

Covert Marketing in Social Commerce: Muslim Consumers' Perception of Viral Products in The Perspective of Islamic Business Ethics

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Abstract

This study is motivated by the rapid development of increasingly creative digital marketing strategies that may raise ethical concerns when conducted without transparency. This study aims to analyze Muslim consumer perceptions of covert marketing practices on viral products in TikTok Shop from the perspective of Islamic business ethics. This research employed a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with business actors and consumers. The researcher also conducted observations and documentation related to covert marketing practices. Data analysis techniques included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that covert marketing practices are considered effective in attracting consumer attention because they are able to build emotional closeness and increase trust through promotions presented naturally. Such strategies are commonly implemented through social media, personal recommendations, and the use of third parties in delivering promotional messages. However, in practice, several forms of marketing were found to potentially create unclear information and manipulate consumer perceptions. From the perspective of Islamic business ethics, marketing activities should be based on the principles of honesty, transparency, responsibility, and fairness. Therefore, covert marketing may be permissible as long as it does not involve deception, gharar (uncertainty), or misleading information for consumers. This study emphasizes that the balance between marketing creativity and the implementation of Islamic business ethics is an important factor in creating healthy and sustainable business practices.

Received: 2026-05-21
Accepted: 2026-06-29
Published: 2026-07-07

Keywords: *Covert Marketing; Islamic Business Ethics; Digital Marketing; Muslim Consumers; TikTok Shop Marketing Strategy.*

Introduction

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The development of digital technology has brought major changes to people's marketing patterns and consumption behavior. Social media is no longer only used as a means of communication, but also has developed into a digital marketing space that is able to influence consumer purchasing decisions quickly and massively.¹ One of the platforms that is experiencing rapid development is TikTok through the TikTok Shop feature which allows promotional activities and transactions to be carried out in one application. The presence of TikTok Shop encourages the emergence of various digital marketing strategies that utilize creative content, influencers, affiliate marketing, and viral product trends to attract consumer attention.²

The phenomenon of viral products on TikTok Shop is growing as the consumption of short video content increases among the public. Many social media users are interested in buying a product after seeing reviews, recommendations, or content that appear on the For Your Page (FYP) page.³ In practice, product promotions are not always delivered directly as advertisements, but are packaged in the form of reviews, personal experiences, or recommendations that look natural. This kind of marketing strategy is known as covert marketing, which is a covert promotional technique designed so that consumers don't realize that they are being targeted by marketing.⁴

The practice of covert marketing is considered effective in building trust and influencing consumer purchasing decisions because promotions are

¹ Barbara Olga Antczak, "The Influence of Digital Marketing and Social Media Marketing on Consumer Buying Behavior," *Journal of Modern Science*, 56, No. 2 (June 2024): 310–35, <https://doi.org/10.13166/jms/189429>.

² Hikmah Akbar Robiul Ramadhan et al., "TikTok as a Marketing Medium: The Influence of User Generated Content (UGC) and Viral Marketing on Online Purchase Decisions on Glad2Glow Skincare Products," *International Journal of Business, Economics, and Social Development*, 6, No. 2 (June 2025): 282–91, <https://doi.org/10.46336/ijbesd.v6i2.945>.

³ Wenyao Zhang, Tugrul Daim, and Wei Zhang, "Investigating Consumer Purchase Intention in Online Social Media Marketing: A Case Study of Tiktok," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3971795>.

⁴ Sophie C. Boerman and Céline M. Müller, "Understanding Which Cues People Use to Identify Influencer Marketing on Instagram: An Eye Tracking Study and Experiment," *International Journal of Advertising*, 41, No. 1 (January 2022): 6–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2021.1986256>.

delivered in a subtle manner and do not look like formal advertisements.⁵ However, this phenomenon also raises ethical issues in digital marketing activities. Not a few content creators give excessive reviews of a product without explaining that the content is part of a promotional or affiliate marketing cooperation. This condition has the potential to cause misleading information, manipulation of perceptions, and consumptive behavior of the public due to the influence of viral trends and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO).⁶

In an Islamic perspective, marketing activities are not only oriented towards economic profit, but must also pay attention to Islamic business ethical values such as honesty (*sidq*), trustworthiness, fairness, and transparency.⁷ Islam emphasizes that promotional activities must be carried out openly and do not contain elements of fraud or information concealment.⁸ The practice of covert marketing that disguises promotional elements can be associated with the concept of *tadlis*, which is the act of hiding important information in transactions that has the potential to harm other parties.⁹ Therefore, the phenomenon of covert marketing on social media needs to be further analyzed to find out how the practice is viewed by Muslim consumers as well as its conformity with Islamic business ethics principles.

Muslim consumers' perception of covert marketing practices is an important aspect that needs to be studied in the context of digital marketing.

⁵ Kaoutar Sarhour, "The Influence of Persuasion Knowledge Activation on Gen Z Purchase Decisions: A Comparative Analysis of User-Generated Content and Macro-Influencer Marketing," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 9, No. 1 (2025): 4965–76, <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.9010383>.

⁶ İlknur Ayar, "The Impact of Exaggerated and Deceptive Influencer Advertising and Influencer Attractiveness on Consumer Purchase Intentions," *İktisadi İdari ve Siyasal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 9, No. 25 (October 2024): 837–53, <https://doi.org/10.25204/iktisad.1480293>.

⁷ Nurhaeni Sikki et al., "The Application of Islamic Business Ethics in Modern Markets: Principles, Challenges, and Opportunities in a Globalized Economy," *RIGGS: Journal of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Business*, 4, No. 3 (August 2025): 2050–56, <https://doi.org/10.31004/riggs.v4i3.2215>.

⁸ Syafwendi Syafril and M. Fuad Hadziq, "Islamic Principles in Marketing: An Overview of Islamic Marketing Mix in Social-Media Campaign," *El-Qish: Journal of Islamic Economics*, 1, No. 1 (August 2021): 69–82, <https://doi.org/10.33830/elqish.v1i1.1568.2021>.

⁹ Mohammad Saiful Rifai, Nurwahyuni Nurwahyuni, and Mochamat Amarodin, "Praktik Jual Beli Sayuran Sistem Untingan dalam Perspektif Ekonomi Syariah (Studi Kasus di Pasar Gambar Wonodadi Blitar)," *Musyarakah: Journal of Sharia Economic (MJSE)*, April 2025, 16–27, <https://doi.org/10.24269/mjse.v5i1.11675>.

This is because Muslim consumers not only consider the functional aspects and quality of the product, but also pay attention to ethical values in the transaction and promotion process.¹⁰ In a social media environment like TikTok, consumers are often exposed to content that is not completely transparent, potentially affecting the way they understand and judge a product. Differences in levels of religious understanding, experience, and awareness can shape diverse perceptions of covert promotional practices. Therefore, it is important to explore how Muslim consumers interpret covert marketing practices, whether it is considered a reasonable marketing strategy or a form of dishonesty that is contrary to Islamic business ethics principles.

Several previous studies have shown that digital marketing through social media has a great influence on consumer behavior. Research Felicia explains that excessive delivery of product information can affect consumer objectivity in making purchase decisions.¹¹ In addition, research M Chairil Abbrar and Iman Sumarlan shows that some consumers tend to easily trust promotions delivered by content creators on social media.¹² Likewise, Fathur Rahman regarding the practice of affiliate marketing in the perspective of Islamic economics, it is stated that digital promotional activities are allowed as long as they do not contain elements of fraud, manipulation, or concealment of product information.¹³ The research also explains that transparency in endorsements is an important part of maintaining Islamic business ethics in digital marketing.

Meanwhile, the study Zahrotul Wahyu Layyinah, et al. found that influencer marketing and viral marketing on TikTok Shop have an influence on

¹⁰ Esraa M. Alamayreh, Khalid Fadhil, and Nash'at Issam, "Building Brand Trust through Content: How Social Media Marketing Influences Muslim Consumers' Purchasing Decisions," *Journal of Posthumanism*, 5, No. 7 (July 2025): 929–36, <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i7.2861>.

¹¹ Felicia Neva Ayuningtyas, "Strategi Promosi Endorsement oleh Digital Influencer dalam Etika Bisnis Islam," *Jurnal Ekonomika dan Bisnis Islam*, 4, No. 3 (January 2022): 160–73, <https://doi.org/10.26740/jekobi.v4n3.p160-173>.

¹² M Chairil Abbrar and Iman Sumarlan, "Exploring Marketing Communication Strategies and Islamic Ethics in TikTok Live Streaming for Social Commerce," *Golden Ratio of Marketing and Applied Psychology of Business*, 5, No. 2 (May 2025): 554–64, <https://doi.org/10.52970/grmapb.v5i2.1201>.

¹³ Fathur Rahman, "Praktik Affiliate Marketing pada Platform E-Commerce dalam Tinjauan Hukum Ekonomi Syariah," *Istidlal: Jurnal Ekonomi dan Hukum Islam*, 6, No. 1 (June 2022): 24–37, <https://doi.org/10.35316/istidlal.v6i1.407>.

consumer purchase decisions, especially among active social media users.¹⁴ Consumers tend to be interested in buying products because they are influenced by testimonials, viral trends, and influencer recommendations that appear repeatedly on social media. Another study also Adinda Rania Nurmadinda, et al. explains that digital marketing practices in the sharia economy must prioritize the principle of honesty and avoid elements of gharar and tadlis. This shows that promotional activities on social media require ethical boundaries so as not to mislead Muslim consumers.¹⁵

Although research on digital marketing and consumer behavior on social media has grown rapidly, most previous research has focused on influencer marketing, affiliate marketing, and viral marketing on consumer buying interest and purchasing decisions. The previous research above also tends to discuss digital marketing in general without specifically examining covert marketing practices as a form of covert promotion in social commerce. In addition, studies on Muslim consumers' perceptions of covert promotional practices on TikTok Shop are still relatively limited, even though Muslim consumers have ethical considerations such as honesty, transparency, and trust in digital consumption and transaction activities.

On the other hand, there has also not been much research on covert marketing from the perspective of Islamic business ethics. Previous studies of Islamic marketing ethics have highlighted general concepts such as gharar, trust, and honesty in trade and e-commerce, but have not specifically linked covert marketing practices with the concept of tadlis, misleading information, and manipulation of consumer perception on the TikTok Shop platform. Therefore, this study is here to fill the literature gap by analyzing covert marketing practices on viral products on TikTok Shop, examining Muslim consumer perceptions, and evaluating them based on the perspective of Islamic business ethics.

¹⁴ Zahrotul Wahyu Layyinah, Misti Hariasih, and Mas Oetarjo, "Pengaruh Influencer Marketing, Brand Image, dan Kualitas Produk Terhadap Keputusan Pembelian Produk Fashion Lokal di Platfrom Tiktoshop," *El-Mal: Jurnal Kajian Ekonomi & Bisnis Islam*, 7, No. 3 (March 2026): 1695–1711, <https://doi.org/10.47467/elmal.v7i3.11329>.

¹⁵ Adinda Rania Nurmadinda et al., "Increasing Revenue through Instagram, Shopee, TikTok, and WhatsApp Applications from a Sharia Economic Perspective: (Case Study of Rabbani Wonosobo Store)," *Proceedings Series on Social Sciences & Humanities*, 22 (May 2025): 83–91, <https://doi.org/10.30595/pssh.v22i.1530>.

The novelty of this research lies in the integration between the concept of covert marketing, Muslim consumer behavior, and Islamic business ethics in the context of TikTok Shop's social commerce which has been rarely studied in previous research. Based on this phenomenon, this study aims to analyze the form of covert marketing practices on viral products, understand Muslim consumers' perceptions of these practices, and analyze them based on the perspective of Islamic business ethics. This research is expected to contribute to the development of sharia economics studies, especially related to digital marketing ethics and Muslim consumer behavior in the social media era.

Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive type of research. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to deeply understand the phenomenon of covert marketing on viral products on TikTok Shop through the perception of Muslim consumers in the perspective of Islamic business ethics.¹⁶ Descriptive research is used to describe the social reality of how consumers perceive the covert marketing practices that are developing on social media, specifically TikTok Shop.¹⁷ The research was carried out in Tulungagung Regency with the research subjects in the form of Muslim consumers who had seen, followed, or bought viral products on TikTok Shop. The informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques based on certain criteria, namely Muslim, active in using TikTok, having seen viral product promotions, and having bought or were interested in buying products promoted through TikTok Shop. The informants in this study were eleven people with diverse professional backgrounds. The data sources in this study consist of primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with informants to explore their experiences and perceptions regarding covert marketing practices on TikTok Shop.¹⁸ The

¹⁶ Lathif Hanafir Rifqi, Ana Zahrotun Nihayah, and Siti Mujibatun, "Integrasi Prinsip Ekonomi Syariah dalam Penggunaan Digital Payment oleh Pelaku Usaha Mikro Kecil," *Iqtisad: Reconstruction of Justice and Welfare for Indonesia*, 12, No. 2 (2025): 211–34, <https://doi.org/10.31942/iq.v12i2.12392>.

¹⁷ Abdul Fattah Nasution, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: CV. Harfa Creative, 2023).

¹⁸ Mohammad Saiful Rifai, "Tinjauan Ekonomi Islam Tentang Perilaku Konsumen Apotek Barokah Kaliboto Pasca Pemberhentian Aturan Pemberlakuan Pembatasan Kegiatan Masyarakat

secondary data was obtained from books, scientific journals, articles, and previous research that was relevant to the research topic.¹⁹ Data collection techniques are carried out through interviews, observations, and documentation.²⁰

The data analysis technique uses the Miles and Huberman model which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn.²¹ Data reduction is carried out by selecting and focusing data according to the research objectives, then the data is presented in the form of a narrative description to facilitate the interpretation process²². Furthermore, conclusions are drawn based on the results of the data analysis that has been obtained.²³ The validity of the data was tested using source triangulation and triangulation techniques by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation from various informants so that the data produced had stronger validity.²⁴

Results and Discussion

Form Covert Marketing on TikTok Shop

The results of the study show that covert marketing practices on viral products on TikTok Shop are carried out through promotional strategies that are naturally packaged and do not always look like direct advertisements. The most common forms of promotion are video reviews, product usage tutorials, daily vlogs, user testimonials, live streaming, and affiliate content accompanied by a yellow basket as a product purchase link. This strategy makes marketing activities seem like personal experiences or regular entertainment content so that it is easier to attract the attention of consumers. This phenomenon shows

(PPKM)," *Musyarakah: Journal of Sharia Economic (MJSE)*, 12, No. 1 (June 2023): 68–75, <https://doi.org/10.24269/mjse.v12i1.7342>.

¹⁹ Rifai, Nurwahyuni, and Amarodin, "Praktik Jual Beli Sayuran Sistem Untingan dalam Perspektif Ekonomi Syariah (Studi Kasus di Pasar Gambar Wonodadi Blitar)."

²⁰ Rizal Pahlevinur et al., *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Pradina Pustaka, 2022).

²¹ Hardani et al., *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif & Kuantitatif* (Yogyakarta: CV. Pustaka Ilmu, 2020).

²² Adhi Kusumastuti Ahmad Mustamil Khoiron, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Semarang: Lembaga Penerbit Sukarno Press, 2019).

²³ Feny Rita Fiantika Mohammad Wasil Sri Jumiyati Leli Honesti Sri Wahyuni et al., *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (PT. Global Eksekutif Teknologi, 2022).

²⁴ Sugiyono, *Metodologi Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan R & D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2013).

the existence of covert marketing practices as explained by Boerman and Müller that covert marketing is a covert marketing strategy that makes consumers not fully aware that they are being targeted for promotion.²⁵ This strategy utilizes an emotional approach and personal closeness so that marketing messages are more easily accepted by the audience than conventional advertising. In the context of social media, this approach is becoming more effective because consumers tend to trust the experience of other users more than formal company promotions.

In addition to being packaged naturally, covert marketing practices on TikTok Shop are also strengthened by the use of affiliate features, live streaming, and yellow baskets that are directly integrated with the product purchase system. The presence of this feature allows the promotion and transaction process to take place on the same platform, encouraging consumers to make purchases faster and more practically. In many content, promotional elements are even visible at the end of the video through the appearance of a yellow basket or a call to buy a product. This shows that the marketing strategy on TikTok Shop works gradually and in disguise.

Promotional models like this show a change in digital marketing patterns from hard selling to soft selling. Consumers are no longer positioned as direct advertising targets, but are slowly directed through entertainment content and digital social interactions. The results of the study also show that consumers tend to be more interested in content that looks realistic, natural, and not exaggerated. Content that displays direct product use, detailed reviews, user testimonials, and original product visuals are considered more able to build consumer trust.

On the other hand, some consumers are starting to realize that there is a hidden promotional strategy in TikTok Shop content. Consumers understand that a lot of content that initially looks like regular reviews or entertainment turns out to have a specific marketing purpose. Nevertheless, a subtle promotional approach is still considered effective in building consumer curiosity and interest in viral products. This shows that covert marketing works through a

²⁵ Boerman and Müller, "Understanding Which Cues People Use to Identify Influencer Marketing on Instagram: An Eye Tracking Study and Experiment."

combination of entertainment, emotional closeness, and disguising promotional messages in digital content.

These findings show that the development of social media not only changes marketing communication patterns, but also changes consumer behavior in making purchase decisions. Consumers tend to be more easily influenced by personal, emotional, and relatable content than formal advertising that clearly indicates a commercial purpose. In these conditions, the boundaries between entertainment content, personal experience, and marketing activities become increasingly blurred so that covert marketing practices are more easily accepted by the digital society.

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The findings of this study are in line with research Wahyu Layyinah, et al. that states that influencer content and product reviews on TikTok Shop have a great influence on consumer buying interest because they are packaged in an attractive and realistic way.²⁶ In addition, research Rahman also shows that affiliate marketing on social media is able to influence purchase decisions through a personal and communicative approach.²⁷ This study strengthens the results of previous research by showing that covert marketing on TikTok Shop develops through natural-looking content so that consumers are not always aware of the promotional element in the content they consume.

Thus, it can be understood that the form of covert marketing on viral products on TikTok Shop is carried out through a covert promotional strategy that utilizes natural content, a personal approach, and the integration of digital features such as affiliates and yellow baskets. This strategy has been proven to be able to build trust, attract attention, and influence consumer interest in viral products on TikTok Shop.

Muslim Consumers' Perception of Covert Marketing

The development of TikTok Shop as a social commerce platform has changed the promotional patterns and consumption behavior of the digital

²⁶ Wahyu Layyinah, Hariasih, and Oetarjo, "Pengaruh Influencer Marketing, Brand Image, dan Kualitas Produk Terhadap Keputusan Pembelian Produk Fashion Lokal di Platfrom Tiktokshop."

²⁷ Rahman, "Praktik Affiliate Marketing pada Platform E-Commerce dalam Tinjauan Hukum Ekonomi Syariah."

community. Marketing strategies are no longer carried out overtly through formal advertising, but are packaged in the form of entertainment content, personal experiences, and natural-looking product reviews. This condition gives rise to the phenomenon of covert marketing, which is a covert marketing strategy that is often unaware by consumers as a form of commercial promotion²⁸. Based on the results of the interviews, most of the informants stated that they had been interested in buying a product after seeing content that repeatedly appeared on TikTok's FYP accompanied by positive reviews from other users.

This phenomenon shows that TikTok's algorithm has a great influence in shaping consumer interest and purchase decisions. Content that continues to appear repeatedly can create psychological effects in the form of curiosity, emotional interest, and impulsive impulses to buy certain products. In consumer behavior theory, repeated visual exposure can increase the level of familiarity with a product so that consumers are more easily trusted and encouraged to make purchases.²⁹

In addition, viral content on TikTok Shop is also closely related to the culture of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) that many people experience digitally. This can be seen from the tendency of consumers to buy products because they often appear on social media, are used by influencers, and get a lot of positive reviews from other users. The results of the study also show that some consumers are starting to realize the existence of covert promotional practices in TikTok Shop content. Some consumers are able to recognize content that initially seems like an ordinary review, but is actually a form of promotional cooperation with a brand. This awareness shows that today's digital consumers are starting to have better media literacy skills in distinguishing between organic and commercial content. However, not a few consumers are still interested in the content because it is considered a creative marketing strategy and keeps up with the times.

²⁸ Boerman and Müller, "Understanding Which Cues People Use to Identify Influencer Marketing on Instagram: An Eye Tracking Study and Experiment."

²⁹ R. Matthew Montoya et al., "A Re-Examination of the Mere Exposure Effect: The Influence of Repeated Exposure on Recognition, Familiarity, and Liking.," *Psychological Bulletin*, 143, No. 5 (2017): 459–98, <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000085>.

On the other hand, some consumers consider covert marketing as something that is still acceptable as long as the product information conveyed is in accordance with reality and does not harm consumers. Consumers tend to understand marketing strategies that are subtly packaged because they have become part of modern digital culture. However, such acceptance still has ethical limits, especially when the promotion is excessive, manipulative, or contains elements of dishonesty.

Some consumers even admitted to feeling disappointed when they found out that content that looked like a personal experience turned out to be a covert advertisement. This feeling arises because consumers feel that they do not get full transparency of information. In the context of consumer behavior, trust is an important factor in building a relationship between sellers and buyers. When consumers feel manipulated through dishonest promotions, the level of trust in both products and content creators can decrease.³⁰

The phenomenon of covert marketing on TikTok Shop can also be analyzed through the perspective of Islamic business ethics. In Islam, business activities must be based on the principles of honesty, openness, and do not contain elements of fraud. Promotions that are deliberately disguised without providing clear information to consumers have the potential to contradict the principles of *ṣidq* (honesty) and trust in *muamalah*. Islam emphasizes that sellers are obliged to convey the condition of the product honestly without exaggerating information for the sake of profit.³¹

In addition, covert marketing practices also have the potential to contain elements of *gharar* if consumers do not get clear information about the promotional status of a product. *Gharar* is a condition of ambiguity that can harm one of the parties in the transaction. When consumers do not know that a piece of content is actually a paid advertisement, there is an information imbalance that can affect the objectivity of the purchase decision. Therefore,

³⁰ Jian Wang et al., "Trust and Consumers' Purchase Intention in a Social Commerce Platform: A Meta-Analytic Approach," *Sage Open*, 12, No. 2 (April 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221091262>.

³¹ Jamaluddin Burhanudin, "Tinjauan Etika Bisnis Islam pada Penetapan Upah Jasa Angkut Barang di Terminal," *Jurnal Riset Perbankan Syariah*, 2, No. 2 (December 2023): 115–20, <https://doi.org/10.29313/jrps.v2i2.2902>.

transparency in promotion is an important aspect in maintaining business ethics in the digital era.

However, the use of creative marketing strategies is basically not prohibited in Islam as long as it does not contain elements of fraud and still prioritizes moral values in transactions. TikTok Shop as a digital marketing medium can actually be an effective business tool if used ethically, honestly, and responsibly. Thus, the main challenge in the covert marketing phenomenon does not lie in the use of digital media, but in how business actors maintain transparency and honesty in conveying information to consumers.

The results of this study are in line with the research conducted by Ahmad Nabil et al.³² which states that promotion through social media is able to shape the consumptive behavior of the digital society through visual influences, algorithms, and viral trends. The research shows that consumers tend to be more easily attracted to products that often appear on social media due to the effect of information repetition and the influence of the digital environment.³³ The findings in this study reinforce that TikTok Shop's algorithm has a big role in building curiosity and impulse buying impulses in Muslim consumers.

In addition, this research also has similarities with Muhammad Syafi'i Antonio's research on Islamic business ethics which emphasizes the importance of the principles of honesty and openness in marketing activities. In this study, it was found that some consumers felt disappointed when they found out that content that looked like personal reviews turned out to be a form of disguised promotion. This condition shows that information transparency is an important aspect in building consumer trust, especially in social media-based digital marketing practices.³⁴

However, this study differs from some previous studies because the focus of the research is not only on consumptive behavior due to social media, but

³² Ahmad Nabil et al., "Pengaruh Media Sosial Terhadap Perilaku Konsumtif Mahasiswa ITS," *IKOMIK: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi dan Informasi*, 4, No. 1 (July 2024): 38–43, <https://doi.org/10.33830/ikomik.v4i1.8310>.

³³ Ahmad Nabil et al.

³⁴ Faozi Latif, "Islamic Business Ethics in Muhammad Syafii Antonio's Thought," *Proceeding of SAIZU International Conference on Transdisciplinary Religious Studies*, November 2021, 75–81, <https://doi.org/10.24090/icontrees.2021.13>.

also examines Muslim consumers' perceptions of covert marketing practices from the perspective of Islamic business ethics. Thus, this research makes a new contribution to understanding the relationship between digital marketing strategies, consumer behavior, and Islamic ethical values on the TikTok Shop platform.

Analysis of Islamic Business Ethics Towards Covert Marketing Practices on TikTok Shop

The development of social media as a means of digital marketing has given birth to various new promotional strategies that are increasingly complex, one of which is covert marketing. This strategy utilizes naturally packaged content such as personal experiences, product reviews, and entertainment videos so that consumers don't always realize that the content is part of a commercial promotion. However, from the perspective of Islamic business ethics, marketing practices are not only judged by their success in increasing sales, but must also pay attention to moral values, honesty, and the benefit of consumers.³⁵

Based on the results of the interviews, the majority of Muslim consumers consider that product promotion is basically allowed as long as it is done honestly and does not contain elements of fraud. Most respondents emphasized that promotion is still considered in accordance with Islamic teachings if the product information conveyed is in accordance with the actual conditions and does not exaggerate the quality of the product. The findings show that Muslim consumers do not completely reject the development of digital marketing strategies, but rather emphasize the ethical aspects of the promotion process.

This view is in line with the basic principles of Islamic business ethics which places honesty as the main foundation in muamalah activities. In Islam, business activities must be carried out openly, fairly, and without harming other parties. The principle of *ṣidq* (honesty) is the main value that must be applied in every transaction, including in digital promotional activities.³⁶ Therefore,

³⁵ Mohiuddin M. G. and Md. Juwel Ahmed Sarker, "Business and Marketing Ethics in Islam: A Conceptual Study," *Journal of Economics and Technology Research*, 1, No. 2 (July 2020): p10, <https://doi.org/10.22158/jetr.v1n2p10>.

³⁶ Burhanudin, "Tinjauan Etika Bisnis Islam pada Penetapan Upah Jasa Angkut Barang di Terminal."

marketing that is carried out by hiding facts, manipulating information, or leading consumer opinions in an untransparent manner has the potential to be contrary to Islamic business ethical principles.

In addition to honesty, Islam also emphasizes the importance of trust in business activities. Amanah is not only related to maintaining consumer trust, but also conveying product information correctly and responsibly. In this study, some consumers admitted to feeling uncomfortable when they found out that a piece of content that looked like a personal review turned out to be a form of covert promotion. This condition shows that transparency is an important aspect in building trust between sellers, content creators, and consumers.

The phenomenon of covert marketing can also be attributed to the concept of gharar in Islamic business ethics. Gharar is a condition of unclear information that can harm one of the parties in the transaction. When consumers do not know that a content is part of a paid promotion, there is an inequality of information that can affect the objectivity of the purchase decision. In addition, promotional practices that hide product shortcomings or display visuals that do not match real conditions also have the potential to contain elements of tadlis, which is the act of hiding defects or giving a misleading image to buyers.³⁷

The results of the study show that some Muslim consumers are beginning to have a critical awareness of manipulative digital marketing practices. Several respondents stated the importance of checking product reviews from various sources, reading product descriptions in detail, and ensuring halal-haram aspects before making a purchase. This shows that today's Muslim consumers are no longer just the object of marketing, but are beginning to develop into consumers who are more selective and critical of digital information.

In addition, the caution of Muslim consumers can also be seen from the attention to the halal aspects of products and the social impact of consumption activities. From the perspective of Islamic business ethics, promotion is actually permissible as long as it is done correctly and does not violate moral principles. Islam does not prohibit the use of creative marketing strategies to attract

³⁷ Rifai, Nurwahyuni, and Amarodin, "Praktik Jual Beli Sayuran Sistem Untingan dalam Perspektif Ekonomi Syariah (Studi Kasus di Pasar Gambar Wonodadi Blitar)."

consumers attention, including through social media such as TikTok Shop. However, promotions must still be carried out honestly, openly, and not manipulate consumers for the sake of profit.³⁸ Therefore, the main problem in the phenomenon of covert marketing does not lie in the use of digital media, but in the practice of disguise promotions that can obscure the real information to consumers.

The results of this study are in line with research Nurul A'yun that emphasizes that business activities in Islam must uphold the values of honesty, fairness, and information disclosure to consumers.³⁹ The study stated that promotions that contain elements of manipulation and misdirection can damage public trust and are contrary to the principles of Islamic muamalah. The findings in this study reinforce that Muslim consumers still place the value of honesty as the main standard in assessing digital marketing practices.⁴⁰

In addition, this research also has similarities with the research of Muhammad Syafi'i Antonio who explains that sharia business is not only profit-oriented, but must also pay attention to moral aspects and social responsibility. In this study, it was found that Muslim consumers tend to be more cautious of viral products and do not easily believe in excessive promotion. This shows that the ethical awareness of Muslim consumers is starting to grow along with the increasing flow of digital information on social media.⁴¹

However, this study differs from several previous studies because it not only discusses consumer behavior towards social media, but also examines the phenomenon of covert marketing specifically from the perspective of Islamic business ethics on the TikTok Shop platform. This research shows that Muslim consumers in the digital era are starting to face new challenges in the form of visual manipulation, covert promotion, and information obscuration through viral content. Thus, this research contributes to understanding the dynamics of

³⁸ Burhanudin, "Tinjauan Etika Bisnis Islam pada Penetapan Upah Jasa Angkut Barang di Terminal."

³⁹ Nurul A'yun, "Islamic Business Ethics Yusuf Al-Qardhawi's Perspective," *Al-Muttaqin: Jurnal Studi, Sosial dan Ekonomi*, 5, No. 2 (June 2024): 150–56, <https://doi.org/10.63230/almuttaqin.v5i2.195>.

⁴⁰ Nurul A'yun.

⁴¹ Faozi Latif, "Islamic Business Ethics in Muhammad Syafii Antonio's Thought."

modern digital marketing as well as the importance of applying Islamic business ethics in maintaining the trust and protection of Muslim consumers.

Conclusion

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Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that covert marketing practices are used as a modern marketing strategy that aims to attract attention and build consumer interest indirectly. This strategy is considered effective because it is able to influence consumer decisions through more subtle approaches, such as covert recommendations, promotions through social media, endorsements, and the delivery of information that is packaged naturally so that it does not appear as overt advertising. In practice, covert marketing provides advantages for business actors because it is considered more able to create emotional closeness and trust from consumers than conventional promotional methods.

However, the results of the study show that covert marketing practices have the potential to be contrary to Islamic business ethics if carried out without transparency and contain elements of information manipulation. From the perspective of Islamic business ethics, marketing activities must be based on the principles of honesty, openness, responsibility, and do not contain elements of gharar or fraud that can harm consumers. Therefore, covert marketing is acceptable in Islam as long as the strategy used is not misleading, does not hide important facts, and still maintains moral values in the relationship between business actors and consumers. This research also shows that the development of technology and social media requires business actors to be more creative in marketing, but still have to pay attention to ethical limits so that consumer trust is maintained.

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