

# Thematic Analysis of Shariah Principles in Digital Advertising: A case study of traditional medicine marketing

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## Abstract

This study examines the application of shariah principles related to the current practice of social media advertising. This study specifically examines the marketing practice of traditional medicine. This qualitative study employs thematic content analysis using ATLAS.ti 22, conducted in three stages: open coding, classification, and theme generation to answer the research objectives. This study highlights the five themes of principles in social media advertising that serve as the primary indication of regulatory control in the marketing of traditional medicine products that do not violate the principle of fiqh muamalat, the purpose of which is to safeguard consumer rights.

**Keywords:** Thematic analysis, shariah principles, digital advertising, traditional medicine

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## 1.0 Introduction

The transformation of digital media advertising and the internet has recently acquired popularity among corporate organizations due to government assistance granting RM210 million for 2019–2021 in the service sector to effectively promote the transition to industry 4.0 technology (SKMM, 2018; Finance, 2020). PENJANA 2020 has infused RM1.8 billion into the digital economy, while the creative sector, including the advertising business, has received RM190 million to support economic development and innovation via digital platforms (EPU, 2021). According to RMK-12, digital advertising may revitalize the economy and revive the micro, small, and medium business (SME) sector to maintain and compete. As everyone knows, the COVID-19 pandemic devastated many parties (Nur Amirah Abd Rani, 2021). Hence, advertising increases investment and government taxes to boost business profits as advertising enables customers to contrast the top products available and simultaneously increase the quality of the product. According to the internet user study conducted in 2020, 98% of users go online for social and communication purposes, while 64% use it for financial and online shopping since digital advertising fuelled its expansion. Hence, promoting traditional medical items using social media platforms is categorized as adaptable, innovative, effective, and following current trends for promoting and influencing consumers of health products worldwide. Several businesses utilize social media to promote health products by posting ads, images, and customer reviews (Nur Amirah Abd Rani, 2021b). Social media promotion of traditional pharmaceutical items is a successful business trend and a new standard in today's lifestyle (Ismail, S. F., Azmi, I. M. A. G., Daud, M., Jalil, J. A., & Safuan, S. 2020).

Promoting traditional medical items on social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok is on the rise and becoming more prevalent in society. This growing phenomenon is criticized and threatens the Malaysian advertising landscape (Nur Atikah binti Yaakub, 2020). S. F. Ismail et al. (2019) assert that most of the marketing for traditional medicine products often makes exaggerated and overclaims, such as being able to treat obesity, diabetes, hypertension, muscular pain, heart discomfort, and cancer. According to Jaapar et al. (2019) and Medications Advertising Board (MOB) 2019, this is against the legislation and regulations for promoting medicines and health goods to the public. It also goes against the *maqasid al-nafs* principles towards the customers. Advertisers and business owners often utilize the phenomena of religious exploitation to entice customers by making claims about how their products recited from the Quran, prevent jinn intervention, ward against witchcraft, or are conducive to ablution. According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), the communications content code (CMCF) forbids acts of violence based on gender, incitement or provocation, and the use of religious imagery in marketing. According to Ismail, S. F., Azmi, I. M. A. G., Daud, M., Jalil, J. A., & Safuan, S. (2020), the government should keep an eye on pharmaceutical marketing activities for the reason that they serve as a platform for educating the public about the value of maintaining health and selecting the best health products. The shariah principles of social media advertising must be researched to fill the lacuna of traditional medicines marketing regulations to ensure the legal protection of the community complied

with *fiqh muamalat's* value. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the application of shariah principles related to the current practice of social media advertising, specifically examining the marketing practice of traditional medicine.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Traditional medicine

According to worldwide data, the annual cost of medicines, in general, is estimated at USD60 billion (about RM192 billion) and is expected to increase continuously. In the next few decades, this number will increase to 20 times. From the global market perspective, traditional medicine is predicted to increase income by RM16 trillion in 30 years by 2050 by the World Bank. However, according to (Mohd Jalil, 2016), concerns about the effectiveness and safety of traditional and herbal medicine have been raised due to market demand in this industry. The local community makes plants and herbs part of the culture and medical practice in Malaysia. In every race, whether the Malay, Chinese, Indian, Orang Asli, and Pribumi communities, each has an understanding and use of traditional medicine that is scientifically proven and beneficial. In line with the current modernity, traditional medicine is now also recommended as one of the alternative or complementary treatments to relieve pain and increase the effectiveness of modern medicine (Zulfikar et al., 2020). Traditional medicine among other communities, such as the indigenous people of Sabah and Sarawak, the Chinese, Indians, and others, has been scientifically proven as a complementary and alternative treatment and has its benefits. The historical usage of herbal and traditional remedies can be linked to the habits of ancient civilizations that made traditional herbs a significant component of their daily lives, supporting the government's strategy for increasing well-being and sustainable health. (S. Ismail & Mohd Mokhtar, 2017).

Industrialized and developing countries now favor herbal and traditional medicines, part of complementary medicine (WHO, 2019). Traditional and herbal medicine is a popular choice for millions in developing countries because it is the most accessible and inexpensive treatment alternative (Mohamad et al., 2019). In this era of globalization, the increasing and rapid global increase in the use of the internet, together with active online marketing by operators, marketers, and consumers, has increased the attractiveness of these drugs in a rapid period (Erlangga, H. 2022). This phenomenon is because the economic potential in the herbal and traditional medicine industry has grown after the epidemic (Panyod et al., 2020). Even the country also has many unique current plant species. According to the development of the traditional medicine industry can be explored and developed to provide an opportunity for the herbal medicine sector in Malaysia to generate a large income in addition to supporting the government's policy in improving well-being and sustainable health (sustainable well-being) (Tan et al., 2020). In Malaysia, ethnic diversity with its traditional medicinal practices has played an important role in developing herbal medicine. There are six main forms of traditional medicine practiced in this country:

traditional Malay, Chinese and Indian medicine, Islamic medical practice, homeopathy, and chiropractic and osteopathy treatment.

Currently, pharmaceutical marketing in Malaysia is regulated under the Medicine (Advertisement & Selling) Act (MASA) 1956. The Malaysian Ministry of Health established the Food-Medicine Interphase Classification Committee in 2000 to define and control FDI products, namely the National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Division (NPRO) and the Food Safety and Quality Division (FSQD). According to MASA, to control the advertising of medicine and health food, this act monitors and regulates the promotion and sale of these products to protect the interests and health of consumers. Some of these things are not precisely characterized as "food", "medicine", or "food-drug interphase products", i.e. (FDI). Several categories of products need to be registered, such as a) Pharmaceutical products that contain scheduled poisons, b) Pharmaceutical products that do not, such as probiotics, and c) natural products, such as traditional medicine or herbs.

## **2.2 Social media advertising in the Marketing of traditional medicine**

The technique of utilizing social media platforms to advertise a company, a product, or a service is known as social media advertising. Paid or sponsored articles and user-generated material posted by fans of the company may all be examples of this. Social media marketing may increase brand recognition, website traffic, and company revenue (Zainuddin, 2022). Artificial intelligence, machines, and social media technologies have evolved through technology and the internet, significantly reducing marketing costs (Chugh, 2022). As a result, customers embrace new media technologies and change their preferences. Digital marketing offers benefits, including marketing effectiveness, adaptability, a broader target audience, and direct client engagement (Nandy & Pal, 2016). According to Liang (2021), digital marketing has displaced conventional pharmaceutical marketing owing to improved cost savings, time management efficiency, and more engaging ad communication strategies. Social media marketing has displaced traditional medication promotion in the pharmaceutical sector because of increased cost savings, time management effectiveness, and more engaging advertising communication techniques (Ngamvichaikit, 2021).

Further, Tan et al., (2020) suggest that traditional pharmaceutical companies using value chain applications can increase sales results and integrate the marketing value chain to be competitive in the market based on business model innovation on the internet. According to Hamilton (2020), most pharmaceutical companies maintain their performance and sales through business digitalization. In addition, digital marketing during the pandemic season has greatly benefited hospital and pharmacy services because it is more effective in generating more interactions with customers (Raden Vasthu Broto Ariyo, 2022).

Bharskar & Siddheshwar (2020) have identified methods of marketing medicinal products through celebrities or influencers to increase sales and profits as the ads connect with customers through youtube, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook have been used. Akella (2022) has proven Facebook ads help pharmaceutical companies track and target users who have visited the company's e-commerce site. Facebook ads offer tools to help

pharmaceutical companies stay compliant with regulations about disclosing safety information or reporting side effects. Sawad & Turkistani (2021) suggest that pharmaceutical companies prepare a reliable digital platform while ensuring that other aspects, such as supply chain, inventory, and delivery systems, are not neglected.

Despite the popularity of social media advertising, a lack of disclosure of 'material relationships' between businesses or brands may affect consumer interest. Chan & Fan (2022) found that celebrities' moral image and nature of social responsibility influence consumers' choice of advertised products because they are cognitive and more persuasive than ordinary advertisements. However, according to Erlangga et al., (2020), customer satisfaction with advertising copywriting must be consistent with the quality of products that pharmaceutical companies must provide. This quality product is higher than customer satisfaction with high-tech advertisements.

Ahaiwe (2019) reports some unethical media practices such as fraud, deception, and misleading involving the advertising of herbal medicines. The authorities in charge of regulating herbal medicine should take on the role of observers in the effort to reduce the danger to people's health and the detrimental impacts on their well-being that are caused by the illegal actions of certain herbal medicine practitioners. Consumers may make more informed decisions with regulations requiring truthful advertising (Shakeel, 2020). Etemad et al., (2016) agree that policymakers must implement various executive and administrative rules to prohibit the airing of hazardous commercials. Yeboah-Banin & Asante (2020) draws attention to the need to regulate the marketing of herbal medicinal products, especially when they use various media channels that introduce variations into their messages. As the previous study has studied digitization in marketing, market segmentation in advertising, well-known medicine advertising platforms, ethics, and regulatory and governance enforcement regarding pharmaceutical and health product advertising guidelines, undoubtedly has created a gap in studies on Shariah-compliant principle on digital advertising for traditional medicinal products. To effectively implement shariah in digital advertising, it is necessary to emphasize protecting all these things: religion, life, the mind, future generations, and property.

### **3.0 Methodology**

This qualitative study employs thematic content analysis using ATLAS. ti 22, described the results from data collection conducted through a semi-structured interview process with authorities, NGOs, industry, and consumers consisting of MCMC, MOH, JAKIM, LPF, KPDPNHEP, industry players, and consumer associations. Thematic analysis is a technique for evaluating qualitative data that entails going over a collection of data and searching for patterns in the meaning of the data to identify themes. It is an active process of reflexivity in which the researcher's subjective experience plays a central role in making meaning of the facts. The following figure 1 provides an overview of three methods—open coding, categorization, and thematic analysis used in the qualitative data as follows:

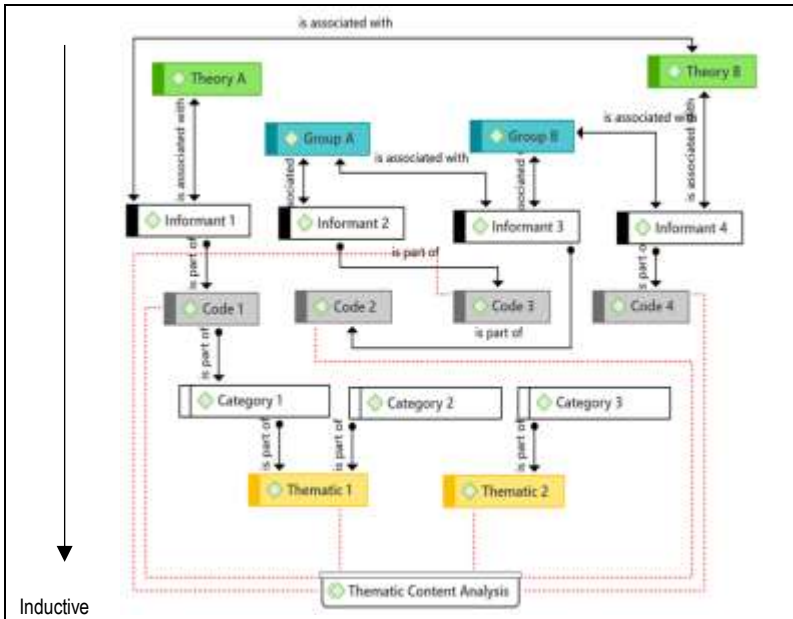


Figure 1: Description of the process of thematic analysis of qualitative data using ATLAS.ti 22

In the thematic analysis, open coding was used to designate material related to the topic and allowed the researcher to discover the themes spontaneously. It can reach at least 10 to 50 codes, mainly because the researcher must review the interview data to derive potential codes. Next, the categorization involves reading, examining, and recognizing patterns or similarities in qualitative data, then arranging them into research-related topics. Categories or themes are utilized to answer the research question or comprehend the phenomena. An extensive description of the theme analysis based on inductive and deductive methods is provided in the final stage. The analyzed data is used to find themes or patterns inductively and bring the themes closer to reality. Validity testing utilizing data triangulation is used in the context of integrated data from multiple sources and assesses them simultaneously to ensure the quality and reliability of the study.

#### 4.0 Results

This study examines the application of shariah principles related to the current practice of social media advertising, specifically in the marketing practice of traditional medicine. After the process of thematic analysis, the principles have produced 35 initial codings. However,

following several rounds of re-coding and code merging in ATLAS. Ti 22, the final principles delivered seven main themes (Table 2).

Table 2: The thematic analysis of shariah principles on social media advertising in the traditional medicinal product marketing

No	Thematic content analysis	Categories	Open coding
1	Principle of benefit	<i>Protection of religion, protection of intellect,</i>	Sanctity of religion, national harmony, scientific verification, consumer protection
2	Principle of safety		Racism & discrimination, sexual exploitation, Harmful, bad marketing
3	Principle of transparency	<i>protection of life, protection of lineage,</i>	Consumer limitations, overclaims, manipulations of product descriptions
4	Principle of accountability	<i>protection of rights &amp; wealth</i>	Comply with the law, quality of the product, liability
5	Principle of simplicity		Divine profit, realistic, strategic, and moderate

#### 4.1 Principle of benefit

Compared to other academic disciplines, the economic scale offers a wide interpretation of the benefit principle. Economic benefit indicators are particularly essential because they serve as a crucial foundation for formulating economic policies based on societal demands, the advancement of technology, and the needs of the moment. Advertising in the context of company marketing serves a variety of commercial goals but is required by shariah laws and other legal restraints. Within this theme, the benefit of advertising is an important principle in traditional medicine marketing that has been divided into several subcodes, such as the sanctity of religion, national harmony, scientific verification, and consumer protection (Figure 2).

Informants agree that the benefit principle is the main indicator in controlling traditional medicine advertisements. Since religion represents the culture and the tenacity of the community's ideas, it has to be stressed in a guideline as the foundation for forming public attitudes, particularly those concerning consumerism. It is backed by academics who advocate emphasizing religious standards to reduce moral issues. In addition, the significance of incorporating religious principles, such as disclosing a product's halal certification, and marketers' responsibility to guarantee that a product doesn't include any content prohibited by a certain religion. Meanwhile, ads must also serve as information and an effective broadcasting channel. The MCMC informant roles in a larger context can foster community unity and serve as a roadmap for navigating the current globalized world. Advertisements for traditional medicinal products must be registered with the authorities and approved by the Medicines Advertisement Board (MOB), which also issues an approval number such as KKLIU1234/2022 to ensure that the medicinal marketing process complies

with the law and shariah as the negative list of foods is prohibited. Next, advertisers are responsible for protecting consumer rights (*mashlah hajiyah*). Amongst applications of the market segmentation theory, the protection of consumer rights enables advertisers to pinpoint their target audience to profit and spark public interest while defense consumer rights.

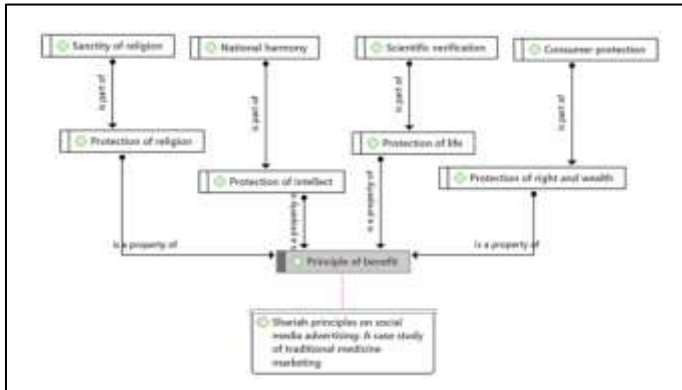


Figure 2: Network view on the principle of benefit

#### 4.2 Principle of safety

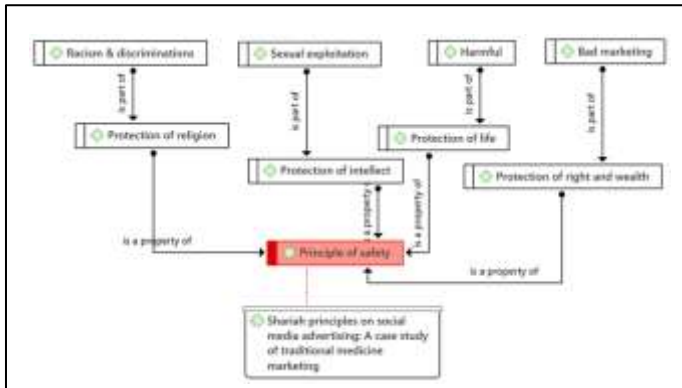


Figure 3: Network view on the principle of safety

In the context of advertising on social media, the possibility of violating shariah law should be considered by all relevant parties, including business owners, those who supply services, and advertisers. As a result, before publishing advertising, it is necessary to



validate every aspect of the decision-making process by referring to the applicable policies and regulations. Islam establishes constraints and limitations on safety standards to safeguard the parties concerned, particularly in the social media advertising business. The following theme divides safety principles into several sub-codes, such as racism and discrimination, sexual exploitation, harmful to life and bad marketing (Figure 3).

The JAKIM informant also spoke on delicate subjects, including racial discrimination, which is prohibited in marketing promotion. Disparaging a particular race's physical traits or cultural traditions may cause backlash from consumers who will have negative impressions of the brands and businesses in question. As with any other type of advertising, medical commercials have informed and affected the public's perspective as exposed to physical exploitation. Yet, such ads on social media frequently address sexual subjects such as intimacy and eroticism and are presented to all ages. Islam forbids behaviors that encourage enmity, brawls, and antics. The Pharmaceuticals (Advertisement and Sale) Act of 1956 mandates that no advertiser may display actions that might encourage viewers to engage in violent or illegal behaviors. Thus, the issue is believed to harm customer behaviors and provide an unnecessary danger. In addition, bad marketing and demeaning competitiveness create a marketing culture that ignores religion and national identity. Paradoxically in the Islamic business philosophy, avoiding controversial and provocative marketing methods to attract viewers allows creative elements in advertising as long as they don't ridicule, offend, humiliate, defame, or destroy Muslims' image.

### 4.3 Principle of transparency

The next pattern highlighted the principle of transparency in digital advertising for traditional medicine marketing. The following theme is divided into various subthemes, such as consumer limitations, overclaim advertisement, and manipulation of the product description (Figure 4).

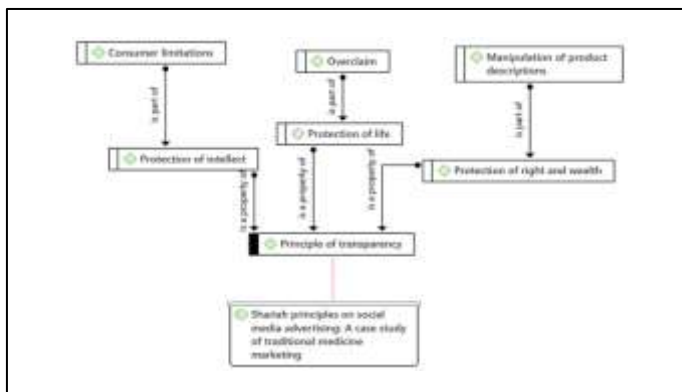


Figure 4: Network view on the principle of transparency

Islamic law has concerned with the principle of transparency in business activities. Islam explicitly states that the objective of shariah in economics is to guarantee justice. Therefore, the constraints imposed by the consumer's condition concerning the therapeutic product that is being promoted. When a product is advertised on a digital platform, the completeness of the advertisement needs to serve the purpose of providing the user with the most relevant information while also taking into account the limited factors and user knowledge in the area of inspecting and verifying the product in question. Islam is prohibited from providing incorrect and misleading information as supported in the Medications (Advertisement and Sale) Act of 1956 and the rules of the medicine advertising board of 1976. This issue would encourage people to adopt goods that carry unnecessary danger. The Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Content Forum (2022) and the Guidelines for the Advertising of Medicines and Medical Products to the Public (2019) have supported that advertisers must be transparent and honest when delivering any promotional sentence. In the context of traditional medicine marketing, the advertisement shown cannot make excessive claims to uphold business justice.

#### 4.4 Principle of Accountability

The principle of accountability needs to be applied as a shariah basis in making advertisements because it can avoid oppression and breach of trust due to individuals who lack integrity. Hence, Islam emphasizes responsibility in marketing to encourage integrity and honesty. The following theme is divided into various subthemes, such as compliance with the law, quality of the product, and liability (Figure 5)

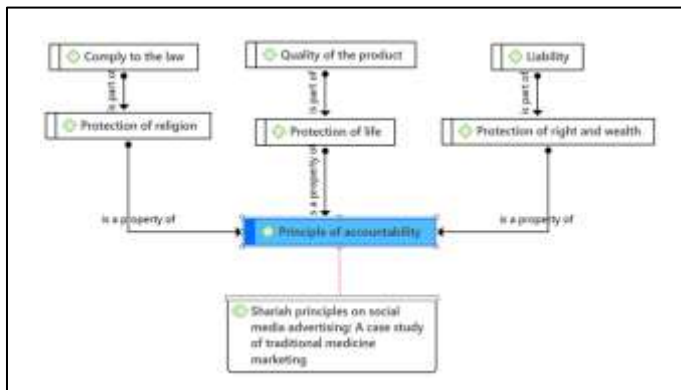


Figure 5: Network view on the principle of accountability

Every advertiser must comply with the regulation to avoid contravening advertisements. It has become customary when a brand appoints a celebrity as a marketing ambassador to increase consumer awareness of the brand. Entrepreneurs cannot ignore the rules and take advantage of the popularity and influence of celebrities. In addition, business owners

are reminded of the duty to provide customers with high-quality products and advantages commensurate with the claims made in their marketing. Besides, significant research and development for medicinal products that will be marketed need to be carried out as the quality delivered to consumers will be the best marketing agency. Celebrities are not exempt from liability to the company and the brand. If there is any non-compliance in the promotion by the celebrity, the consumer should be able to claim their rights based on what the celebrity has told, such as the informant's opinion. Choosing ambassadors among prominent public figures who exude positive qualities and can effectively spread a message of social responsibility is important. In addition to having a trustworthy reputation, celebrities who are paid to promote products must have a large following on social media. Since they have agreed to represent the brand and the firm as part of a contract, celebrity endorsers must always uphold their reputation.

#### 4.5 Principle of Simplicity

The prophet PBUH advocated simplicity in every activity of life as it is amongst the main principle that needs to be nurtured in everyone to create balance and not go beyond the boundaries. Within this theme, benefit in advertising is an important principle in traditional medicine marketing divided into several sub-codes such as divine profit, realistic, strategic, and moderate (Figure 6).

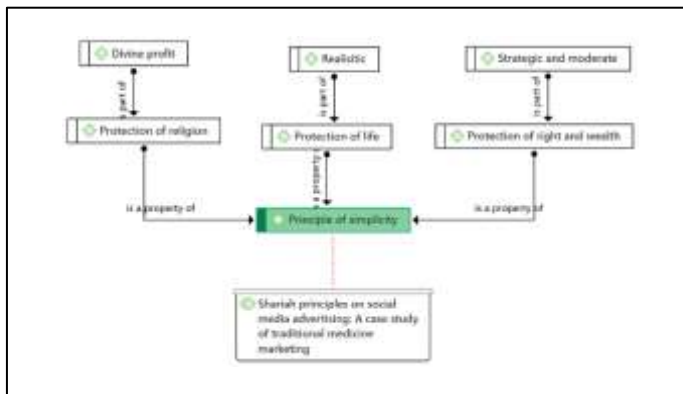


Figure 6: Network view on the principle of simplicity

Marketing is a symbol of the entrepreneur's earnestness in seeking the blessings of sustenance. Advertisements with a message of simplicity and universal values will capture the audience's hearts because they are easily accepted as a positive message without mixing in provocative things. Islam reminds us that the blessings of sustenance depend on business processes that help develop oneself and the people around us while avoiding things against Shariah. Advertisements that carry dire implications, such as moral and social problems, are likely to attract a lot of attention at the same time as easy to make a profit but ignore the principles of halal and the blessing of sustenance they get. Marketing

campaigns should be straightforward, highlighting the product's benefits rather than creating or including features that are not present in the product. The straightforward and truthful presentation of product advantages demonstrates the marketer's morals, which are required by religion. The major requirements that need to be considered in the framework of traditional marketing are the USP. The USP is the unique selling proposition that sets your company apart from the competitors. Compared to other companies in the market, a company stands out because of its distinct and obvious value. However, the value of customer reviews that provide factual information is supported by images to balance the claims made and what is asserted. The informant claims that since consumers act to research multiple sources before making a purchase, they are increasingly curious about experiencing sharing.

## **5.0 Discussion**

This study examines the application of shariah principles related to the current practice of social media advertising in the traditional medicinal product. The result shows that social media advertising has successfully incorporated shariah principles. However, according to the advertising activities and regulations, there are substantial gaps in several areas where Shariah places a high priority. According to the findings of the interviews, the principal values of the present laws and regulations are safety, benefit, and accountability. Meanwhile, the principles of simplicity and transparency have yet to be used and need to be more specific in the regulations. Therefore, those principles must be considered when reviewing and amending guidelines and regulations related to social media advertising, especially in traditional medicine marketing. This practice shows that although there are certain issues with traditional medical advertisements on social media, the regulations against such behavior have been made public and have become the industry norm. Authorities and NGOs must increase awareness of the issue and monitor how company owners, advertisers, and marketers participate in this industry to ensure the situation does not worsen.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

Understanding these legal and regulatory requirements is essential to managing social media advertising in pharmaceutical marketing in a way that complies with FDA (Food and Drug Administration) and MAB standards (Malaysian Advertising Board). Ultimately, the relevant authorities must ensure that social media marketing for traditional medicine complies with legal standards, doesn't make false health claims, and promotes high-quality, safe goods. Some recent research has raised questions regarding the safety and efficacy of traditional medical marketing practices. As a result, it's crucial to investigate any items or services promoted on social media thoroughly. The concerns of consumers may be alleviated by rigorous research, which could also lead to the promotion of safer, better products and services. One limitation of this research is that changes in technology, laws,

regulations, and marketing trends greatly affect social media advertising research in traditional medicine marketing.

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### **Article Contribution to Related Field of Study**

The contribution of this writing is to the body of knowledge in digital marketing according to Shariah, especially for the halal pharmaceutical industry.

### **Authors Declaration**

This article is an extended version of the original conference paper published in the E-BPJ, Vol (6), Special Issue (5), Sept 2021, 95-104.

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