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Sport, Spirituality, and Brand Experience: Examining Marathon Participant Loyalty in the Contemporary Islamic Lifestyle Ecosystem

Abstract: This study examines the interconnections among sport, spirituality, and brand experience in shaping marathon participants' loyalty within the contemporary Islamic lifestyle ecosystem. The increasing emergence of Islamic-themed marathons—incorporating elements of da'wah, charity, and halal-oriented community engagement—indicates that sporting events are no longer perceived solely as arenas of physical competition. Instead, they function as spaces for meaning-making, spiritual connection, and the expression of modern religious identity. Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, this study explores how participants interpret and narrate their experiences in Islamic-themed marathon events. Particular attention is given to how the event's religious atmosphere, embedded spiritual values, and participants' interactions with the organisers' symbols, narratives, and identities cultivate emotional attachment. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and analysis of digital documents related to various Islamic running events, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of lived experiences and symbolic engagement. The findings reveal that both personal and communal dimensions of spirituality play a crucial role in reinforcing emotional bonds between participants and event organisers. These bonds extend beyond satisfaction with event quality, shaping a more profound sense of belonging, shared purpose, and value alignment. As a result, participants demonstrate stronger intentions to re-participate and to recommend the events within their social networks. This study contributes to Islamic marketing and consumer culture scholarship by highlighting how contemporary sports practices can be strategically integrated with spiritual values. It shows that within the expanding Islamic lifestyle industry, brand loyalty can be cultivated not only through functional or experiential benefits but also through spiritually meaningful engagement.

Keywords: Brand Experience, *Halal* Branding, Islamic Lifestyle, Marathon Loyalty, Spirituality.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Islamic lifestyle has undergone rapid development and become an integral part of the social identity of the contemporary Muslim generation. These developments are evident not only in the consumption of *halal* products, Muslim fashion, and Islamic financial services, but also in sports activities. This phenomenon is evident in the growing number of marathons with Islamic nuances, such as *halal* runs, Islamic marathons, or charity runs that incorporate spiritual elements, moral messages, and religious symbols throughout the series of events. For many participants, this kind of marathon is not just a physical activity, but a space to express religious identity while strengthening spiritual connectedness through experiences that unite the values of worship, community, and fitness.¹

This shift in the orientation of marathon participants aligns with the contemporary era's change of consumption patterns, where consumers seek not only functional benefits but also holistic experiences that encompass emotional, social, and even spiritual aspects. This is explained through the concept of brand experience, as developed by Bernd Schmitt, which posits that sensory, affective, cognitive, and behavioural experiences can foster a deep attachment and ultimately influence loyalty.² In the context of an Islamic marathon, the brand experience is formed not only through the design of the event, the quality of service, or the facilities provided by the organisers, but also through the religious atmosphere, symbols of Muslim identity, and community interactions that strengthen the spiritual dimension of the participants.³

Although this phenomenon is increasingly prevalent, academic research that combines sports, spirituality, and brand experience remains relatively scarce. Studies on

¹ Dini Salmiyah Fithrah Ali et al., 'Customer Loyalty in Halal Fashion Brand: The Role of Social Information Processing and Brand Personality', *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication* 41, no. 2 (2025), <http://ejournal.ukm.my/mjc/article/view/71080>.

² Bernd Schmitt, 'Experiential Marketing', *Journal of Marketing Management* 15, nos 1-3 (1999): 53-67, <https://doi.org/10.1362/026725799784870496>.

³ Arshia Mukhtar and Muhammad Mohsin Butt, 'Intention to Choose Halal Products: The Role of Religiosity', *Journal of Islamic Marketing* 3, no. 2 (2012): 108-120, <https://doi.org/10.1108/17590831211232519>.

Muslim consumer spirituality and behaviour have indeed evolved, as shown by Asiyah & Hariri (2021), who found that religiosity can increase consumer trust, satisfaction, and commitment to a brand.⁴ However, these studies still focus on Islamic banking, *halal* tourism, or consumer products and have not yet entered the realm of sports.

On the other hand, the sports marketing literature emphasises physical motivation, community engagement, quality of service, and event satisfaction. Research by Imran Tahir and Mark Brimble shows that positive experiences in sports events do affect participant loyalty.⁵ However, these studies generally did not consider the religious dimensions that might influence the participants' knowledge, even though spirituality can be a decisive factor in physical activity such as marathons. This is reinforced by the findings of Corneillia and Luke (2021), who explain that intense physical activity can lead to profound spiritual experiences.⁶ Meanwhile, research on Islamic lifestyles and experiential Islamic marketing is also growing. Mutmainah and Muhammad Ryan Romadhon (2023) demonstrate that religious symbols and spiritual values play a crucial role in shaping Muslim consumer engagement and loyalty.⁷ However, these studies primarily focus on consumer products, such as fashion, *halal* cosmetics, or *halal* food and beverages. No study has examined how these spiritual values shape participants' experiences and loyalty at sports events with an Islamic identity.

Thus, a significant gap exists: no research has examined how sport, spirituality, and brand experience shape loyalty among marathon participants within the contemporary Islamic lifestyle ecosystem. In fact, the SSMarathon event with Islamic nuances continues

⁴ Siti Asiyah and Hariri Hariri, 'Perilaku Konsumen Berdasarkan Religiusitas: Consumer Behavior Based on Religiosity', *Perisai: Islamic Banking and Finance Journal* 5, no. 2 (2021): 154-163, <https://doi.org/10.21070/perisai.v5i2.1533>.

⁵ Imran Tahir and Mark Brimble, 'Islamic Investment Behaviour', *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management* 4, no. 2 (2011): 116-130, <https://doi.org/10.1108/17538391111144515>.

⁶ Jessica Sophie Corneille and David Luke, 'Spontaneous Spiritual Awakenings: Phenomenology, Altered States, Individual Differences, and Well-Being', *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (August 2021): 720579, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.720579>.

⁷ Mutmainah and Muhammad Ryan Romadhon, 'Influence of Halal Lifestyle, Islamic Branding, and Social Media Marketing on Muslim Fashion Purchasing Decisions', *Airlangga Journal of Innovation Management* 4, no. 2 (2023): 158-171, <https://doi.org/10.20473/ajim.v4i2.49714>.

to grow and is increasingly competitive, so a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that determine participant loyalty is needed. Departing from this gap, this research is formulated around the central question: How does the relationship between sports, spirituality, and brand experience shape the loyalty of marathon participants in the contemporary Islamic lifestyle ecosystem? This question aims to determine the extent to which spiritual values enhance participants' brand experiences and how those experiences influence their likelihood of attending similar events in the future.

This research is expected to make two main contributions. Theoretically, this study expands the scope of Islamic marketing studies by including the context of sports as a medium of spiritual expression and brand experience. The integration of Islamic marketing literature, brand experience, and sports marketing presents new perspectives that have not been extensively explored in previous research. In practice, this research provides insight for marathon organisers and Muslim lifestyle industry players on designing events that are not only physically appealing but also offer authentic and meaningful spiritual experiences. By understanding the factors that shape participant loyalty, organisers can develop more effective branding strategies, foster strong community engagement, and maximise the potential of Islamic marathons as a vital part of the Islamic lifestyle ecosystem in the modern era.

METHOD

This study employs a phenomenological qualitative approach to capture the experiences of marathon participants involved in various events with an Islamic lifestyle theme. This approach was chosen because it allowed researchers to understand how participants narrated their running experience not only as a physical activity, but also as a space for spiritual encounter, personal reflection, and a form of self-identification with Islamic values that was built into the event by the organisers. Informants were selected through purposive sampling⁸ with the criteria of having participated in a marathon with

⁸ Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Analisis Data Kualitatif: Buku Sumber Tentang Metode Metode Baru* (Universitas Indonesia Press, 2014).

Islamic nuances, such as Islamic Run, *Halal* Marathon, or Sharia Charity Run. The number of informants is flexible and develops gradually until researchers find patterns of meaning that are repeated or achieve data saturation, typically ranging from 12 to 20 informants from various backgrounds, including individual runners, community members, and organising committees.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, direct field observations, and the review of documents and digital content, including promotional materials, social media posts, and recordings of community activities. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, allowing informants to share their experiences more freely, express their impressions of the event's atmosphere, and explain the reasons they returned to participate in similar events. All data were then analysed using thematic analysis, following coding, pattern identification, and theme formation to examine the relationship among the spiritual dimension, the organiser's brand experience, and participant loyalty. The validity of the findings is maintained through triangulation, member checking, and transparent documentation of the analysis process. With this approach, the research aims to provide a comprehensive, nuanced, and contextual understanding of how marathon sports can serve as a meeting space for religiosity, emotional experiences, and social bonds within the contemporary Islamic lifestyle ecosystem.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Islamic Marathon in the Current of Contemporary Lifestyle: A New Space for Self-Expression and Religious Identity

The emergence of marathons with Islamic nuances has become an interesting phenomenon in today's urban Muslim lifestyle landscape. Activities that were once viewed as arenas of physical competition have now evolved into forums for openly expressing values, identity, and spirituality. The contemporary Muslim generation no longer sees sports as a separate entity from religious life; instead, the Islamic marathon provides a new space to celebrate piety through a more active, creative, and social medium. This

transformation is also influenced by the visual culture of social media, which encourages sports activities to align with modern *halal* aesthetics. Running content, photos of bib numbers with Islamic nuances, and merchandise with spiritual messages are part of a digital narrative that combines health, faith, and self-image. In this environment, marathons not only shape sports routines but also expand young people's sense of religious togetherness in public spaces.⁹

For many participants, Islamic marathons create a more lively and personal spiritual experience. Elements such as opening prayers, the chanting of holy verses, or *da'wah* messages along the running route present an atmosphere that reinforces the meaning of the physical and mental journey.¹⁰ This experience fosters a sense of closeness to religious values without requiring formal worship spaces, a dynamic that is particularly relevant to the tendency of contemporary spirituality to be more fluid and flexible.¹¹ In addition to the spiritual dimension, the Islamic marathon also serves as a space for constructing a more inclusive religious identity. Attendees can celebrate a healthy lifestyle without feeling detached from Sharia values, while the organisers package the event in a community- and women-friendly format that maintains *halal* principles. This combination emphasises that the modern lifestyle can be synergised with the natural Islamic ethos.

In the context of the Islamic lifestyle ecosystem, marathons act as a bridge between the *halal* industry, the digital community, and Muslim popular culture. Sharia brands, Muslim-run communities, and *halal* influencers also provide new elements that enrich the participants' experience. This collaboration is not just a marketing strategy but also a representation of how religious values are articulated through the cultural medium preferred by the younger generation. The involvement of participants in Islamic marathons also demonstrates how sport fosters a sense of community belonging. Encounters with

⁹ Salahudin Salahudin and Rabwan Satriawan, 'Olahraga Lari Dalam Pandangan Agama Islam', *Jurnal Pendidikan Olahraga* 12, no. 1 (2022): 17-27, <https://doi.org/10.37630/jpo.v12i1.1139>.

¹⁰ Joko, 'Personal Interview', 2025.

¹¹ Mingtao Wang et al., 'The Multidimensional Attractiveness of Marathon Events: How Self-Efficacy Bridges Perception to Participation', *Frontiers in Psychology* 16 (August 2025), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1649195>.

fellow Muslim runners, interactions during joint preparations, or participation in social activities around the event create social bonds that strengthen loyalty to the event. For many participants, the marathon is not just about the finish line, but about a collective journey that strengthens religious solidarity.¹²

At the same time, the event's design, which conveys the message of *da'wah* and charity, adds an ethical dimension that enhances the participants' experience. Running while donating or participating in a humanitarian campaign gives a sense of meaning that goes beyond the sport itself. This aspect aligns the Islamic marathon more closely with the contemporary Muslim generation's value orientation, which prioritises social benefits and community engagement. Participation in events like this also shapes how participants understand the relationship among the body, faith, and well-being. Sharia-based fitness movements, *halal* nutrition education, or Islamic health campaigns expand the scope of a healthy lifestyle beyond the physical to include the spiritual and emotional. A marathon is a meeting point between modern health aspirations and inner needs, framed by Islamic values.

In a broader sense, the Islamic marathon exemplifies how the medium of sports can serve as a platform for recontextualising religious values to make them relevant to the pace of modern life. Running is no longer just a routine activity, but a form of spiritual engagement that complements a car, fast-paced, and digital lifestyle, yet remains rooted in meaningful values.¹³ This phenomenon ultimately shows that the Islamic marathon is not just a temporary trend, but an expression of a shift in religious culture in Muslim urban society. Through this event, participants experienced a deeper integration of faith, community, lifestyle, and self-expression, while also demonstrating how sport can serve as a powerful spiritual and social medium within the contemporary Islamic lifestyle ecosystem.

¹² Salahudin Salahudin and Rusdin Rusdin, 'Olahraga Meneurut Pandangan Agama Islam', *JISIP (Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Pendidikan)* 4, no. 3 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.58258/jisip.v4i3.1236>.

¹³ Nibrosu Rohid et al., 'Digital Activism in Contemporary Islamic Politics: A Critical Analysis of Social Media's Impact on Islamic Movements', *MILRev: Metro Islamic Law Review* 4, no. 1 (2025): 208-233, <https://doi.org/10.32332/milrev.v4i1.10159>.

Table 1. Comparison of Characteristics of Conventional Marathon and Contemporary Islamic Marathon

Aspects	Conventional Marathon	Contemporary Islamic Marathon
Activity Orientation	Focus on physical performance and competition	Physical-spiritual-community synergy
Participant Identity	General, without religious symbols	An openly and inclusive Muslim identity
Event Experience	Neutral, without religious overtones	Opening prayer, <i>da'wah</i> message, Islamic atmosphere
Branding	Commercial, market-oriented	<i>Halal</i> branding and integrated sharia values
The Meaning of Participation	Personal achievements	Social worship, health, and the expression of faith
The Role of Community	Varied, not based on religious values	A solid and supportive Muslim running community

Source: Author's Interpretation

The table illustrates the fundamental differences between conventional marathons and contemporary Islamic marathons, emphasising that Islamic-nuanced marathons are not merely cosmetic modifications but reflect a more profound cultural transformation. Conventional marathons generally focus on physical performance, competition, and commercial branding, while contemporary Islamic marathons offer a more holistic experience by combining spiritual values, religious symbols, and a sense of community. Elements such as opening prayers, *da'wah* messages, and religious atmosphere provide additional meaning for participants, making running activities a means of worship, reflection, and expression of modern Muslim identity. Similarly, the presence of *halal* branding and Islamic values-based running communities enriches the participants' experience and builds loyalty rooted in emotional closeness and spiritual meaning, rather than just the satisfaction of participating in the event. This table clearly illustrates how Islamic marathons are evolving into a lifestyle phenomenon that not only nourishes the body but also fosters connections with religious values and stronger social solidarity among participants.

Spirituality Running in the Modern World: Between Personal Reflection and Communal Connectivity

In a fast-paced, stressful urban world, spiritual experience often shifts from formal ritual spaces to more flexible, personalised, and relevant forms that align with the rhythms of modern life.¹⁴ The Islamic marathon, which has gained popularity in recent years, is one area where this shift is evident. Running, commonly understood as a physical fitness activity, has evolved into a means of seeking meaning, a space for contemplation, and a way to foster a sense of connection with God and others.¹⁵ This subchapter examines how participants in the marathon with Islamic nuances experience these forms of spirituality in a more fluid, natural, and relevant manner, in accordance with the needs of the contemporary Muslim generation.¹⁶

For many participants, spirituality in a marathon emerges from the most basic experience: the rhythm of steps, heart rate, and breath that come together in harmony. These repetitive, stable physical moments create a calmer state of mind, as if opening a new space for dialogue with oneself. An informant recounted this experience reflectively: "It is strange, actually, but when I run, I feel the calmest. There was a pause in my mind that made me feel very close to God, without having to say a verbal prayer."¹⁷ Narratives like this show that the personal reflection that arises while running is not planned but flows naturally as the body moves.

However, such spiritual experiences are not limited to personal silence. The Islamic Marathon creates a broader landscape in which communal energy becomes an integral part of the participant's experience. From the moment it began, with the opening prayer being

¹⁴ Mohammad Yaskun et al., 'The Effect of Market Orientation, Entrepreneurial Orientation, Innovation and Competitive Advantage on Business Performance of Indonesian MSMEs', *International Journal of Professional Business Review: Int. J. Prof. Bus. Rev.* 8, no. 4 (2023): 39.

¹⁵ Daniel E. Lieberman et al., 'Running in Tarahumara (Rarámuri) Culture: Persistence Hunting, Footracing, Dancing, Work, and the Fallacy of the Athletic Savage', *Current Anthropology* 61, no. 3 (2020): 356-379, <https://doi.org/10.1086/708810>.

¹⁶ Salahudin Salahudin and Rabwan Satriawan, 'Olahraga Lari Dalam Pandangan Agama Islam', *Jurnal Pendidikan Olahraga* 12, no. 1 (2022): 17-27, <https://doi.org/10.37630/jpo.v12i1.1139>.

¹⁷ Andre, 'Personal Interview', 2025.

chanted and participants raising their hands in unison, a warm, religious atmosphere was immediately felt. The participants described this atmosphere as a moment that brought them together and strengthened them, as they were not only running as individuals but also as part of a Muslim community with a common goal. One participant said, "When everyone says amenism together, it feels like they are embarking on a spiritual journey together, not just a running race."¹⁸

This communal atmosphere continues to form along the running route. Many participants said that support from other runners, even from people they did not know, provided strong emotional motivation.¹⁹ When participants slow down, someone else is almost always there to encourage them to continue. When a participant pauses to calm their breath, the committee or volunteers usually offer motivational speeches, water, or a smile. The participants then understand this mutually supportive energy as part of a form of social worship—a practice of helping in kindness. "I feel that I am practising the teachings of Islam, not only through prayer, but through small actions such as encouraging others," said one participant.²⁰

The spiritual experience in the Islamic marathon is also enriched by the contemporary elements that are part of the event's aesthetic. Modern Islamic music with energetic beats plays in the start and finish areas, creating a passionate religious atmosphere. Creative *da'wah* visuals are disseminated through banners, LED animations, and digital content shared on the organisers' social media platforms. Many participants admitted that these aesthetic elements made the religious atmosphere feel closer to the tastes and rhythms of the younger generation. "The remix version of Shalawat that was played made the atmosphere syahdu but still speeding. It really suits the vibe of young people now," said one of the informants with a laugh.²¹

¹⁸ Badrun Tamam, 'Personal Interview', 2025.

¹⁹ Valeria Melis, 'Some Reflections on the Legend of the Marathon Runner (Hdt. 6.105, Aristoph. Nub. 63-67, Plut. de Glor. Ath. 347c, Lucian. Laps. 3 and the Roman Tradition)', *Classica Cracoviensia* 23 (August 2020): 25-54, <https://doi.org/10.12797/CC.23.2020.23.02>.

²⁰ Indah, 'Personal Interview', 2025.

²¹ Rudi, 'Personal Interview', 2025.

On the other hand, the connection between Islamic marathons and social agendas, such as charity, deepens participants' spiritual experience. Many events feature donation programs that support mosque construction, humanitarian aid, or educational initiatives for underprivileged children. Participation in the program gives participants a sense of purpose, as they feel that every step they take has a positive impact on others. One of the informants explained, "I joined because part of the registration money was used for social programs. So it feels like this run is not only for yourself, but also to help others. It makes the running experience more meaningful."²²

Marathon Islami also provides a very inclusive space for a diverse range of participants. Some runners are very religious, considering marathons a form of physical worship; others participate to maintain their health; others come because they are interested in jersey design or community, or because they want to experience a different atmosphere. This versatility of purpose makes Islamic marathons feel close to modern Muslim life, which tends to seek a religious experience that is non-judgmental, non-exclusive, and enjoyable by everyone. This is what makes the spirituality that emerges feel more natural and inherent in everyday experience.²³

Some participants emphasised that the spirituality they felt did not always have to be present in a ritualistic form. They said that smiles from fellow runners, warm greetings from volunteers, or simply a sense of togetherness among thousands of participants are expressions of faith that are no less powerful. One informant described this very emotionally: "I don't memorise many prayers, but when I see everyone helping each other and respecting each other, that's when I feel that Islam is very alive. Not from the sentences we speak, but from how we treat others."²⁴ This narrative demonstrates that communal spirituality plays a significant role in the experience of participating in an Islamic marathon.

²² Susi, 'Personal Interview', 2025.

²³ Adithya Yohannes Manurung et al., 'Pelari Kalcer: Antara Identitas, Eksistensi, dan Gaya Hidup', *JIMU: Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisipliner* 4, no. 01 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.70294/jimu.v4i01.1365>.

²⁴ Anisa, 'Personal Interview', 2025.

This whole set of experiences—personal reflection, communal energy, social values, contemporary aesthetics, and inclusive religious expression—forms a distinctive picture of modern spirituality.²⁵ For many participants, the Islamic marathon is not just a sporting activity but an emotional journey that strengthens their connection to Islamic values in a more tangible, relatable way, bringing them closer to everyday life. The Islamic Marathon provides a space for generations of Muslims to celebrate health, faith, togetherness, and social contributions in one comprehensive and immersive experience.²⁶ Ultimately, this phenomenon suggests that spirituality is set to be part of the transformation of the way modern generations of Muslims understand and feel religiosity. No longer limited to formal worship spaces, spirituality is now expanding into daily activities that bring tranquility, meaning, and social connection. The Islamic Marathon is one of the tangible manifestations of how Islamic values evolve in response to the rhythm of the times, while still maintaining their depth of meaning and relevance for Muslims in the contemporary era.

Brand Experience in the Modern *Halal* Ecosystem: Narrative, Aesthetics, and the Sensation of Experience

In the contemporary *halal* industry landscape, brand experience no longer stands limited to the quality of products or services,²⁷ but instead on how the overall atmosphere of an event shapes an emotional experience, identity, and value connection for its participants.²⁸ Marathon events with Islamic themes are among the most interesting examples of this phenomenon. In the midst of developing a healthy lifestyle among urban

²⁵ H. Hamdana et al., 'The Effects of Financial and Technology Literacy on the Sustainability of Indonesian SMEs: Mediating Role of Supply Chain Practice', *Uncertain Supply Chain Management* 10, no. 4 (2022): 1449–1156.

²⁶ Allisa Zahrotun Nadhiroh and Zein Muchamad Masykur, 'Makna Spiritualitas Pada Era Modern Di Kalangan Mahasiswa UIN Salatiga: Perspektif Fenomenologi Agama', *An Najah (Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Dan Sosial Keagamaan)* 4, no. 2 (2025): 31–49.

²⁷ Wahyu Abdul Jafar, 'Legality of Halal Food Certification on Masalah Mursalah Perspective', *Jurnal Ilmiah Mizani: Wacana Hukum, Ekonomi Dan Keagamaan* 9, no. 1 (2024): 96–118, <https://doi.org/10.29300/mzn.v9i1.2888>.

²⁸ Achmad Kholid Fadlullah et al., 'The Effect of Halal Label, Halal Awareness, Food Ingredients, Advertising and Purchase Interest on the Decision to Buy "Samyang Noodles" (Study on Universities Students in Malang City)', *South East Asia Journal of Contemporary Business, Economics and Law* 24, no. 2 (2021): 107–113.

Muslims, event organisers utilise spiritual narratives, *halal* aesthetics, and conceptualised sensory experiences to foster a deeper emotional connection. This subchapter outlines how brand experiences are built in layers through visuals, symbols, social interactions, and spiritual touches, all firmly embedded in the identity of today's Muslim consumers.²⁹

Brand experiences are first and foremost built through narrative—the way organisers tell the story, the event's purpose, and the value it offers. *Halal* marathon promotions not only emphasise sportsmanship but also connect it with the spirit of hijrah, fitness as worship, and the meaning of social sustainability. Participants feel they are not just running a race but engaging in a modern spiritual journey. One participant I interviewed said, "What made me list was not only the running, but also because the tagline talked about 'running as a form of gratitude'. It feels different. It was as if I had been invited to be part of a bigger story than myself."³⁰ Narratives like this lay the initial foundation for value-oriented brand experiences.

The next layer is characterised by a visual aesthetic carefully designed to align with contemporary Muslim identity. From logo design and typography to colour palette, everything is orchestrated to convey a modern Islamic feel—minimalist, clean, and relevant to the urban style of the younger generation. The participants' jerseys, for example, not only feature a polite, neutral colour palette but are also adorned with Islamic geometric elements, modern calligraphy, or subtly sublimated monotheistic symbols.³¹ This kind of visual identity not only marks a brand but also fosters a sense of pride and representation among participants. A graphic designer from the organisers said, "We want participants to feel that this jersey is not just a running suit, but a symbol of a progressive *halal* lifestyle."³²

²⁹ Nadhiroh and Masykur, 'Makna Spiritualitas Pada Era Modern Di Kalangan Mahasiswa UIN Salatiga'.

³⁰ Andre, 'Personal Interview'.

³¹ Hanafi Malik and Juwita Wirta Sri Depi, 'Building Brand Identity Through Event Experiences: A Design Approach in Branding Strategy', *Scientific Journal of Management and Business (JIMBI)* 6, no. 1 (2025): 90-98, <https://doi.org/10.31289/jimbi.v6i1.5913>.

³² Joko, 'Personal Interview'.

In addition to visuals, sensory experiences play a significant role in creating an imprinted atmosphere.³³ Modern Islamic music, an acoustic version of dhikr chanting, or ambient sound with a soft spiritual touch, fills the start and finish areas. The aroma of essential oils, with nuances of mint and citrus, is deliberately dispersed at designated points to create a fresh, soothing ambience. Each sensory element is designed to foster a positive mood among participants while affirming Islam's warm, inclusive qualities. In an interview, one of the participants said, "When I want to start, the slow nasyid music makes my heart cool. I feel lighter and ready to run. It feels like it's not a competition, but a healing room."³⁴

No less important is the use of intense, consistent storytelling on social media.³⁵ Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are spaces where event identities are formed, strengthened, and disseminated.³⁶ Diverse photos of participants, inspirational testimonials, migration narratives, and highlights of charity activities are professionally packaged so that they create emotional closeness. Social media algorithms make space for personal stories, further expanding the event's spiritual message's reach.³⁷ Many participants admitted that they registered not because of the official poster, but because they had seen the content reels of the previous year's participants, which featured meaningful moments. "I saw the video constantly appearing on FYP. Everything seems to be fun, but it's still rooted in Islamic values. From there, I am sure I want to participate," said a young participant.³⁸

³³ Denny Bernardus et al., 'Which Psychological Characteristics Strengthen "The Entrepreneurial Intention-Action Relationship"?: An Extension of the Theory of Planned Behavior', *Cogent Business & Management* 7, no. 1 (2020): 1823579, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2020.1823579>.

³⁴ Indah, 'Personal Interview'.

³⁵ Fitri Damayanti et al., 'From Tradition to Modernity: The Contemporary Relevance of Islamic Law in Art and Culture', *Nusantara: Journal of Law Studies* 3, no. 1 (2024): 14-26, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17372790>.

³⁶ Lina Saptaria et al., 'Impact of the Implementation of Green Human Resources Management: A Study of Systematic Literature', *Ilomata International Journal of Management* 3, no. 2 (2022): 264-283.

³⁷ Daisy Aulia Fitri, 'The Influence of Experiential Marketing and Islamic Branding on Word of Mouth and The Decision of Choosing a Private College', *Indonesian Journal of Economics, Business, Accounting, and Management (IJEBAAM)* 3, no. 3 (2025): 14-29, <https://doi.org/10.63901/ijeabam.v3i3.124>.

³⁸ Rudi, 'Personal Interview'.

One key element of the brand experience is the presence of Muslim influencer runners, who serve as a bridge between the organiser and the digital audience. They shared training tips, unboxing race packs, and spiritual reflection before the race. Influencers not only expand the event's visibility but also provide social validation of the *halal* values it embodies. Their involvement creates a sense of 'closeness' and aspiration; participants feel part of a healthy, spiritual community that continues to grow. The existence of this figure demonstrates that the organisers do not solely build the brand experience, but rather do so through collaboration with a broader social ecosystem.³⁹

Furthermore, the brand experience at modern *halal* events is also supported by symbols of Islamic values incorporated into the event's details, reflecting participants' understanding of these values. Starting with departure prayers, invitations to donate, *halal* MSME stands, and the provision of representative, comfortable prayer rooms.⁴⁰ All of these elements create an environment that feels safe, clean, and in accordance with the principles of *halal-thayyib*.⁴¹ Many participants consider that events like this combine professionalism with a spiritual touch that is neither patronising nor condescending.⁴² "Usually, big events are noisy. However, this one is orderly and neat, and there is a sense of mutual respect among the participants. The atmosphere is different," said one of the female participants.⁴³

Ultimately, brand experience in the context of the modern *halal* marathon is shifting towards the experience economy—where the primary value comes not from the physical product but from the meaningful experience it offers. This event provides a space

³⁹ Kartika Rose Rachmadi and Ahsani Taqwiem, 'Eksistensi Brand Love Terhadap Perilaku Konsumen Produk Makanan Halal: Peran Islamic Marketing Literacy', *Jurnal Ilmiah Ekonomi Islam* 8, no. 2 (2022): 1145–1152, <https://doi.org/10.29040/jiei.v8i2.4693>.

⁴⁰ Khusniati Rofiah et al., 'Legal Awareness of Halal Products Certification among East Java Business Operators and Society', *JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah)* 23, no. 1 (2024): 55–65, <https://doi.org/10.31958/juris.v23i1.10467>.

⁴¹ Endeh Suhartini et al., 'Analysis of Halal Certification for Micro and Small Business Actors from the Perspective of Maslahah Principles and Legal Certainty', *Al'Adalah* 21, no. 2 (2024): 401–426, <https://doi.org/10.24042/adalah.v21i2.23442>.

⁴² Rooza Meilia Anggraini et al., 'Perlindungan Hak Spiritual Konsumen Muslim Dalam Program Sertifikasi Halal Jalur Pernyataan Pelaku Usaha (Self Declare)', *Justicia Islamica* 20, no. 2 (2023): 301–320, <https://doi.org/10.21154/justicia.v20i2.5003>.

⁴³ Susi, 'Personal Interview'.

where urban Muslim consumers can find identity, community, and spirituality simultaneously. For organisers, this is not just a marketing strategy, but a way to build a *halal* ecosystem that touches the emotional, aesthetic, and value dimensions of daily life. Brand experiences like this provide an important lesson: today's Muslim consumers are not only looking for orderly, professional events, but also for experiences that enrich the meaning of their lives.⁴⁴

Table 2. Summary of Brand Experience Elements in the Modern *Halal* Marathon Event

Elemen Brand Experience	Form of Implementation	Impact on Participants
Spiritual Narrative	Tagline hijrah, running as worship, meaning of gratitude	Increase emotional attachment and motivation
Islamic Visual Aesthetics	Minimalist logo design, geometric motifs, neutral colours	Forming a modern <i>halal</i> visual identity
Sensory Experience	Modern Islamic music, aroma therapy, spiritual ambience	Improves positive mood and sense of calm
Storytelling Media Sosial	Reels, witnesses, behind-the-scenes contacts	Expand promotional reach & build closeness
Influencer Muslim Runner	Endorsements, exercise tips, spiritual content	Strengthen social validation & increase participant interest
Symbol of Islamic Values	Joint prayer, charity, prayer room, <i>halal</i> MSMEs	Fostering a sense of security, comfort, and meaning

Source: Author's Interpretation

The table outlines how the brand experience in a modern *halal* marathon event is constructed through six key elements that complement one another to create a valuable experience for participants. Spiritual narratives provide an emotional foundation that connects running activities with religious values, such as gratitude, hijrah, and worship, while Islamic visual aesthetics reinforce the event's identity through a modern design that continues to reflect *halal* values. Sensory experiences—whether through music, scents, or ambience—create a calming atmosphere and increase participants' psychological readiness. Storytelling on social media expands the reach of messages while building closeness to

⁴⁴ Tikawati Tikawati et al., 'Bibliometric: Halal Brand on Marketing Performance', *Al-Tijary* 10, no. 1 (2024): 39-57, <https://doi.org/10.21093/at.v10i1.8955>.

audiences, enriched by the role of Muslim runner influencers who provide social validation and encourage participation. Symbols of Islamic values, such as collective prayer, charity, and worship facilities, add depth to the experience, making participants feel safe, valued, and connected to the community. Overall, these six elements work as a unified ecosystem that delivers authentic, emotional, and relevant brand experiences for contemporary Muslim consumers.

Participant Loyalty in the Digital Age: Emotional Bonding, Online Communities, and Recommendation Culture

The loyalty of marathon participants in the contemporary Islamic lifestyle ecosystem is formed through a more complex process than simply attending the event the following year. In the all-connected digital age, loyalty grows from a combination of profound emotional experiences, layered social engagement, and dynamic interactions in online spaces where participants build collective identities and stories.⁴⁵ For many urban Muslims, the Islamic marathon is not just a sporting event but a meeting point for the aspirations for a healthy life, the need for self-expression, and the search for spiritual meaning relevant to modern rhythms. That is where loyalty starts: not from the organiser's promotion, but from an experience that feels personal, wants to be repeated, and is shared with others.⁴⁶

Once the finish line is crossed, the participant's experience does not just stop. This is precisely where the loyalty journey begins. Many participants reported that the moments after the event—when they felt relieved, proud, and emotionally moved by the Islamic atmosphere—encouraged them to share their stories. Rahma, one of the interviewees, described this straightforwardly: "I felt like I was finding a safe space to run and draw closer

⁴⁵ Mohammad Hamim Sul-toni and Agus Hermawan, 'Digital Marketing, Digital Orientation, Marketing Capability, and Information Technology Capability on Marketing Performance of Indonesian SMEs.', *International Journal of Data & Network Science* 6, no. 4 (2022), <https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cluster=7830423485513393588&hl=en&oi=scholar>.

⁴⁶ Gideon Carakaardi Wicaksana and Elia Ardyan, 'Emotional Experiences Drive Customer Loyalty in Indonesia : Pengalaman Emosional Mendorong Loyalitas Pelanggan Di Indonesia', *Academia Open* 9, no. 2 (2024): 10.21070/acopen.9.2024.9144-10.21070/acopen.9.2024.9144, <https://doi.org/10.21070/acopen.9.2024.9144>.

to God. It was an experience I couldn't keep to myself."⁴⁷ Expressions like this demonstrate how the spiritual experiences that arise from an event can be a powerful trigger for sharing, ultimately fostering an emotional bond with the event and its organisers.

In the digital world, every story has its own stage. Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are now places for participants to reassemble their experiences through videos, photos, and reflective writing. They posted *halal* sportswear outfits, the atmosphere of the start line, the moment of praying together, and expressions of fatigue mixed with gratitude when they reached the finish line. Behind each upload lies an identity narrative being constructed: one that portrays them as active, healthy, empowered, and connected to contemporary Islamic values. This content not only extends the event's life in the digital space but also creates a "collective memory" that further strengthens participants' loyalty.⁴⁸

Digital recommendations play an essential role in this process. In interviews, most participants admitted that they became Faiz, a member of the Muslim Runners Jakarta community, said: "When I see my friends posting Islamic and orderly running vibes, I immediately feel that it is a quality event. It feels like being invited to participate, not promoted."⁴⁹ These kinds of recommendations are more convincing than ads because they come from real experience. They're not reading promotions; They witness someone they know enjoying and gaining meaning from the experience. This is where the recommendation culture becomes particularly strong, and it also serves as an essential foundation for building long-term loyalty.⁵⁰

Online communities sustain this process significantly. The Muslim runners' WhatsApp and Telegram groups became lively discussion forums, where members shared tips, motivated one another, and updated each other on upcoming Islamic events.

⁴⁷ Rahma, 'Personal Interview', 2025.

⁴⁸ Dony Wira Sanjaya and Agus Fredy Maradona, 'Customer Experience, Emotional Marketing, and Customer Engagement in Customer Loyalty: Through Customer Satisfaction', *Amkop Management Accounting Review (AMAR)* 5, no. 2 (2025): 1133-1146, <https://doi.org/10.37531/amar.v5i2.3195>.

⁴⁹ Andre, 'Personal Interview'.

⁵⁰ Sri Deti, 'Halal Awareness and Muslim Consumer Behavior in Indonesia: A Systematic Literature Review', *Alkasb: Journal of Islamic Economics* 4, no. 1 (2025): 121-147, <https://doi.org/10.59005/alkasb.v4i1.662>.

Communities like this not only provide data but also offer emotional support, making participants feel like they're part of something bigger than themselves. In the community, the identity as a Muslim runner is strengthened daily through simple conversations about exercise, prayer before running, and reflective dawn-running experiences.

From a phenomenological perspective, the loyalty that grows from this digital space is a process of repeated meaning. Every interaction, whether through comments, likes, or conversations in community groups, helps shape how participants understand their experiences. Loyalty becomes more than just a decision; it becomes a part of one's identity. When a participant considers themselves part of the Islamic marathon community, participating in next year's event is no longer an option but a necessity for their identity. They feel a personal and communal attachment that makes their presence feel important. Aware of this dynamic, event organisers also strengthen participant involvement with more creative digital strategies. The use of official hashtags, participant repost features, digital leaderboards, and content competitions makes participants feel appreciated and recognised. When organisers reshare participant content, it becomes a form of symbolic validation that can increase a sense of ownership of the event. From an Islamic marketing perspective, this is the most authentic form of engagement—engagement that is not forced, but born from a truly meaningful experience.⁵¹

Interestingly, loyalty in the Islamic lifestyle context is also influenced by the ethical and spiritual dimensions inherent in these events.⁵² For some participants, recommending an Islamic marathon event is not only a social action but also part of an invitation to goodness (*da'wah bil-hal*). Yumna, one of the interviewees, explained: "I posted because I wanted others to join in too. Not only sports, but also so that they feel positive activities, God willing."⁵³ This narrative demonstrates that loyalty is not only based on satisfaction

⁵¹ Young-Eun Noh and Syazana Shahdan, 'A Systematic Review of Religion/Spirituality and Sport: A Psychological Perspective', *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 46 (January 2020): 101603, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2019.101603>.

⁵² Idris Idris et al., 'The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction on Compensation, Work Environment, and Employee Performance: Evidence from Indonesia', *Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Issues* 8, no. 2 (2020): 735.

⁵³ Yumna, 'Personal Interview', 2025.

but also on a sense of a spiritual mission we want to share with others. In the end, the loyalty of Islamic marathon participants in the digital era grows as an ecosystem that strengthens each other. Direct experience creates an emotional impression; social media extends and amplifies it; online communities enhance the sense of proximity; and spiritual values provide depth of meaning. When all of this works in harmony, an Islamic marathon event not only binds participants on the day of its implementation, but also builds relationships that continue to live in the digital space. Loyalty is fluid, flexible, and constantly evolving, reflecting the dynamics of modern Muslim lifestyles that are increasingly digital, communal, and meaning-filled.⁵⁴

In this context, loyalty is not a passive phenomenon, but rather a dynamic process that unfolds continuously. It is built from stories, shaped by community, nurtured by spiritual values, and reinforced by digital interactions. These findings offer a new perspective on Islamic marketing, suggesting that loyalty is rooted not only in satisfaction but also in an ecosystem of narratives, emotions, and identities that evolve dynamically in response to the rhythm of contemporary digital culture.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that marathon participant loyalty within the contemporary Islamic lifestyle ecosystem is shaped by a complex interplay among sports experience, spiritual dimensions, and the brand experience constructed by event organisers. Islamic-themed marathon activities are no longer viewed solely as physical competitions; instead, they have evolved into spaces for self-reflection, the expression of religious identity, and the strengthening of social connections among urban Muslims in modern society. This study emphasises that spiritual experiences—both personal, such as gratitude and inner peace, and communal, such as collective prayer and social solidarity—constitute the primary foundation for the formation of emotional bonds between participants and events. The brand experience designed by organisers further reinforces this attachment through Islamic

⁵⁴ Dwi Suhartanto et al., 'Loyalty Formation toward Halal Food: Integrating the Quality-Loyalty Model and the Religiosity-Loyalty Model', *British Food Journal* 122, no. 1 (2019): 48-59, <https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-03-2019-0188>.

narratives, halal-oriented visual aesthetics, sensory elements, and the presence of Muslim runner communities and influencers. These visual identities and symbolic representations of Islamic values create a sense of security, relevance, and meaning, while the collective experience during the event broadens participants' understanding of sport as a spiritually meaningful practice. In the digital age, these emotional bonds are amplified through participants' social media engagement, where experiences are produced, shared, and circulated. Digital word-of-mouth culture and online community interaction, therefore, play a crucial role in fostering more dynamic and sustainable forms of loyalty. Future research could extend this study by employing quantitative or mixed-method approaches to test the relationships among spirituality, brand experience, and loyalty across broader participant populations. Comparative studies of Islamic-themed and secular sporting events would further clarify the distinct role of integrating spiritual values. Additionally, investigations into gender perspectives, cross-cultural contexts, and the long-term impact of digital religious branding in sports events would offer deeper theoretical and practical insights into the evolving Islamic lifestyle industry.

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During the preparation of this article, Yudianto Perdana Putra served as the primary designer of the research concept, compiler of the theoretical framework, and author of the initial draft of the manuscript. Sudarmiatin provides thorough academic supervision,

ensures methodological accuracy, and offers critical input that strengthens analysis and discussion. Budi Eko Soetjipto also developed the research design, conducted an in-depth literature review, and enriched the scientific arguments in the manuscript. Meanwhile, Cipto Wardoyo contributed to advanced data processing, checked the accuracy of the analysis results, and made final improvements to ensure the overall academic quality of the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors state that there are no conflicts of interest, either financial or non-financial, that could affect the research, analysis, or preparation process of this manuscript. All contributions are made independently and are not influenced by any party or institution beyond those mentioned in the article.

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The author states that the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in compiling this article is limited to supporting functions, such as improving grammar, enhancing sentence structure, and verifying consistency in writing style. All ideas, analyses, findings, and scientific interpretations are the result of the author's whole thinking and responsibility. No substantive content is generated entirely by AI without review, verification, and final approval from the author.

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