

Shifting Meanings of Consumer Trust in Halal Labels: A Grounded Theory Study on Young Muslim Entrepreneurs

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Article Info

Received: 22-05-2026

Revised: 10-08-2026

Accepted: 29-08-2026

Online Version: 24-09-2026

Abstract

This study aims to explore the shift in the meaning of consumer trust in halal labels among young Muslim entrepreneurs in Pekalongan Regency. This study uses a qualitative approach with the Grounded Theory method to explore in depth perspectives based on the experiences of informants. The data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with two purposively selected informants, namely an online food entrepreneur and a TikTok affiliate. Data analysis was carried out through the stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to build a conceptual model of trust transformation. The results of the study show that consumer trust in halal labels has shifted from being absolute and normative to more critical, selective, and experience-based. This shift is influenced by consumption experience, unclear certification information, and increased access to digital information and consumer reviews. As a result, halal labels are no longer the sole basis in decision-making, but are considered alongside other factors such as product transparency, reputation, and user experience. The novelty of this research lies in the development of a conceptual model that explains the dynamic process of trust transformation in the context of halal consumption. This research contributes to the development of halal consumer behavior studies. It provides practical implications for business actors and policymakers in increasing transparency, credibility, and adaptive strategies in building consumer trust in halal-certified products.

Keywords: halal label, consumer trust, grounded theory, muslim entrepreneurship, consumer behavior.



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world. The Muslim population in Indonesia by 2025 will reach 87% of the 288.3 million people (Databoks 2026; Muhammad, 2026). With the large Muslim population in Indonesia, the halal aspect is an inseparable part of the activities of the Muslim community. Etymologically, the term *ḥalāl* comes from Arabic, which refers to something that is allowed, legal, and licit. In the context of Islamic law, *ḥalāl* is interpreted as everything that is allowed in accordance with the provisions of Islamic teachings (Adinugraha Hendri, Andrean Rizky et al., 2022). Halal is the foundation for Muslims, which is not only related to the fulfillment of religious obligations, but also a reflection of compliance with the values of the teachings adhered to. In fact, the number of halal-certified products in Indonesia by the end of 2025 has exceeded 9.6 million (BPJPH, 2025).

In this context, the halal label is the main view of the Muslim community to determine consumption choices. In *Al-Fiqh al-Islami Wa Adillatuhu* by Wahbah al-Zuhaili, Islam strongly emphasizes to its adherents to really pay attention to the food and drink that will be consumed (Rasyid, 2018). Halal labels on packaging, if the product meets halal standards according to Islamic law, are expected to provide a guarantee of safety and comfort for Muslim consumers (Fartini, 2019; Hastuti et al., 2025).

Along with social developments and changes in people's consumption patterns, trust in halal labels is no longer solid. In this case, the halal label not only serves as a marker of halal, but also as a symbolic stimulus that is interpreted through consumer perception and interpretation (Syarifah Luk, Yusnia, Khotimah Husnul, 2026). Consumers tend to start combining halal labels with various other factors, such as considering product perception and consumption experience. This condition shows that trust in halal labels is developing into more aspects. This shift not only reflects a change in the level of consumer awareness of halal products but also shows a change in the way consumers interpret trust in halal labels themselves (Ozkan et al., 2024).

A shift in the meaning of belief in halal labels can also be observed in young Muslim entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are not only required to understand products, but also can manage digital platforms, implement communication strategies, and manage interactions with customers (Anjali Resti, Princess Revalia, Novita Yulia, 2026). This group has unique characteristics because it plays the role of consumers as well as business actors. This experience allows for the formation of a more complex perspective on halal labels. Young entrepreneurs generally have a higher level of access to information, market experience, and interaction with consumers than other groups. This condition affects the way they interpret their belief in the halal label, which is not only based on religious aspects but also influenced by experience, perception, and considerations in consumption activities.

Research on consumer behavior towards halal products has been carried out extensively, such as research conducted by (Rizki & Susanti, 2025) which analyzes consumer perception of halal labels on packaged food products. The results of the study show that consumers view halal labels as religious guarantees as well as indicators of product safety. Other research by Rachmadina et al. (2025) regarding the impact of fake halal labels on consumer trust and the reputation of local businesses, it shows that the non-disclosure of information related to the content of ingredients, especially non-halal ingredients, can have a serious impact on consumer

trust, especially on Muslim consumers. These findings indicate that trust in halal labels is not always stable, but can decline when consumers are exposed to non-transparent information.

The above description requires a research approach that can delve into how the meaning of consumer trust in halal labels is formed and changes. This study applies a qualitative approach with the Grounded Theory method to understand this phenomenon from the perspective of direct consumer experience. This research is motivated by the increasingly complex dynamics of consumer trust in halal labels in the midst of social developments and increasing access to information. Consumers no longer rely only on halal labels as the only reference, but start to consider various other aspects in the consumption process. In addition, the group of young Muslim entrepreneurs has a strategic position because they play the role of consumers as well as business actors. This experience allows them to have a broader perspective on understanding trust in halal labels. This condition is an important motivation to examine more deeply how the meaning of trust is formed and changes (Magfiratun et al., 2025).

The main purpose of this study is to explore the Shift in the Meaning of Consumer Trust in Halal Labels in Young Muslim Entrepreneurs in Pekalongan Regency. The specific purpose of this study is to identify how consumers interpret trust in halal labels, analyze changes in the meaning of trust in halal labels based on experience and consumption context, identify factors that affect the occurrence of shifts in the meaning of belief, and identify factors that affect the shift in the meaning of belief (Pradana et al., 2024). Although previous studies have extensively examined halal consumer behavior by focusing on purchase intention, perceived halal assurance, certification, and the impact of fraudulent halal claims, little attention has been paid to how the meaning of trust in halal labels is socially reconstructed and transformed through consumers' lived experiences. This study addresses that gap by developing a grounded theoretical explanation of the dynamic process through which trust evolves from normative religious acceptance to critical, experience-based evaluation. Young Muslim entrepreneurs in Pekalongan Regency were selected because they occupy a unique dual role as both consumers and business actors within a region characterized by a strong halal-oriented economy. Their intensive engagement with digital commerce, customer interactions, and product verification provides valuable insights into changing trust perceptions that are not captured in conventional consumer studies. Accordingly, this study aims to develop a conceptual model explaining how consumer trust in halal labels is constructed, challenged, and transformed, as well as to identify the key experiential and contextual factors driving this process.

This research has significance and urgency, which lies in the importance of understanding the dynamics of consumer trust in halal labels in the midst of social changes and consumption patterns of the Muslim community. If this change in the meaning of trust is not understood in depth, it has the potential to create a gap between consumer perception and the efforts of business actors and policymakers in building trust in halal products. Theoretically, this research contributes to enriching the study of halal consumer behavior, especially related to the shift in the meaning of beliefs that are still limited in the literature. In addition, this research also strengthens the use of the Grounded Theory approach in understanding social phenomena that are constantly changing and adjusting to existing conditions. Practically, this research is expected to provide benefits for business actors and policymakers in formulating strategies that are more adaptive to changing consumer perspectives, especially in increasing trust in halal labels. In addition, the results of this study can also be considered in strengthening the halal product assurance system that is more in line with the needs and perceptions of the public.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a constructivist Grounded Theory approach to generate an explanatory model of the shifting meanings of consumer trust in halal labels. Theoretical sampling was applied by selecting participants who represented different entrepreneurial contexts, an online food entrepreneur and a TikTok affiliate, to maximize conceptual variation relevant to the emerging categories. One of the approaches put forward by John W. Creswell is Grounded Theory. This approach is a qualitative procedure that is systematic and is used to produce theories at a broad conceptual level, which describe a process, action, or interaction related to the phenomenon being studied (Oktaria et al., 2023).

The population in this study is young Muslim entrepreneurs in Pekalongan Regency. This population was chosen because it has characteristics as consumers as well as business actors, thus allowing for the formation of a more complex perspective on halal labels. The research sample consisted of two informants selected through purposive sampling techniques based on criteria relevant to the research objectives. The informant is a young Muslim entrepreneur with a different type of business, namely an online food entrepreneur and an affiliate through the TikTok platform. These differences provide a variety of perspectives, and the data obtained is considered sufficient because it shows a repeating and deep pattern.

The data collection technique in this study uses in-depth interviews as the main method. The interview was conducted in a semi-structured manner so that the informant could convey his experiences and views more flexibly regarding trust in the halal label. In addition to interviews, this research is also supported by documentation techniques, such as recording interview results and collecting information relevant to the research object. The research instruments used are interview guidelines that are prepared based on the focus of the research, including an understanding of halal labels, halal product consumption experience, trust in halal labels, changes or shifts in the meaning of trust, and factors that affect these changes. Data collection and analysis proceeded iteratively using the constant comparative method, in which incidents, codes, and categories were continuously compared throughout the research process. Coding followed three stages: open coding to identify initial concepts, axial coding to establish relationships among categories, and selective coding to integrate them into a core explanatory concept. Although only two participants were involved, data collection ceased when theoretical saturation was achieved, as no new conceptual categories or properties emerged from subsequent analysis. Trustworthiness was enhanced through member checking, researcher memo writing, and peer debriefing to ensure coding consistency and conceptual credibility. Ethical principles were observed by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation, maintaining anonymity through pseudonyms, and treating all interview data confidentially throughout the study.

Data analysis techniques were carried out through the stages of grounded theory by Chun Tie et al. (2019). The first stage is Open Coding, which is the process of identifying and grouping interview data into categories based on the themes that emerge. Furthermore, axial coding is carried out, which is the stage of connecting the categories that have been found, so that a more structured relationship between concepts is formed. The final stage is Selective Coding, which is the process of integrating all categories into a main concept that explains the shift in the meaning of consumer trust in halal labels.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Initial Construction of Consumer Trust in Halal Labels

The process of the open coding stage, namely the initial belief of consumers in halal labels, is interpreted as a normative religious guarantee. The halal label is perceived as a symbol of compliance with Islamic law as well as an indicator of product safety. At this stage, consumers tend to accept halal labels without further evaluation of the production process and product content. The findings are supported by the results of interviews with informants.

Online food entrepreneur informants view halal labels, halal labels, as a means to build customer trust. Meanwhile, the TikTok affiliate platform informant views the halal label as proof that the product has gone through an inspection process in accordance with the provisions of Islamic law. The results of data grouping also emerged categories such as direct trust, halal guarantees, and a sense of security in consumption (Masriani et al., 2025).

“The halal label is an effort to make customers more confident and feel safe.” (Informant online food entrepreneur, M.R).

“A halal label means that the product has gone through an inspection process and is in accordance with Islamic law.” (affiliate platform TikTok, E.D.A.S).

From a theoretical perspective, halal labels can be understood as religious symbols that function to give legitimacy to a product. This label not only shows conformity with Islamic law, but also serves as a form of security guarantee that is socially accepted by Muslim consumers. This condition is in line with halal consumption, not only related to religious obligations, but also part of the identity and lifestyle of modern Muslim society (Scott, Oktafiyani Melati et.al., 2021). This shows that the halal label has a broader meaning as a symbol of trust and safety in consumption.

The interpretation for researchers in the early stage or process of the open coding stage is that trust in halal labels is still simple and direct, because consumers have not been influenced much by experience or external information (Yali & Woong-jae, 2025). The belief is based more on religious values and the assumption that the halal label is an unquestionable guarantee. This condition shows that halal labels are still placed as the main authority in determining consumption decisions, so consumers are less likely to carry out additional verification (Kholilah et al., 2024). In other words, the trust formed at this stage is still passive and has not developed into a critical attitude in evaluating the halalness of a product.

Factors Triggering the Shift in Trust in Halal Labels

In the second stage of axial coding, the shift in trust in halal labels is influenced by several main factors, namely consumption experience, unclear product information, and increased access to information from the digital environment. At this stage, consumer confidence begins to change from being direct to more evaluative. This change is reflected in the experience of informants who have found products labeled halal but raised doubts due to unclear information. The TikTok platform affiliate informant stated that packaging that does not include a reliable source of certification is one of the reasons for doubts. Meanwhile, online food entrepreneurs also revealed that not all products with halal labels can be immediately trusted without ensuring the authenticity of the certification (Osman, 2023).

“Have found a dubious product because the packaging is not clear and does not list a trusted certification body” (Informant of the affiliate platform TikTok, E.D.A.S).

“Sometimes products with a halal logo are not necessarily officially halal certified.” (Online food entrepreneur informant, M.R).

Perspective: Theoretically, consumer confidence can change when there is a mismatch between expectations and perceived experiences. In this context, the halal label as a symbol of trust can lose its meaning if it is not supported by clear and transparent information. This shows that trust is not something stable, but can grow or even decrease along with consumer experience. The condition of the change is in line with previous research by Riyadi et al. (2026)

which shows that consumers, especially the younger generation in the digital age, tend to be more critical of product information and not just rely on symbols or labels alone. Consumers are starting to demand transparency and clarity of information as the basis for building trust in a product.

Table 1. Factors triggering the shift in consumer trust toward halal labels in the digital era

Main Triggering Factor	Description of the Factor	Evidence from Informants	Impact on Consumer Trust
Consumption Experience	Consumers encounter products labeled halal that do not fully meet their expectations regarding transparency and certification authenticity.	“Have found a dubious product because the packaging is not clear and does not list a trusted certification body” (TikTok affiliate platform informant, E.D.A.S).	Direct trust begins to shift toward a more evaluative and cautious attitude. Consumers become less likely to rely solely on halal symbols.
Unclear Product Information	Product packaging lacks detailed and reliable certification information, creating uncertainty about halal authenticity.	“Sometimes products with a halal logo are not necessarily officially halal certified” (Online food entrepreneur informant, M.R).	Consumers experience doubt and demand greater transparency before trusting halal claims.
Increased Digital Information Access	Consumers are increasingly exposed to information through digital platforms, enabling them to compare products and verify claims independently.	Consumers actively seek additional information from online sources and social media platforms before making purchasing decisions.	Trust becomes more selective, rational, and evidence-based rather than automatic.
Expectation–Experience Mismatch	Consumer trust decreases when actual product experiences differ from expectations created by halal labels.	Informants reported skepticism after discovering inconsistencies between halal claims and certification transparency.	Halal labels may lose symbolic credibility if not supported by clear and verifiable information.
Growing Consumer Critical Awareness	Younger digital consumers increasingly evaluate halal products critically rather than accepting labels at face value.	Consumers now demand certification clarity, transparency, and accessible verification mechanisms.	Trust evolves from emotional-symbolic reliance to rational and informed consideration.

Table 1 shows that the interpretation for researchers at the axial coding stage is that the main factor driving this shift in trust is the emergence of experiences that do not fully match consumer expectations of halal labels. This experience triggers the emergence of doubts and encourages consumers to be more careful in trusting a product. In addition, increased access to information also amplifies these changes, as consumers have more resources to compare and evaluate products (Kumar et al., 2025). Thus, trust in halal labels began to shift from automatic to more selective and based on rational considerations.

In the second stage of results by axial coding, the pattern of consumer trust has been transformed from being direct to more critical and selective. This change is characterized by the tendency of consumers to not only rely on halal labels but also consider various other factors in the decision-making process. This transformation is reflected in the informant's statement, which shows an increase in caution in trusting halal labels. The TikTok affiliate platform informant revealed that he no longer directly believes and is more thorough in checking the authenticity of halal labels (Azmi et al., 2025). Meanwhile, the online food entrepreneur informant also showed a change in attitude by paying more attention to the halalness of the ingredients used in his business (Aziz, 2024).

"I became more thorough and did not just believe it." (Informant of the affiliate platform TikTok, E.D.A.S).

"Now we are more aware of the halalness of a product." (Food entrepreneur informant online, M.R).

In addition, the two informants also consider other factors such as consumer reviews, user experience, and transparency of product information.

"I look at other people's reviews and experiences before I believe." (Informant of the affiliate platform TikTok, E.D.A.S).

"In addition to the halal label, I look at the ingredients and experience of the product." (Food entrepreneur informant online, M.R).

Theoretically, this change in trust patterns suggests that consumers no longer rely solely on symbols or labels as the basis for decision-making, but also use a more rational and experience-based approach. Trust in this context develops into an evaluative process that involves consideration of information, personal experience, and the influence of the social environment. This change is in line with consumers in the digital age who tend to rely on social validation, such as reviews and user experience, in shaping the perception of a product (Adinugraha Hendri, Riskiyani Dwi et al., 2023). This shows that consumer trust is increasingly influenced by social interaction and wide access to information.

The interpretation for the researcher at the stage of axial coding results is that this transformation of trust patterns occurs because consumers, especially young entrepreneurs, have dual experience as users as well as business actors (Theelen et al., 2024). This condition makes them better understand the risks and the importance of maintaining trust in consumption and business activities. Engagement in the digital environment also amplifies this change, as consumers are accustomed to being exposed to various information and opinions from other users. Thus, belief in the halal label is no longer singular, but is formed through a combination of religious values and experience.

The grounded theory developed in this study emerged through a systematic progression from open coding, which identified categories of *initial religious trust*, *halal assurance*, and *consumption safety*, to axial coding, where these categories were linked with *consumption experience*, *information transparency*, *digital information access*, and *consumer evaluation*. Finally, selective coding integrated these relationships into the core category of dynamic trust transformation, explaining how consumer trust evolves from unquestioned reliance on halal labels to critical and experience-based evaluation. Unlike previous studies that primarily portray halal labels as stable predictors of consumer trust, this study demonstrates that trust is continuously reconstructed through personal experience and digital interactions. The proposed conceptual model extends consumer trust theory by positioning trust as an adaptive and iterative process, complements halal consumption theory by showing that religious commitment is mediated by transparency and credibility, and aligns with digital consumer

behavior theory, where online reviews and social validation increasingly shape purchasing decisions. Theoretically, this model advances halal consumer behavior research by integrating religious, experiential, and digital dimensions into a single explanatory framework.

Shifting Model of Consumer Trust in Halal Labels

The last stage for selective coding is obtaining a core concept that explains the shift in the meaning of consumer trust in halal labels, namely, from the original absolute to a more critical and experience-based belief. This shift occurs gradually through a process that involves consumer experience, information, and social interaction. The shift process is reflected in the change in the attitude of informants in interpreting halal labels. The reseller informant revealed that currently, he no longer directly believes in halal labels without conducting additional checks. The two informants also emphasized that trust in products is not only based on halal labels, but is also influenced by other factors such as information transparency, consumer reviews, and product reputation (Bechler et al., 2019).

“Now I am more critical and do not believe it right away.” (Informant TikTok affiliate platform, E.D.A.S).

Meanwhile, online food entrepreneur informants also showed a more cautious attitude in ensuring the halalness of the products used and sold.

“Now be more careful in looking at the halalness of the product.” (Food entrepreneur informant online, M.R).

The model shows that consumer trust is a dynamic process and is not fixed. Beliefs can change along with individual experiences, information obtained, and social interactions experienced. In this context, halal labels are no longer the only source of trust, but rather part of a broader evaluation process. This shift model is in line with halal awareness in the modern era, experiencing development from just a religious obligation to a more complex lifestyle. Consumers not only consider the halal aspect, but also the aspects of transparency, quality, and the experience of other users in forming trust in a product (Scott, R., et al., 2022).

Based on the results of the *selective coding* stage, this study produced a conceptual model that describes the process of shifting the meaning of consumer trust in halal labels. The model is presented in the following image:

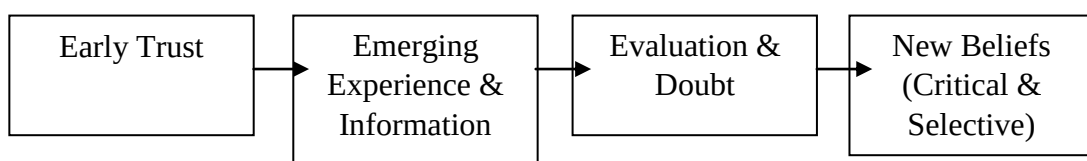


Figure 1. Concept Model of Shifting the Meaning of Consumer Trust

Figure 1 shows that consumer trust has shifted gradually, starting from an initial trust that is absolute, then influenced by experience and information, which gives rise to evaluation and doubt, until finally, a new trust that is more critical and selective is formed. This process confirms that trust in halal labels is dynamic and develops along with consumer experience and access to information.

For researchers at the selective coding stage, this shift shows that trust in halal labels is no longer static, but continues to evolve following changes in the environment and consumer experience. The shift from absolute to more critical trust reflects an increase in consumer awareness and ability to evaluate information. Consumer engagement in the digital ecosystem

is also accelerating the shifting process, as consumers have wider access to other users' information and experiences (Jo & Ahn, 2024). Thus, the meaning of trust in halal labels is no longer only based on religious symbols, but also on rational considerations, experiences, and social interactions that shape the overall consumer perspective.

Beyond describing the categories, this study demonstrates how the Grounded Theory coding process generated a conceptual explanation of trust transformation. Open coding identified initial religious trust as the starting category, axial coding revealed the causal conditions- consumption experience, information transparency, and digital exposure that reshaped consumer perceptions, while selective coding integrated these relationships into a theoretical model of dynamic trust transformation, explaining the progression from absolute trust to critical and experience-based trust. This model extends previous studies, which primarily conceptualized halal labels as symbols of religious assurance or determinants of purchase intention, by demonstrating that trust is continuously reconstructed through interaction between religious values, lived experiences, and digital information. The findings also support earlier research emphasizing transparency and consumer awareness while advancing the literature through a process-oriented explanation rather than a static description of trust. Practically, the model suggests that businesses and halal certification authorities should complement certification with transparent information, digital communication, and consumer engagement strategies to sustain trust in increasingly critical Muslim markets.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that consumer trust in halal labels among young Muslim entrepreneurs has shifted from being absolute and normative to more critical, selective, and experience-based. In the early stages, the halal label is understood as a religious guarantee that is immediately trusted without further verification. However, along with increasing consumption experiences, access to information, and interaction in the digital environment, consumers are beginning to evaluate the validity of halal labels more rationally. The main factors influencing this shift include product experiences that cause doubt, unclear certification information, and the availability of information from digital media and consumer reviews. In this condition, halal labels are no longer the only basis for decision-making, but are considered alongside other factors such as product transparency, reputation, and user experience. Through the Grounded Theory approach, this study resulted in the finding that trust in halal labels is dynamic and formed through the process of interaction between religious values, experiences, and external information. Thus, the meaning of belief in halal labels has evolved from a mere religious symbol to a more complex and evaluative construct. This research contributes theoretically to enriching the study of halal consumer behavior, especially related to trust dynamics, and practically provides implications for business actors and policymakers to improve transparency, certification credibility, and product information quality. Further research is suggested to expand the number of informants and regional coverage to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

This study suggests that, among the two young Muslim entrepreneurs interviewed, trust in halal labels has shifted from immediate acceptance toward a more careful evaluation that considers certification clarity, product transparency, consumer reviews, and personal experience. These findings indicate that halal labels are increasingly interpreted alongside other sources of information rather than being relied upon alone. Given the small qualitative sample, the findings should be understood as an exploratory account rather than evidence of broader consumer trust patterns. The study contributes by providing an initial grounded description of how these informants interpret halal labels in a digital environment. Practically, food businesses should display verifiable halal certification, provide clear ingredient information, and respond transparently to consumer inquiries, while certification authorities should improve

the accessibility of online verification systems. Future studies should involve more diverse participants and multiple regions to examine whether similar patterns emerge across different consumer groups.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank all parties who have provided support in the preparation of this research. Special thanks are expressed to the lecturers of the Creative Economy and Halal Industry course who have provided direction, input, and guidance during the research process until the writing of this article. The author also appreciates the informants who have been willing to take the time and share their experiences and views, so that this research can be carried out well. In addition, thanks are extended to institutions that have provided academic support and facilities in the research process. The author realizes that this research still has limitations, so all constructive criticism and suggestions are highly expected for future research improvements.

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