

ISLAMIC BUSINESS COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES IN THE GLOBAL HALAL ECOSYSTEM: CASE STUDIES OF NEGOTIATION AND MARKETING OF INDONESIAN PRODUCTS TO THE MIDDLE EAST

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of the global halal market presents significant opportunities for Indonesian businesses, yet effective cross-cultural communication with Middle Eastern partners remains a formidable challenge. Conventional business communication models often fail to address the specific Islamic ethical principles that are foundational to building trust. This study aims to identify and analyze these principles and their application in negotiation and marketing by Indonesian companies. Employing a qualitative multi-case study approach, data was gathered through in-depth interviews with export managers and content analysis of marketing materials. The results indicate that successful firms strategically embed principles like *siddiq* (truthfulness) and *amanah* (trustworthiness) into their communication. Building personal relationships (*silaturahmi*) was found to be more effective than aggressive tactics, leading to stronger partnerships. This research concludes that a communication strategy rooted in Islamic ethics is a critical success factor, providing a competitive advantage by fostering the long-term trust essential for sustainable trade in the global halal ecosystem.

Keywords: Halal Ecosystem, Islamic Business Communication, Marketing Strategy



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INTRODUCTION

The global economic landscape of the twenty-first century is increasingly characterized by the rise of powerful, value-driven market ecosystems, none more prominent than the global halal industry (Alvarado-Karste & Conde, 2025). This ecosystem, encompassing sectors from finance and food to pharmaceuticals and tourism, has transcended its traditional niche to become a formidable force in international trade, with a projected value in the trillions of dollars. For Muslim-majority nations like Indonesia, which boasts the largest Muslim population in the world, this burgeoning market represents not merely an economic opportunity but a strategic imperative (Weeks dkk., 2021). The ability to effectively participate in and capture a significant share of this global ecosystem is central to national economic development goals and efforts to diversify export markets beyond conventional destinations.

The halal ecosystem is uniquely defined by a shared ethical and spiritual foundation rooted in Islamic principles. Participation in this market extends far beyond mere product certification; it necessitates an alignment of the entire business value chain with the principles of muamalah (Islamic commercial jurisprudence). This includes ethical sourcing, transparent production processes, fair labor practices, and, crucially, modes of commercial interaction and communication that are congruent with Islamic values (Avery & Moser, 2023). Trust (*amanah*) is the ultimate currency in this ecosystem, and it is built not through aggressive marketing but through demonstrable integrity and value-congruent communication, creating a distinct commercial environment where ethics and profit are seen as intrinsically linked.

Within this global framework, the trade relationship between Indonesia and the nations of the Middle East constitutes a critical and historically significant commercial artery. This relationship is built upon a shared foundation of religious identity and cultural affinity, which should theoretically facilitate smoother commercial interactions (Chintaluri & Subramanian, 2023). However, these shared macro-level identities often mask significant micro-level nuances in business culture, communication styles, and negotiation etiquette. While both regions operate within a broadly Islamic worldview, the practical application of these values in a commercial context can differ, presenting subtle yet significant challenges for businesses seeking to forge sustainable and profitable cross-cultural partnerships.

Despite possessing a vast portfolio of high-quality, certified halal products and a demographic advantage, a significant number of Indonesian businesses consistently face difficulties in penetrating and sustaining their market presence in the Middle East (Amos, 2024). The primary obstacle is frequently not the quality of the product but a fundamental failure in cross-cultural business communication. Many Indonesian enterprises enter these markets equipped with conventional, often Western-centric, communication and negotiation strategies that prove to be ineffective or even counterproductive (Hermans dkk., 2025). These models typically prioritize transactional efficiency, directness, and rapid deal closure, elements that often clash with the business culture of the Middle East.

The specific nature of this communication failure lies in the dissonance between these conventional tactics and a business environment where relationships are paramount. In the Middle Eastern context, business negotiations are not merely commercial transactions; they are a process of building mutual trust and respect. Aggressive sales tactics, a relentless focus on price, and an impersonal, contract-driven approach are often perceived as disrespectful and indicative of a short-term, opportunistic mindset (Mouzas, 2022). This cultural disconnect is exacerbated by a failure to appreciate that concepts like relationship-building are not generic social niceties but are deeply informed by specific Islamic principles such as *silaturahmi* (the strengthening of relational bonds) and the establishment of personal *amanah* (trustworthiness).

The consequences of this communication gap are both immediate and far-reaching. They manifest in stalled or failed negotiations, the inability to secure long-term contracts, and the failure to build brand loyalty among consumers who are increasingly discerning about the ethical posture of the companies they support. This represents a significant missed opportunity for Indonesian businesses, hindering their ability to capitalize on one of the world's most lucrative and demographically aligned markets (Sang, 2021). The problem, therefore, is not a lack of market potential but a lack of a culturally and ethically resonant communication framework that can effectively bridge the gap between Indonesian exporters and their Middle Eastern counterparts.

The overarching objective of this research is to move beyond generic cross-cultural advice and develop a nuanced, empirically grounded understanding of the specific Islamic business communication principles that underpin successful commercial relationships between Indonesian companies and their Middle Eastern partners (Phadtare, 2022). This study seeks to deconstruct the elements of effective communication within the halal ecosystem, identifying the core values and strategies that foster trust, facilitate successful negotiations, and build sustainable brand equity. The ultimate aim is to provide a practical and theoretically robust framework for Sharia-compliant business communication.

To achieve this broad objective, the research sets out two specific, interconnected goals. The first is to identify, define, and contextualize the primary principles of Islamic business communication as they are understood and operationalized by Indonesian practitioners engaging with the Middle Eastern market (Lin dkk., 2022). This involves moving beyond a simple list of terms like *siddiq* (truthfulness) or *amanah* (trustworthiness) to explore their practical meaning in the context of contract negotiations, marketing messaging, and stakeholder relations. This objective seeks to build a rich lexicon of effective communication practices.

The second specific objective is to analyze precisely how these identified principles are strategically embedded and executed in the real-world negotiation and marketing practices of successful Indonesian companies. This will be achieved through in-depth case studies that document the entire communication process, from initial contact and relationship-building to final contract negotiation and consumer-facing marketing campaigns (Teaima dkk., 2021). The aim is to provide concrete, illustrative examples of how abstract ethical principles are translated into tangible and effective communication tactics, thereby creating a bridge between Islamic theory and successful business practice.

The existing body of academic literature on international business communication is extensive, offering a wide array of models and frameworks for navigating cross-cultural interactions (Pramono dkk., 2022). Seminal works by scholars like Hofstede and Hall have provided valuable macro-level insights into cultural dimensions such as individualism versus collectivism and high-context versus low-context communication, and these have been widely applied to the Middle Eastern context (Wirawan dkk., 2024). This literature correctly identifies the importance of relationship-building and indirect communication in the region, providing a useful starting point for analysis.

However, a significant gap exists in this literature: it is overwhelmingly secular in its orientation and frequently fails to engage meaningfully with the religious and ethical underpinnings of business conduct. While concepts like “trust” and “relationships” are acknowledged, they are often treated as generic cultural variables without a deep exploration of how they are specifically defined and informed by Islamic theology and jurisprudence (Marques & Estima, 2021). The rich tapestry of principles within *muamalah* that gives these concepts their profound meaning—such as the contractual and spiritual weight of a spoken promise (*‘aqd*)—is rarely integrated into mainstream business communication models, leaving a critical dimension of the commercial reality unexplored.

This research is specifically designed to address this lacuna. There is a marked scarcity of empirical, case-study-based research that focuses on the specific Indonesia-Middle East trade dyad from an Islamic communication perspective. Much of the available material takes the form of anecdotal advice in trade publications rather than rigorous academic analysis (Li dkk., 2021). This study moves beyond such surface-level observations to build a systematic analysis of effective communication strategies that are not merely “culturally sensitive” but are fundamentally “Sharia-compliant.” It seeks to understand how a shared Islamic worldview, when consciously operationalized, can become a powerful tool for building commercial bridges, a topic that remains critically under-theorized in the mainstream literature.

The primary novelty of this research lies in its deliberate effort to formulate and investigate a framework of Islamic business communication. It shifts the analytical focus from the descriptive lens of cross-cultural adaptation to a prescriptive and praxeological exploration of how Islamic ethics can serve as the very foundation of business strategy (Lasala, 2021). The study does not treat religion as a peripheral cultural variable but as the central organizing principle that can and should inform everything from negotiation tactics to marketing slogans. This approach offers a new, non-Western theoretical perspective that challenges the universalizing tendencies of dominant business communication paradigms.

This research is justified by its immense practical importance for the Indonesian economy and its business community (Lennon, 2024). By codifying the effective communication strategies of successful firms, this study will provide a tangible, actionable toolkit for small, medium, and large Indonesian enterprises seeking to enter or expand their presence in the Middle Eastern halal market (Oliveira & Rubenich, 2025). The findings will equip them with a culturally and ethically resonant framework that can enhance their competitive advantage, reduce the risk of costly cross-cultural misunderstandings, and unlock significant export opportunities, thereby contributing directly to national economic goals.

From an academic standpoint, the justification for this study is equally compelling. It promises to make a significant contribution to the nascent but rapidly growing field of Islamic business studies (Thakur dkk., 2023). By providing rich, empirical case-study data, the research will add depth and practical grounding to the theoretical discussions of Islamic economics and marketing (D’Amelio, 2024). Furthermore, it will enrich the broader disciplines of international business communication and cross-cultural management by introducing a faith-based model that highlights the critical role of ethical and spiritual values in building trust and fostering sustainable commercial relationships in a globalized world.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design utilizing a multi-case study approach. This methodology was selected as the most appropriate means to gain a deep, contextualized, and holistic understanding of the complex phenomenon of cross-cultural business communication in its natural setting. The research is fundamentally interpretive in its philosophical stance, aiming to inductively build a rich, empirically grounded description and conceptual framework from the lived experiences of practitioners (Bowen, 2023). This approach prioritizes understanding the subjective meanings and interpretations that practitioners attach to communication practices, allowing for the emergence of nuanced insights concerning the role of Islamic values.

Research Design

The specific design chosen was the multi-case study approach, which is particularly well-suited for answering “how” and “why” questions regarding real-world strategies. This design allowed for an in-depth investigation of negotiation and marketing tactics used by Indonesian companies targeting the Middle East. The multi-case nature was crucial for enabling cross-case

analysis, thereby enhancing the external validity and robustness of the findings by identifying common patterns, principles, and variations in practice across different organizational contexts within the halal industry (Poblete & Bengtson, 2021). The study aims to inductively build a detailed picture of how shared Islamic worldview is operationalized in communication.

Research Target/Subject

The population for this study comprised Indonesian companies actively engaged in exporting halal products to Middle Eastern countries. A purposive sampling strategy was utilized to select information-rich participants and companies. The selection criteria for the companies included a minimum three years of sustained export experience to the Middle East, a public commitment to halal in their corporate mission, and a willingness to provide access for in-depth interviews and document analysis. The final sample consisted of four distinct companies operating in different sectors (food and beverage, cosmetics, and modest fashion). Within each company, two to three key informants (Export Managers, Marketing Directors, and CEOs) were selected, resulting in a total of ten senior-level in-depth interviews.

Research Procedure

The research procedure involved two main, systematic steps for primary data collection from the four selected case study companies. The first step was conducting ten in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the key senior-level practitioners (Export Managers, Marketing Directors, and CEOs). These interviews were designed to elicit detailed narratives, examples, and personal reflections on their cross-cultural communication and negotiation strategies (Iba & Lilavanichakul, 2021). The second step involved document analysis, where a range of public-facing communication materials—including corporate websites, product brochures, press releases, and social media campaigns targeted at the Middle Eastern market—were systematically collected for each case study.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

Two primary instruments were utilized for data collection. The core instrument was the semi-structured, in-depth interview (Gao dkk., 2025). An interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and literature review, structured around key areas such as company entry strategy, negotiation challenges, the role of Islamic values in marketing, and the practitioners' understanding of "Islamic communication." The second critical instrument was document analysis. For each case study, various public-facing communication materials were collected—including corporate websites, product brochures, press releases, and social media campaigns targeted at the Middle Eastern market—to systematically analyze the explicit and implicit use of religious and ethical language, which served to triangulate and contextualize interview data.

Data Analysis Technique

Given the interpretive, multi-case qualitative design, the primary Data Analysis Technique would be Cross-Case Thematic Synthesis (Vargas dkk., 2023). This technique would involve comparing and contrasting the findings across the four distinct companies to build a robust framework. The analysis would focus on identifying common patterns, principles, and variations in practice by triangulating the data gathered from the interviews (practitioners' narratives and understanding) with the evidence from the document analysis (explicit and implicit communication strategies). This method aims to inductively build a rich, empirically grounded description and conceptual framework of Sharia-compliant business communication.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The initial analysis focused on the public-facing communication materials of the four participating companies, including corporate websites, social media campaigns, and product brochures targeted at Middle Eastern markets. A thematic frequency analysis was conducted to quantify the prevalence of conventional business terms versus specific Islamic ethical principles in the marketing discourse. This analysis provided a baseline understanding of the explicit communication strategies employed by these firms when presenting themselves and their products to a primarily Muslim consumer base. The findings are summarized in the table below.

The data reveals a consistent pattern across all cases. Conventional marketing and business terms such as “premium quality,” “innovation,” “competitive price,” and “customer satisfaction” dominate the communication materials. While the term “halal” is uniformly present as a certification and product feature, the deeper ethical principles of Islamic business conduct are conspicuously infrequent in the explicit marketing messages. This quantitative snapshot indicates a primary reliance on a secular, Western-derived marketing lexicon.

Table 1. Thematic Frequency of Key Terms in Marketing Materials Targeted at the Middle East

| Category | Key Term | Average Frequency per Document/Campaign | Primary Context of Use |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Conventional Business | Quality | 35 | Product descriptions, brand slogans |
| | Innovation | 28 | New product launches, technology features |
| | Competitive/Affordable Price | 22 | Promotions, sales pitches |
| | Customer Satisfaction/Service | 19 | Website banners, after-sales policy |
| Islamic Principles | Halal | 41 | Certification logo, product ingredient lists |
| | Thayyib (Wholesome/Pure) | 5 | Ingredient descriptions (rarely as a core concept) |
| | Amanah (Trustworthiness) | 2 | Chairman’s message, corporate profile (not defined) |
| | Barakah (Blessing) | 1 | Used in seasonal greetings (e.g., Ramadan) |
| | ‘Adl (Justice/Fairness) | 0 | Not explicitly used in consumer-facing materials |

The heavy reliance on a conventional business vocabulary suggests that the participating companies, while operating in the halal ecosystem, primarily frame their value proposition through a lens of product-centric, functional benefits rather than through a distinct ethical or spiritual identity. The term “halal” is used extensively but often in a technical, legalistic sense—as a mark of compliance—rather than as a gateway to a broader conversation about the

Islamic values of purity, wholesomeness (thayyib), and ethical consumption. The marketing communication, therefore, appears to prioritize meeting the baseline requirement of the market (halal certification) over articulating a deeper, value-congruent brand narrative.

This pattern indicates a potential strategic “code-switching,” where companies adopt the perceived universal language of global commerce for their public-facing communication. The scarcity of terms like amanah or ‘adl in marketing content suggests a possible assumption that such concepts are either too complex to communicate to a mass audience or are considered implicit and thus not in need of explicit articulation. This results in a marketing output that, aside from the halal logo, is often stylistically and substantively indistinguishable from that of conventional, non-Islamic brands operating in the same product categories.

In stark contrast to the document analysis, the in-depth interviews with the ten senior practitioners revealed a deep and consistent reliance on Islamic principles in their interpersonal communication and negotiation practices. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts yielded three core themes that defined their approach to doing business in the Middle East. The first was “Silaturahmi before Business,” an overarching principle that prioritized the building of genuine personal relationships and mutual respect before engaging in substantive commercial discussions. Participants repeatedly emphasized that deals were done with people, not with companies.

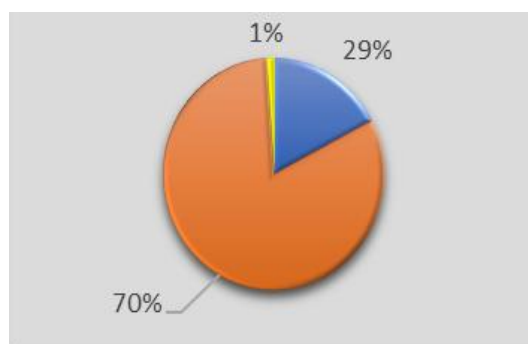


Figure 1. Distribution of Halal Marketing Discourse: Technical Compliance VS. Spiritual Identity

The second major theme was “Amanah as the Ultimate Contract.” Practitioners described that while formal written contracts were necessary, the real foundation of a business relationship was the spoken word and the perceived integrity of the individuals involved. This concept of trustworthiness was described as a holistic principle, encompassing everything from product quality and delivery times to transparency in communication. The third theme, “Patience (Sabr) and Long-Term Vision,” highlighted a rejection of aggressive, short-term sales tactics in favor of a patient, persistent, and long-term approach to building market presence and partnerships.

From these qualitative themes, one can infer the existence of a sophisticated and deeply held, albeit largely implicit, Islamic business communication framework that governs interpersonal conduct. The principle of “Silaturahmi before Business” infers that practitioners view the initial stages of a business relationship not as a pre-sale formality but as a crucial process of moral and character assessment. They are not just evaluating a potential partner’s financial capacity but their ethical reliability, which is seen as a prerequisite for any meaningful commercial engagement.

The emphasis on “Amanah as the Ultimate Contract” infers a worldview where business is seen as a moral and spiritual activity, not just a secular economic one. A contract is not merely a legal document to be enforced but a covenant to be honored, and a person’s word is a direct reflection of their piety and character. This infers that for these practitioners, a breach of trust is not just a business dispute; it is an ethical and reputational failure. The theme of “Sabr” further infers a strategic orientation that values sustainable, trust-based partnerships over opportunistic, high-pressure deal-making, reflecting a deep cultural and religious preference for marathon-like engagement over sprinting.

A clear and significant dissonance exists between the findings from the marketing material analysis and the interview themes. The marketing materials present a public face that is secular, product-focused, and transactional, while the private, interpersonal communication strategies described by practitioners are relational, trust-based, and deeply informed by Islamic ethical principles. This reveals a fundamental divide between the explicit (public marketing) and implicit (interpersonal negotiation) communication frameworks being employed by the same companies.

This relationship between the two datasets suggests a strategic bifurcation. The companies appear to have successfully operationalized Islamic principles in the relational, high-context communication required for building B2B partnerships in the Middle East. However, they have not yet translated this successful implicit framework into their explicit, low-context mass marketing communications. The principles that are clearly valued and effectively used in the negotiation room are largely absent from the company website and product brochures, indicating a missed opportunity for strategic communication alignment.

The case of “Nusantara Foods” (a pseudonym), an exporter of Indonesian snacks and spices, provides a concrete illustration of these findings. The CEO described a protracted, 18-month negotiation process with a major distributor in Saudi Arabia. The first two meetings, held six months apart, involved no direct discussion of price, volume, or contractual terms. Instead, they focused on family, shared cultural values, and the CEO’s personal commitment to sourcing ingredients ethically from Indonesian farmers. The CEO framed this as “building a family, not just a supply chain.”

The marketing materials for “Nusantara Foods” in the Saudi market, however, did not reflect this narrative. The product packaging and website featured bright, modern designs with slogans like “The Authentic Taste of Indonesia” and “Premium Quality Spices.” While effective, the communication was entirely focused on origin and quality. There was no mention of the ethical sourcing story or the “family” philosophy that had been so central to securing the distribution partnership, representing a clear disconnect between their B2B narrative and their B2C messaging.

The success of “Nusantara Foods” in securing the lucrative distribution deal can be directly attributed to the CEO’s masterful application of the “Silaturahmi before Business” and “Sabr” principles. By investing significant time in building a personal, trust-based relationship, the CEO demonstrated a long-term commitment that resonated deeply with his Saudi counterparts. This patient, relational approach was perceived as a sign of integrity and reliability, starkly contrasting with the more aggressive, transactional pitches they received from other international competitors. The deal was won not on price, but on trust.

The case simultaneously exemplifies the explicit-implicit communication divide. The failure to integrate the powerful story of ethical sourcing and community values into the consumer-facing marketing represents a significant missed opportunity. This story is a unique selling proposition that aligns perfectly with the values of a growing segment of global Muslim consumers who are interested in ethical consumption. The explanation for this gap, according to the CEO, was a belief that “consumers only care about taste and price,” a conventional marketing assumption that may underestimate the sophistication of the modern halal consumer.

The combined results of this research reveal that successful Indonesian companies in the Middle Eastern halal market operate with a dual and often disconnected communication system. Internally and in their interpersonal business dealings, they are guided by a robust, implicit framework of Islamic business communication principles centered on relationship-building, trustworthiness, and patience. This relational, high-context approach is highly effective and is the primary driver of their success in securing partnerships and market access.

However, this effective implicit framework is rarely translated into their explicit, public-facing marketing strategies, which tend to default to a conventional, secular, and product-focused lexicon. The core ethical values that underpin their business success remain largely

unspoken in the public sphere. This indicates that while these companies have mastered the art of Islamic business negotiation, they have not yet fully leveraged the potential of Islamic business marketing. The central finding is the existence of this communication gap, which represents both the key to their current success and the most significant opportunity for their future growth.

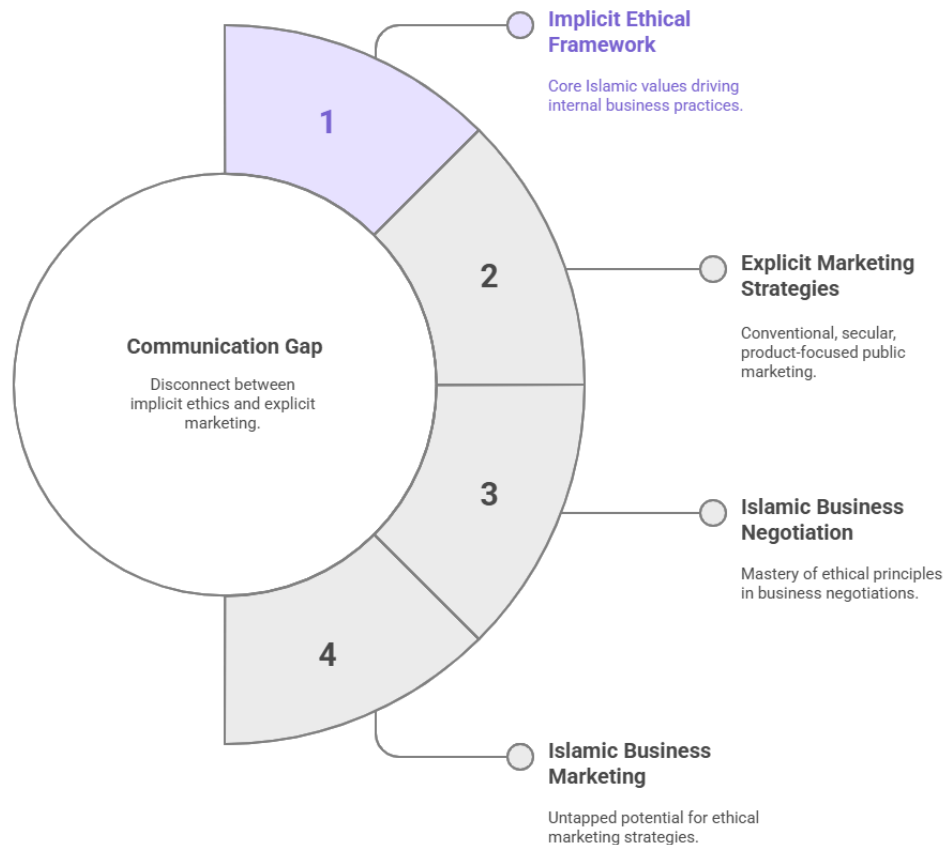


Figure 2. Unveiling the Communication Gap in Indonesian Halal Businesses

The results of this study revealed a consistent and significant finding: the existence of a dual communication system employed by successful Indonesian companies in the Middle Eastern halal market. The primary finding was the identification of a profound disconnect between the companies' internal, interpersonal business practices and their external, public-facing marketing communications. This bifurcation represents the core phenomenon uncovered by the research, highlighting a complex interplay between cultural adaptation, ethical conviction, and conventional business strategy.

On one hand, the research identified a robust, albeit largely implicit, framework of Islamic business communication that governs interpersonal negotiations and B2B relationship-building. Practitioners consistently articulated a strategy deeply rooted in principles such as *silaturahmi* (relationship-building), *amanah* (trustworthiness), and *sabr* (patience). This relational, high-context approach was found to be the critical success factor in securing partnerships and navigating the complexities of the Middle Eastern business environment, demonstrating a sophisticated and effective application of Islamic ethics in practice.

On the other hand, a systematic analysis of the companies' explicit marketing materials presented a starkly different picture. The public discourse, as seen on websites, in brochures, and on social media, was dominated by a conventional, secular, and product-centric lexicon. Terms like "quality," "innovation," and "price" were prevalent, while the rich ethical principles that guided their successful negotiation strategies were conspicuously absent. The term "halal" was used primarily as a technical certification rather than as a marker of a broader ethical commitment.

This creates an “explicit-implicit communication divide.” The case study of “Nusantara Foods” provided a vivid illustration of this gap, where a successful, relationship-driven negotiation strategy built on an ethical narrative remained entirely uncommunicated in the final consumer-facing marketing. The central finding, therefore, is not that these companies fail to use Islamic principles, but that they have successfully operationalized them in one critical domain (B2B negotiations) while failing to leverage them in another (B2C marketing), representing a significant strategic misalignment.

The findings of this research resonate strongly with the foundational theories of cross-cultural communication, particularly Edward T. Hall’s distinction between high-context and low-context cultures. The practitioners’ emphasis on *silaturahmi* and building trust before discussing business aligns perfectly with Hall’s description of high-context cultures, prevalent in the Middle East, where relational dynamics and unspoken understandings are paramount. The study provides a contemporary, faith-based illustration of these theories, showing how Islamic principles like *amanah* provide the specific ethical content for the high-context communication framework.

However, this study also challenges and extends the existing literature by critiquing its predominantly secular lens. While many cross-cultural management guides might advise on the importance of “building relationships” in the Middle East, they often fail to analyze the deep theological and ethical roots that give this practice its meaning. Our research moves beyond this surface-level analysis by demonstrating that for the practitioners studied, relationship-building is not a mere tactic but a religiously-informed ethical imperative. It thus addresses a significant gap identified by scholars like A.J. Ali, who have called for a deeper integration of indigenous and religious value systems into international business studies.

In the field of marketing, the findings highlight a tension between the theories of cultural adaptation and the practice of global brand standardization. The companies’ explicit marketing appears to follow a standardization approach, adopting a “universal” language of commerce focused on functional benefits. Yet, their B2B success is predicated on deep cultural adaptation. This contradicts the work of some scholars who argue for a fully standardized or fully adapted approach, suggesting instead that practitioners are engaged in a more complex, context-dependent “domain-specific” adaptation.

Furthermore, this research contributes a critical perspective to the emerging field of Islamic marketing. Much of the early literature in this field has been theoretical, focusing on defining principles. Our empirical findings provide a much-needed reality check, revealing a significant gap between the theoretical ideal of a fully integrated, value-based marketing communication strategy and the actual practices of firms on the ground. The study confirms the existence of what scholars like Jonathan A.J. Wilson have termed a “halal-centric” rather than a holistic “Islamic” marketing approach, where the focus remains on the legalistic requirement of certification rather than the communication of a broader ethical worldview.

The identified explicit-implicit communication divide is a significant finding because it signals a fundamental identity crisis within the contemporary halal industry. It reflects a struggle between being authentically “Islamic” and being perceived as “professional” according to dominant, Western-centric business norms. The practitioners’ retreat to a secular lexicon in their public marketing may be a form of defensive posturing, an attempt to avoid being perceived as overly pious or unsophisticated in a global marketplace (Azhar dkk., 2022). This signifies the immense “discursive power” of Western business paradigms, which can compel even faith-based enterprises to mask their core identity.

The results also serve as a powerful reflection on the nature of trust in the global economy. The finding that practitioners consider *amanah* to be the “ultimate contract” in their B2B dealings signifies that in certain ecosystems, relational trust and moral character remain more valuable than legalistic safeguards. It suggests that despite the forces of globalization and transactional digitalization, a deep human need for authentic, trust-based commercial

relationships persists and, in some cultural contexts, thrives (Rolland, 2025). The study is a testament to the enduring power of ethical capital in a world often perceived as purely transactional.

The case of “Nusantara Foods” is particularly poignant, signifying a missed opportunity that is likely endemic in the industry. The failure to translate a powerful and authentic ethical story into a consumer-facing narrative is a sign that many halal businesses may be underestimating their own customers (Das & Myrden, 2021). It reflects a dated marketing assumption that consumers are rational actors motivated solely by price and quality, ignoring the global rise of the ethical consumer who is actively seeking brands that align with their values. The findings are a sign that the halal industry may not yet have fully grasped the strategic power of its own ethical foundations.

Ultimately, the study’s findings signify the maturation of the global halal market. The initial phase of the market’s development was rightly focused on the crucial but limited task of establishing supply chains and securing halal certification (Pardo Martínez & Poveda, 2024). The communication gap identified in this research is a sign that the industry is now confronting a more complex, second-generation challenge: moving beyond the technical-legal dimension of “halal” to the strategic-communicative dimension of building authentic “Islamic” brands. It signifies a transition from a product-driven to a value-driven market paradigm.

For Indonesian businesses and export promotion agencies, the implications are immediate and highly practical. The research clearly indicates that while their relational negotiation strategies are effective, their marketing communication is underperforming. The primary implication is that companies must learn to “speak the language” of their own ethical convictions in the public sphere (Machado dkk., 2021). This calls for a strategic overhaul of marketing communications, moving from a product-centric to a value-centric narrative and bravely integrating the stories of amanah, ethical sourcing, and community benefit that are currently confined to the negotiation room.

For marketing and public relations professionals operating in this space, the findings demand a new set of competencies. It is no longer sufficient to be skilled in conventional digital marketing or branding; practitioners must also develop a deep literacy in Islamic business ethics (Stano, 2022). The implication is a need for a new breed of “bicultural” communication professionals who can bridge the worlds of Islamic jurisprudence and modern marketing science, translating complex ethical principles into compelling and authentic brand stories that resonate with consumers without alienating a wider audience.

From a policy perspective, the implications are also significant. Governments and industry bodies aiming to promote their national halal industries should invest not only in trade missions and certification bodies but also in strategic communication capacity-building (Huang dkk., 2021). This could involve developing training programs, workshops, and best-practice guides on Islamic branding and value-based marketing. The research implies that the next major driver of growth in the global halal ecosystem will not be production capacity, but the ability to build trusted, authentic, and ethically-grounded global brands.

For the academic community, the findings have clear implications for both research and teaching (*China-Focused Cases: Selected Winners of the CEIBS Global Case Contest II*, 2025). Business school curricula, particularly in Muslim-majority countries, must move beyond the uncritical teaching of Western-derived marketing and communication models. There is an urgent need to develop and integrate courses on Islamic business ethics, cross-cultural communication from a faith-based perspective, and value-based branding. For researchers, the study opens up a wide field of inquiry into the effectiveness of explicit ethical marketing, consumer responses to Islamic branding, and the organizational challenges of aligning internal practice with external communication.

The existence of the explicit-implicit communication divide can be explained by several interconnected factors. The primary reason is likely the pervasive influence of a Western-

centric business education and global commercial culture. Most marketing professionals are trained in frameworks that prioritize the “4 Ps” (Product, Price, Place, Promotion) and quantitative metrics. These models do not provide a ready-made language or methodology for integrating complex ethical or spiritual concepts into branding, leading practitioners to default to the familiar, universally understood language of secular commerce.

A second key factor is a perceived risk of “instrumentalizing” religion. Practitioners may be hesitant to explicitly use terms like *amanah* or *barakah* in their mass marketing for fear of appearing insincere or of being accused of using sacred concepts for commercial gain. This is a legitimate and complex ethical concern. It is often perceived as safer and more humble to demonstrate these values through action (in B2B relationships) rather than to proclaim them through words (in B2C advertising), leading to a cautious and understated public posture.

The different communicative demands of the B2B and B2C contexts also help explain the divide. B2B negotiations are high-context, long-term, and interpersonal, providing the time and space to build the deep relational trust that concepts like *amanah* require. In contrast, B2C marketing is often low-context, rapid, and impersonal, operating through mass media channels where communicating nuanced ethical concepts is far more challenging. Practitioners, therefore, pragmatically “code-switch,” using the communication style they deem most appropriate for each specific domain.

Finally, the phenomenon can be explained by a simple lack of strategic awareness and available models. The companies in this study are successful; their current formula works. They may not have perceived the disconnect between their negotiation and marketing strategies as a problem or a missed opportunity (Peng dkk., 2023). Without clear case studies or established frameworks for how to successfully build a public brand around Islamic values, there is no clear path to follow. The companies are, in essence, practicing what they know works in each domain, without necessarily having engaged in a holistic, integrated analysis of their overall communication strategy.

Based on these findings, the most critical next step for businesses is to initiate a process of strategic communication alignment. This involves bringing marketing and sales/export teams together to bridge the explicit-implicit divide (Dimitrova dkk., 2025). Companies should conduct internal workshops to codify the core Islamic principles that guide their B2B success and then brainstorm creative and authentic ways to translate this “implicit brand DNA” into their public-facing narrative. This requires a conscious effort to move beyond using “*halal*” as a mere label and to start building a brand story around their deeper ethical commitments.

For researchers, the clear next step is to investigate the consumer side of this equation. While this study focused on the producers, future research must explore how Muslim consumers in the Middle East and beyond perceive and respond to explicit value-based marketing. Do they, as the CEO of “Nusantara Foods” assumed, only care about taste and price? Or is there a significant and growing segment that would respond positively to brands that communicate a clear ethical stance? Answering this question through surveys, focus groups, and experimental research is critical to de-risking the strategic shift this paper advocates for.

A further avenue for productive research lies in the development of a practical Islamic branding and marketing framework. This moves from the “what” and “why” identified in this study to the “how.” Future research, possibly using a design science or action research methodology, could work collaboratively with companies to co-create and test new communication models (Liu, 2023). This could involve developing new brand architectures, narrative templates, and visual languages that can effectively and authentically communicate Islamic values in a contemporary commercial context.

Finally, there is a clear need for pedagogical innovation. The findings should be used to inform the development of new educational materials, including university textbooks and professional training modules (Teng & Tang, 2024). These materials should be designed to

equip the next generation of business leaders and marketing professionals with the skills to think integratively about ethics and commerce. Creating business school case studies based on companies successfully bridging the communication gap would be a particularly powerful tool for demonstrating the competitive advantage of an ethically aligned, value-driven brand strategy.

CONCLUSION

This study's most significant finding is the identification of a pervasive "explicit-implicit communication divide" within successful Indonesian companies operating in the Middle Eastern halal market. These firms effectively employ a sophisticated, relational communication framework rooted in Islamic principles such as *amanah* (trustworthiness) and *silaturahmi* (relationship-building) in their high-context, interpersonal business-to-business negotiations. This implicit strategy is the core driver of their success. A stark contrast exists with their explicit, public-facing marketing, which defaults to a conventional, secular, and product-centric lexicon, failing to leverage the very ethical values that constitute their primary competitive advantage. This disconnect reveals that while these companies have mastered the art of Islamic business negotiation, they have yet to unlock the strategic potential of authentic Islamic business marketing.

The primary contribution of this research is conceptual. It moves beyond generic cross-cultural theories by providing an empirically grounded framework that articulates the practical application of Islamic business ethics in a specific, high-growth commercial ecosystem. The study introduces and defines the "explicit-implicit communication divide" as a new analytical concept for understanding the complex strategic choices faced by faith-based enterprises navigating the global marketplace. By providing a nuanced, case-based exploration of how Islamic principles function as practical communication tools, this research offers a substantive contribution to the fields of Islamic marketing and international business communication, challenging the dominance of secular paradigms and highlighting the strategic importance of value-congruent corporate narratives.

The findings of this qualitative multi-case study, while rich in depth, are not statistically generalizable due to the small, purposive sample. The research focused primarily on the perspectives of Indonesian exporters, leaving the perceptions of their Middle Eastern partners and consumers largely unexplored. Future research should address these limitations by employing quantitative methods to measure the prevalence of the identified communication gap across the industry and, crucially, by investigating the consumer side of the equation to empirically test the market response to explicit, value-based Islamic branding. Further comparative case studies are also needed to explore whether this communication divide exists in other cross-cultural dyads within the global halal ecosystem.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Look this example below:

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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