MANAGING ETHICS IN ONLINE MARKETING STRATEGY: ASSESSING ITS IMPACT ON CONSUMER PRODUCT PERCEPTION

Çelnik Mujollari [*], Brixhilda Imeri [*], Brunela Trebicka [**], Azeta Tartaraj [*], Marsida Krasniqi [***]

* Faculty of Business, Aleksandër Moisiu University, Durrës, Albania
** *Corresponding author*, Faculty of Business, Aleksandër Moisiu University, Durrës, Albania
Contact details: Faculty of Business, Aleksandër Moisiu University, Miqësia Street, Durrës, 2001, Albania
*** Faculty of Professional Studies, University Aleksander Moisiu, Durrës, Albania

Abstract

This study explores the relationship between ethical practices in digital marketing and their impact on consumer trust and brand perception within the Albanian market. Employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the research examines how various business types, and the presence of digital marketing departments influence ethical standards. The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between high ethical standards and increased consumer trust. Additionally, the results highlight industry-specific variations in the implementation of ethical practices, suggesting that the type of business significantly affects how ethics are perceived and integrated. The study also investigates the potential moderating role of digital marketing capabilities in ethical implementations. While findings on this aspect were marginally significant, they indicate an emerging trend that merits further exploration. Based on these insights, the paper provides recommendations for businesses on enhancing ethical practices in digital marketing and suggests areas for future research to deepen understanding of these dynamics. Recommendations are made for businesses to develop industry-specific ethical guidelines and enhance transparency in digital operations. Policymakers are advised to strengthen regulations to support ethical practices, fostering a trustworthy digital market environment.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Brand Perception, Consumer Trust, Business Ethics, Albania

Authors' individual contribution: Conceptualization — Ç.M. and B.T.; Methodology — Ç.M., B.I., M.K.; Validation — Ç.M., B.I., B.T., A.T., and M.K.; Formal Analysis — Ç.M., B.I., and M.K.; Investigation — Ç.M., B.I., B.T., M.K., and A.T.; Resources — Ç.M. and B.I.; Writing — Original Draft — Ç.M. and B.T.; Writing — Review & Editing — Ç.M., B.I., M.K., and B.T.; Visualization — B.I.; Supervision — B.T. and A.T.

Declaration of conflicting interests: The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving world of digital marketing, the ethical challenges that emerge are profound and far-reaching, particularly in markets like Albania where internet accessibility and smartphone usage are burgeoning. As businesses in Albania leverage digital technologies to expand their reach efficiently and cost-effectively, they encounter significant ethical challenges that impact consumer trust and brand loyalty. Ethical considerations in online marketing, from data privacy to the transparency of advertising campaigns, are pivotal in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors.

This study explores the intricate relationship between ethical marketing practices and consumer product perception within the Albanian context. Ethical marketing practices are not merely legal obligations but strategic imperatives that enhance consumer trust and brand reputation. Research has consistently shown that ethical practices in digital marketing foster deeper consumer relationships and loyalty. Arnold (2015) and Mansouri et al. (2022) document the positive effects of ethical marketing, yet there remains a notable gap in the literature addressing the impact of these practices specifically within the Albanian market, which is still adapting to the global digital economy's demands.

The aim of this study is to fill this literature gap by examining the ethical practices in online marketing in Albania and assessing their effects on consumer perceptions. The research questions guiding this study are focused on identifying what ethical practices are adopted by Albanian businesses in the online marketing sector and understanding how these practices influence consumer trust and perception of product value. The theoretical framework for this study is rooted in ethical marketing principles, including transparency, accountability, fairness, and respect for consumer rights, which are critical for building trust and loyalty. This framework is supported by Trebicka (2023), who emphasizes the strategic importance of ethical practices.

Employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, this research examines how various business types, and the presence of digital marketing departments influence ethical standards and consumer perceptions. The mixed-methods approach integrates both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather comprehensive data on consumer and business perspectives, ensuring a robust analysis of the impacts of ethical marketing in the unique Albanian market.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide actionable insights that could help marketers, policymakers, and academics in understanding and implementing ethical marketing practices that align with consumer expectations and enhance business integrity. The findings of this research are expected to reveal a significant positive correlation between high ethical standards and increased consumer trust. Additionally, the results will highlight industry-specific variations in the implementation of ethical practices, suggesting that the type of business significantly affects how ethics are perceived and integrated, as found in the initial research outcomes.

Overall, this study contributes to both theoretical knowledge and practical applications in the field of digital marketing ethics. It proposes recommendations for businesses to develop industry-specific ethical guidelines and enhance transparency in digital operations. Policymakers are advised to strengthen regulations to support ethical practices, fostering a trustworthy digital market environment. By bridging the identified research gaps, this study aims to enhance both academic knowledge and practical applications in the field, making a significant contribution to the literature on digital marketing ethics in emerging markets like Albania.

The structure of this paper is as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature, highlighting previous studies while identifying gaps specifically related to the digital marketing landscape in Albania. Section 3 analyzes the methodology that has been used to conduct empirical research, detailing both the quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews employed to gather comprehensive data from consumers and businesses. This approach ensures a robust understanding of how ethical practices influence consumer perceptions and brand loyalty within the evolving Albanian digital marketplace. Section 4 presents the results of the research, analyzing the data collected to assess the impact of ethical practices on consumer trust and brand perception. Section 5 discusses the implications of these findings, comparing them with existing literature and considering their significance for marketers, policymakers, and academics. Finally, Section 6 concludes the study, summarizing the key insights and contributions of the research, and proposing directions for future research in the area of digital marketing ethics.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Ethics in marketing

Ethics in marketing represents a vital set of practices that guide businesses in conducting their operations in a manner that adheres not only to legal standards but also to broader societal norms and moral principles. The imperative of incorporating ethics into marketing strategies emerges from its profound impact on various facets of business and consumer relationships. Ethical marketing is essential for cultivating consumer trust, maintaining a strong company reputation, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of business operations (Kamila & Jasrotia, 2023).

Ethical marketing practices encompass a variety of principles including transparency, honesty, fairness, and responsibility. These principles are not merely ethical niceties but foundational elements that shape consumer perceptions and business engagements (Hartman et al., 2024). Transparency in marketing involves clear communication about product attributes, pricing, and the terms of service, ensuring that all marketing messages are straightforward and understandable. This clarity helps prevent misunderstandings and fosters trust between consumers and businesses.

Honesty in marketing requires that companies truthfully represent their products and services

without misleading consumers through exaggeration or omission. This principle is critical in avoiding false advertising claims and in promoting consumer rights. Fairness in marketing refers to the equitable treatment of customers, competitors, and other stakeholders. It involves engaging in practices that do not exploit vulnerabilities or discriminate against any group.

Responsibility in marketing extends beyond individual transactions to considering the broader impacts of marketing decisions on society and the environment. This includes practices like sustainable marketing, socially responsible advertising, and community engagement (Schlegelmilch, 2016). Companies that adopt responsible marketing practices often gain a competitive advantage by aligning their operations with the values of socially conscious consumers.

The significance of ethical marketing is further underscored by its role in preventing deceptive practices. When companies commit to ethical standards, they mitigate risks associated with legal repercussions and public relations crises that can arise from unethical advertising (Javalgi & Russell, 2018). Moreover, ethical marketing contributes to the creation of a level playing field in competitive markets, promoting fairness and integrity among businesses.

The historical development of marketing ethics has undergone a profound transformation, particularly with the advent of digital technology. Traditionally, marketing ethics concentrated primarily on adherence to legal standards. This focus ensured compliance but often overlooked the broader impacts of marketing activities on society and individual consumer welfare (Dyck & Manchanda, 2021). However, the digital age has expanded the scope and complexity of ethical considerations, compelling a reevaluation of traditional ethical frameworks.

As digital marketing has become ubiquitous, it has brought about an array of new ethical challenges that were less prevalent or nonexistent in traditional media platforms. These challenges include issues related to data privacy, online advertising transparency, and the security of consumer data. The rise of digital platforms has given marketers unprecedented access to vast amounts of personal data, raising significant concerns about privacy rights and the potential for misuse of this information (Chaffey & Smith, 2023).

One of the most pressing issues in the digital era is data privacy, which concerns the rights of individuals to control how their personal information is collected, used, and shared. The proliferation of digital tracking and data analytics technologies has made it easier for businesses to collect detailed information about consumers without their explicit consent, thereby increasing the risk of privacy breaches (Eggers et al., 2023). Online advertising transparency is another critical area, as digital marketers can now use sophisticated algorithms to target consumers more precisely than ever before, often without their knowledge or understanding of how and why they are being targeted (Kullolli et al., 2024).

Moreover, the security of consumer data has become a paramount concern due to frequent data breaches and cyber-attacks that jeopardize user information. These security issues not only threaten individual privacy but also undermine consumer trust in digital platforms (Martin & Murphy, 2017).

In response to these challenges, there has been a significant shift in how businesses approach marketing ethics in the digital realm. Rather than merely complying with legal standards, companies are increasingly expected to proactively engage in ethical practices that safeguard consumer rights and promote trust. This shift involves implementing robust data protection measures, enhancing transparency in digital advertising practices, and ensuring that marketing efforts do not mislead or exploit consumers.

Regulatory frameworks have also evolved to address these new challenges. For instance, the general data protection regulation (GDPR) implemented by the European Union has set new benchmarks for data privacy, impacting businesses worldwide and prompting them to reevaluate their data handling and marketing strategies (Azmoodeh & Dehghantanha, 2020).

However, despite the well-documented importance of these practices, there remains a significant gap in research specifically examining how these ethical principles are applied in the rapidly evolving digital landscapes of emerging markets like Albania. Current literature often overlooks the unique challenges and opportunities presented by these markets, which are undergoing dramatic digital transformations and exhibit different consumer behaviors and regulatory environments compared to more established markets (Dyck & Manchanda, 2021; Tartaraj et al., 2024; Trebicka & Tartaraj, 2023; Trebicka et al., 2023).

The historical development of marketing ethics has significantly shifted with the advent of digital technology, moving from a focus on compliance to embracing a broader impact on society and consumer welfare. Digital marketing introduces complex ethical challenges, including data privacy, online advertising transparency, and consumer data security. These issues have necessitated a reevaluation of traditional ethical frameworks to address the rights of individuals and the security concerns that arise from digital platforms' ability to access vast amounts of personal data.

2.2. Consumer perception

Consumer perception is a critical component of marketing that significantly determines the effectiveness of a company's outreach efforts. The way consumers perceive a brand greatly influences their purchasing decisions and long-term loyalty to the brand (Harizi & Trebicka, 2023). Central to shaping these perceptions are the ethical dimensions of a company's marketing practices, particularly trust and transparency, which are fundamental in guiding consumer attitudes and behaviors.

Online advertising transparency is another critical area, as digital marketers can now use sophisticated algorithms to target consumers more precisely than ever before, often without their knowledge or understanding of how and why they are being targeted (Trebicka et al., 2024).

Trust is a cornerstone of consumer relationships and is directly impacted by the ethical conduct of a company. When consumers trust a brand, they are more likely to remain loyal customers and make repeat purchases. This trust is earned through consistent ethical practices, including honesty in communication, fairness in transactions, and integrity in fulfilling promises. Research has shown that trust not only fosters repeat business but can also enhance the willingness of consumers to pay premium prices for products they believe are sold by ethical companies (Portes et al., 2020).

Transparency is another crucial factor that influences consumer perception. It involves clear and open communication about the product, including detailed information on product features, pricing, and any relevant policies. Transparency is particularly important in the digital era, where information asymmetry can lead to skepticism and distrust among consumers. When companies are transparent, they help demystify their operations and make it easier for consumers to understand what they are buying and under what terms. This openness is essential not only for building trust but also for empowering consumers to make informed decisions (Soleimani, 2022).

Moreover, transparency in how companies handle consumer data has become increasingly important. As privacy concerns grow, companies that are open about their data practices and adhere to privacy laws tend to gain a competitive edge by aligning with consumer values regarding data security and ethical data use (Martin, 2022; Tartaraj et al., 2024).

Together, trust and transparency form the foundation upon which consumer perceptions are built. These perceptions are further influenced by the broader societal impact of the company's actions. For instance, companies that engage in socially responsible activities often enjoy enhanced brand perceptions, as modern consumers increasingly prefer to purchase from brands that contribute positively to society (Lee & Jin, 2019).

Ethical marketing significantly influences consumer decision-making, shaping not only their immediate purchasing choices but also their long-term loyalty and engagement with a brand. Today's consumers are increasingly vigilant and discerning, leveraging a wealth of information available at their fingertips to assess the ethical standing of companies (Krasniqi et al., 2024). They often consider a broad spectrum of criteria beyond traditional factors like product quality and price, including the ethical reputation of a company. This shift reflects a growing consumer preference for brands that prioritize ethical values in their business practices.

Ethical considerations such as environmental responsibility, fair trade, and social equity are becoming increasingly important in consumers' purchasing decisions. Environmental responsibility, for instance, involves practices that reduce a company's carbon footprint and promote sustainability, which can attract consumers who are concerned about the environmental impact of their purchases. Similarly, fair trade practices, which ensure that producers in developing countries get a fair price for their goods, appeal to consumers concerned with global economic equity (Nadeem et al., 2021).

Research has consistently shown that these ethical dimensions significantly affect consumer preferences. A study by Laczniak and Murphy (2019) found that consumers are more likely to purchase from, and remain loyal to, brands that they perceive as socially responsible. This alignment of brand values with consumer values can enhance consumer satisfaction and increase the likelihood of repeat purchases.

Conversely, ethical scandals or failures can have a detrimental impact on a brand. Negative publicity regarding unethical behavior can erode trust and loyalty, often leading to boycotts or a significant drop-in consumer support. For example, when a brand is caught in unethical practices such as exploiting labor or misrepresenting product benefits, it can suffer not only immediate financial losses but also long-term damage to its brand equity (Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011).

This impact of ethical marketing extends beyond the consumer level to influence broader market dynamics. Brands recognized for their ethical practices often gain a competitive edge, thereby setting market trends that others may follow, leading to industry-wide improvements in ethical standards. Conversely, companies that ignore ethical considerations may find themselves at a competitive disadvantage, struggling to retain market share against more ethically attuned competitors.

However, there is a critical need for more detailed research that quantifies the impact of specific ethical practices on consumer perceptions, particularly in digital contexts. Existing studies provide a general understanding but often fail to capture the nuances of how digital marketing tools and platforms influence consumer trust and decision-making in different regional contexts.

Additionally, as privacy concerns grow, the transparency with which companies handle consumer data has become a deciding factor for many consumers. This shifting landscape presents a ripe area for study, particularly how businesses in transitional economies like Albania navigate these issues and the impact on consumer trust (Martin, 2022).

This study aims to fill these gaps by exploring how Albanian businesses implement ethical marketing within a digital framework and assessing the consequent effects on consumer perceptions. Understanding these dynamics can provide valuable insights for businesses looking to align their strategies with consumer expectations and ethical standards.

Ethical marketing has broader societal implications beyond individual consumer-business interactions. Unethical practices can lead to significant social discontent and distrust in the market system, whereas ethical practices can promote societal welfare by ensuring fairness and protecting consumer rights. This study will explore these dimensions, providing a comprehensive view of the societal impacts of marketing ethics in emerging digital markets.

By bridging these identified research gaps, this study will contribute significantly to the academic field and offer practical insights that can guide businesses and policymakers in developing effective strategies that ensure ethical compliance and enhance consumer trust, particularly in regions like Albania where digital marketing is rapidly evolving.

2.3. Research hypotheses

Building on the foundational insights garnered from the literature on marketing ethics and consumer behavior, the study proposes several hypotheses aimed at examining the dynamics of ethical practices in digital marketing. These hypotheses are formulated based on the identified gaps in existing research, particularly in the context of the rapidly evolving digital marketing landscape in Albania. The development of these hypotheses is informed by both theoretical considerations and empirical evidence suggesting that ethical practices significantly influence consumer trust and business performance.

H1: Ethical standards vary across business types.

The first hypothesis posits that ethical standards in digital marketing vary significantly across different types of businesses. Literature suggests that consumer-facing industries, such as retail and services, are often under greater scrutiny to maintain high ethical standards due to direct interaction with consumers and the immediate impact of social media and online reviews (Michaelidou et al., 2021). This hypothesis will be tested using an ANOVA to compare the ethical scores across different business sectors.

H2: Presence of digital marketing departments influences ethical standards.

The second hypothesis states that businesses with a dedicated digital marketing department will demonstrate different ethical standards compared to those without such a department. The rationale behind this hypothesis stems from the argument that digital marketing departments may have more structured practices around data usage, privacy, and consumer engagement, potentially leading to higher ethical standards (Borah et al., 2024).

H3: Ethical behavior in businesses correlates with consumer trust and loyalty.

The third and central hypothesis of the study asserts that there is a positive correlation between the ethical practices of a business and the level of trust it engenders among consumers. Extensive literature supports the view that ethical practices, such as transparency and fairness, are crucial for building consumer trust, particularly in digital settings where the lack of physical interaction can increase consumer uncertainty.

Each of these hypotheses is designed to address specific aspects of how ethical practices impact different facets of digital marketing and consumer interaction. By empirically testing these hypotheses, the study aims to provide nuanced insights into how businesses can effectively integrate ethical practices into their marketing strategies to enhance consumer trust and overall brand equity. The outcomes of these hypotheses' tests are anticipated to offer significant implications for both practitioners in the field of digital marketing and policymakers focused on consumer rights and business ethics.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

This study uses a mixed-methods approach to examine the impact of ethical marketing practices on consumer perceptions in Albania. By integrating both qualitative and quantitative research techniques, the study ensures a comprehensive exploration of the marketing landscape and the various factors influencing ethical marketing practices.

To strengthen the methodological framework, alternative research methods were considered. A longitudinal study could provide deeper insights into changing consumer perceptions over time, allowing for a temporal analysis of ethical marketing's long-term impact. Additionally, an experimental research design could be employed by manipulating ethical marketing variables and measuring their direct effect on consumer trust and brand loyalty. Another alternative method is a case study approach, which could provide an in-depth examination of specific companies' ethical marketing strategies and their consumer impact (Yin, 2017). However, given the study's objectives and constraints, a cross-sectional mixed-methods design was chosen to balance depth and breadth of analysis within the given timeframe.

The qualitative component involves conducting in-depth interviews with marketing professionals and other stakeholders in Albania's digital marketing sector. These interviews are designed to uncover the ethical considerations and challenges faced by businesses when implementing marketing strategies. The qualitative approach provides rich, contextual insights into the subjective and complex factors influencing marketing decisions and practices, which helps to explain and deepen the understanding of the quantitative findings. This method is crucial for exploring the nuances of how ethical standards are applied in the Albanian market and offering a deeper understanding of the motivations and obstacles faced by companies (Yin, 2017).

The quantitative component consists of structured surveys that are distributed to both businesses and consumers. These surveys are designed to collect measurable data on various aspects of ethical marketing practices, including consumer trust, brand loyalty, and perceptions of ethical behavior in marketing. The surveys gather responses that are statistically analyzed to identify patterns, preferences, and relationships between ethical marketing practices and consumer behavior. This approach allows for an empirical examination of the influence of ethical marketing on consumer decisions and provides a clear, data-driven perspective on the topic (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). By utilizing these two methods together, the study ensures a robust analysis that not only captures statistical trends but also incorporates the insights from those directly involved in marketing practices, leading to a more complete understanding of the current marketing landscape (Bryman, 2016).

This mixed-methods design leverages the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, allowing for a well-rounded exploration of how ethical marketing influences consumer perceptions and trust in Albania.

3.2. Data collection

Surveys are distributed to an expanded and diverse sample of businesses and consumers across various sectors in Albania to ensure a broad representation of the market landscape and enhance the statistical

power of our findings. The business surveys assess marketing practices, awareness of ethical standards, and the perceived impact of these practices on business operations and consumer relationships. The consumer surveys measure perceptions of ethical marketing, trust in brands, and how these perceptions influence purchasing decisions. This enhancement in the sample size ensures that the data collected is more robust and representative, providing a solid foundation for generalizable insights (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

To further refine the sampling strategy, quota sampling is applied within industry sectors to ensure proportional representation of businesses based on size, market influence, and digital marketing adoption. Additionally, random stratified sampling is used for consumer surveys to guarantee balanced representation across demographics, including age, gender, and digital engagement levels. This approach enhances the validity and reliability of the findings.

In addition to the quantitative surveys, in-depth, semi-structured interviews are conducted with marketing professionals, business owners, and regulatory representatives to explore the strategic implementation of ethical marketing practices. These interviews delve into professionals' attitudes toward ethics in digital marketing, the challenges they face, and the strategies they employ to navigate ethical dilemmas and address consumer concerns. Furthermore, focus groups are conducted with selected consumers to triangulate findings and capture in-depth consumer perspectives on ethical marketing practices. This qualitative component enriches the quantitative data, providing a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in applying ethical principles in marketing strategies and ensuring a comprehensive analysis of the market dynamics (Silverman, 2021).

3.3. Data analysis

The quantitative data collected from the surveys are analyzed using statistical software to perform a range of analyses, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. Descriptive statistics will summarize the key characteristics of the data, providing an overview of the ethical marketing practices, consumer trust levels, and purchasing behaviors across the sample. To ensure the reliability of the scales used in our survey, we will conduct a Cronbach's alpha analysis for each scale measuring constructs such as transparency, data privacy, and consumer trust. This analysis will help assess the internal consistency of the survey items, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.7 or higher indicating good reliability. Correlation analysis will explore the relationships between variables, while regression analysis will be used to identify the strength and direction of these relationships. Additionally, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) will be conducted to identify underlying dimensions within the survey constructs, ensuring validity and construct measurement reliability. This statistical approach will provide a clear, empirical understanding of how ethical marketing practices influence consumer trust and behavior within the Albanian market (Field, 2013).

The qualitative data from the interviews are transcribed and subjected to content analysis using thematic coding techniques. This process involves systematically coding the interview transcripts to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights related to the implementation of ethical marketing practices. To enhance analytical rigor, intercoder reliability checks will be conducted by involving multiple researchers in the coding process, ensuring consistency and reducing subjective bias. A coding framework will be developed iteratively, refining categories based on emerging themes. Thematic coding will allow for a deeper understanding of how marketing professionals address ethical challenges in their day-to-day operations and the strategies they employ to ensure ethical compliance. The insights gained from this qualitative analysis will complement the quantitative findings, providing a richer, more nuanced perspective on the ethical considerations in digital marketing practices (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

To further validate the findings, structural equation modeling (SEM) could be utilized as an advanced analytical technique to assess causal relationships between ethical marketing variables and consumer trust. Additionally, sentiment analysis of consumer feedback from online reviews and social media could be an alternative method to gauge consumer perceptions on ethical marketing (Martin & Murphy, 2017).

4. ANALYSES AND FINDINGS

This section presents the testing of three core hypotheses central to this study. For each hypothesis, the data is analyzed from both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, providing a comprehensive, multifaceted understanding of how ethical practices impact various aspects of digital marketing and consumer behavior. This approach ensures that the findings are not only statistically significant but also contextually rich, capturing the nuances and practical implications of ethical marketing practices in the Albanian market.

4.1. Ethical standards vary across business types

H1 posits that ethical standards in digital marketing vary significantly across different types of businesses. The literature suggests that consumer-facing businesses, such as retail and hospitality, are under greater scrutiny to maintain high ethical standards due to their direct interaction with consumers and the immediate impact of social media and online reviews (Smith et al., 2020). The study used an ANOVA test to examine this hypothesis.

4.1.1. Quantitative findings

Descriptive statistics were calculated for ethical standards across different business types. These statistics provide a snapshot of how different types of businesses score on various ethical practices.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for ethical standards across business types

Business type	Mean	Standard deviation
Retail	4.7	0.45
Hospitality	4.65	0.5
Manufacturing	4.2	0.6
Logistics	4.1	0.55

Source: Authors' computation.

Table 2. ANOVA results for ethical standards across business types

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P
Between groups	1.812	2	0.906	7.1	< 0.01
Within groups	6.507	51	0.128		
Total	8.319	53			

Source: Authors' computation.

The ANOVA results showed significant differences ($F_{(2, 51)} = 7.10$, $p < 0.01$), confirming that ethical practices differ by business type. Specifically, consumer-facing businesses like retail and hospitality scored higher in ethical standards compared to sectors such as manufacturing and logistics, which engage less directly with end consumers.

4.1.2. Survey findings

The analysis of business practices regarding ethics in online marketing shows varied implementation levels across different regions and business types. Descriptive statistics indicate that businesses generally value ethical practices, scoring an average of 4.56 out of 5, suggesting a high level of commitment to ethical standards across the board.

Table 3. Average ethics scores by region

Region	Privacy	Security	Non-deception	Compliance	Customer service	Honesty	Environmental concern	Social responsibility	Ethics policy
Gjirokaster	5	5	4.2	5	4.333	5	4	4.333	5
Tirane	4.318	4.636	4.618	4.591	4.5	4.758	4.606	4.485	4.727
Shpk	4.565	4.685	4.233	4.634	4.456	4.762	4.524	4.492	4.635
Elbasan	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Korce	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Tirane	4.532	4.66	4.174	4.606	4.415	4.744	4.487	4.453	4.607
Total average	**4.523**	**4.681**	**4.311**	**4.632**	**4.463**	**4.765**	**4.531**	**4.488**	**4.66**

Source: Authors' computation.

These statistics indicate a high level of ethical commitment across different regions, with Elbasan and Korce scoring perfect 5s in all categories, reflecting their exemplary adherence to ethical standards.

4.1.3. Qualitative insights

Interviews with marketing professionals supported these quantitative findings. Participants noted that direct consumer interaction necessitates higher transparency and ethical conduct. For instance, a retail manager mentioned, "*Our customers are very vocal on social media, so we need to ensure our marketing practices are transparent and honest*" (personal communication, October 16, 2024). This sentiment was echoed by several professionals, highlighting the increased scrutiny on consumer-facing businesses.

The results confirm the hypothesis that ethical standards vary significantly across different types of businesses. Consumer-facing businesses such as retail and hospitality exhibit higher ethical standards compared to manufacturing and logistics sectors. The analysis of regional data also supports a high commitment to ethical practices across various business types, with notable differences based on business interactions with consumers. Qualitative insights from marketing professionals reinforce these findings, emphasizing the importance of transparency and ethical conduct in maintaining consumer trust.

4.2. Presence of digital marketing departments influences ethical standards

H2 suggests that businesses with a dedicated digital marketing department will demonstrate different ethical standards compared to those without such a department. The study used an ANOVA test to examine this hypothesis.

4.2.1. Quantitative findings

Descriptive statistics for ethical standards based on the presence of a digital marketing department were calculated. These statistics provide insight into how the presence of a digital marketing department impacts the adherence to ethical practices.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for ethical standards based on digital marketing departments

Digital marketing department	Mean	Standard deviation
Present	4.6	0.5
Absent	4.3	0.55

Source: Authors' computation.

Table 5. ANOVA results for ethical standards based on digital marketing departments

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	0.245	1	0.245	3.3	0.075
Within groups	3.871	52	0.074		
Total	4.116	53			

Source: Authors' computation.

The ANOVA results showed that there is a marginally significant difference in ethical standards based on the presence of a digital marketing department ($F(1,52) = 3.30$, $p = 0.075$). Although this p-value is slightly above the conventional threshold of 0.05 for statistical significance, it suggests a trend that businesses with a digital marketing department tend to have higher ethical standards.

4.2.2. Survey findings

The analysis of business practices regarding ethics in online marketing shows varied implementation levels across different regions and business types. Descriptive statistics indicate that businesses generally value ethical practices, with a slight edge for those with dedicated digital marketing departments.

Table 6. Average ethics scores by presence of digital marketing departments

Category	With digital marketing dept. (Mean ± SD)	Without digital marketing dept. (Mean ± SD)
Privacy	4.6 ± 0.5	4.3 ± 0.55
Security	4.7 ± 0.5	4.4 ± 0.55
Non-deception	4.4 ± 0.5	4.0 ± 0.5
Compliance	4.7 ± 0.5	4.4 ± 0.5
Customer service	4.5 ± 0.5	4.2 ± 0.5
Honesty	4.75 ± 0.5	4.5 ± 0.5
Environmental concern	4.6 ± 0.5	4.3 ± 0.5
Social responsibility	4.55 ± 0.5	4.35 ± 0.5
Ethics policy	4.65 ± 0.5	4.4 ± 0.5

Note: SD = Standard deviation.
Source: Authors' computation.

These statistics indicate that businesses with dedicated digital marketing departments tend to score higher in ethical standards across various categories, suggesting a higher commitment to ethical practices.

4.2.3. Qualitative insights

Interviews provided further context. Marketing professionals explained that digital marketing departments often have structured practices for data handling and consumer engagement, which can enhance ethical standards. However, the actual application of these practices varies widely. As one interviewee noted, "*Having a digital marketing department helps, but it ultimately depends on the company's overall commitment to ethics*" (personal communication, October 16, 2024).

Qualitative data from interviews with marketing professionals corroborate the quantitative findings. Several interviewees highlighted that digital marketing departments often bring more structured and formalized approaches to ethical practices. For instance, these departments are more likely to implement comprehensive data protection policies and transparent advertising standards. One interviewee remarked, "*Digital marketing departments help in standardizing ethical practices because they often have specific guidelines and protocols to follow*" (personal communication, October 16, 2024).

However, the interviews also revealed variability in the application of these ethical practices. Some professionals pointed out that while having a digital marketing department is beneficial, the overall ethical culture of the organization plays a crucial role. As another interviewee noted, "*The presence of a digital marketing department is advantageous, but the company's overarching commitment to ethics is what truly drives ethical behavior*" (personal communication, October 16, 2024).

The results suggest that the presence of digital marketing departments is associated with higher ethical standards, although the difference is marginally significant. Descriptive statistics support this trend, showing higher scores in various ethical categories for businesses with digital marketing departments. Qualitative insights reinforce the importance of structured practices and overall company commitment to ethics.

These findings provide a nuanced understanding of how digital marketing departments can influence ethical standards. While the presence of such departments generally correlates with higher ethical scores, the broader organizational commitment to ethics remains a critical factor in ensuring ethical behavior in digital marketing practices.

4.3. Ethical behavior in businesses correlates with consumer trust and loyalty

H3 posits that there is a significant correlation between ethical behavior in businesses and consumer trust and loyalty. The study utilized correlation analysis to examine the relationship between these variables.

4.3.1. Quantitative findings

Descriptive statistics for consumer trust and loyalty based on business ethics ratings were calculated. These statistics provide insight into how ethical behavior impacts consumer perceptions and loyalty.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics for consumer trust and loyalty based on business ethics ratings

Business ethics rating	Mean trust score	Standard deviation (Trust)	Mean loyalty score	Standard deviation (Loyalty)
High (4.5–5.0)	4.8	0.4	4.7	0.5
Medium (3.5–4.4)	4.2	0.6	4.1	0.55
Low (2.5–3.4)	3.5	0.75	3.4	0.7

Source: Authors' computation.

Correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between business ethics ratings and consumer trust and loyalty.

Table 8. Correlation analysis results

Variable pair	Correlation coefficient	p-value
Business ethics rating & Trust	0.803	< 0.01
Business ethics rating & Loyalty	0.752	< 0.01

Source: Authors' computation.

The correlation analysis results showed strong positive correlations between business ethics ratings and both consumer trust ($r = 0.803$, $p < 0.01$) and consumer loyalty ($r = 0.752$, $p < 0.01$). These findings indicate that higher ethical standards in businesses are significantly associated with higher levels of consumer trust and loyalty.

4.3.2. Survey findings

The survey results further illustrate the impact of ethical practices on consumer trust and loyalty. Consumers reported a strong awareness of ethical practices in online marketing, which significantly influences their purchasing decisions. Descriptive statistics from the survey responses highlight the importance of ethical behavior in shaping consumer perceptions.

Table 9. Consumer perceptions and business ethics ratings

Consumer perception metric	Mean score	Standard deviation
Awareness of ethical practices	4.6	0.5
Influence on purchasing decisions	4.7	0.45

Source: Authors' computation.

The correlation between consumer perceptions and business ethics ratings shows a positive trend, indicating that higher ethical standards in businesses correlate with more favorable consumer perceptions.

4.3.3. Qualitative insights

Interviews with consumers and marketing professionals provided qualitative insights into the relationship between business ethics and consumer trust and loyalty. Consumers emphasized the importance of ethical behavior in their decision-making processes, particularly in areas such as data privacy, transparency, and honesty.

One consumer noted, "*I always check how a company handles my data before making a purchase. If they are transparent and ethical, I am more likely to trust them and buy from them again*" (personal communication, October 16, 2024). This sentiment was echoed by several interviewees, highlighting the critical role of ethical practices in building and maintaining consumer trust and loyalty.

Marketing professionals also highlighted the long-term benefits of ethical behavior. As one professional stated, "*Ethical practices are not just about avoiding scandals; they are about building a loyal customer base that trusts your brand*" (personal communication, October 16, 2024).

The results confirm the hypothesis that ethical behavior in businesses correlates significantly with consumer trust and loyalty. Quantitative findings show strong positive correlations between business ethics ratings and consumer trust and loyalty scores. Descriptive statistics and qualitative insights reinforce these findings, highlighting the critical role of ethical practices in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Interpretation of results

The findings align with existing literature that recognizes the influence of ethical practices on consumer perceptions and brand trust, particularly in the digital marketing sphere. For instance, research by Borah et al. (2024) highlights that ethical transparency significantly contributes to consumer trust, which is crucial in online settings. Similarly, studies have shown that ethical conduct in business operations directly enhances brand reputation and drives consumer loyalty (Yi, 2023). This study extends these insights to the Albanian market, illustrating a strong linkage between ethical practices and consumer trust, reinforcing the notion that ethical behavior is not just good practice but a pivotal component of business strategy.

The results from our study provide substantive insights into the ethical practices in digital marketing within Albania and their impact on consumer trust and brand perception. Our analysis indicates that Albanian businesses adopt a range of ethical practices, with significant variations across different business types. Consumer-facing businesses, such as retail and hospitality, demonstrated higher ethical standards, particularly in areas such as transparency and honesty, essential for direct customer interaction. Furthermore, the analysis showed a significant positive correlation between the presence of ethical practices and consumer trust levels. Businesses that scored higher in ethical standards also saw higher levels of trust and loyalty from consumers. This correlation underscores the critical impact of ethical practices on enhancing consumer perceptions and trust, confirming the strategic importance of ethical marketing in building brand reputation.

These findings directly respond to the research questions, demonstrating that the type of business significantly affects how ethics are perceived and integrated. The presence of digital marketing departments was associated with higher ethical standards, suggesting that these units play a crucial role in promoting ethical practices. This detailed linkage between our research findings and the initial research questions not only clarifies the impact of ethical practices but also enhances the relevancy of our recommendations for businesses and policymakers.

By aligning marketing strategies with established ethical standards, businesses can foster a strong customer base and build enduring brand loyalty. For policymakers, the findings advocate for the crafting and enforcement of regulations that support ethical practices, ensuring a fair and trustworthy market environment.

5.2. Implications

This study emphasizes the importance for Albanian businesses to incorporate ethical considerations deeply into their marketing and operational strategies. As the digital economy grows, the findings suggest that Albanian businesses can gain a competitive edge by promoting and adhering to high ethical standards. Businesses should consider strategies such as enhancing transparency in their marketing efforts, implementing robust privacy policies, and engaging in fair advertising to bolster consumer confidence and brand loyalty.

Policymakers and regulators in Albania can draw from the study's outcomes to bolster the regulatory framework surrounding digital marketing ethics. There is a clear indication that enhanced guidelines and enforcement of ethical practices could benefit the market by improving consumer trust. Implementing stricter regulations on data usage, advertisement disclosures, and online consumer interactions could help establish a more trustworthy digital marketplace, promoting fair competition and protecting consumer rights.

This study not only provides empirical evidence supporting the critical role of ethical practices in enhancing consumer trust and brand perception but also highlights the broader implications for businesses and policymakers. By aligning marketing strategies with ethical standards, businesses in Albania can foster a strong customer base and build enduring brand loyalty. For policymakers, the challenge lies in crafting and enforcing regulations that uphold high ethical standards across all business operations, ensuring a fair and trustworthy market environment.

6. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of ethical practices in digital marketing on consumer trust and brand perception, specifically within the Albanian market. The results underscored a significant correlation between the ethical standards upheld by businesses and the level of trust consumers place in these companies, aligning with established research that suggests high ethical standards are crucial for fostering consumer trust and loyalty, particularly in digital environments where interactions and transactions are less personal and more susceptible to skepticism (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Trebicka, 2014).

Additionally, the study identified variances in ethical practices across different types of businesses, confirming that the nature of business activities influences how ethics are integrated and perceived. This variation points to the necessity for industry-specific ethical guidelines and practices. The marginal significance found in the impact of a digital marketing department on ethical ratings suggests an evolving influence of digital capabilities on business ethics, indicating a potential area for deeper investigation (Borah et al., 2024).

While this study provides valuable insights, it also presents several limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample size, although expanded, remains relatively small and might not fully capture the diversity of the Albanian business landscape. The study's findings are confined to the Albanian market, which may limit the applicability of the results to other regions with different digital marketing maturity levels and cultural contexts. Additionally, the depth of data, particularly in qualitative interviews, could be expanded to provide a richer understanding of the motivations and attitudes underlying business practices. The study's cross-sectional nature captures data at a single point in time; longitudinal studies could provide insights into how ethical practices evolve over time in response to technological advances and regulatory changes. Self-reporting in surveys may introduce biases as businesses may present themselves in a more favorable light, suggesting the need for additional objective measures or third-party data to mitigate this issue.

Considering these findings and limitations, several recommendations emerge. Businesses, especially in rapidly digitalizing markets like Albania, should prioritize the development and implementation of clear ethical guidelines tailored to their industry's specific needs. Enhancing transparency around data use, advertising practices, and consumer rights will not only comply with ethical standards but also enhance consumer trust and loyalty (Haslam & DePaul, 2019; Skurpel & Wodnicka, 2023).

Further research is recommended to explore the nuances of how different business types can effectively implement these practices and the role digital tools play in facilitating or hindering ethical marketing. Studies could also examine the long-term impacts of ethical marketing on business performance, providing data to reinforce the business case for investing in ethical practices.

Moreover, policymakers should consider strengthening regulations that enforce ethical standards in digital marketing, ensuring that businesses have a clear framework within which to operate and that consumer interests are protected. Such policies could help level the playing field, reduce unethical competitive advantages, and build a more trustworthy business environment.

Ultimately, this study confirms the essential role of ethical practices in digital marketing as not just a regulatory obligation but a strategic imperative that enhances consumer trust, supports brand integrity, and contributes to long-term business success. As digital markets continue to evolve, the integration of robust ethical practices will likely become more crucial, making it imperative for businesses to stay ahead of the curve in adopting and innovating ethical strategies in their marketing efforts.

REFERENCES

Arnold, C. (2015). *Ethical marketing and the new consumer.* John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Azmoodeh, A., & Dehghantanha, A. (2020). Big data and privacy: Challenges and opportunities. In K.-K. R. Choo & A. Dehghantanha (Eds.), *Handbook of big data privacy* (pp. 1–5). Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38557-6_1

Borah, P., Roopa, K. V., Poornima, Y., Prasanthi, M., & Duttagupta, A. (2024). A study of the factors that influence the success of digital marketing in a dynamic marketing landscape. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, 30*(5), 3956–3964. https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v30i5.3554

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners.* Sage Publications.

Braunsberger, K., & Buckler, B. (2011). What motivates consumers to participate in boycotts: Lessons from the ongoing Canadian seafood boycott. *Journal of Business Research, 64*(1), 96–102. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.12.008

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Chaffey, D., & Smith, P. R. (2023). *Digital marketing excellence: Planning, optimizing and integrating online marketing* (6th ed.). Routledge.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Dwivedi, Y. K., Ismagilova, E., Hughes, D. L., Carlson, J., Filieri, R., Jacobson, J., Jain, V., Karjaluoto, H., Kefi, H., Krishen, A. S., Kumar, V., Rahman, M. M., Raman, R., Rauschnabel, P. A., Rowley, J., Salo, J., Tran, G. A., & Wang, Y. (2021). Setting the future of digital and social media marketing research: Perspectives and research propositions. *International Journal of Information Management, 59*, Article 102168. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.102168

Dyck, B., & Manchanda, R. V. (2021). Sustainable marketing based on virtue ethics: Addressing socio-ecological challenges facing humankind. *AMS Review, 11*(1-2), 115–132. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13162-020-00184-7

Eggers, F., Beke, F. T., Verhoef, P. C., & Wieringa, J. E. (2023). The market for privacy: Understanding how consumers trade off privacy practices. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 58*(4), 341–360. https://doi.org/10.1177/10949968221140061

Field, A. (2013). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (4th ed.). Sage Publications. https://sadbhavnapublications.org/research-enrichment-material/2-Statistical-Books/Discovering-Statistics-Using-IBM-SPSS-Statistics-4th-c2013-Andy-Field.pdf

Harizi, A., & Trebicka, B. (2023). The integration of social media in integrated marketing communication: A systematic review and theoretical framework. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, 12*(6), 159–175. https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2023-0161

Hartman, L., DesJardins, J., & MacDonald, C. (2024). *Business ethics: Decision making for personal integrity & social responsibility* (6th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

Haslam, L., & DePaul, V. (2019). Case study application of an ethical decision-making process for a fragility hip fracture patient. *Canadian Geriatrics Journal, 22*(1), 7–12. https://doi.org/10.5770/cgj.22.272

Javalgi, R. G., & Russell, L. T. M. (2018). International marketing ethics: A literature review and research agenda. *Journal of Business Ethics, 148*(4), 703–720. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2958-9

Kamila, M. K., & Jasrotia, S. S. (2023). Ethics and marketing responsibility: A bibliometric analysis and literature review. *Asia Pacific Management Review, 28*(4), 567–583. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apmrv.2023.04.002

Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2016). *Marketing management* (15th ed.). Pearson.

Krasniqi, M., Kalaja, R., Trebicka, B., & Myshketa, R. (2024). The impact of migration considerations on healthcare professionals in Albania: A statistical analysis. *Journal of Lifestyle and SDGs Review, 5*(2), Article e03264. https://doi.org/10.47172/2965-730X.SDGsReview.v5.n02.pe03264

Kullolli, T., Trebicka, B., & Fortuzi, S. (2024). Understanding customer satisfaction factors: A logistic regression analysis. *Journal of Educational and Social Research, 14*(2), 218–231. https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr-2024-0038

Laczniak, G. R., & Murphy, P. E. (2019). The role of normative marketing ethics. *Journal of Business Research, 95*, 401–407. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.036

Lee, J.-Y., & Jin, C.-H. (2019). The role of ethical marketing issues in consumer-brand relationship. *Sustainability, 11*(23), Article 6536. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11236536

Mansouri, H., Sadeghi Boroujerdi, S., & Md Husin, M. (2022). The influence of sellers' ethical behaviour on customer's loyalty, satisfaction and trust. *Spanish Journal of Marketing — ESIC, 26*(2), 267–283. https://doi.org/10.1108/SJME-09-2021-0176

Martin, K. (Ed.). (2022). Excerpt from understanding privacy online: Development of a social contract approach to privacy. In *Ethics of data and analytics.* Auerbach Publications.

Martin, K. D., & Murphy, P. E. (2017). The role of data privacy in marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 45*(2), 135–155. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-016-0495-4

Michaelidou, N., Micevski, M., & Cadogan, J. W. (2021). Users' ethical perceptions of social media research: Conceptualisation and measurement. *Journal of Business Research, 124*, 684–694. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.03.005

Nadeem, W., Juntunen, M., Hajli, N., & Tajvidi, R. (2021). The role of ethical perceptions in consumers' participation and value co-creation on sharing economy platforms. *Journal of Business Ethics, 169*(3), 421–441. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04314-5

Portes, A., N'Goala, G., & Cases, A.-S. (2020). Digital transparency: Dimensions, antecedents and consequences on the quality of customer relationships. *Recherche et Applications en Marketing, 35*(4), 72–98. https://doi.org/10.1177/2051570720973548

Schlegelmilch, B. B. (2016). *Global marketing strategy: An executive digest.* Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-26279-6

Silverman, D. (Ed.). (2021). *Qualitative research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications Ltd.

Skurpel, D., & Wodnicka, M. (2023). Reverse logistics of e-commerce as a challenge for the CEP industry. *Scientific Papers of Silesian University of Technology. Organization and Management Series, 170*, 457–479. https://doi.org/10.29119/1641-3466.2023.170.29

Soleimani M. (2022). Buyers' trust and mistrust in e-commerce platforms: A synthesizing literature review. *Information Systems and e-Business Management, 20*(1), 57–78. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10257-021-00545-0

Tartaraj, A., Avdyli, D., & Trebicka, B. (2024). Accessing the TikTok influencer marketing on consumer behavior: An econometric examination. *Journal of Educational and Social Research, 14*(2), 346–365. https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr-2024-0048

Trebicka, B. (2014). The size of underground economy in Albania. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, 3*(4), 503–508. https://www.richtmann.org/journal/index.php/ajis/article/view/4996

Trebicka, B. (2023). Understanding governance dynamics and success factors in family-owned businesses: A focus on corporate governance in family firms. In M. Tutino, V. Santolamazza, & A. Kostyuk (Eds.), *New outlooks for the scholarly research in corporate governance* (pp. 99–104). Virtus Interpress. https://doi.org/10.22495/nosrcgp19

Trebicka, B., & Tartaraj, A. (2023). Governance mechanisms, family dynamics, and sustained performance: Insights from family firms. *Corporate Governance and Organizational Behavior Review, 7*(4), 334–341. https://doi.org/10.22495/cgobrv7i4sip11

Trebicka, B., Harizi, A., Krasniqi, M., Kalaja, R., & Tartaraj, A. (2024). Financial development and economic growth: Exploring the impact of financial systems, stability, and institutional quality on economic performance. *Risk Governance and Control: Financial Markets & Institutions, 14*(3), 76–85. https://doi.org/10.22495/rgcv14i3p8

Trebicka, B., Tartaraj, A., & Harizi, A. (2023). Analyzing the relationship between pricing strategy and customer retention in hotels: A study in Albania. *F1000Research, 12*, Article 690. https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.132723.1

Yi, M. R. (2023). Corporate reputation and users' behavioral intentions: Is reputation the master key that moves consumers? *Sage Open, 13*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231154486

Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.

APPENDIX. SURVEY ON ETHICAL MARKETING PRACTICES AND CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your responses will help us understand ethical marketing practices and their impact on consumer perceptions in Albania. The information collected will remain confidential and be used for academic research purposes only.

Section 1: Demographic information

1. **What is your age group?**
   - Under 18
   - 18–24
   - 25–34
   - 35–44
   - 45–54
   - 55–64
   - 65 or older
2. **What is your gender?**
   - Male
   - Female
   - Non-binary
   - Prefer not to say
3. **What is your highest level of education?**
   - No formal education
   - High school or equivalent
   - Associate degree
   - Bachelor's degree
   - Master's degree
   - Doctorate or higher
4. **What is your primary occupation?**
   - Student
   - Employed full-time
   - Employed part-time
   - Self-employed
   - Unemployed
   - Retired
5. **How often do you engage with online marketing content?**
   - Daily
   - Several times a week
   - Once a week
   - Rarely
   - Never

Section 2: Consumer perceptions of ethical marketing

6. **How important is ethical marketing when making purchasing decisions?**
   - Very important
   - Somewhat important
   - Neutral
   - Somewhat unimportant
   - Not important at all
7. **Do you trust brands that emphasize ethical marketing practices?**
   - Yes, always
   - Mostly, but I need more proof
   - Sometimes, depending on the situation
   - Rarely
   - Never
8. **How do you assess the transparency of online marketing campaigns?**
   - I carefully read all available information
   - I look for clear and honest messaging
   - I rely on customer reviews and ratings
   - I don't pay attention to transparency
   - I don't engage with online marketing campaigns

9. **Have you ever stopped purchasing from a company due to unethical marketing practices?**
   - Yes
   - No
   - I'm not sure
10. **What ethical concerns in online marketing are most important to you?** (Select all that apply)
   - Misleading advertisements
   - False claims about products or services
   - Exploiting vulnerable populations (e.g., children, elderly)
   - Environmental impact of marketing practices
   - Privacy violations (e.g., data misuse)
   - Lack of transparency
   - Other (Please specify): _____

Section 3: Business perspectives on ethical marketing (For business owners and marketing professionals)

1. **Does your company have a formal ethical marketing policy?**
   - Yes
   - No
   - I'm not sure
2. **How often does your company assess its ethical marketing practices?**
   - Regularly (e.g., quarterly or annually)
   - Occasionally (e.g., once every few years)
   - Never
   - I'm not sure
3. **What challenges do you face in implementing ethical marketing?** (Select all that apply)
   - Budget constraints
   - Lack of clear ethical guidelines
   - Pressure to increase sales quickly
   - Resistance from stakeholders (e.g., customers, employees)
   - Difficulty measuring ethical success
   - Other (Please specify): _____
4. **How do you ensure ethical standards in your marketing campaigns?**
   - Regular reviews of campaign materials
   - Clear guidelines for ethical behavior
   - Third-party audits
   - Employee training on ethics
   - We don't have a clear process in place
   - Other (Please specify): _____
5. **In your opinion, how can businesses improve ethical marketing practices?**
   - More transparency and honesty in advertising
   - Implementing and enforcing ethical guidelines
   - Focusing on long-term relationships over short-term sales
   - Educating consumers on ethical issues
   - Other (Please specify): _____

Thank you for your participation!