values but critically reflected on their implications for business sustainability, consumer trust, and market differentiation. Such insights underscore the suitability of PAR in contexts where spiritual, cultural, and behavioral dimensions intersect, because it captures both the interpretive depth of participants' experiences and their evolving consciousness regarding the ethical foundations of their business practices.

The analysis provides strong evidence that internalizing ISE values produces spiritual capital, understood here as a set of non-material resources faith-driven motivation, ethical sensibilities, sincerity, and moral discipline that guide business conduct. This finding corroborates and elaborates Marshall's (2018) notion of spiritual capital as transcendental values that sustain long-term economic and social well-being. In the Sumatra MSME context, spiritual capital becomes a strategic asset that simultaneously shapes behavior and communicates brand meaning. Entrepreneurs who embody *Amanah* and *Shiddiq*, for example, cultivate an operational culture rooted in integrity and transparency, which directly strengthens customer perceptions of reliability. Moreover, the value of Ihsan encourages continuous improvement in service quality, while adherence to Halal reinforces brand authenticity and religious coherence. Barakah, as a spiritual aspiration, extends the meaning of business success beyond profit accumulation to

encompass social benefit and moral fulfillment. Altogether, these dimensions illustrate that spiritual capital not only guides ethical conduct but also positions the business within a unique spiritual value space that competitors without similar grounding cannot easily replicate. Thus, the strategic implementation of PAR reveals a critical conceptual insight: spiritual capital is the missing conceptual bridge that links religious values, entrepreneurial identity, and competitive branding in Islamic economic contexts.

Value-Driven Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) as the Mechanism of Transformation

A central contribution of this study lies in demonstrating how spiritual capital is operationalized into communicative practices through value-driven Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC). The findings indicate that MSME entrepreneurs do not treat marketing communication merely as a promotional activity, but as a moral and relational process grounded in their internalized ISE values. This shift from transactional to value-driven communication is analytically significant. It demonstrates that IMC becomes a medium through which spiritual values are articulated, performed, and reinforced in ways that shape consumer perceptions and strengthen relational bonds. In practice, entrepreneurs communicated with customers using language and narratives that emphasize honesty, sincerity, religious alignment, and social care, thereby constructing a communicative ecosystem that embodies and reinforces Islamic principles. This aligns with Kliatchko's (2020) conceptualization of modern IMC as a value-centered framework, where authenticity, consistency, and relational resonance are prioritized over promotional intensity.

The field evidence shows that the most influential dimension of IMC was relational communication, where entrepreneurs cultivated trust through transparency, reliability, and emotional presence. This pattern mirrors the value of Amanah, which customers perceived not only as a moral quality but as a measure of transactional safety. The dimension of relevance, meanwhile, emerged when entrepreneurs contextualized their brand messages within local cultural idioms and Islamic moral scripts, making communication more meaningful and personally resonant for consumers. This reflects the interplay of Shiddiq in truthful messaging and Halal in product assurance. Responsive communication, characterized by attentive interaction and empathetic service, embodies the value of Ihsan, reinforcing the business's humanistic and spiritual orientation. Finally, a spiritual understanding of return on investment (ROI) emerged,

where success was measured not solely through profit, but through social benefit and perceived divine favor a manifestation of Barakah. The analytical insight here is that IMC becomes the structural and performative mechanism through which spiritual capital is translated into brand meaning. It transforms abstract moral values into communicative practices that consumers can perceive, interpret, and respond to, thereby generating distinctive Islamic brand assets. These assets trust, credibility, religious association, and spiritual differentiation form the building blocks that reinforce Islamic Brand Equity in both cognitive and emotional dimensions.

Integrating ISE, IMC, and Islamic Brand Equity: Toward a Coherent Islamic Brand-Building Logic

Synthesizing the findings reveals a coherent theoretical logic that integrates ISE values, value-driven IMC, and Islamic Brand Equity into a unified brand-building model. The analysis shows that ISE values serve as the foundational inputs that shape entrepreneurial identity and ethical commitment. When these values are internalized as spiritual capital, they become the ethical and motivational force behind every business interaction. IMC functions as the mechanism that translates these internal values into externally observable communication and relational practices, ensuring that the brand consistently reflects its spiritual foundations. This transformation reinforces the credibility, authenticity, and spiritual coherence of the brand, which the market interprets as meaningful differentiation. In this sense, IMC acts as the mediator through which internal ethics become external perceptions.

The resulting Islamic Brand Equity is strengthened across multiple dimensions. Brand awareness increases because spiritual narratives and ethical communication create emotionally memorable impressions. Perceived quality is enhanced as consumers associate sincerity, Halal assurance, and moral integrity with superior reliability. Brand loyalty grows as customers feel spiritually connected and emotionally secure with a brand grounded in Islamic ethics. Brand image becomes deeply rooted in trustworthiness, religiosity, and social purpose attributes that are increasingly sought by Muslim consumers in halal markets. While Keller's (2020) customer-based brand equity model emphasizes the importance of meaningful differentiation, this research expands the conceptual terrain by demonstrating that spirituality itself constitutes a powerful and culturally resonant source of differentiation. In markets where religious identity is deeply embedded in consumer behavior, spiritual congruence becomes a strategic advantage that is both functionally relevant and emotionally compelling. Thus, the integration of ISE, IMC,

and brand equity represents not merely a model of Islamic branding, but a holistic system in which spiritual values drive both ethical behavior and competitive positioning.

Empirical Transformation and Interventional Dynamics

To systemically address the baseline operational gaps identified across the participating enterprises, the Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework established a direct alignment between sectoral vulnerabilities, targeted ISE–IMC interventions, and observed transformational outcomes. In the halal culinary sector, content repetition and over-promotional messaging were mitigated by operationalizing Barakah and Ihsan, pivoting social media content toward behind-the-scenes halal compliance and authentic local sourcing narratives.

For Muslim fashion MSMEs, persistent sizing inconsistencies were overcome through *Shiddiq* and *Amanah*, leading to standardized, transparent size charts and honest label disclosures. In the craft sector, weak packaging storytelling was resolved by embedding Ihsan-driven insert cards and QR codes detailing cultural craftsmanship, thereby elevating perceived product quality. Finally, herbal and health enterprises eliminated exaggerated medical claims by applying *Halal-Thayyib* and *Shiddiq* principles, auditing promotional copy to comply with regulatory standards and building genuine brand credibility.

Rather than remaining passive research subjects, the participants demonstrated active agency through four distinct dimensions of engagement that directly yielded concrete branding decisions. Through Intellectual Engagement, herbal business owners collectively decided to eliminate bombastic cure-all claims, replacing them with legally compliant, spiritually grounded taglines such as "Progressive Natural Health Effort, Pure & Halal-Certified." Spiritual Engagement fostered the collective resolution to strictly separate personal and business digital wallets while implementing a "No Hidden Cost" commitment on pricing catalogs, recognizing financial honesty as a prerequisite for spiritual integrity. Furthermore, Practical Engagement materialized in the collaborative redesign of eco-friendly packaging and interactive QR-code touchpoints, while Social Engagement culminated in a cross-promotional "Halal-Bermartabat Sumatra" community network, operationalizing Ukhuwah (brotherhood) into a shared marketing strategy.

To rigorously distinguish between planned actions, observed behavioral shifts, and demonstrated customer effects, the implementation outcomes across the two PAR cycles were systematically tracked and evaluated among the participating enterprises (N=30). Planned

actions initially focused on reformulating brand messaging, establishing financial discipline, replacing misleading stock imagery with authentic product photography, and implementing standardized customer service protocols. Over two PAR cycles, these planned initiatives translated into verifiable internal behavioral changes as business owners actively incorporated ISE values into their daily operational routines, customer interactions, and financial management systems.

The observed behavioral changes provided concrete proof of internal transformation across the participating MSMEs. Specifically, 27 out of 30MSMEs (90%) fully revised their digital promotional narratives to reflect *Amanah* and *Ihsan*, shifting from aggressive selling to value-driven educational engagement. In terms of financial stewardship, 22 MSMEs (73.3%) successfully executed a complete separation between personal and business bank accounts, establishing structured owner salaries and transparent cost accounting. Furthermore, 25 MSMEs (83.3%) eliminated downloaded internet imagery, updating their digital catalogs with high-resolution, unedited photos of actual products (real-picture) alongside transparent defect disclosures to embody *Shiddiq*. Finally, 28 MSMEs (93.3%) adopted formal, Ihsan-based customer service protocols, incorporating empathetic communication, prompt responses, and hassle-free return guarantees.

The external effectiveness of these behavioral transformations was demonstrated through measurable customer responses and feedback collected across digital touchpoints and post-purchase evaluations (N=150). The adoption of authentic ISE-driven narratives generated a 38% average increase in social media engagement, with consumers explicitly citing enhanced brand warmth and ethical trust during qualitative follow-up interviews. The transition to honest product representation and accurate sizing resulted in an 82% reduction in customer complaints and product return rates across marketplace platforms, accompanied by a substantial rise in positive five-star reviews praising brand transparency.

The consolidation of Ihsan-based service protocols and transparent brand communications directly reinforced brand trust, which acted as a catalyst for overall brand equity. Participating MSMEs recorded an average 29% increase in repeat purchase rates within three months following Cycle 2 implementation. By systematically converting intangible spiritual capital (*Amanah, Shiddiq, Ihsan, Halal, Barakah*) into consistent, market-oriented signaling through IMC, the PAR intervention proved that ethical-spiritual alignment does not compromise commercial viability;

rather, it creates a resilient, trust-based competitive advantage that distinguishes regional halal MSMEs in a crowded marketplace.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic Spiritual Entrepreneurship (ISE) values Amanah, Shiddiq, Ihsan, Halal, and Barakah play a meaningful transformative role in shaping the branding practices and competitive positioning of MSMEs in Regional Sumatra. Rather than functioning merely as abstract ethical doctrines, these values operate as internal moral-spiritual capital that provides a distinctive source of brand differentiation across various business sectors. Through their qualitative internalization, MSMEs position their brands not only as commercial entities but also as authentic conduits of Islamic values in the marketplace. Within this qualitative paradigm, such value-based positioning is interpretively perceived by consumers as authentic and trustworthy, thereby reinforcing the emotional and spiritual resonance of the brand.

The research reveals that value-driven Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) functions as a crucial translative mechanism for converting ISE values into coherent brand narratives, visual identities, digital messaging, and customer interaction touchpoints. The alignment of IMC with ISE ensures that the spiritual character of the brand is communicated consistently across touchpoints, enhancing message credibility and relational depth. Furthermore, the participatory engagement of MSMEs in collaborative promotional activities highlights an emerging culture of mutual support (Ukhuwah) and shared value creation, which qualitatively strengthens the broader halal-driven economic ecosystem in Sumatra.

The findings interpretively show that the interaction between ISE values and IMC strategies fosters brand trust among consumers. Rather than representing a statistically proven quantitative mediation pathway, brand trust is conceptualized as a foundational relational bridge that links value-driven communication to enhanced customer perceptions of brand awareness, ethical associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty, key dimensions of brand equity. Thus, the interplay of ISE, IMC, and trust provides a qualitative foundation for reinforcing brand equity within halal-focused MSMEs.

Through two cycles of Participatory Action Research (PAR), the study proposes a conceptual framework, the ISE–IMC–Trust–Brand Equity–Competitive Advantage Framework that illustrates the qualitative transformation of spiritual values into strategic brand assets. This

framework emphasizes that competitive advantage among halal MSMEs is conceptualized not merely as product-based differentiation or measured market share, but as an emerging strategic capability rooted in communicated spiritual capital. Overall, the study demonstrates that Islamic spirituality, when systematically integrated into communication strategies, can serve as a strategic resource for value-driven branding.

As a qualitative Participatory Action Research study conducted with 50 MSMEs and 55 individual participants, the proposed framework and interpretations are context-specific and exploratory; they cannot be statistically generalized or interpreted as confirmed empirical causal/mediation relationships. Furthermore, while the PAR interventions generated clear behavioral changes and positive short-term customer responses (such as reduced complaint rates and increased repeat purchases), the research did not measure long-term financial performance or quantitative market share gains. Future research should employ longitudinal quantitative methodologies and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to empirically test the proposed structural pathways, statistically validate the mediating role of brand trust, and quantify the direct impact of spiritual capital on long-term competitive advantage.

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