



Phenomenological Study: Muslim Self-Control in Responding to Shopee's "Flash Sale"

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of flash sales as a digital marketing strategy on e-commerce platforms such as Shopee has triggered an increase in impulsive purchasing behavior, especially among millennials and Generation Z. This study aims to understand how Muslim consumers respond to this phenomenon from the perspective of Islamic concepts and self-control. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study explores the subjective experiences of Muslim consumers in dealing with flash sale promotions, as well as their reflections on Islamic ethical consumption values. The results show that features such as countdown timers and free shipping create a sense of urgency and a perception of scarcity, which trigger spontaneous purchasing decisions. In Islam, the concept of nafs (ammarah, lawwamah, muthmainnah) and the principles of muamalah are important foundations in shaping ethical and moderate consumption behavior. Although an understanding of Islamic values and the level of self-control among Muslims can suppress impulsive urges, the stimulus of flash sales still has a strong influence. These findings highlight the importance of educating Muslim consumers about consumption ethics, as well as the need for more ethical and transparent marketing practices from e-commerce players to align with the principles of justice and honesty in Islam.

Keywords: Islamic consumption, flash sale, self-control, impulsive buying, e-commerce ethics, nafs

Introduction

The existing literature establishes a conflicting relationship between flash sale stimuli and Muslim consumers' self-control. While studies by Anggreni et al. (2023) and Cahayani et al. (2024) confirm that flash sales and advertisements positively induce impulsive buying, they offer mixed results on the moderating role of Muslim self-control; it is effective against free shipping but reportedly less potent against flash sales themselves. This inconsistency suggests a significant gap in understanding the mechanism and lived experience of self-control failure or success. Current quantitative research often measures self-control as an aggregate variable, failing to capture the dynamic, internal struggle – the shift from nafs al-ammara (inviting lust/desire) to lawwamah (self-reproach) – that occurs in the moment of resisting or succumbing to a time-sensitive digital promotion. Furthermore, the studies primarily focus on behavioral outcomes (impulsive buying tendency) rather than the depth of reflection and the application of Islamic

consumption principles (muamalah ethics, elimination of gharar and tadelis) as they are internalized and practiced by the consumer.

The proposed phenomenological study offers a crucial methodological novelty to bridge these gaps. Instead of quantifying the relationship, the study will qualitatively explore the "how" and "why" of the consumption decision, providing a rich, in-depth understanding of the subjective meaning and tafsir (interpretation) that Muslim consumers attach to the flash sale experience. This approach will reveal the cognitive and affective processes behind the transition between the different levels of nafs in a high-pressure digital environment. By focusing on the consumers' direct experience and sense-making, the research can articulate how principles of ethical consumption—such as buying according to need versus desire (moderation)—are operationalized or compromised in real-time. This deeper insight is essential for developing nuanced policy recommendations for both e-commerce platforms (promoting transparency and fairness in transactions) and religious/educational institutions (strengthening effective consumer self-regulation congruent with muamalah ethics).

Research Methods

This study used a purposive sampling strategy to recruit three (3) Muslim consumers who met certain criteria: they were active online shoppers on Shopee and had participated in flash sale promotions. The selected respondents consisted of individuals from the Millennial and Generation Z demographics, specifically one (1) male and two (2) females, aged between 20 and 35 years old, representing a stage of life that is highly exposed to digital consumerism. Demographic details include a university student (Generation Z, 21 years old), a young professional who has just started working (Millennial, 27 years old), and a young housewife (Millennial, 33 years old). This demographic diversity aims to capture diverse perspectives shaped by different levels of financial independence, life responsibilities, and exposure to promotional pressures. Data was collected primarily through semi-structured in-depth interviews, conducted both in person and online (via video conferencing) to accommodate the informants' availability. Each interview session was designed to last approximately 60 to 90 minutes, allowing sufficient time to explore the psychological, religious, and ethical dimensions of their involvement in flash sales using open-ended questions. All interviews are digitally recorded with the informants' consent and transcribed verbatim. The longer duration ensures that researchers can fully engage in the phenomenological stages of epoché (suspending prejudices) and subsequent phenomenological reduction, resulting in rich and in-depth data necessary to reveal the essence of the experience through imaginative variation in the subsequent analysis phase.

Phenomenological research aims to understand an individual's subjective experience through in-depth exploration of the meaning of the phenomenon experienced by participants (Bhar, 2019). Purposive sampling is used to obtain informants who have relevant experience with the phenomenon being studied, in accordance with specific criteria. Semi-structured interviews allow for the exploration of the psychological, religious, and ethical dimensions of these experiences with the flexibility of open-ended questions so that informants can recount their experiences and reflections in depth. The process of verbatim transcription and phenomenological stages such as epoche (suspension of judgment) and phenomenological reduction ensure that the data produced is rich and imbued with the essence of the experience being analyzed.

Results and discussion

The development of digital technology has significantly changed people's consumption patterns, particularly through the rise of e-commerce platforms such as Shopee, which employ aggressive marketing strategies. One of the most dominant strategies is flash sale promotions—limited-time discounts that exploit consumers' psychological elements to encourage quick purchases without rational consideration. This strategy targets millennial and Gen Z consumers who are highly responsive to visuals, speed of information, and instant offers. In this context, purchases are no longer based solely on need, but are also influenced by momentary impulses, fear of missing out, and digital social pressure. This phenomenon raises ethical issues in consumption, especially for Muslim consumers who are required to practice moderation, prudence, and spiritual responsibility in their shopping (Desky, 2024). Kesuma (2023) found that flash sales significantly influence the consumptive behavior of Muslim Shopee users in Aceh, with a direct correlation between the rise of flash sale events and increased consumptive behavior. Rismawati (2025) explains that while flash sale promotions positively and significantly impact Shopee marketplace consumers' behavior, excessive use could risk israf (wastefulness) from an Islamic economic perspective. Ali and Wahyudi (2024) further indicate that flash sales and affiliated programs positively affect purchase interest among Shopee consumers, emphasizing the balance between business goals and Islamic ethics in e-commerce.

This study highlights how Islamic values, particularly the concepts of self-control and muamalah ethics, can serve as an important foundation in responding to manipulative digital marketing practices (Fahrial, 2022). The opinions of scholars who can issue fatwas, or in Indonesia known as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), can be used as legal considerations (Deryasa and Alamsyah 2025). Using a phenomenological approach, the researcher examines the subjective experiences of Muslim consumers in facing the temptation of flash sales, as well as how they

interpret the urge to consume from a spiritual perspective. Asadiyah (2024) emphasizes that the visibility and information of flash sale promotions significantly influence consumer attitudes, thereby shaping impulsive purchasing behaviors. Heryanti (2024) reports partial positive effects of flash sale promotions on consumptive behavior in Shopee, analyzed through Sharia business management perspectives. Zai (2025) confirms a positive association between flash sale discounts and online impulsive buying, strengthening arguments about the powerful influence of these promotional features on digital consumers.

1. Flash Sales and Consumer Psychology Mechanisms

Flash sales are a marketing strategy deliberately designed to take advantage of consumer psychology mechanisms. (Amalina Maryam Zakiyah, 2018) states that the flash sale sales system provides customers special offers by giving discounts on certain products for a limited time. (Aminatus Sholekah, 2023) explains that flash sale marketing is a type of e-commerce business where websites recommend individual product selections at discounted prices for a short period. Features such as countdown timers and free shipping create a perception of urgency and scarcity, encouraging quick decisions without deep rational analysis. Anggreni et al. (2023) found that millennials and Generation Z are highly responsive to these stimuli due to their digital-native, impulsive characteristics and intense exposure to online promotions. analyzed that flash sale and free shipping promotions affect impulsive buying behavior, reflecting principles of Islamic economics and underscoring the need for ethical marketing practices (Panggabean, 2025).

The existence of flash sales influences consumer psychology by creating perceptions that products sold are heavily discounted or cheap, leading consumers to feel they are getting good deals. Moreover, flash sales motivate consumers to act swiftly, fearing missing out, with social influence amplifying that motivation as many others also purchase during these sales. This aligns with consumer behavior theory explaining that impulsive buying occurs when cognitive control diminishes due to emotional stimuli (Dholakia, 2000). In e-commerce, platforms design for impulse buying ease through easy checkout, large discount displays, real-time notifications, and social proof like "X people have already bought."

2. The Ethical Perspective of Consumption in Islam

In Islam, consumption judgment goes beyond material satisfaction to moral and spiritual values, emphasizing balance (*wasathiyyah*) and prohibiting wastefulness (*tabdzir*). The concept of *nafs* in Sufism is pertinent:

- *Nafs al-ammarah*: uncontrolled urge causing impulsive, unplanned buying.

- Nafs lawwamah: awareness and regret over excessive consumption.
- Nafs muthmainnah: calmness, submission to spiritual principles, and control over desires.

This parallels modern psychology's self-regulation theory. Self-control helps resist aggressive promotion temptation and is influenced by religious values (Hoetoro & Hannaf, 2024).

3. Empirical Evidence on Muslim Self-Control

Empirical findings in Indonesia reveal dynamic interactions. Anggraini et al. (2023) found flash sales significantly increase impulsivity, with Muslim self-control moderating free shipping effects but less so flash sales themselves, underscoring time-limited stimuli's power to overcome self-control. Cahayani et al. (2024) added that Islamic consumption understanding helps reduce impulsive buying tendencies by fostering critical views of promotions, yet flash sales still appeal strongly to religious consumers, so Islamic values moderate but do not eliminate impulses.

4. Ethical Challenges for E-Commerce

From an Islamic economic perspective, flash sale strategies need to be examined ethically. Islam rejects sales practices that involve gharar (uncertainty) or tadlis (deception), including psychological manipulation that pressures consumers into making hasty decisions. Flash sale practices have the potential to violate the principle of transparency if:

1. False price anchoring: Information about normal prices is often unclear or exaggerated, creating the illusion of a big discount.
2. Dishonest limited stock: Sellers promote very limited stock to create an impression of artificial scarcity, but without transparent explanations to consumers.
3. Artificial countdown timers: Countdown timers that are repeatedly reset are often used to create false urgency and pressure consumers into making impulsive purchases.

Ideally, promotions such as flash sales should be conducted honestly, transparently, and fairly. E-commerce businesses need to ensure that advertisements do not deceive consumers and do not encourage purchases beyond their needs.

5. Implications for Muslim Consumer Education

Flash sale promotion strategies on e-commerce platforms such as Shopee are highly attractive to Muslim consumers, especially through the mechanisms of time urgency and large discounts that encourage impulsive decisions. This poses a

challenge to self-control (mujahadat al-nafs), which is an important principle in Islamic consumer ethics (Khoirun Nisa. 2016)). The importance of educating Muslim consumers about consumption ethics, understanding nafs, muamalah principles, and the importance of self-control can be an important filter in facing aggressive marketing strategies. This can be facilitated through:

1. Islamic value-based consumer education in schools/madrasas.
2. Sharia financial literacy campaigns on social media.
3. Collaboration between scholars, business actors, and the government to encourage ethical marketing practices.

Thus, consumption behavior becomes more prudent, needs-based, and supportive of equitable economic sustainability.

6. The Role of Family and Social Environment in Shaping Consumption Ethics

In addition to internal factors such as self-control and understanding of Islamic values, external factors such as family and social environment also play an important role in shaping a person's consumption patterns. In the Muslim context, the family is the first institution to instill spiritual values and muamalah ethics. Habits of frugal living, discussions about needs versus wants, and a selective attitude towards advertisements and promotions can be formed early on in the home environment (Abidin, 2022). On the other hand, the social environment, including peers and digital media, can either exert consumptive pressure or, conversely, become a community that supports an Islamic and frugal lifestyle. Therefore, the formation of a social ecosystem that is conscious of ethical consumption is crucial in strengthening individuals' resilience against manipulative promotions.

7. Recommendations for Sharia E-Commerce Regulations and Policies

To create a more ethical and fair digital business climate, regulations are needed to govern promotional practices in e-commerce in accordance with sharia principles. The government, together with the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), e-commerce associations, and academics, can formulate sharia marketing ethical guidelines that prohibit gharar, tadlis, and psychological manipulation of consumers. Digital platforms also need to be audited regularly in terms of price transparency, clarity of product information, and honesty in communicating stock or promotions. Additionally, a "halal and ethical e-commerce" certification can be developed to encourage businesses to be more responsible and provide a sense of security for Muslim consumers. Thus, the digital marketing system can remain innovative without compromising the integrity of Islamic values (Abrar, 2024).

Conclusion

Flash sale strategies in e-commerce have a strong effect on encouraging impulsive purchases, especially among the younger generation who are familiar with digital technology. From an Islamic perspective, controlling consumption desires is key to resisting such temptations. Empirical research shows that self-control and an understanding of Islamic values do play a role in inhibiting impulsive behavior, although they are not yet fully effective against flash sale stimuli. Therefore, in addition to encouraging the strengthening of self-control among Muslim consumers, e-commerce players also need to design promotional strategies that are transparent and in line with the principles of muamalah justice.

Suggestion

By internalizing the Islamic consumption ethics of wasathiyah (moderation) and working toward the state of nafs al-muthmainnah (the calm soul), Muslim consumers—especially Millennials and Gen Z, who are particularly vulnerable to flash sale stimuli—must actively cultivate their self-control (mujahadat al-nafs). The goal of educational initiatives should be to convert the idea of nafs into sensible digital consumption practices, like setting fixed spending limits, instituting "cooling-off" periods prior to checkout for non-essential items, and practicing critical digital literacy to recognize and thwart marketing strategies that exploit fictitious urgency and scarcity. The intention is to guarantee that real necessity (hajat) rather than transient, impulsive desire (syahwat) drives purchasing decisions.

Regarding Digital Marketing Strategies and E-Commerce Platforms To adhere to the norms of muamalah (Islamic transaction ethics), e-commerce platforms must adopt more moral and open marketing strategies. In particular, they must refrain from gharar (uncertainty) and tadlis (deception), which are inherent hazards in high-pressure flash sales. To guarantee complete transparency in pricing, product availability, and countdown timer functionality, strict self-regulation is necessary. Platforms should make a sincere effort to be honest and abstain from psychological tricks like continuously resetting timers or using phony price anchoring. Adhering to moral principles will not only be consistent with Islamic principles but also foster enduring trust and equity with their sizable Muslim clientele.

For e-commerce marketing, regulatory agencies must create and implement certain Sharia Marketing Ethical Guidelines in coordination with Islamic councils such as the MUI. These rules ought to forbid deceptive practices that take advantage of consumer psychology and encourage rash purchases. In order to promote responsibility, they should also require openness in online transactions and think

about creating a uniform "Halal and Ethical E-commerce" accreditation. In addition to creating a digital business environment that is both creative and completely compliant with Islamic values of justice and fairness, the implementation of such policies and certifications will fortify consumers' exterior defense against pushy marketing.

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