

An Implementation of Islamic Marketing Ethics among Muslimpreneurs on Digital Marketing Via Facebook

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i9/17839> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i9/17839

Published Date: 13 September 2023

Abstract

This study aims to examine the level of implementation of Islamic marketing ethics among Muslimpreneurs when utilizing social media platforms for advertising. Facebook is widely recognized as a popular social media platform used by traders, including Muslimpreneurs of different business scales. The data for this study was gathered through observational methods and subsequently analyzed using content analysis methods. An analysis of 32 advertising materials on Facebook revealed that Muslimpreneurs generally emphasize the fundamental principles of Islamic marketing ethics. However, it was observed that there is a lack of clear disclosure regarding marketing information in the advertising materials. Therefore, further study on marketing information is required to determine what influences Muslimpreneurs attention to this issue in their promotional materials.

Keywords: Muslimpreneurs, Islamic Marketing Ethics, Facebook Marketing, Online Advertising

Introduction

In today's business landscape, numerous traders show a preference for employing online marketing strategies, with a particular focus on social media platforms. Within the context of Malaysia, Facebook as a prominent marketing avenue has emerged as the preferred choice among Muslimpreneurs. This shift is mainly attributed to the implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in early 2020. Facebook has emerged as an alternative to conventional marketing methods due to its extensive reach, rapid dissemination, and cost-effectiveness. It is perceived as a platform with a wider scope that enables quick and widespread distribution of marketing messages at a relatively lower cost, making it an effective choice for businesses (Vinkvist, 2022).

The involvement of Muslimpreneurs in Facebook advertising closely tied to ethical and integrity practices. This study aims to

- explain the level of Muslimpreneurs adherence to Islamic ethical values in the creation of marketing materials; and
- understand the level of Muslimpreneurs adherence to Islamic ethical values in the creation of marketing materials.

To elucidate this, the content of Facebook materials has been observed and analyzed through the implementation of content analysis methods. This method is considered appropriate for analyzing the data collected from the established Facebook pages due to its alignment with the characteristics of the collected data. Through a comparison with the fundamental principles of Islamic marketing ethics, this study has discovered that the content of advertisements owned by Muslimpreneurs does not fully meet all the requirements of Islamic marketing ethics. The discussion in this study is structured into four main sections, including literature review, methodology, discussion of study findings and conclusion.

Literature Review

Marketing Ethics

Marketing is indeed a critical tool in the business field for achieving business goals. The effectiveness of a business heavily relies on the marketing approach implemented. The advancement of technology has brought about significant changes in marketing approaches over time. Entrepreneurs systematically engage in the marketing process to fulfill consumers' wants and needs while simultaneously driving business profitability. Customers will choose quality products that offer reasonable prices thus providing satisfaction to customers.

Marketing elements include elements such as product, price, place, and promotion. Meanwhile, the 7P Marketing Mix consists of product, price, place, people, process, physical evidence, and promotion (Išoraitė, 2021). The 7P elements in marketing are explained as follows

- Product: refers to an item or service offered. Customers benefit from the products produced in five ways: functionality, effectiveness of goods and services, user satisfaction, quality of services and goods, and value for money.
- Price: refers to the amount that consumers are willing to pay for a product or service. The pricing of goods and services needs to consider the target market, product variations, variations of product and services offered, services provided and the level of competition in the market.
- Place: refers to the accessibility of a product or service. It extends beyond physical locations and encompasses the different avenues through which customers can interact with providers, including online platforms.
- People: refer to the providers of goods and services, namely entrepreneurs and workers. This group holds a crucial responsibility in building trust, instilling confidence, and providing assurance to encourage customer purchases. Customers themselves are an integral part of this element and play a significant role in the success of a business. When a business combines competent traders with satisfied customers, it leads to profitability and the growth of the enterprise.
- Process: refers to a set of procedures and operations performed in a specific sequence to provide goods and services to end users. A good business will use Standard Operating Procedures in conducting business activities.
- Physical evidence: refers to physical appearance. It comprises various components, including the physical environment, specific amenities that enhance the convenience of using the service, as well as the utilization of business names, logos, or symbols.

- vii. Promotion: refers to various forms and methods of communication between service providers and customers in the market, through advertising, sales promotion activities and direct and indirect means of communication with the public. Promotional activities influence customer interest and awareness of a product or service, increase sales and form loyalty to a brand.

The application of ethical principles is essential across the marketing elements since the area of business most closely associated with ethical misconduct is marketing. Marketing assumes a critical role within a business as it is entrusted with the responsibility of transparently communicating and fulfilling customer needs. This fundamental function necessitates the application of ethical principles to ensure that marketing activities align with the values of honesty, transparency, and customer satisfaction. Therefore, marketing is closest to the general view and is generally subject to community analysis and scrutiny (Caner & Banu, 2014). Ethics can be defined as a set of principles that guide the actions and decisions of individuals and organizations. In the context of marketing, the implementation of ethical standards entails applying principles of fairness, justice, and morality to decision-making, behavior, and overall organizational practices within marketing activities. This approach ensures that marketing efforts are conducted in an ethical manner, upholding integrity, and respect for stakeholders (Swope, 2019). Marketing ethics encompasses the fundamental principles and values that guide businesses in their promotion of products or services to customers (Rajan, 2016).

A business entity bears a responsibility to operate in an ethical and responsible manner, aligning with the expectations of both society and its stakeholders. When a business conducts its operations ethically, it tends to receive a favorable impact from society and stakeholders (Rajan, 2016; Swope, 2019). Indeed, neglecting ethical aspects by business companies can have severe consequences. It can result in customer dissatisfaction and a loss of trust in the company's integrity and values. This can further lead to a negative image, bad publicity, and damage to the company's reputation. In some cases, the neglect of ethics can even lead to legal action, as unethical practices may violate laws and regulations.

Rajan (2016) has outlined six ethical values in marketing which are honesty, responsibility, justice, respect, transparency, and social responsibility. Business companies must ensure that their products meet market needs in an ethical manner. Incorporating ethical values into marketing strategies will result in a boost in customer trust and respect. Here are some examples of ethical practices in marketing

- i. Honesty: ensuring that the products and services produced deliver the satisfaction promised or contribute to improving the customers' lifestyle as advertised.
- ii. Responsibility: responsible for addressing and taking accountability for any implications that may arise from their marketing and overall business activities.
- iii. Justice: achieving a balance between the needs and desires of both contracting parties and avoiding any elements of manipulation is crucial in ethical marketing.
- iv. Respect: to show respect, demonstrate understanding, and acknowledge the needs of all individuals involved in business activities.
- v. Transparency: offering accurate and transparent facts and information without any hint of manipulation, fraud, or concealment.
- vi. Social responsibility: fulfilling the four levels of social responsibility which are economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic aspects while conducting business operations.

Islamic Marketing Ethics

Islamic economics is deeply intertwined with the utilization of limited economic resources. Business and entrepreneurial activities conducted in accordance with Islamic teachings are considered acts of worship to Allah SWT. The ethical system in Islamic economics incorporates principles such as justice, balance, wisdom, and philanthropy (Buldan et al., 2021) and ethics is a moral system that controls human behavior about what is wrong and right (Ali, 2011). Islamic ethics are moral principles advocated by Islamic teachings, derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. They serve as a guide for individuals in promoting virtuous deeds and preventing them from engaging in harmful actions. Islamic ethics are comprehensive and universal in nature, providing guidance for all aspects of life (Karim, 2014). Important elements in Islamic ethics are *tawhid*, caliphate (*khalifah*), balance and justice (Turnbull, 2016). In business, especially in the marketing aspect, ethics play an important role in adding value to a business operation and distinguishing a Muslim from a non-Muslim. These elements guide economic practices to ensure fairness, sustainability, and the equitable distribution of wealth. By adhering to Islamic ethical values, businesses strive to create a just and prosperous society while fulfilling their religious obligations.

Marketing holds a crucial position in the business realm. Muslimpreneurs must ensure that their marketing activities, including product and service planning, pricing, distribution, and promotional techniques, align with the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. By adhering to these principles, Muslimpreneurs can conduct their marketing operations in a manner that reflects Islamic values and guidelines (Ahmad, 2010). Marketing is an essential aspect of business that serves the purpose of identifying consumer needs and identifying the target market for a particular product or service. The widely marketing approach, known as the Marketing Mix or the '4P' model, encompasses the fundamental elements of product/service, place, price, and promotion. This combination of 4P elements is recognized for its efficacy in attaining marketing objectives tailored to specific target audiences. In addition, there are also other marketing strategies such as the 5Ps which are product or service, place, price, promotion, and people (Abdul Hassan, 2008). There are factors identified in the practice of advertising ethics in a product. These include ensuring transparent and accurate pricing, promoting fairness without discrimination, abstaining from any elements of cruelty or fraud (Saeed, 2013). Examples of the application of ethics in the 5P marketing strategy are (Hassan et al., 2008; Zarrad & Debabi, 2017)

- i. Products: the production of products and services in Islam emphasizes the social and welfare aspects rather than maximizing profits. The production of products must adhere to the principles of purity from inception to completion, respecting Muslim sensitivities, and catering to the diverse needs and desires of various consumer segments in the market. Additionally, the products should be halal, available upon delivery, free from harm, and offer benefits to consumers.
- ii. Place: the main goal of distribution channels in Islam is to create value and improve living standards by providing ethically satisfactory services. The principle held by Islam in the distribution process of goods and services is that there is no element of manipulation, exploitation, coercion, appropriate packaging and does not burden the end user.
- iii. Price: Islam strictly forbids engaging in propaganda or disseminating false information pertaining to prices, demand, and supply in the market. Likewise, Islam prohibits any form of extortion or making excessive profits at the expense of consumers. In Islam, pricing should be conducted with fairness and freedom in the market. In other words,

the price of goods and services is determined by the interaction of demand and supply, while ensuring fairness for both traders and buyers. Islamic principles strictly prohibit activities such as hiding goods, engaging in the black market, monopolizing markets, and other similar practices.

- iv. Promotion: promotional and advertising activities should not rely on sexual persuasion, manipulation of emotions and fear, false testimonials, disregard for common sense, or encouragement of excessive luxury. These methods are considered unethical within the Islamic framework, as they solely aim to exploit the basic instincts of consumers for the sole purpose of gaining profit.
- v. People: freedom in decision making is highly valued. Consumers should be able to make choices without any form of coercion or undue influence. Consumers have the right to access accurate marketing information when engaging in transactions, while traders are obliged to refrain from using coercion and uphold integrity in their business dealings.

In Islam, marketing is viewed as a process of fulfilling the needs of consumers through the provision of halal (permissible) goods and services. It is done with the mutual consent of both parties, taking into consideration the welfare and well-being of individuals in both this world and the hereafter. Islamic marketing extends beyond mere profit-seeking activities in business sales, purchases, and rentals. In fact, all transactions are considered acts of worship, as Islam guides human behavior based on creed, Sharia (Islamic law), and moral principles, as exemplified by the practices of Prophet Muhammad SAW (Alom, 2011). Therefore, businesses in Islam need to comply with sharia principles, especially in conducting marketing activities (Johari, 2015). Islamic marketing ethics combines the concept of profit maximization with the values of equality and justice in creating social well-being different from conventional marketing ethics (Abdullah, 2012).

Advertising, on the other hand, needs to be free from illegal and unethical contracts and transactions, free from usury, monopolies, gambling, *riba'* and others. The process of product advertising adheres to principles such as truthfulness, transparency, accurate statements, the avoidance of prohibited elements as promotional tools, refraining from the exploitation of women, and the absence of elements related to corruption and fraud. These factors are considered essential in ensuring ethical and responsible advertising practices. (Mohammad, 2013). According to the al-Quran and as-Sunnah, ethical principles such as justice, truthfulness, virtue (*ihsan*), sincerity, and trust are essential in conducting business. These principles are emphasized to address behavioral challenges and promote ethical conduct within the realm of business transactions (Ilias, 2008).

Use of Social Media in Marketing and Advertising

Considering the ever-changing global landscape driven by technological advancements, society is compelled to remain in sync with the rapid pace of change. Consequently, the advertising industry, like other sectors, must adapt to these shifts by reevaluating their advertising approaches. This entails modifying traditional advertising practices such as purchasing television and radio slots, newspaper space, and physical street placements. To thrive, businesses must not only shift their perception of social media as solely a platform for leisure and social interactions but also recognize its potential as a powerful medium for marketing and profit generation (Silas, 2020). Social media serves as a marketing tool employed to capture attention and raise awareness among customers regarding the products and services being offered, distinguishing it from more traditional promotional methods.

Entrepreneurs leverage various platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok, to market their goods and services. Remarkably, statistics reveal that a significant number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) worldwide, approximately 10 million in number, utilize Facebook as a pivotal marketing medium (Facebook Data, Q3 2020).

According to findings by SME Corporation Malaysia, Muslimpreneurs predominantly utilize Facebook as their primary medium for marketing compared to other social media platforms. The data reveals that 87.7% of small businesses favor Facebook, followed by WhatsApp at 73.5% and Instagram at 64.9%. This indicates the strong inclination of Muslimpreneurs towards leveraging Facebook as a key component of their marketing strategy (SME, 2020). Facebook possesses specific features that appeal to Muslimpreneurs. Notably, it offers interactive advantages such as direct links to facilitate purchases, various ad format features, and the ability to showcase positive content. These attributes contribute to the attractiveness of Facebook as a platform for Muslimpreneurs, enabling them to engage effectively with their target audience (Klassen et.al, 2018).

Marketing Ethics in Advertising

The rapid of innovative and advanced technologies is revolutionizing the marketing and advertising landscape, both on a domestic and international scale. This transformation is significantly influencing the way business is conducted across various industries. Various studies demonstrated that ethical concerns in marketing primarily arise in advertisements targeting children, women, and those that promote materialism. In addition, there are also unethical advertisements such as advertisements that are stereotyped, advertisements that promote alcohol or tobacco, advertisements that have a negative influence on psychology, advertisements that are deceptive, false, and misleading customers with inaccurate information (Alsheeha, 2018).

Islam encompasses principles that govern various aspects of life, including advertising. In accordance with Islamic guidelines, advertisements must be grounded in truthfulness and devoid of fraudulent elements. Entrepreneurs are required to uphold transparency when promoting products and services, with the aim of benefiting and serving customers. Furthermore, it is essential to avoid any elements of exploitation, discrimination based on gender and the use of racist content in advertisements. Islamic ethics in social media advertising encompass five dimensions: preventing monopolies and exploitation, providing accurate marketing information, setting reasonable prices, respecting business competitors, and ensuring product quality (Ahmadova, 2017; Ghani & Ahmad, 2015; Shafiq, 2018).

Methodology

This study adapts a qualitative approach through the method of direct observation, specifically utilizing unobtrusive observation. The practice of unobtrusive observation has been utilized since the 1960s to observe and document human activities. This method allows for the collection and interpretation of data related to human behaviors and actions (Casselmann & Heinrich, 2011). The selection of this method was driven by the intention of the researcher to refrain from direct communication with the participants. By employing this approach, it can minimize any potential bias or alteration in the participants' behaviors, ensuring a more authentic representation of their natural actions and responses. The data for this study was obtained from the posting of advertising through the Facebook platform by Muslimpreneurs in Melaka during the first implementation period of the (Movement Control Order (MCO), 2020). This study collected a total of 32 samples from Facebook posts of

Muslimpreneurs specifically related to the food and beverage sector. Each sample was assigned a unique code ranging from RF1 to RF32.

The selection of posting by Muslimpreneurs was conducted by utilizing the search engine within Facebook. Keywords such as "food delivery," "menu," "COD" (cash on delivery), "online business group," "online page," and others were employed to identify relevant posts and content. This study conducted an observation and recorded the results in field notes, categorizing them based on predetermined themes. This approach allowed for a structured organization of the data, facilitating analysis and interpretation of the observations. This study involved classifying each Facebook post observed during the study period according to five fundamental principles of Islamic marketing: avoidance of monopoly and exploitation, provision of accurate marketing information, respect for competitors, offering reasonable prices, and ensuring product quality. The data collected were then analyzed using the content analysis method to evaluate the extent to which Muslimpreneurs adhered to Islamic marketing ethics. The study design is visually represented in Figure 1 below

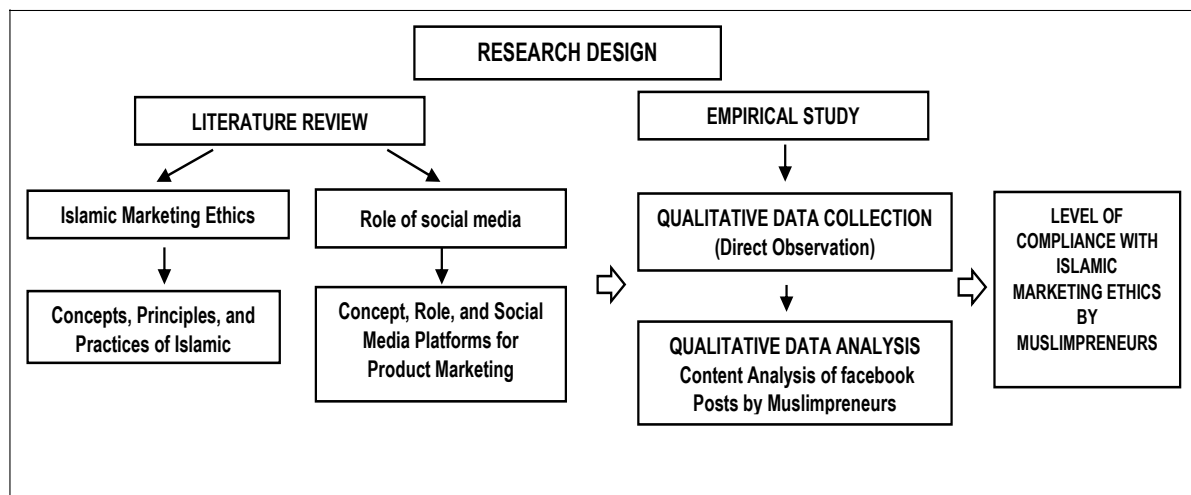


Figure 1: Research Design of Islamic Marketing Ethics by Muslimpreneurs

Findings and Discussion

This study primarily examines marketing strategies on Facebook, focusing on the practices of Muslimpreneurs. Through observations, it was found that Muslimpreneurs predominantly utilize Facebook as their primary medium for marketing compared to other social media platforms. The study incorporates five dimensions of Islamic ethics in social media advertising which are discouraging monopoly and exploitation, providing accurate marketing information, setting reasonable prices, respecting business competitors, and ensuring product quality. These dimensions are illustrated in chart 1:

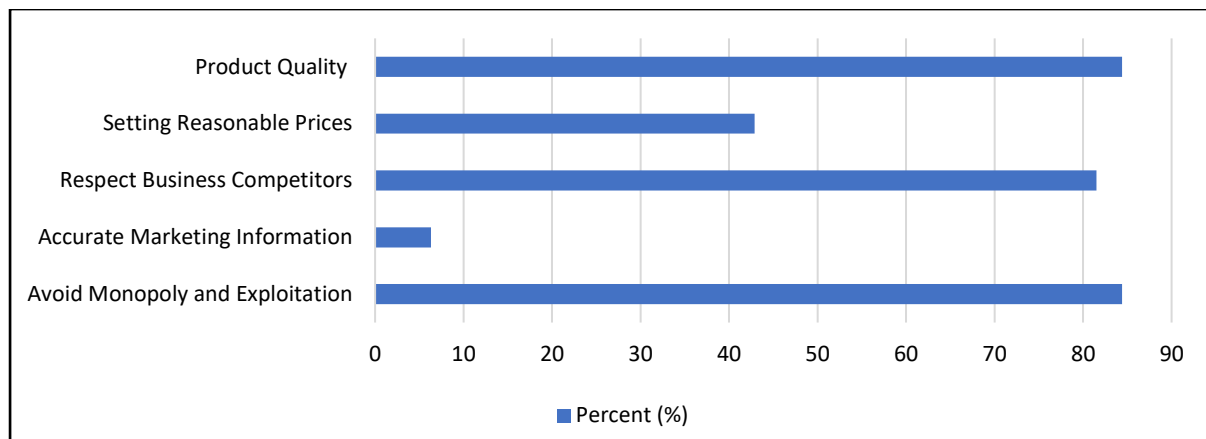


Chart 1: Compliance with Islamic Marketing Ethics by Muslimpreneurs in Advertising through Facebook

Avoid Monopoly and Exploitation

The findings of this study indicate that a majority of Muslimpreneurs demonstrate adherence to business ethics by avoiding monopoly and exploitation in their advertising practices. According to Chart 1, approximately 84.4% of the ads observed on Facebook were found to be free from monopolistic and exploitative elements. Further examination of specific samples, such as RF21, RF23, RF30, RF32, and RF27, revealed instances where sellers claimed that their products were superior to others. Islam forbids monopolies created and maintained by such unfair practices.

Providing Accurate Marketing Information

Interactions on social media platforms generate valuable information that plays a pivotal role in building customer trust. This information has the potential to attract and influence a larger audience, increasing their interest in the company's promoted products (Hajli, 2018). In online marketing, individuals do not have the same opportunity to physically examine products as they would in real-life settings (Andrew, n.d.). In online marketing, where physical product examination is not possible, the quality of products and the availability of comprehensive information, including images, advertisements, and contact details, are crucial in social media marketing. Muslimpreneurs must prioritize providing all necessary information to customers, ensuring compliance with marketing ethics. By doing so, they can build trust and credibility among customers in the online marketplace.

Payment method information is indeed a crucial element in social media marketing as it plays a significant role in encouraging users to make purchases from a business (Asiri, 2019). The study reveals that Muslimpreneurs have a limited understanding of the significance of including payment method information in their advertisement content. Only a small percentage, approximately 6.3%, of Muslimpreneurs clearly provide payment method details in their advertisements.

Respect Business Competitors

Viewing other Muslimpreneurs as rivals can potentially disrupt not only the financial aspects but also the strength of networks within the business community (Kusuma, 2020). Instead, fostering collaboration and partnership can lead to stronger networks and mutually beneficial outcomes. By supporting one another, Muslimpreneurs can contribute to the growth and prosperity of the community (Faizal, 2015). The study found that most Muslimpreneurs

exhibit respect for their competitors by refraining from criticizing other products. Instead, they focus on highlighting the benefits of their own products without taking advantage of the shortcomings of competitors' offerings. Chart 1 demonstrates that a significant majority (81.5%) of Facebook ads by Muslimpreneurs primarily emphasize their own products rather than directly targeting competitors. This indicates that Muslimpreneurs prioritize promoting the unique qualities and advantages of their own offerings rather than engaging in negative marketing tactics against their competitors.

Setting Reasonable Prices

In general, pricing in Islam is primarily governed by the market mechanism. This is in line with the teachings of Islam, as reflected in the Hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah RA:

A man came and said: Messenger of Allah, determine the price. He said: "No, but I will pray". Again, the man came and said: "O Messenger of Allah, set the price". He said: "Only Allah makes the price low and high. I hope that when I meet Allah, none of you will accuse me of wrongdoing in blood or property." (Sunan Abi Dawud, No. 3450)

The study indicates that the level of business ethics in terms of setting reasonable prices among Muslimpreneurs is currently at a moderate level. Only 42.9% of the sampled Facebook posts included this feature in their social media advertising, suggesting a lack of awareness among Muslimpreneurs regarding its importance (Grey & Fox, 2018).

Product Quality as a Method to Face Business Competitors

Product quality is a crucial factor for customers when making purchasing decisions. Matching the desired quality plays a significant role in completing the purchase process (Lemmink & Kasper, 1994). Hussain & Ranabhat (2013) study found that customers prioritize quality over service quality. Most businesses acknowledge that product quality is indeed one of the primary factors that significantly influence customer satisfaction (Sern & Mahadevan, 2019). Islamic ethics encourage Muslim entrepreneurs to focus on promoting the quality of their products to distinguish themselves from competitors, rather than ridiculing their competitors' products. Chart 1 demonstrates that a significant majority (84.4%) of Facebook ads shared by Muslimpreneurs include information about product quality. This indicates that Muslimpreneurs prioritize highlighting the positive aspects and excellence of their own offerings, aligning with ethical principles in their marketing approaches.

Conclusion

The study reveals that Muslimpreneurs have fulfilled at least three of the five basic principles of Islamic marketing ethics outlined. The study indicates that Muslimpreneurs demonstrate strong compliance with principles related to product quality, overcoming business competitors, as well as avoiding monopoly and exploitation, with over 80% adherence to these principles. However, the study also reveals that Muslimpreneurs show less thoroughness in sharing comprehensive marketing information. Less than 50% of Muslimpreneurs provide complete marketing information in their advertising materials, which includes the lack of disclosure regarding prices, transaction methods, and payment mediums.

Furthermore, less than 10% of Muslimpreneurs include price-related information in their advertising materials. The hiding of some vital information is a common marketing practice, but it is not aligned with the Islamic marketing ethics. Muslimpreneurs should prioritize transparency and provide full marketing information. These findings highlight areas for improvement among Muslimpreneurs in terms of providing comprehensive marketing information and transparency in their advertisements.

This study emphasizes the importance of understanding of ethical marketing practices within the Muslimpreneurs context. It highlights the unique ethical considerations faced by Muslimpreneurs when utilizing Facebook as a marketing medium. This study provides practical guidelines for maintaining ethical integrity while leveraging the platform's capabilities.

Furthermore, this study has practical implications for Muslimpreneurs to engage in ethical marketing practices. It provides actionable insights, best practices, and recommendations that can help Muslimpreneurs navigate the ethical dilemmas they may encounter when using Facebook as a marketing medium. By doing so, it assists in promoting responsible and ethical marketing practices within the Muslim business community. Further study can be conducted to understand the factors influencing the lack of emphasis on price and marketing information among Muslimpreneurs.

This study emphasizes the notable congruence between Islamic marketing ethics and the practices of Muslimpreneurs, specifically regarding aspects such as product quality, competition, and avoidance of monopolistic behaviour. Nevertheless, it underscores a deficiency in furnishing comprehensive marketing information, with less than 50% of them incorporating vital particulars like pricing and transaction methodologies. Remarkably, less than 10% divulge information related to prices. This gap indicates the necessity for improved transparency and adherence to Islamic marketing tenets. The findings from this research offer valuable insights to Muslimpreneurs aiming to uphold ethical benchmarks while utilizing platforms like Facebook for promotional endeavours. The study promotes conscientious marketing conduct within the Muslim business sphere and identifies potential avenues for prospective exploration.

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