

The Islamic Economic Paradigm on the Dialectic between Brands, Functional Needs and Symbols of Social Prestige

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Abstract

The lifestyle phenomena of modern society often reveal a mismatch between wants and needs. This study aims to describe the Islamic economic paradigm in relation to the perceptions of Muslim consumers in Pekalongan Regency, Central Java, regarding the iPhone brand image as both a digital communication necessity and a lifestyle symbol. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach involving 15 Muslim iPhone users selected through purposive sampling. The findings indicate that Muslim consumers perceive the iPhone as an innovative product that supports productivity and daily digital activities. At the same time, the iPhone is also viewed as a symbol of prestige and modern social identity. From the perspective of Islamic economics, the use of premium technology products is permissible when based on functional needs and the principle of *maslahah*, while excessive consumption motivated primarily by social status may lead to *israf*. This study contributes to the development of Islamic consumer behavior literature by explaining the dialectical relationship between functional needs, brand image, and social prestige in the consumption.

Keywords: Islamic Economic Paradigm, Functional Needs, Social Prestige

Abstrak

Fenomena gaya hidup masyarakat modern seringkali menunjukkan ketidaksesuaian antara keinginan dengan kebutuhan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan paradigma ekonomi Islam terkait persepsi konsumen Muslim di Kabupaten Pekalongan, Jawa Tengah, terhadap citra merek iPhone sebagai kebutuhan komunikasi digital sekaligus simbol gaya hidup. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan melibatkan 15 pengguna iPhone Muslim yang dipilih secara purposive. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konsumen Muslim memandang iPhone sebagai produk inovatif yang mendukung produktivitas dan aktivitas digital sehari-hari. Di sisi lain, iPhone juga dipersepsikan sebagai simbol prestise dan identitas sosial modern. Dalam perspektif ekonomi Islam, penggunaan produk teknologi premium diperbolehkan selama didasarkan pada kebutuhan fungsional dan prinsip *maslahah*, sedangkan konsumsi yang didorong terutama oleh pencarian status sosial berpotensi mengarah pada perilaku *israf*. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan literatur perilaku konsumen Islam dengan menjelaskan hubungan dialektis antara kebutuhan fungsional, citra merek, dan prestise sosial.

Kata Kunci: Paradigma Ekonomi Islam, Kebutuhan Fungsional, Prestise Sosial

INTRODUCTION

Technological developments have brought about significant changes in the consumption patterns of modern society, including the Muslim community in Indonesia. Technological advances in communication have led to smartphones no longer serving merely as communication tools, but also becoming part of one's social identity, a symbol of lifestyle, and a representation of one's economic status (Saumantri et al., 2023). Despite these developments, Apple has successfully built a strong global brand image through its iPhone products by emphasizing innovation, premium quality, exclusivity, and a user experience that sets it apart from other smartphone brands. As a result, the iPhone holds a special place in the hearts of consumers, including the Muslim community in Indonesia (Safik et al., 2025).

The phenomenon of iPhone usage is becoming increasingly evident in Pekalongan Regency, particularly among the younger generation, college students, business owners, and creative professionals. iPhone usage is driven not only by communication and technological needs but also by the brand image associated with the product. Consumers are inclined to view the iPhone as an innovative, modern, high-quality product that carries social prestige (Mastori dkk., 2026). In modern society, brand image is often the primary factor influencing consumer purchasing decisions, even surpassing the product's functional needs (Sander et al., 2021).

In terms of theory, product innovation and brand image are two key elements in modern marketing strategies. Product innovation refers to a company's ability to introduce new technologies, features, and experiences that meet consumer needs. Meanwhile, brand image reflects the perceptions, beliefs, and associations that consumers have toward a brand (Chandra, 2023). Previous research indicates that innovation and brand image have a significant influence on consumer loyalty, purchasing decisions, and brand equity. However, most of these studies still employ conventional marketing approaches and focus on general economic aspects without considering the dimensions of religiosity and Islamic consumption values.

The Islamic economic perspective views consumption not merely as a means of material satisfaction, but also as a matter that takes into account moral values, ethics, and the public interest (*maslahah*). Islam teaches that consumption should be balanced, free from extravagance (*israf*), and not driven by a desire to show off (*tabdzir*) or social status (Nurlisa et al., 2026). Therefore, Muslim consumers' decisions regarding the use of premium products like the iPhone should not be influenced solely by brand image and technological innovation, but should also be evaluated based on Sharia principles (Dwi, 2025). In this context, the question arises as to how Muslim consumers interpret the use of the iPhone amidst modern consumer culture and current developments in digital lifestyles.

These issues become even more interesting because the iPhone is now viewed not only as a technological device, but also as a symbol of social status and an exclusive lifestyle. Many consumers purchase iPhones, not solely because of their technological needs, but due to social pressures, environmental influences, digital trends, and a desire for social recognition. This phenomenon indicates a shift in the consumption behavior of Muslim

communities, which is increasingly moving toward symbolic consumption (Bachmid, 2025). This condition potentially conflicts with the principles of Islamic economics, which emphasize simplicity, balance, and utility in consumption. On a related note, the expansion of social media has further reinforced the iPhone's brand image as a symbol of prestige. Digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube frequently showcase modern lifestyles that are synonymous with the use of Apple products. Consequently, Muslim consumers, particularly the younger generation, are increasingly driven to follow the trend of using iPhones as part of their social identity. This phenomenon indicates that smartphone purchasing decisions are no longer purely rational but are also influenced by emotional, symbolic, and digital cultural factors (Septiani & Rozikan, 2024).

Previous research has generally examined the relationship between brand image, brand awareness, brand loyalty, and purchasing decisions for various products, including smartphones, and has shown that religiosity can influence brand perceptions from an Islamic economic perspective. Septiani dan Rozikan (2024) It has also found that Islamic branding influences the purchase decisions of Muslim consumers. Furthermore, Purnama dan Zaerofi (2025) indicate that brand equity and halal certification can increase consumer purchase interest from an Islamic marketing perspective. However, most previous studies have primarily focused on halal products, Muslim fashion, halal cosmetics, and Islamic financial institutions (Falasifah et al., 2026).

The study of Muslim consumers' perceptions of global premium technology products such as the iPhone from an Islamic economics perspective remains very limited. Previous research has not extensively integrated product innovation theory and brand image with Islamic consumption concepts such as *maslahah*, consumption ethics, and prohibitions against excessive consumption. Furthermore, research on smartphones generally only evaluates product quality, brand loyalty, and purchasing decisions without examining how Muslim consumers interpret the use of premium products as social symbols in everyday life (Ali et al., 2017). Furthermore, research on smartphones generally only evaluates product quality, brand loyalty, and purchasing decisions without examining how Muslim consumers interpret the use of premium products as social symbols in their daily lives. Consequently, there is a research gap between modern marketing theory and the Islamic economics perspective in understanding Muslim consumer behavior toward global technology products (Pratama et al., 2023).

Based on these issues, this research aims to analyze Muslim consumers' perceptions of iPhone innovation and brand image from an Islamic economics perspective among the community in Pekalongan Regency. This research seeks to understand how Muslim consumers view iPhone technological innovations, how brand image influences their consumption behavior, and how Islamic values are considered in their decisions regarding the use of these products. This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of research on Muslim consumer behavior by integrating product innovation theory and brand image with an Islamic economics perspective. It also expands the scope of Islamic economics research within the context of premium technology products, a field that has been under-explored to

date. Practically, this research can serve as a reference for technology companies in understanding the characteristics of Muslim consumers and formulating marketing strategies that are more aligned with Islamic ethical values and consumption behavior. Additionally, this research is also expected to raise awareness among the Muslim community regarding the significance of balanced, prudent, and Sharia-compliant consumption amidst the development of digital culture and modern lifestyles.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design to explore Muslim consumers' perceptions of iPhone innovation and brand image from an Islamic economics perspective. The research was conducted in Pekalongan Regency and involved 15 informants selected through purposive sampling. Participants were required to be Muslim, reside in Pekalongan Regency, have used an iPhone for at least one year, and actively engage in digital activities. To ensure diverse perspectives, informants came from various backgrounds, including students, entrepreneurs, creative workers, and private-sector employees.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation. The interview guide focused on themes such as product innovation, brand image, consumer behavior, and Islamic economic values. The research process included participant selection, in-depth interviews, observation of iPhone usage patterns, and data transcription for further analysis. The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Thematic coding was applied to identify patterns related to innovation perceptions, brand image, and Islamic consumption principles. To ensure data validity, the study employed source and methodological triangulation. Ethical considerations were also maintained by obtaining participants' informed consent, protecting their identities, and ensuring that all collected data were used exclusively for academic research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Iphone is Perceived as A Symbol of Innovation and Premium Quality

Based on interviews with iPhone users in Pekalongan Regency, it was found that the majority of Muslim consumers view the iPhone as a technological product with superior innovation compared to other smartphones. These innovations include camera quality, operating system security, exclusive design, device stability, and integration with Apple's digital ecosystem. These results show that technological innovation is the primary factor shaping Muslim consumers' positive perception of the iPhone. The iPhone is seen as capable of providing tangible benefits in work, education, digital communication, and even online business.

Theoretically, these findings align with the product innovation theory proposed by Kotler dan Keller (2016), which states that innovation includes updates to technology, design, features, and user experience that can sustainably enhance consumer satisfaction

(Trishananto, 2019). The iPhone has successfully created added value through consistent technological differentiation, with each new generation introducing features not available on other smartphone brands. Within the conceptual framework of this study, positive perceptions of innovation are inseparable from the influence of the social and digital cultural environment. Informants working as content creators, students, and small business owners assessed that the iPhone provides greater efficiency and better results compared to other devices. This indicates that innovation is not merely technical but also functional and contextual.

From an Islamic economics perspective, innovations that provide productive benefits to users are consistent with the principle of *maslahah* (beneficialness) (Chapra, 2000; Yusuf, 2020). The Maslahah in Islam emphasizes that all consumption must bring benefit to both the individual and society, in both worldly and spiritual matters (Anggraeni dkk., 2025). The usage of iPhones to support work productivity, educational access, and digital business development falls under the category of *hajah* (secondary needs that serve the public good), which is permitted and even encouraged as long as it does not violate other Sharia provisions (Kurniaputri, 2020). These results also support Suki (2013) research, which found that product features and technological quality are the primary considerations for smartphone consumers in general. Thus, the use of iPhones based on functional needs and innovations that provide benefits does not conflict with Islamic consumption ethics (Hidayat, 2023). Nevertheless, these findings also indicate that innovation alone is insufficient to fully explain consumption behavior, as other factors such as brand image and social pressure also play a role.

The iPhone Brand Image as A Symbol of Social Prestige

The iPhone brand image is closely related to social status, prestige, and modern lifestyle among Muslim consumers in Pekalongan Regency. Most informants acknowledged that using an iPhone not only meets their communication needs but also boosts their self-confidence and is considered a symbol of prestige within their social circles. These findings reveal a trend toward symbolic consumption, in which the iPhone no longer functions merely as a communication tool but also as a marker of social identity, economic class, and even a measure of one's "modernity." Theoretically, these conclusions are consistent with the brand image theory developed by Keller (2013), which explains that brand image is a set of consumer perceptions formed through experiences, information, and associations with a product (Rahmah et al., 2025). For luxury products like the iPhone, brand image is not only related to functional quality but also involves social symbols, self-identity, lifestyle, and prestige (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). These results support Veblen (1899) classic theory of conspicuous consumption, in which individuals purchase expensive goods primarily to demonstrate their social status to others. This study also reinforces the findings of Idris et al. (2024) that brand image may shape Muslim consumers' perceptions through emotional and psychological aspects, even before considering rational or functional aspects.

In the conceptual framework of this study, Muslim consumers do not exist in a vacuum (Affandy, 2020). They are continuously exposed to digital culture, social media, and

social circles that portray the iPhone as a symbol of success, wealth, and modernity. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube showcase the lifestyles of influencers who are synonymous with Apple products, thereby creating social proof that the iPhone is a “must-have item” for today’s youth. From an Islamic economics perspective, symbolic consumption driven solely by social prestige has the potential to violate the principles of simplicity, balance, and the prohibitions against *israf* (excess) and *tabdzir* (wastefulness) (Chapra, 2000). Islam explicitly teaches that consumption must not be based on *riya’* (show-off), social prestige, or the desire to be seen as superior to others. In fact, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) warned that anyone who eats and dresses out of arrogance and to show off falls into a category disliked by Allah (Rani dkk., 2025). Therefore, although a positive brand image is commercially beneficial to producers, Muslim consumers must be wary of the pitfalls of symbolic consumption that can undermine their spiritual values and economic ethics.

Considerations of Sharia Principles Regarding the Use of the Iphone

Some informants consciously consider Islamic economic values when deciding to use an iPhone. Although they use global premium products, the informants recognize that Islam teaches balanced consumption one that is not excessive and is based on needs that provide benefits (Nurkaromah et al., 2026). However, some informants also openly criticize the consumerist behavior they observe in their surroundings. These findings indicate that Muslim consumers in Pekalongan Regency possess a normative awareness of Islamic economic principles such as *maslahah* (benefit), balanced consumption (*tawazun*), and the prohibition against wasteful (*israf*) and extravagant (*tabdzir*) behavior.

Theoretically, the Islamic economic perspective on consumption behavior emphasizes that consumption is not a value-neutral activity (Wn dkk., 2025). Rather, every consumption decision must consider aspects of *halal*, *thayyib* (good and pure), as well as its social and spiritual impacts (Chapra, 2000; Nasr, 2003). The concept of *maslahah* serves as the primary foundation, wherein consumption must bring benefits to the individual, family, society, and the environment (Hasibuan & Hasanah, 2026). These results reinforce the research of Purnama dan Zaerofi (2025), which explain that Muslim consumers significantly consider ethical aspects and Sharia values in their consumption behavior, even for products that are not explicitly labeled as *halal*. This study also support Yusuf (2020) view that Islamic consumption ethics require a balance between fulfilling worldly needs and preparing for the afterlife, as well as avoiding all forms of wastefulness.

Within the conceptual framework of this research, Sharia awareness functions as a moral control mechanism that can curb the urge toward excessive symbolic consumption (Raihanun & Martiana, 2025). But this study also acknowledges a gap between normative awareness and actual practices in the field. Informants who verbally agree with the principle against wastefulness sometimes still struggle to resist social pressure or the desire to follow digital trends. In other words, Sharia consciousness has not yet fully become the primary filter in purchasing decisions because the influence of digital culture, social circles, and social media is often more dominant (Fikri & Mufidah, 2025). This study confirms that the Sharia

economy does not absolutely prohibit the consumption of premium products. As long as the product is halal, used for needs that provide *maslahah*, and is not accompanied by wastefulness or social status-seeking, then the consumption of an iPhone can be justified. However, when the main motivation is social status, showing off, or simply following trends without a clear need, then such behavior approaches the category of *israf*, which is prohibited.

The Tension between Functional Needs and Modern Lifestyles

The fourth theme is the most complex finding in this study, as it reveals an internal dilemma that Muslim consumers genuinely experience between rational functional needs and the symbolic allure of a modern lifestyle (Al Hafidz, 2025). Some informants admitted that they initially purchased an iPhone due to productivity needs and superior technological quality. However, over time, using an iPhone became part of their lifestyle and social identity. This finding indicates that the consumption behavior of Muslim consumers today is no longer purely rational-utilitarian but is also significantly influenced by emotional, symbolic, psychological, and digital cultural factors. The phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) or the fear of missing out on trends serves as a strong driver prompting consumers to purchase iPhones even when their economic circumstances may not be particularly favorable (Novalia et al., 2025). Theoretically, these findings reinforce Veblen (1899) and concept of symbolic consumption Belk (1988), theory of the extended self, which explain that consumer products particularly premium branded goods function as an extension of the user's self-identity. When someone uses an iPhone, they are not merely using a phone, but also "communicating" who they are to others. These results align with Solomon (2018) on socio-cultural influences on modern consumer behavior, as well as Triandis (1995) findings on how collectivist cultures can reinforce social pressure in consumption decisions.

Within the conceptual framework of this study, Muslim consumers find themselves in a constant and exhausting negotiation between three major forces: (1) technological drivers and rational functional needs, (2) social and digital cultural pressures that encourage symbolic consumption, and (3) ethical-religious awareness that reminds them of the principle of *maslahah* and the prohibition against *israf*. From an Islamic economics perspective, this dilemma poses a serious challenge that cannot be ignored. This study finds that while consumers normatively understand Islamic teachings regarding the prohibition of excess and wastefulness, environmental and digital cultural pressures often dominate in determining their actual behavior. This indicates that digital transformation and the modernization of lifestyles have created new conditions that have not yet been fully accommodated in conventional Islamic economic literature. In other words, the consumption behavior of Muslim societies in the current digital era is in a highly dilemmatic position between the demands of technological progress and the pressures of a highly consumptive lifestyle, on the one hand, and the desire to uphold Islamic values in daily consumption, on the other.

Overall, this study found that Muslim consumers' perceptions of the iPhone in Pekalongan Regency are shaped by a complex interplay of technological innovation,

premium brand image, social environment, digital culture, and the Sharia economic values they adhere to. Innovation and product quality are the primary reasons that can be justified under Sharia law as long as they provide tangible benefits to users. However, a strong brand image as a symbol of social prestige has driven symbolic consumption that potentially violates the principles of *israf* and *tabdzir*. The dichotomy between functional needs and modern lifestyles reflects the reality that Muslim consumers today are in a constant state of negotiation between the demands of modernity and adherence to the Islamic values they hold dear. This study makes a significant theoretical contribution by integrating product innovation theory, brand image, and the Islamic economics perspective into a framework for analyzing Muslim consumer behavior in the context of global premium technology products an area that has been largely unexplored in both the Islamic economics and consumer behavior literature in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study found that Muslim consumers in Pekalongan Regency perceive the iPhone as an innovative and high-quality technological product that supports productivity, communication, and digital activities. At the same time, the iPhone's strong brand image has transformed it into a symbol of social prestige, modern lifestyle, and self-identity among Muslim consumers. The findings reveal a dilemma between functional needs and symbolic consumption, where purchasing decisions are influenced not only by technological benefits but also by social pressure, digital culture, and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). From an Islamic economics perspective, the use of iPhones is considered permissible as long as it is based on *maslahah* (benefit), moderation, and genuine needs, while avoiding *israf* (excessive consumption) and *tabdzir* (wastefulness).

This study contributes to the literature by integrating product innovation theory and brand image theory with Islamic economic principles in the context of premium technology products. However, the study is limited by its focus on a single geographical area and a relatively small number of participants, which restricts broader generalization. Future studies are encouraged to employ quantitative or mixed-method approaches, involve larger and more diverse samples, and examine variables such as religiosity, social media influence, and digital consumer culture. Overall, this research highlights the importance of balancing technological advancement with Islamic ethical values in shaping contemporary Muslim consumption behavior.

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