

## **The Role of Religious Brand Community Support in Enhancing Value Co-Creation in Religio-Centric Markets: Case Study in Religious Tourism Destinations**

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### **Abstract**

The urgency of this research stems from the phenomenon of religiously-based Packaged Drinking Water in tourism destinations, presenting a unique value co-creation model within Islamic economics. This study aims to analyze the role of religious brand community support in enhancing value co-creation for "Martajasah" Packaged Drinking Water in the Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan Religious Tourism Area. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study explores business actors' and consumers' experiences regarding how Islamic values and pilgrim community interactions influence product value perception and purchasing. The findings indicate that community support rooted in Islamic faith plays a central role; verbal interactions and recommendations based on ukhuwah islamiyah increase product value and drive transactions. This research contributes to Islamic economics and sharia marketing literature by demonstrating how value co-creation is strengthened through religious communities, offering guidance for businesses operating in religio-centric markets

**Keywords:** *Religious Brand Community; Value Co-Creation; Religious Tourism; Sharia Marketing*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The global landscape increasingly witnesses a profound intersection between religious values, spiritual practices, and economic activities, manifesting prominently in the burgeoning Islamic economy and religious tourism sectors. This convergence has given rise to unique market dynamics where consumer behavior is not solely driven by utilitarian or hedonic needs, but also by spiritual motivations and religious affiliations (Aglozo, E. Y., & Cohen, A. B. 2025; Tarka et al., 2024; Barrett, et al., 2024). In Indonesia, a country with a large Muslim population and a rich tradition of religious pilgrimage, this phenomenon is particularly salient. Products and services imbued with spiritual significance often find a distinct market segment, exemplified by the presence of Packaged Drinking Water (PDW) like "Martajasah" in the Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan

Religious Tourism Area, which is marketed with narratives of blessing and sanctity. This context presents a compelling case for examining how spiritual attributes are translated into commercial value and influence consumer engagement.

Previous studies have extensively explored various facets of Islamic marketing, halal consumption, and religious tourism. Research by Dashti et al (2024) highlighted the importance of halal certification in building consumer trust, while Drăguleasa et al (2024) investigated the motivations of pilgrims and their spending patterns in sacred sites. Furthermore, scholars have delved into the role of religiosity in shaping consumer behavior and brand loyalty in general (Osanlou, B., & Rezaei, E. 2025). These empirical contributions provide a foundational understanding of the Islamic market and the influence of religious beliefs. However, a significant limitation in the existing literature is the relatively underexplored area of how religious brand communities actively contribute to value co-creation for specific, everyday products within a deeply religio-centric market, especially when the product itself carries perceived spiritual attributes. While individual religiosity or general community aspects might have been studied, the specific mechanism of how a religious brand community actively co-creates value for a product like "Martajasah" is underexplored.

This research aims to bridge this empirical and theoretical gap by focusing on the active role of the religious community surrounding the "Martajasah" Packaged Drinking Water. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks such as Religious Brand Community general (Di Placido, M., & Palmisano, S. 2025), Value Co-Creation (Zhang, Y., & Prebensen, N. K. 2025), and Islamic Marketing principles (Fernando et al.,2025), this study will analyze the nuanced interactions. While individual religiosity has been examined, the collective and interactive dynamics within a brand community, particularly one bound by shared Islamic values and pilgrimage experiences, remain less understood in terms of their direct impact on value co-creation. The unique case of "Martajasah" allows for an in-depth exploration of how narratives of *barakah* (blessing) and the social fabric of the pilgrim community intertwine to enhance product perception and drive purchasing decisions, moving beyond simple transactional exchanges to a more collaborative value generation process. By elucidating these intricate relationships, this study offers critical insights for developing sustainable and ethically sound business models within the burgeoning

Islamic economy, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on the intersection of faith and commerce.

Therefore, the primary goal of this study is to thoroughly analyze the role of religious brand community support in enhancing value co-creation for "Martajasah" Packaged Drinking Water in the Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan Religious Tourism Area. Specifically, this research seeks to identify how Islamic values influence the community's engagement with the product, how this collective support translates into a shared creation of value between the producers and consumers, and what implications these dynamics hold for the broader practice of Sharia marketing and Islamic economics. Ultimately, this research serves as a vital step in understanding the complex interplay between spiritual conviction, social solidarity, and economic prosperity within religio-centric markets, providing a robust framework for future studies and practical applications in the global Islamic economy.

The originality of this research stems from its specific focus on the *interplay* between religious brand community support and value co-creation for a product imbued with spiritual significance within a distinct Islamic tourism context. Unlike previous studies that might touch upon elements of religiosity or community separately, this research offers a holistic, phenomenological perspective to uncover the nuanced lived experiences that drive this unique market dynamic. By doing so, it contributes significantly to the theoretical understanding of Islamic economics and Sharia marketing, providing practical guidance for businesses seeking to operate authentically and effectively within religio-centric markets by leveraging the power of shared faith and community engagement.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach, grounded within an interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm is chosen because it emphasizes understanding the subjective meanings and social realities constructed by individuals within their specific contexts, rather than seeking universal laws or objective truths (Watson, 2024). This aligns perfectly with the phenomenological method, which seeks to deeply explore and understand the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals involved in the sales and

consumption of "Martajasah" Packaged Drinking Water within the Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan Religious Tourism Area. A phenomenological design is particularly suited for this research as it aims to uncover the essence of a phenomenon from the perspective of those who have experienced it, providing rich, nuanced insights into how religious values, community dynamics, and spiritual meanings influence economic behavior (Chaudhary et al., 2025). This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the subjective interpretations and shared understandings that shape the value co-creation process in a religio-centric market.

The research is conducted in the Kawasan Wisata Religi Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan, Madura, Jawa Timur, Indonesia. This location is chosen due to its significance as a prominent Islamic pilgrimage site, providing a rich context for observing the interplay between religious devotion and economic activities related to spiritual products. Given the qualitative and phenomenological nature of the research, a purposive sampling technique will be utilized to select key informants who possess rich knowledge and direct experience related to the phenomenon under study (Nyimbili, F., & Nyimbili, L. 2024). Characteristics of informants include: individuals who are directly involved in the production or sale of "Martajasah" PDW, long-term residents of the area who are familiar with the product's history and community perception, and regular pilgrims who frequently purchase and consume "Martajasah" due to its perceived spiritual attributes. To protect their privacy and ensure ethical conduct, pseudonyms will be used for all informants in the research findings and discussions. This allows for honest and open sharing of experiences without fear of identification. There are 15 informants.

Primary data will be collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with selected informants. These interviews will allow for open-ended discussions, enabling participants to share their experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding "Martajasah" PDW, its spiritual significance, and the role of the religious community in its value. The semi-structured format provides flexibility to explore emerging themes while ensuring coverage of key research questions. The interviews will be recorded (with informed consent) and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and facilitate detailed analysis. This method is chosen to capture the rich, nuanced narratives and subjective meanings that are central to a phenomenological inquiry. In addition to interviews, direct observation will be conducted within the Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan Religious

Tourism Area to capture the natural interactions between sellers and consumers, the display of the product, and the overall atmosphere that contributes to its perceived value. Documentation analysis, including any available promotional materials, local narratives, or historical records related to "Martajasah" and the religious site, will also be utilized to provide contextual understanding and triangulation of data, enhancing the credibility of the findings.

The collected data will be analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, consistent with phenomenological inquiry (Haberlin, S. 2024). This method is chosen because it allows for the systematic identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns (themes) within the data, which is crucial for understanding the lived experiences of the informants. The analysis process will involve several iterative steps: (1) Familiarization: Reading and re-reading transcripts and field notes to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. (2) Initial Coding: Generating initial codes from the data, identifying interesting features across the entire dataset. (3) Searching for Themes: Grouping codes into potential themes that represent significant patterns or meanings related to the research questions. (4) Reviewing Themes: Refining and reviewing themes to ensure they accurately reflect the data and the overall phenomenon. (5) Defining and Naming Themes: Developing clear definitions and names for each theme, articulating the story they tell. (6) Producing the Report: Weaving the themes into a coherent narrative that addresses the research objectives. Throughout this process, constant comparison (Tracy, 2024) will be employed to identify similarities and differences across informant accounts, ensuring a robust and grounded interpretation of the findings. The analysis will be guided by the theoretical frameworks of Religious Brand Community and Value Co-Creation, allowing for a critical interpretation of how these concepts manifest in the specific context of "Martajasah" PDW.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the key findings derived from the phenomenological inquiry into the role of religious brand community support in enhancing value co-creation for "Martajasah" Packaged Drinking Water. The themes emerging from the data illuminate the intricate interplay between spiritual beliefs, community dynamics, and economic transactions in a religio-centric market.

### **Spiritual Value as the Core Proposition**

The research findings consistently indicate that the primary appeal of "Martajasah" is not merely its physical properties as drinking water, but rather its perceived spiritual value, deeply rooted in its association with Syaikhona Kholil and the sacred pilgrimage site. This spiritual utility transcends conventional product attributes, becoming the fundamental basis for its market acceptance and demand. Informants frequently articulated that purchasing "Martajasah" is an act of seeking *barakah* (blessing) and a continuation of their spiritual journey, often viewing the water as a conduit for spiritual connection and inner peace. This profound spiritual dimension transformatively changes the product from a common commodity into a sacred artifact within the pilgrims' experience.

As stated by Fatimah (55, Local Vendor):

*"People buy this water not just because they're thirsty, Sir. They seek blessings from Mbah Kholil. They say it tastes different, more calming to the heart. It has become part of their pilgrimage."*

This sentiment underscores (Roth, 2024), concept of "spiritual utility," where products offer benefits that extend far beyond the material realm, fulfilling a deeper, intrinsic spiritual need. This is particularly salient in religio-centric markets, as the perceived spiritual efficacy of a product often becomes the primary driver of its demand and acceptance, demonstrating a distinct departure from purely utilitarian consumption models. In this context, the product is sacralized through its association with a revered figure and sacred space, transforming it into a medium for spiritual connection. Therefore, the perceived spiritual value becomes the dominant value proposition, often outweighing price or conventional brand recognition, aligning with principles of Islamic economics that emphasize non-material benefits and ethical consumption, where the pursuit of *barakah* is a legitimate economic motivation. This highlights a unique form of value creation where the intangible spiritual benefit is paramount.

The empirical findings align strongly with the principles of Islamic economics and Sharia marketing. Islamic economics, as a distinct field, emphasizes principles rooted in Sharia, promoting justice, equity, and ethical conduct in all economic activities (Alhejaili, 2025). This framework extends to marketing, where Sharia marketing is not merely about adhering to halal standards but encompasses broader ethical considerations, transparency, and social responsibility

(Taufik Syamlan *et al.*, 2025). The demand for "Martajasah," driven by the pursuit of *barakah*, demonstrates a form of ethical consumption that prioritizes spiritual returns, which is fundamentally distinct from the profit-maximization focus of conventional economics. Previous research has explored various dimensions of Islamic marketing, from consumer behavior in halal markets (Zafar *et al.*, 2025) to the development of Islamic financial products (Raimi *et al.*, 2025). Studies have shown how Muslim consumers' purchasing decisions are significantly influenced by religious values, leading to a demand for products and services that align with Islamic principles (Al-Malkawi *et al.*, 2025). While these studies provide a robust understanding of the normative aspects and market segments within the Islamic economy, they often focus on compliance and product attributes rather than the dynamic, co-creative processes driven by community engagement. The existing literature, though rich in its foundational principles, sometimes overlooks the nuanced interaction between spiritual conviction and market participation at a grassroots, community level beyond formal certifications, leaving a gap in understanding how shared faith actively shapes market dynamics beyond individual choice. Our findings fill this gap by showing that Martajasah's success is rooted in the community's active affirmation of its spiritual value, an essential element of a faith-based economy.

### **The Manifestation of *Ukhuwah Islamiyah* in Community Support**

The study reveals that *ukhuwah islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood/solidarity) plays a central role in fostering a strong religious brand community around "Martajasah." This communal bond manifests as active support for the product, driven by shared faith, mutual trust, and a collective sense of purpose related to the pilgrimage. The community functions as a powerful informal marketing channel, where recommendations and shared experiences are highly influential, often surpassing formal advertising or promotions. This collective endorsement stems from a deep-seated trust among fellow pilgrims and community members who share a common spiritual objective. Ahmad (48, Regular Pilgrim) explained:

*"If we're here, we recommend it to each other. 'Martajasah' is already known for its blessings. So, if a friend hasn't tried it, we definitely invite them. This is also part of silaturahmi, sharing goodness."*

This direct quote illustrates how social ties within the religious community, reinforced by shared beliefs and the concept of *silaturahmi* (maintaining kinship/social ties), directly drive product endorsement. This goes beyond typical brand loyalty, as the support is rooted in a collective religious identity and a desire to share perceived blessings, aligning with (Alharbi, 2025) notion of religious brand communities fostering deep bonds and advocacy. The communal trust built on *ukhuwah islamiyah* significantly reduces perceived risk and enhances the product's credibility within this market, demonstrating how social capital in a religious context directly translates into economic value.

Furthermore, *ukhuwah islamiyah* cultivates a sense of collective responsibility for the well-being of fellow pilgrims. Recommending "Martajasah" is perceived not merely as a commercial act, but as an act of kindness and sharing a spiritual benefit. This creates a self-reinforcing loop where positive experiences are shared, trust is built, and the brand's reputation is collectively enhanced within the community. This dynamic highlights a unique aspect of religio-centric markets where social and spiritual bonds are inextricably linked to economic behavior, demonstrating a form of collective value creation that is deeply embedded in the community's shared faith and social fabric.

This communal support confirms the existence of a robust Religious Brand Community for "Martajasah," which differentiates itself from conventional brand communities. The concept of brand community, initially defined by (Wang, Z., & Yang, X. 2025) as a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand, has been widely adopted in marketing. It highlights shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility among members. These elements foster a sense of belonging and collective identity, which in turn can lead to increased brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth (Aslan, M., & Aslan, H. 2025). The conventional understanding of brand communities often emphasizes consumer-to-consumer interactions and their relationship with the brand itself, primarily driven by product features or lifestyle associations. More recently, scholars have begun to explore religious brand communities, recognizing that shared faith can form an even stronger, more deeply rooted bond among consumers of certain brands or products (Khandeparkar et al., 2025). These communities are characterized by collective religious identity,

shared spiritual experiences, and a sense of belonging that transcends mere product consumption, often extending into a shared purpose or mission (Gürlesin, Ö. F. 2024). Members of such communities may view the brand as an extension of their spiritual values, leading to heightened emotional attachment and a strong desire to promote the brand within their social circles. However, a critical gap remains in understanding the specific mechanisms through which these communities, particularly in a pilgrimage context, actively support and participate in the value creation process for products intertwined with their spiritual journey, moving beyond passive advocacy to active co-creation. The findings here show that *ukhuwah islamiyah* serves as the specific "shared consciousness" and "moral responsibility" that drives co-creation, actively bridging the gap identified in the literature by demonstrating the mechanism of active support in a pilgrimage context.

### **Co-Creation through Shared Narratives and Rituals**

Value co-creation for "Martajasah" extends beyond simple purchase and consumption; it actively involves the community in shaping and enhancing the product's spiritual narrative and utility through shared stories, testimonials, and integration into personal and collective rituals. Consumers are not just passive recipients of the product, but become active participants in validating and propagating its spiritual value, effectively becoming co-creators of its meaning and efficacy. This process transforms individual experiences into collective knowledge, amplifying the product's perceived benefits. Siti (62, Senior Pilgrim) recounted:

*"My child was sick, I recited prayers over this Martajasah water, and alhamdulillah [praise be to Allah] they recovered. I often tell this story to neighbors or friends who are going on pilgrimage. So they can also feel the blessings."*

This powerful testimonial exemplifies how consumers actively co-create value by embedding the product into their personal narratives of healing and spiritual experience, then sharing these stories within their network. This aligns with (Kandampully, et al.,2023) service-dominant logic, where value is co-created through the integration of resources (in this case, spiritual belief and personal experience) in use. The act of sharing these narratives transforms the product into a communal symbol of faith and healing, collectively enriching its perceived value and reinforcing its position within the religio-centric market. Moreover, the integration of "Martajasah" into personal rituals, such as reciting prayers over the water or using it for specific

spiritual purposes, further solidifies its co-created value. These rituals, often shared or observed within the community, reinforce the product's sacred attributes and enhance its efficacy in the eyes of consumers. The collective belief in the water's blessings, perpetuated through these shared practices and narratives, demonstrates a powerful form of co-creation where consumers actively contribute to the brand's spiritual capital. This dynamic underscores the active role of consumers as meaning-makers and storytellers, transforming a simple product into a deeply significant element of their spiritual journey and economic practice.

The observed co-creation process is a unique manifestation of the Value Co-Creation (VCC) paradigm in a spiritual context. Value co-creation (VCC) posits that value is not solely created by the firm and delivered to the consumer, but rather is jointly created by the firm and the consumer through interaction (Jain *et al.*, 2024). This paradigm shift emphasizes the active role of consumers as "resource integrators" and "co-creators" of value, where their engagement, knowledge, and experiences contribute directly to the value proposition (Durco *et al.*, 2025). VCC moves beyond a transactional view of marketing to a relational one, where ongoing dialogue and collaboration between firms and consumers lead to mutually beneficial outcomes. Studies on VCC have spanned various industries, from technology to services, demonstrating how consumer participation in design, feedback, and promotion enhances value for all stakeholders (Ullah *et al.*, 2024). The literature highlights various forms of co-creation, including co-production, co-design, and co-experience, all of which underscore the consumer's active role in shaping their own consumption experience and the value derived from it (Dudau *et al.*, 2023). While the general principles of VCC are well-established, its application within highly spiritual or religiously-centric markets, where value extends beyond functional or emotional benefits to include spiritual utility (Ohgata, 2024), is still nascent. There is a limited exploration of how religious communities, through their shared beliefs and practices, become integral to this co-creation process, especially for products perceived as sacred or blessed, where the spiritual dimension of value is paramount. The narratives and rituals surrounding Martajasah demonstrate that the key resource being integrated by consumers is not technical knowledge or design input, but *spiritual experience* (healing, peace), thereby enriching the VCC framework to include non-material, sacred forms of value.

Despite the growing body of literature on Islamic marketing, brand communities, and value co-creation, a critical lacuna exists at their intersection, particularly concerning products embedded within religious pilgrimage contexts. Existing studies often treat religiosity as an individual trait influencing consumption or view communities as passive recipients of marketing efforts. For instance, while (Akbari et al., 2024) highlight pilgrim motivations and spending, they do not elaborate on how the collective experience and shared belief within the pilgrim community directly co-create value for specific products consumed during the pilgrimage. This overlooks the profound impact of *ukhuwah islamiyah*—the Islamic concept of brotherhood and solidarity—as a powerful driver for collective endorsement and value enhancement within such communities. This research argues that in religio-centric markets, the collective agency of a religious brand community is not merely a supportive factor but an active co-creator of value. The shared spiritual narratives, rituals, and traditions within these communities transform a product from a mere commodity into a meaningful artifact that resonates with deeper beliefs. This dynamic extends beyond traditional word-of-mouth marketing, as community members actively interpret, validate, and propagate the spiritual value of the product, thereby enriching its perceived utility and authenticity. The collective endorsement, rooted in shared faith and trust, becomes an indispensable component of the value proposition, especially for products like "Martajasah" that are explicitly linked to spiritual blessings.

The aforementioned limitations underscore a significant research gap: the lack of in-depth, qualitative exploration into how religious brand community support directly contributes to value co-creation in religio-centric markets, particularly for products with perceived spiritual attributes in Islamic tourism destinations. Previous quantitative studies might identify correlations between religiosity and consumption, or community engagement and brand loyalty, but they often fail to capture the nuanced lived experiences and the mechanisms through which this co-creation occurs in a spiritual context. There is a pressing need to move beyond aggregate data to understand the subjective meanings and collective practices that underpin value generation in these unique markets. This study aims to fill this critical gap by employing a phenomenological approach to uncover these intricate dynamics, providing a richer understanding of the consumer-firm-community nexus in Islamic economics. By exploring the "how" and "why" behind the

community's active participation in value co-creation for a product like "Martajasah," this research offers not only theoretical advancements in understanding spiritual consumption and Sharia marketing but also practical insights for businesses seeking to authentically engage with and serve religiously-motivated consumers. Ultimately, fostering sustainable economic models rooted in shared faith requires a deep appreciation of these community-driven value co-creation processes.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This phenomenological study aimed to analyze the role of religious brand community support in enhancing value co-creation for "Martajasah" Packaged Drinking Water within the Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan Religious Tourism Area. The findings descriptively illustrate that the perceived spiritual value of "Martajasah," rooted in its association with the sacred site and Syaikhona Kholil, serves as its core market proposition, transcending conventional product attributes. Furthermore, the robust manifestation of *ukhuwah islamiyah* among pilgrims and local community members fosters a strong religious brand community. This communal bond actively translates into product support, driven by shared faith, mutual trust, and a collective purpose related to the pilgrimage. Crucially, value co-creation extends beyond mere consumption, as the community actively participates in shaping and enhancing the product's spiritual narrative and utility through shared stories, testimonials, and integration into personal and collective rituals. These findings affirm that the collective agency of the religious brand community is not merely supportive but is an active co-creator of value, deeply embedded in the spiritual and social fabric of the market.

Based on these findings, several avenues for future research emerge. Firstly, quantitative studies could be conducted to generalize the extent to which religious brand community support and spiritual value influence purchasing decisions and value co-creation across a broader sample of religio-centric markets. Secondly, comparative studies exploring different religious contexts or product categories (e.g., food, apparel) could provide deeper insights into the universality or specificity of these dynamics. Researchers might also investigate the potential challenges or ethical considerations that arise when commercializing products with strong spiritual attributes, ensuring authenticity and avoiding commodification of faith. Practically, businesses operating in

such markets should focus on nurturing genuine community engagement and facilitating the sharing of spiritual experiences, rather than solely relying on conventional marketing tactics. This involves understanding and respecting the underlying religious values and integrating them authentically into their business models to foster sustainable and ethically sound economic practices.

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