



COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR ISLAMIC BUSINESSES IN FACING COMPETITION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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ABSTRACT

Sharia business communication is becoming increasingly important as digital competition transforms the way businesses promote products, negotiate, serve customers, and build trust. This article analyses Sharia business communication strategies in the face of digital-era competition by synthesising the literature on Sharia communication in the digital transformation of SMEs and value-based Islamic organisational communication. The research employs a qualitative descriptive approach through a literature review and thematic analysis. The findings identify five pillars of strategy: honest and transparent product communication; digital trust based on amanah; internal coordination based on musyawarah; halal and ethical content branding; and transactional communication aligned with Sharia principles. Digital competition cannot be adequately addressed merely through mastery of platforms, algorithms, and promotional speed. Business operators must also demonstrate ethical discipline, clarity of contracts, data responsibility, fair pricing, and consistent after-sales service. A Sharia communication strategy can strengthen market differentiation, customer loyalty, team synergy, and business sustainability when implemented through communication operational standards, Sharia digital literacy, halal certification, and measurable communication indicators. This article offers a practical framework for SMEs and Islamic business organisations seeking to compete ethically in the digital marketplace.

1. INTRODUCTION

Business competition in the digital age moves through channels that are far faster than conventional marketing patterns. Consumers can compare prices, view reviews, assess a seller's reputation, and switch to a competitor in just a few minutes. In such a situation, business communication is no longer a supplementary activity once a product is available. Communication has transformed into a strategic system that determines how a product's value is understood, how trust is built, and how long-term relationships are maintained. The e-Conomy SEA 2024 report notes that Indonesia's digital economy is projected to reach a Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) of approximately US\$90 billion by 2024, with e-commerce as the largest contributor, making the digital competitive landscape increasingly crowded (Google, Temasek, & Bain & Company, 2024).

For sharia business operators, these dynamics have more complex consequences. It is not enough for them to simply market products through marketplaces, social media, and business messaging apps. Every message sent to customers must embody the values of honesty, responsibility, clarity of contracts, and respect for consumer rights. Hidayat and Hakim (2025) demonstrate that the digital transformation of SMEs has shifted communication strategies towards digital platforms, yet the integration of Sharia principles often remains informal and lacks a robust operational framework. This situation necessitates that Sharia businesses adopt a more value-conscious communication strategy.

Sharia business communication is fundamentally rooted in the principles of fiqh muamalah and Islamic ethics. The value of shidq demands truthfulness in information; amanah demands responsibility for promises and data; adl demands justice in business relations; whilst the prohibition of gharar demands clarity regarding the object, price, risk, and transaction process. These principles become crucial when digital promotion is prone to slipping into exaggerated claims, overly edited visuals, fake testimonials, or discounts that do not genuinely benefit consumers. From an Islamic business ethics perspective, customer trust must not be built through the manipulation of perceptions (Beekun & Badawi, 2005; Rice, 1999).

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The digital era has also expanded the competitive arena from merely product quality to the quality of the customer experience. Buyers assess the speed of admin responses, the clarity of product photos, the friendliness of language, the accuracy of delivery, payment security, and how sellers resolve complaints. At this point, communication strategy becomes part of service design. Businesses that are slow to respond to messages, lack transparency regarding delivery costs, or delete customer complaints will be outperformed by more open competitors. Ethical communication helps companies maintain market relationships because digital consumers tend to remember poor communication experiences for longer than mere small price differences (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

Digital competition also forces businesses to produce content continuously. Platform algorithms prioritise content that grabs attention, is quickly shared, and sparks interaction. This pressure can drive aggressive communication strategies. Businesses may be tempted to use clickbait, fake scarcity, 'fear of missing out' narratives, or halal claims without adequate evidence. In the sharia business sector, methods of attracting attention must not undermine the principle of trust. Ali and Al-Aali (2015) emphasise that Islamic ethics make a significant contribution to marketing practices by placing morality at the core of economic relations.

At an internal level, sharia business communication also determines team performance. Digital competition demands rapid coordination between social media administrators, production teams, finance, logistics, and customer service. Minor errors in internal communication can lead to stock discrepancies, mispriced promotions, delivery delays, or inconsistent customer responses. Firdaus, Syahza, and Azkiyya (2025) emphasise that communication based on shura, akhlaq al-karimah, honesty, and trustworthiness can strengthen team cohesion, mutual trust, and collaboration within the organisation. These values are particularly relevant for digital businesses that require cross-functional work.

Trust is the primary asset in the digital marketplace because transactions take place without face-to-face interaction. Buyers often do not know the seller directly, whilst sellers cannot always ascertain the buyer's intentions and behaviour. In such circumstances, the quality of information serves as a substitute for physical proximity. Honest photographs, comprehensive descriptions, clear return policies, and explanations of the terms and conditions in pre-order or instalment schemes will reduce uncertainty. The commitment-trust theory explains that strong marketing relationships are built through trust and consistent commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In Sharia business, this trust must be underpinned by the value of amanah.

The issue of Sharia digital literacy is a major concern. Some SMEs have adopted digital platforms but do not yet understand how contracts such as salam, istishna, murabahah, or wakalah can be applied to explain specific digital transactions. Hidayat and Hakim (2025) note that a lack of understanding regarding transaction contracts poses a significant challenge in the digital communication of Sharia SMEs. Consequently, business operators may sell halal products using transaction communication methods that remain unclear. Such situations need to be addressed through practical communication guidelines, rather than merely moral exhortations that are difficult to implement on a daily basis.

The development of the national Islamic economy and finance presents significant opportunities for digital Islamic businesses. Bank Indonesia (2025) positions the synergy between the Islamic economy and finance as part of strengthening national economic stability and transformation. This opportunity needs to be translated into ' ' for small and medium-sized enterprises. Sharia SMEs need to link promotional messages, customer service, and transaction models with the halal ecosystem. Effective communication can help small products appear more credible, particularly when businesses can demonstrate halal certification, clean production processes, raw material sources, and social benefits in a reasonable manner.

Nevertheless, sharia businesses must not rely solely on religious symbols as a marketing identity. Islamic branding that merely highlights terms such as 'halal', 'blessing', or 'trust' without operational evidence can create a disconnect between image and reality. Sharia communication must move from symbols towards evidence. Such evidence may include information on ingredients, certifications, complaint policies, quality records, valid testimonials, and price transparency. In the literature on Islamic marketing, spiritual values must be integrated with service quality and social responsibility so as not to remain mere slogans (Arham, 2010; Hassan et al., 2008).

Competitive pressures in the digital sphere also arise from the use of consumer data. Businesses collect telephone numbers, addresses, transaction histories, product preferences, and social media

interactions. This data can aid in personalising services, but it can also be misused for spam, excessive profiling, or promotional activities that infringe on privacy. The principle of amanah requires businesses to safeguard consumer data and use information only as necessary. On the other hand, data-driven communication must remain fair, clear, and non-deceptive. Modern digital marketing requires companies to understand technology, whilst Sharia ethics require companies to uphold moral boundaries in the use of technology (Kotler et al., 2021).

Studies on Sharia-compliant communication in the digital transformation of SMEs have provided an important foundation, particularly regarding the integration of shidq, amanah, adl, transparency, and the avoidance of gharar in digital communication (Hidayat & Hakim, 2025). Research on Sharia business communication for team performance and synergy also highlights the importance of consultation, empathetic communication, and openness within organisations (Firdaus et al., 2025). However, these two strands of research still need to be unified within a single framework that addresses digital competition more broadly. This framework must integrate external communication with consumers and internal communication within teams.

The main gap that this article seeks to address lies in the area of practical strategy. Much of the discussion on Shariah-compliant communication remains focused on norms, but is not yet concrete enough to help businesses navigate platform algorithms, price wars, customer reviews, short-form video promotions, chat services and pre-order transactions. Meanwhile, business operators require practical guidance, such as standards for product descriptions, ethical use of testimonials, complaint response protocols, marketing team consultation procedures, and communication evaluation metrics. This study positions Islamic values as the foundation for operationally viable communication policies.

This article aims to analyse sharia business communication strategies in the face of digital-era competition. The discussion focuses on five practical questions: how to maintain the integrity of product information, how to build digital trust, how to manage team coordination, how to create halal and ethical content, and how to explain contracts and services transparently. This approach is expected to assist SMEs, Islamic cooperatives, halal business institutions, and organisations based on Islamic values to compete without compromising Sharia principles.

The contribution of this article is both conceptual and practical. Conceptually, the article integrates the literature on digital Sharia communication and Sharia organisational communication into a single strategic model. Practically, the article offers an implementation matrix that can serve as a simple guide for designing messages, selecting channels, allocating team roles, and evaluating the quality of communication. In this way, Sharia business communication can be understood as a managerial process that more effectively links values, technology, the market, and organisational performance.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a literature review design. This approach was chosen because the article's focus is on building conceptual understanding and developing practical strategies based on a review of the literature, rather than testing statistical relationships between variables. A literature review is appropriate for mapping concepts, arguments, and previous findings scattered across scientific articles, books, institutional reports, and academic documents relevant to sharia business communication, digital competition, halal SMEs, and team performance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Waruwu, 2023).

The primary sources of this study are the study on Sharia communication strategies in the digital transformation of SMEs by Hidayat and Hakim (2025) and the study on Sharia business communication strategies to improve team performance and synergy by Firdaus et al. (2025). Supporting sources include literature on Islamic marketing, Islamic business ethics, digital marketing communication, teamwork quality, and institutional reports on the digital economy and the Islamic economy.

The analysis process was conducted in four stages. First, the researcher read the primary sources to identify key issues, dominant Sharia values, digital challenges, and strategic recommendations. Second, the researcher categorised the supporting literature into the themes of external communication, internal communication, transactional ethics, and digital competition. Third, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns of meaning, such as shidq, amanah, transparency, shura, akhlaq, contract literacy, and halal branding. Fourth, the researcher synthesised the findings into a strategic model that can be applied by sharia business practitioners (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The validity of the analysis was ensured through source triangulation. This article utilises not only normative Islamic literature but also incorporates literature on digital marketing, customer relationship management, organisational behaviour, and reports on the development of the digital economy. This triangulation is crucial because competition in the digital era is not solely related to religious norms but also involves technology, consumer behaviour, internal coordination, and an organisation's ability to translate values into daily procedures.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 First pillar: honest and transparent product communication

The first pillar of the Shariah business communication strategy is the honesty of product information. In the digital marketplace, product descriptions effectively serve as an initial contract, as consumers make decisions based on the text, photos, videos, prices, and reviews available. Ambiguous information increases the risk of gharar. Businesses need to provide detailed product specifications, including size, composition, shelf life, instructions for use, warranty limits, and possible variations in colour or shape. For food products, information on raw materials, halal status, production dates, and distribution permits must be placed in an easily accessible section.

Honesty in information also covers pricing policies. Discount strategies are permissible, but must avoid misleading pricing. For example, a shop should not raise prices a few hours before a promotion and then display a large discount that does not actually result in a real reduction. Such practices undermine trust and can erode customer confidence. The principle of shidq demands consistency between the message and reality. In the long term, an honest business may not always receive the most clicks, but it has a greater chance of building a loyal customer base because customers feel secure.

Transparency must also be applied to the use of photos and videos. Visual content may be made appealing, but it must not alter the fundamental perception of product quality. The use of colour filters on food, excessive editing of clothing, or the demonstration of unrealistic benefits can mislead consumers. In Sharia-compliant communication, aesthetics must aid understanding, not obscure reality. This aligns with the concept of Islamic marketing, which places honesty and balance as core principles in market communication (Arham, 2010; Ali & Al-Aali, 2015).

4.2 The second pillar: digital trustworthiness and trust management

The second pillar is digital trust. Trust in online transactions is built through consistency between communication promises, operational actions, and problem resolution. Businesses must ensure that administrative responses are not merely polite, but also accurate. If stock is out of stock, the admin must convey the actual situation. If delivery is delayed, customers need to receive an explanation and options for a solution. If a product is damaged, return or compensation procedures need to be carried out without making the customer repeatedly explain the same issue.

Digital trust is also linked to the protection of customer data. Phone numbers, addresses, purchase history, and proof of payment are information that must be safeguarded. Practices such as adding customers to promotional groups without permission, sending repeated messages at unreasonable hours, or sharing data with third parties are contrary to communication responsibilities. Sharia businesses need to have simple rules, such as seeking consent before sending broadcasts, providing an unsubscribe option, and restricting data access to only those teams that require it.

Digital trust is also strengthened through valid social proof. Customer reviews, testimonials, and user-generated content may be used provided they stem from genuine experiences. Purchasing fake testimonials or displaying fictitious reviews will undermine the principle of trustworthiness. Doney and Cannon (1997) explain that trust in buyer-seller relationships is influenced by reputation, care, and credibility. In sharia business, reputation must be built through transparency, not through the manipulation of perceptions.

4.3 The third pillar: consultation and coordination within the digital team

The third pillar concerns internal communication. Digital competition demands speed, but uncoordinated speed can lead to fatal errors. The content team needs to know the current stock levels. Customer service needs to understand ongoing promotions. The packaging team needs to be aware of delivery deadlines. The finance department needs to understand payment schemes. Consultation in this context does not always mean lengthy meetings. Consultation can be achieved through 10-minute daily

briefings, disciplined coordination groups, shared stock dashboards, and weekly evaluations based on customer complaint data.

Internal communication based on shura gives team members the space to raise issues without fear of being blamed. For example, an admin might report that product descriptions frequently trigger repetitive queries, prompting the content team to improve the product pages. Packaging staff might report that bundled promotions are slowing down the packing process, leading the marketing team to adjust order limits. This pattern strengthens psychological safety within the organisation. Research on teamwork quality indicates that communication, coordination, mutual support, balanced effort, and cohesion are linked to team success (Hoegl & Gemuenden, 2001).

From a Sharia perspective, consultation must be conducted with propriety. Criticism of content strategies must not turn into personal attacks. Evaluations by administrators must not humiliate team members in public forums. Leaders must set an example in accepting feedback. Firdaus et al. (2025) identify empathetic and open communication as factors that build loyalty, comfort, and a healthy work environment. Therefore, Shariah business communication strategies must incorporate ethical standards in meetings, work chats, and performance evaluations.

4.4 The fourth pillar: halal branding, gentle da'wah content, and market differentiation

The fourth pillar is substantial halal branding. Sharia businesses can utilise educational content on the benefits of halal products, clean production processes, value of utility, and social responsibility. However, da'wah content within business must be conveyed in a gentle and relevant manner. The aim is not to make consumers feel judged, but to help them make safer and more meaningful decisions. A simple example is content explaining how to read ingredient labels, tips for choosing halal food whilst travelling, or an explanation of the difference between pre-order contracts and standard sales agreements.

Market differentiation can also be built through authentic business stories. SMEs can explain the origin of raw materials, hygiene maintenance processes, the involvement of local workers, or corporate charity programmes. Such stories will be compelling if they are genuinely practised and documented in a natural manner. Hidayat and Hakim (2025) note that some SME operators have begun using Islamic messaging and halal branding to build an emotional connection with consumers. The article adds that this emotional connection must be backed by operational evidence so that it does not remain merely symbolic.

Islamic content must also be sensitive to the diversity of the digital audience. Businesses should use language that is polite, informative, and inclusive. Narratives that disparage competitors, accuse other products of being unblest, or exploit religious fears to coerce purchases should be avoided. Sharia communication strategies should highlight strengths through data and etiquette, for example by mentioning certified ingredients, hygienic processes, or clear returns policies. This approach is ethically sounder and stronger in terms of reputation.

4.5 The fifth pillar: clarity regarding contracts, pricing, and after-sales service

The fifth pillar is transactional communication. Many digital transactions involve structures that require careful explanation, such as pre-orders, dropshipping, reselling, instalments, bundled packages, deposits, and consignment services. Sharia-compliant businesses must clarify when goods will be available, when payment is due, who the seller is, the status of ownership of the goods, and the cancellation mechanism. Such details can be included on product pages, invoice formats, chat templates, and shop policies. In a pre-order scheme, for example, the seller needs to explain the estimated production time, product specifications, payment deadlines, risks of delays, and the customer's rights if the goods do not meet expectations. If using a salam or istishna contract, the specifications, delivery time, and price must be clear. In service transactions, the scope of work and revision limits need to be defined. Such clarity in communication reduces disputes and ensures customers understand their rights and obligations. Hidayat and Hakim (2025) cite understanding contracts as a major challenge for SMEs in digital transactions.

After-sales service is part of the trust placed in the business. In digital competition, customers judge a business not only at the time of purchase, but also when problems arise. Sharia businesses need to have guidelines for handling complaints, such as a maximum response time of 12 hours on working days, photographic evidence for damage claims, options for replacement goods, partial refunds, or compensation vouchers. These guidelines need to be communicated from the outset so that customers do not feel neglected. Fair service can turn a complaint into a positive experience.

4.6 Operational model of digital Sharia business communication strategy

Based on a literature review, this article formulates an operational model for digital Sharia business communication strategies. This model places Sharia values as the foundation, digital channels as the execution space, and trust as the intermediate output that drives customer loyalty and team performance. This model is not intended as a rigid mathematical formula, but as a managerial guide that can be adapted to the scale of the business. Small MSMEs can start with product description templates and weekly briefings, whilst larger companies can develop communication SOPs, admin training, and periodic content audits. Simply put, the effectiveness of digital Shariah business communication can be understood through the following relationship: $EKBSD = f(S, A, T, M, K)$. EKBSD stands for the effectiveness of digital Shariah business communication. (S) reflects shidq, or the honesty of information. (A) reflects amanah in promises, data, and services. (T) reflects transparency in contracts, pricing, and risks. (M) reflects consultation and team coordination. (K) reflects the quality of content and digital channels. If any one element is weak, communication effectiveness will decline. For example, good content without transparency in contracts still risks causing complaints.

Table 2. Operationalisation matrix for digital Islamic business communication strategies

Strategy pillars	Sharia values	Communication practices	Evaluation indicators	Examples of implementation
Product transparency	Shidq, anti-deception	Comprehensive descriptions, realistic photos, evidence-based claims	Reduction in repetitive queries, positive reviews regarding product suitability	Description template includes size, materials, shelf life, halal status, and warranty
Digital trust	Trust, safeguarding funds	Clear responses, data protection, fulfilment of delivery promises	Response time, complaint resolution rate, repeat orders	Customer chat SOP and approval of promotional broadcasts
Team coordination	Consultation, cooperation, etiquette	Briefings, evaluation meetings, stock dashboards, polite feedback	Fewer promotional errors, quicker decision-making, fewer conflicts	10-minute briefing every morning and weekly complaint review
Halal branding	Ihsan, masalahah	Educational content, halal certification, authentic business stories	High-quality engagement, brand trust, community growth	Content on production processes, sourcing of ingredients, and halal labelling education
Transaction transparency	Fairness, anti-gharar	Explanation of contracts, prices, risks, returns, and refunds	Fewer disputes, customers understand their rights and obligations	Pre-order and returns policies are stated on the invoice and product page

4.8 Managerial implications for SMEs and sharia business organisations

The first implication is the need for digital communication standards. SMEs often rely on administrative improvisation, resulting in inconsistent communication quality. Simple standards could include opening greetings, how to answer price enquiries, how to explain stock availability, how to decline requests that do not comply with Sharia, and how to handle complaints. These standards are not intended to make communication rigid, but rather to ensure messages remain consistent. Administrators may still use a warm tone, but must not fabricate information.

The second implication is training in contract literacy for sales and customer service teams. Many transaction issues arise because staff are unable to explain order status, deposits, refunds, or production delays. Training need not be complex. Business owners can create guide cards explaining the differences between cash sales, pre-orders, consignment, services, and instalments. Each transaction type is accompanied by example phrases that can be easily used in customer chats.

The third implication is regular content audits. The team needs to review published promotional content, particularly older content that may contain outdated prices, overly strong benefit claims, or

product photos that do not reflect the latest quality standards. Content audits can be conducted monthly using a checklist: are the claims accurate, are the prices clear, is the halal status stated, are the promotion terms easy to understand, and does the CTA avoid emotional coercion? This approach helps businesses remain competitive without compromising integrity.

The fourth implication is the strengthening of a culture of consultation. Digital competition often leads teams to work in a rush. Leaders need to provide regular evaluation sessions so that every department can raise issues. Meetings do not need to be long, but they must result in clear decisions: who does what, when it is due, and what the success indicators are. This culture helps Sharia values to be embedded in daily practice. Civility in communication within the team will be reflected in the quality of communication with customers.

4.9 Implementation challenges

The first challenge is limited resources. Many SMEs have only one or two people handling production, promotion, sales, and delivery. In these circumstances, Sharia communication strategies need to be kept simple. Initial priorities can focus on three areas: improving product descriptions, creating complaint response templates, and noting the most frequently asked customer questions. After that, business owners can add other elements such as content audits and contract training.

The second challenge is algorithmic pressure and price wars. Digital platforms often favour high-traffic content and highly competitive pricing. Sharia-compliant businesses can be quickly outpaced if they rely solely on a moral approach without technical strategies. Therefore, Sharia values must be combined with digital capabilities such as marketplace SEO, honest copywriting, clear product photography, review analysis, and content calendar management. Ethics do not replace technical competence; rather, ethics guide that competence to ensure it does not harm consumers.

The third challenge is the gap between brand identity and operational practices. Business owners readily declare themselves to be trustworthy, but it is harder to maintain consistency when orders surge, stock runs low, or customers lodge complaints. This is where systems are needed. Sharia values need to be anchored in standard operating procedures (SOPs), task allocation, complaint records, and data evaluation. Without a system, values often depend on individual intentions and can easily weaken as business pressures mount.

5. CONCLUSION

Sharia business communication strategies in the face of digital-era competition must be understood as a communication system that integrates ethics, technology, the market, and organisational coordination. Digitalisation expands opportunities for SMEs and Sharia business organisations to reach consumers, but it also intensifies competitive pressures through price wars, content speed, customer reviews, platform algorithms, and demands for real-time service. In this context, Sharia communication provides a framework to ensure businesses remain competitive without compromising on honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, and transactional clarity. The study's findings highlight five key strategic pillars. First, product communication must be honest and transparent. Second, digital trust must be built through trustworthiness in promises, data, and services. Third, internal coordination must be carried out through consultation, civilised feedback, and clear information sharing. Fourth, halal branding must be substantive, educational, and evidence-based. Fifth, transactional communication must explain contracts, prices, risks, returns, and after-sales services in an easily understandable manner. These five pillars are interrelated and need to be implemented as daily procedures. This article demonstrates that Sharia values can become a competitive advantage when translated into measurable communication practices. Sharia-compliant businesses cannot rely solely on religious symbols or moral narratives. Business operators must demonstrate these values through honest content, responsible service, consumer protection, and a healthy work culture. With this strategy, sharia-compliant business communication can strengthen customer loyalty, enhance team synergy, and support business growth oriented towards the public good.

Policy Recommendations

- a. Sharia MSME operators need to establish digital communication SOPs that include standards for product descriptions, testimonial ethics, pricing policies, customer response templates, and complaint procedures.

- b. SME support institutions, universities, Islamic boarding schools, sharia cooperatives, and halal business communities need to provide practical digital contract literacy training for administrators, sellers, and business owners.
- c. Marketplace platforms and digital service providers need to provide support features for halal products, such as certification sections, pre-order explanations, clear return policies, and badges for shops that adhere to ethical communication standards.
- d. The government and Islamic economic institutions need to strengthen Islamic e-commerce guidelines for SMEs, including guidelines on promotion, digital contracts, data protection, and consumer dispute resolution.
- e. Sharia business organisations need to assess communication performance not only in terms of sales, but also in terms of response speed, complaint resolution rates, clarity of information, repeat orders, and customer satisfaction.

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