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## Islamic Ethics in Influencer Marketing: (Guidelines for Shariah-Compliant Digital Campaigns)

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### **Abstract**

The rapid rise of digital influencer marketing has transformed consumer engagement and brand communication across the Muslim world. However, the ethical implications of this trend remain underexplored, particularly in light of Islamic values and Shariah-compliant business practices. This paper investigates influencer marketing through the lens of Islamic ethics, offering a comprehensive framework for developing ethical and Shariah-aligned digital campaigns. Drawing upon classical sources of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), Maqasid al-Shariah (objectives of Islamic law), and contemporary business ethics, the study highlights the critical boundaries of halal and haram in online persuasion, the risks of deceptive promotion (gharar), and the moral responsibilities of content creators and brands. Using a qualitative review of case studies, fatwas, and marketing guidelines from Muslim-majority countries, the article proposes a practical guideline checklist for Islamic influencer marketing. The findings aim to assist marketers, Islamic scholars, digital platforms, and consumers in fostering a more spiritually conscious and ethically responsible digital marketplace.

**Keywords:** Islamic Marketing Ethics, Influencer Marketing, Shariah Compliance, Digital Campaign, Halal Branding, Gharar (Uncertainty), Maqasid al-Shariah, Business Ethics in Islam, Online Consumer Behavior, Islamic Advertising Standards.

### **Introduction**

#### **Background and Rationale**

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In recent years, influencer marketing has emerged as a dominant force in digital advertising. Through social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook, influencers—individuals with the power to affect the purchasing decisions of their followers—play a key role in shaping public opinion and consumer behavior. According to global digital marketing reports, influencer marketing has become a multi-billion-dollar industry, projected to reach over \$24 billion by 2025.<sup>1</sup>

This rise is also evident in Muslim-majority societies, where digital literacy, smartphone penetration, and the consumption of social media content are rapidly increasing. However, with this growth comes a unique set of challenges. The Islamic ethical framework, deeply rooted in the Qur'an, Sunnah, and classical jurisprudence (fiqh), sets boundaries for lawful (halal) and unlawful (haram) economic activity. This extends to how businesses communicate, promote, and influence consumers. Yet, influencer marketing remains largely unregulated and unexamined from an Islamic ethical standpoint.

### **Problem Statement**

While Western marketing ethics focus on transparency, fairness, and consumer rights, Islamic ethics place additional emphasis on intention (niyyah), honesty (sidq), justice (adl), and avoiding harm (darar). These principles are not always observed in influencer marketing, where paid promotions are often disguised as personal recommendations, exaggerated claims are common, and undisclosed sponsorships create deceptive perceptions (gharar).

In addition, Islamic consumers face ethical dilemmas when following influencers who promote non-halal products, exhibit un-Islamic lifestyles, or engage in content that may contradict modesty guidelines. This creates a conflict between market practices and religious values, leading to the need for clear Shariah-compliant guidelines in the influencer marketing domain.

### **Research Objectives**

This study aims to:

- Explore the ethical implications of influencer marketing from an Islamic perspective.
- Identify major violations of Islamic business ethics in digital campaigns.
- Develop a Shariah-compliant framework or checklist for Islamic influencer marketing.
- Provide recommendations for stakeholders: influencers, brands, regulators, and Muslim consumers.

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## **Significance of the Study**

This research bridges the gap between Islamic jurisprudence and contemporary marketing practice, enabling Muslim-majority societies, Islamic brands, and consumers to navigate the digital economy ethically. It also contributes to the global discourse on ethical marketing by introducing faith-based perspectives that transcend purely secular concerns.

In doing so, the article responds to the call for Islamization of knowledge in business and administration, particularly for BBA-level students and researchers seeking to integrate Shariah principles with modern commercial models.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Rise of Influencer Marketing**

Influencer marketing is defined as a form of social media marketing that uses individuals with established online reputations to promote products or services to their followers. Influencers build trust through authenticity, personal branding, and direct engagement with their audience. Research shows that consumers often trust influencers more than traditional advertisements, particularly in lifestyle, fashion, beauty, and health sectors.<sup>2</sup>

This marketing model operates on the power of social proof—psychological phenomenon's where people mimic the actions of others, assuming they reflect correct behavior. Brands exploit this by paying influencers to subtly promote their offerings, often without clear disclosure, blurring the lines between genuine opinion and commercial interest.<sup>3</sup>

### **Ethical Challenges in Influencer Marketing**

Several ethical concerns have emerged:

- **Lack of Transparency:** Influencers often fail to disclose paid promotions, creating a deceptive environment.
- **Misleading Claims:** Many influencers exaggerate the benefits of a product to attract engagement.
- **Inappropriate Content:** Sexualized images, luxurious lifestyles, and excessive consumerism conflict with ethical and moral standards in many cultures.
- **Audience Exploitation:** Children and adolescents, in particular, are vulnerable to uncritical acceptance of influencer messages.

In response, some regulatory bodies like the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the United States and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in the UK have imposed disclosure

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requirements, yet such standards are inconsistently applied or absent in many Muslim countries.<sup>4</sup>

**Islamic Ethical Framework in Business:** Islamic business ethics are derived from Qur'an, Hadith, and centuries of juristic scholarship. The foundation of Islamic ethics includes:

**Sidq** (truthfulness): Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, *"The merchant who tells the truth and is honest will be with the prophets, the truthful, and the martyrs"*

**Amanah** (trust): Fulfilling responsibilities honestly without betrayal.

**Tazkiyah** (purification): Avoiding deceit and immoral content for personal gain.

Avoidance of Gharar (uncertainty) and Tadbis (misrepresentation) in business transactions.

Furthermore, Maqasid al-Shariah (objectives of Islamic law) emphasizes five protections: religion, life, intellect, progeny, and wealth. Any economic activity that harms these objectives—like deceptive marketing, mental manipulation, or spiritual corruption – is ethically problematic in Islam.<sup>5</sup>

### **Islamic Marketing: Principles and Practice**

Islamic marketing aims to serve societal welfare, not just generate profit. According to *Alserhan*, Islamic marketing emphasizes halal content, ethical persuasion, value-based segmentation, and God-consciousness (taqwa) in transactions.

- Muslim scholars and marketers advocate for content that:
- Promotes modesty and truth.
- Avoids exploitation of desires.
- Ensures transparent pricing and ethical endorsements.

However, most literature on Islamic marketing focuses on traditional media or halal product certification, with little focus on digital and influencer marketing models.<sup>6</sup>

### **Influencer Marketing in the Muslim World**

Despite the growth of Muslim influencers, research shows that Shariah-compliance is often overlooked in digital campaigns. A study in Malaysia revealed that only a minority of Muslim influencers disclosed paid endorsements or followed ethical advertising norms.

There is also growing concern over the cultural westernization of Muslim youth through influencers who promote luxury consumption, liberal values, and body image ideals that contradict Islamic modesty and contentment (qana'ah).<sup>7</sup>

Few frameworks currently exist to guide:

- Influencers on how to stay within Islamic limits.
- Brands on how to select Shariah-compliant content creators.
- Regulators on how to monitor unethical influencer behavior.<sup>8</sup>

Summary of Literature Gaps:

- Area Literature Coverage Gap:
- Islamic business ethics
- Well developed
- Mostly in general commerce, less in digital media
- Influencer marketing
- Rapidly expanding Little integration with Islamic norms
- Guidelines for Muslim influencers
- Very limited No formalized Shariah framework for digital marketing.

## **Conceptual Framework and Methodology**

### **Conceptual Framework: Integrating Islamic Ethics with Influencer Marketing**

The central proposition of this study is that influencer marketing can be aligned with Shariah principles through a conscious integration of Islamic ethical values into digital communication strategies. The conceptual framework of this research is grounded in the following Islamic ethical sources:

#### **Qur'anic Principles**

The Qur'an repeatedly commands honesty, justice, and avoidance of deception. In commercial matters, it emphasizes fairness and accountability. For example,

وَيْلٌ لِلْمُطَفِّفِينَ (1) الَّذِينَ إِذَا اكْتَالُوا عَلَى النَّاسِ يَسْتَوْفُونَ (2) وَإِذَا كَالُوا لَهُمْ أَوْ وَزَنُوا لَهُمْ يُخْسِرُونَ (3)<sup>9</sup>

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“Woe to those who give less [than due], who, when they take a measure from people, take in full. But if they give by measure or by weight to them, they cause loss”.

This principle underpins the Islamic prohibition of misrepresentation in product endorsements.

### **Sunnah and Prophetic Business Ethics**

The *Prophet Muhammad* ﷺ was known as "Al-Amin" (the trustworthy). His business practices were marked by truthfulness, transparency, and moral persuasion. He disapproved of hiding defects in goods and warned against fraudulent trade. These traits form the ethical core of a Shariah-compliant influencer's conduct.

### **Maqasid al-Shariah (Higher Objectives of Islamic Law)**

This framework assesses whether a marketing action preserves or harms the five fundamental objectives of Islam: protection of faith, life, intellect, progeny, and wealth. Influencer content that promotes unlawful products, distorts values, or psychologically manipulates consumers would violate these objectives.<sup>10</sup>

### **Avoidance of Gharar and Taghrir**

Islamic jurisprudence prohibits gharar (excessive uncertainty) and taghrir (delusion or exaggeration) in economic transactions. Influencer marketing often blurs the line between genuine recommendation and sponsored advertising, especially when disclosures are missing or content is sensationalized. A Shariah-aligned campaign must clearly distinguish between paid promotion and personal opinion.

Thus, the conceptual framework integrates Qur'anic morality, Prophetic business conduct, Maqasid al-Shariah, and Fiqhi prohibitions against deception to evaluate the ethicality of digital campaigns.

### **Methodological Approach**

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory methodology to understand the emerging field of Islamic influencer marketing and its ethical boundaries. The methodology includes the following steps:

### **Literature-Based Thematic Analysis**

A review of academic sources, Islamic jurisprudential texts, fatwas, and regulatory documents was conducted to identify recurring themes related to:

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- Business ethics in Islam
  - Digital media conduct
  - Islamic rulings on advertising and deception
  - Contemporary influencer behavior

Themes were coded manually and clustered under categories such as "honesty in promotion," "modesty in content," "haram product endorsements," and "audience manipulation."

### **Case Study Analysis**

Selected real-world influencer campaigns in Muslim-majority countries (e.g., Malaysia, UAE, Pakistan, and Indonesia) were analyzed to:

- Evaluate whether Islamic ethical principles were observed or violated
- Assess audience reactions from an ethical standpoint
- Identify gaps in regulation or influencer awareness
- Cases included product endorsements in fashion, cosmetics, wellness, and food sectors, often presented as lifestyle vlogs or personal recommendations.

### **Consultative Review of Fatwas and Shariah Committees**

Opinions from respected Islamic jurists and national Shariah advisory boards (e.g., Malaysian Shariah Advisory Council, UAE Fatwa Council) were reviewed on the subjects of:

Digital advertising, Financial disclosures, Halal vs. haram product promotion, Visual modesty and Islamic content boundaries, This helped in developing a normative baseline for evaluating campaigns.

### **Development of Ethical Guidelines**

Based on the conceptual framework and findings from the above sources, the study formulates a practical checklist for influencers, brands, and regulators. The guidelines aim to ensure:

- Transparency of paid promotions
- Avoidance of unlawful (haram) product marketing
- Maintenance of Islamic values in content presentation

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## Scope and Limitations

This study is exploratory and normative in nature. While it draws on selected examples and doctrinal sources, it does not attempt to measure compliance levels statistically. The findings are primarily conceptual and intended to inform ethical frameworks, not to provide quantitative generalizations.

Limitations include:

- Lack of uniform Shariah guidelines across jurisdictions
- Difficulty in accessing private sponsorship data from influencers
- Variability in cultural interpretations of modesty and ethics

However, by offering a structured ethical model grounded in Islamic tradition, the study aims to contribute meaningfully to future empirical and policy-based research.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Common Ethical Violations in Influencer Marketing**

Based on case study analysis, content observation, and Shariah-based review, several frequent ethical violations were identified in influencer marketing practices among Muslim influencers and brands targeting Muslim audiences:

#### **Non-Disclosure of Sponsored Content**

Many influencers fail to clearly disclose when a post is paid or sponsored. In Islamic ethics, this constitutes *gharar* (deception) and *ikhfa al-haqiqah* (concealing the truth), which are categorically prohibited in trade and marketing. *The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ* warned against misleading buyers about goods or their pricing.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Promotion of Haram Products**

Several influencers promote items such as alcohol-mimicking beverages, non-halal food items, or fashion products that violate modesty guidelines (e.g., revealing clothing, perfumes with intoxicating ingredients). This violates both the letter and spirit of Shariah and leads to the normalization of impermissible (*haram*) consumption among their followers.

#### **Use of Sexualized or Immodest Content**

Some influencers use sexually provocative poses, revealing attire, or flirtatious tone to increase reach and engagement. Such content undermines the Islamic concept of *haya*



(modesty) and contradicts Qur'anic injunctions on lowering the gaze and guarding private parts.

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَلِكَ أَزْكَى لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ (30)<sup>12</sup>

### Materialism and Extravagance

A recurring theme is the glorification of luxury, brand obsession, and extravagant lifestyles. Islam encourages moderation (i'tidal) and warns against israf (extravagance). The Qur'an states,

إِنَّ الْمُبَذِّرِينَ كَانُوا إِخْوَانَ الشَّيَاطِينِ<sup>13</sup>

“Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils...”

Influencer culture often glamorizes wasteful consumption, indirectly pressuring audiences to pursue material excess.

### Manipulative or Exaggerated Claims

Some influencers exaggerate the effectiveness of a product, using scripted testimonials, paid comments, or edited visuals. Islam condemns taghrir (delusion), where the consumer is led to believe a false reality. *The Prophet* ﷺ forbade hiding product defects and marketing through deceit.<sup>14</sup>

### Stakeholder-Specific Responsibilities

To develop a Shariah-compliant influencer ecosystem, ethical accountability must be shared among all involved actors:

#### Influencers

Muslim influencers must operate with a sense of amanah (trust) and recognize their responsibility to represent truth and virtue. Their conduct should align with prophetic traits: honesty, humility, modesty, and transparency. Influencers are role models, and Islam places moral accountability on those who influence public behavior.

وَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا إِنَّا أَطَعْنَا سَادَتَنَا وَكُبَرَاءَنَا فَأَضَلُّونَا السَّبِيلَا (67) رَبَّنَا آتِهِمْ ضِعْفَيْنِ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ وَالْعَنَاهُمْ لَعْنًا كَبِيرًا (68)<sup>15</sup>

#### Brands and Advertisers

Brands that target Muslim audiences should ensure:

- Products are halal-certified or at least free of known haram elements.

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- Content guidelines for marketing collaborations are consistent with Islamic values.
  - Paid posts are clearly disclosed and free from manipulative tactics.
  - Brands must also avoid using Muslim influencers merely as cultural tokens without respecting ethical boundaries or modesty standards.

### **Regulators and Islamic Advisory Councils**

Islamic finance and media regulatory authorities can:

- Issue fatwas or ethical codes specific to influencer marketing.
- Monitor high-traffic influencer accounts for violations.
- Encourage platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok) to implement “Shariah-compliant content flags” for Muslim markets.

Countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia already have Shariah advisory boards under their finance and broadcasting sectors, which can expand their purview to include influencer behavior.<sup>16</sup>

### **Audiences and Followers**

Muslim followers should also develop ethical literacy regarding online consumption. Just as buyers in Islamic law are accountable for ensuring halal transactions, digital followers are responsible for not endorsing or spreading unethical content. Passive liking or sharing of haram promotions indirectly supports them.

### **Ethical Criteria for Shariah-Compliant Influencer Campaigns**

Based on Islamic texts, contemporary scholarship, and case-based analysis, the following ethical criteria are proposed as a foundation for developing Shariah-compliant digital campaigns:

- Truthfulness (Sidq): No exaggerated claims or hidden agendas.
- Transparency (Wuduh): Full disclosure of paid partnerships or sponsorships.
- Modesty (Haya): Content should observe Islamic guidelines on dress, tone, and conduct.
- Halal Content: Product or service promoted must be halal in nature and usage.
- No Deception (Gharar/Taghrir): Clear, honest representation of the product.

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- Avoidance of Harm (Darar): No psychological manipulation or content promoting harmful behaviors.
  - Purposeful Intention (Niyyah): Campaigns should serve a higher ethical purpose beyond profit.
  - Moderation (Wasatiyyah): Avoidance of extravagance or material excess.
  - Cultural Sensitivity (Ihtiram): Respect for Islamic norms across diverse regions and madhhabs (schools of thought).
  - Spiritual Accountability (Taqwa): Recognizing that all actions—even digital—fall under divine observation.

These criteria can serve as the basis for a voluntary code of ethics adopted by brands, influencers, and even digital platforms seeking to serve Muslim-majority markets ethically.<sup>17</sup>

### **Practical Guidelines: Toward a Shariah-Compliant Influencer Ecosystem**

To move from ethical theory to practical implementation, this section presents actionable recommendations for four primary stakeholder groups: influencers, brands, regulators, and educational institutions. These guidelines aim to foster a digitally responsible ecosystem that reflects the spiritual, ethical, and social values of Islam while enabling business innovation.

#### **For Muslim Influencers**

Muslim influencers must acknowledge their moral agency in shaping public behavior. They are not just content creators but are seen—willingly or not—as role models. Their actions have a profound effect on identity formation, moral standards, and consumer choices, particularly among youth.

#### **Guidelines:**

1. Disclose all sponsored content clearly using hashtags like #PaidAd or #Sponsored, as per international best practices.
2. Avoid promoting haram products or services, such as alcoholic drinks, non-halal food, or un-Islamic finance products.
3. Respect Islamic modesty standards in visual appearance, speech, and content themes.
4. Consult a qualified Shariah advisor when dealing with religiously sensitive endorsements.

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5. Avoid misleading testimonials, edited visuals, or excessive praise that can deceive the audience.
  6. Practice moderation in showcasing wealth, luxury, or lifestyle habits—resisting the glamorization of israf (extravagance).
  7. Declare affiliate links or commission-based promotions, ensuring transparency in monetary gain.
  8. Promote products and messages that align with values like sustainability, social good, or spiritual well-being.
  9. By embodying taqwa (God-consciousness) in their digital presence, influencers can build credibility and earn both consumer trust and divine reward.

#### **For Islamic Brands and Advertisers**

Islamic businesses hold a responsibility to choose ethical collaborators and to ensure their brand messaging does not contradict Islamic principles. The profit motive must be balanced with spiritual integrity.

##### **Guidelines:**

- Vet influencers for Shariah-compliant behavior and content consistency before entering partnerships.
- Provide influencer training on Islamic business ethics and transparent disclosure norms.
- Avoid influencer collaborations that involve unethical messaging, vulgarity, or religious mockery.
- Use content contracts that include clauses for Islamic values, modesty, and appropriate language.
- Include Islamic ethics officers or consultants in campaign design and review processes.
- Islamic brands must lead by example, making ethics a core value, not a marketing slogan.

#### **For Regulators and Digital Platforms**

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Given the lack of unified guidelines in most Muslim countries, Islamic media councils, advertising authorities, and Shariah boards can help define boundaries, promote ethics, and enforce norms.

**Guidelines:**

- Develop Shariah-based digital advertising codes in collaboration with scholars and tech experts.
- Enforce disclosure rules for paid influencer content across all major platforms in Muslim-majority jurisdictions.
- Establish digital media complaint cells to allow consumers to report unethical content.
- Certify Islamic influencers or ethical advertisers through voluntary badges or public registers.
- Collaborate with global platforms (e.g., Meta, TikTok, YouTube) to incorporate filters, halal product indicators, or religious sensitivity settings.
- Policy development must keep pace with technology while staying grounded in the timeless values of Shariah.

**For Business Schools and Islamic Institutions**

Finally, educational institutions—especially BBA programs and Islamic finance departments—must train future marketers and business leaders to operate ethically in a faith-integrated framework.

**Guidelines:**

- Incorporate Islamic business ethics courses with a special focus on digital and influencer marketing.
  - Develop research labs and student projects to monitor, analyze, and design Shariah-compliant campaigns.
  - Invite practicing Muslim influencers and scholars to share experiences and discuss ethical dilemmas.
  - Encourage interdisciplinary learning, combining Shariah, media studies, consumer psychology, and brand communication.
  - This intellectual investment will build a new generation of ethically conscious marketers rooted in Islamic tradition yet fully equipped for the digital age.
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## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

As influencer marketing continues to reshape the landscape of digital commerce, it is imperative for Muslim societies to ensure that the principles of Islamic ethics are not left behind in this transformation. The unchecked growth of this industry poses significant spiritual and ethical risks—ranging from the normalization of haram products and immodest content to deceptive advertising practices and consumer manipulation.

This study has highlighted the major ethical violations present in current influencer marketing practices and evaluated them against a rich framework drawn from Qur’anic principles, Prophetic traditions, and Islamic jurisprudence. The paper presented a set of actionable ethical guidelines rooted in the values of truthfulness, modesty, transparency, trust, and spiritual accountability. These guidelines are not only relevant to Muslim influencers and brands but also essential for digital regulators and educational institutions committed to building a more principled marketplace.

Influencer marketing, when done ethically, can serve as a force for good: promoting halal consumption, modest lifestyles, charitable causes, and Islamic values. The key lies in fostering a culture of conscious engagement, where influencers recognize their spiritual responsibilities and brands uphold the sacred trust of consumer welfare.

Ultimately, a Shariah-compliant digital campaign is not merely about avoiding haram—it is about promoting what is wholesome, just, and spiritually elevating. Such a vision calls for collaboration between scholars, marketers, regulators, and consumers, who must collectively rise to the ethical challenges of the digital age.

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