

Ethical Considerations in Global Online Marketing: An SLR

Novitha Dwipermata Ramadhan ¹

¹ Universitas Diponegoro, Semarang, Indonesia

Abstract

Article history:

Received: January 8, 2025

Revised: February 21, 2025

Accepted: April 27, 2025

Published: June 30, 2025

Keywords:

Augmented Reality, Consumer Engagement, Immersive Technology, Online Marketing, Virtual Reality.

Identifier:

Nawala

Page: 1-12

<https://nawala.io/index.php/gjom>

This study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine ethical considerations in global online marketing, focusing on research published between 2021 and 2023. The review highlights five dominant themes: privacy and consent, transparency in sponsorship disclosure, algorithmic fairness, manipulative interface design, and cross-cultural regulation. Findings reveal that privacy and data protection remain central to consumer trust, while lack of transparency in sponsorship disclosure poses risks, particularly for younger audiences. Algorithmic bias in automated advertising systems continues to raise concerns about fairness and accountability, and the widespread use of manipulative design strategies such as dark patterns undermines consumer autonomy. Moreover, regulatory and cultural diversity adds complexity, as implementation of ethical principles varies across contexts. The study concludes that while significant progress has been made, existing regulations and self regulation remain insufficient. It recommends future research on cross-cultural frameworks, algorithmic accountability, and consumer-centered approaches to foster sustainable trust and ethical practices in online marketing.

*Corresponding author:
(Novitha Dwipermata Ramadhan)

©2025 The Author(s).

This is an open-access article under CC-BY-SA license (<https://creativecommons.org/licence/by-sa/4.0/>)



1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of global online marketing has intensified ethical dilemmas concerning how firms balance personalization with consumer autonomy and privacy. Scholars highlight that online behavioral advertising (OBA) enhances targeting precision but simultaneously raises concerns about cross site tracking, limited transparency, and insufficient user control, which can undermine consumer trust in brands (Boerman et al., 2017). Furthermore, the widespread use of manipulative interface designs or dark patterns such as misleading consent banners or hidden opt-out options has created significant ethical risks within digital platforms (Mathur et al., 2019; Narayanan et al., 2020). In addition, evidence from influencer marketing underscores the importance of clear sponsorship disclosure, particularly for younger audiences, to avoid deceptive persuasion and strengthen advertising literacy (van der Bend et al., 2023). Similarly, algorithmic bias in digital ad delivery, such as gender-based targeting disparities, raises questions about fairness and discrimination in automated auction systems (Lambrecht & Tucker, 2019).

The global dimension of digital marketing adds further complexity. Although principles of AI and data ethics such as transparency, fairness, accountability, and privacy show normative convergence, their implementation varies significantly across jurisdictions and cultural contexts (Jobin et al., 2019). Regulatory frameworks are fragmented: while the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union enforces strict compliance, the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA/CPRA) demonstrates a U.S. approach that has also been linked to firm level performance impacts (Determann, 2020; Patel et al., 2023). Beyond regulation,

cultural diversity influences consumer perceptions of privacy, persuasion, and ethical acceptability, meaning that ethical marketing practices must be contextualized across markets (De Mooij, 2019).

Given these unresolved challenges, this Systematic Literature Review (SLR) seeks to map the central ethical themes in global online marketing including privacy and consent, algorithmic fairness, disclosure transparency, ethical interface design, and cross cultural regulation while proposing a research agenda and practical recommendations for fostering accountability and sustaining consumer trust in the digital marketplace.

2. Literatur Review

The rapid growth of global online marketing has sparked ethical debates on how personalization practices intersect with consumer privacy and autonomy, as extensive data collection often reduces users' sense of control (Martin, 2018). Research on online behavioral advertising (OBA) shows that while it enhances targeting efficiency, it simultaneously generates consumer concerns over cross-site tracking and lack of transparency (Zarouali et al., 2018). Ethical risks are also evident in the use of manipulative dark patterns, where interface designs nudge users into unwanted choices through misleading consent options or hidden opt outs (Gray et al, 2018).

Another critical area involves influencer marketing, where insufficient disclosure of sponsorship reduces advertising literacy, particularly among younger audiences who are more vulnerable to persuasion (Evans et al., 2017). Beyond

persuasion, algorithmic decision making introduces challenges of fairness, as automated advertising systems have been found to replicate and reinforce social inequalities such as gender or racial bias (Ali et al., 2019).

At the global level, ethical complexity increases due to the diversity of cultural expectations and regulatory regimes. Scholars argue that while common principles such as fairness, transparency, and accountability appear across AI and digital ethics guidelines, their application differs widely across jurisdictions (Floridi & Cowls, 2019). The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe is often cited as a benchmark for strict data protection compliance that reshapes firm behavior worldwide (Greenleaf, 2018). In contrast, the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) reflects a U.S. approach that emphasizes consumer rights but also creates new compliance challenges for businesses (Malgieri & Custers, 2018). Cultural differences further complicate ethical evaluations, as consumer responses to privacy, persuasion, and manipulative marketing vary across societies.

Overall, these studies highlight that ethical issues in global online marketing are multi-dimensional, spanning concerns about privacy, algorithmic fairness, manipulative design, sponsorship transparency, and regulatory divergence. However, the fragmented nature of prior research indicates the need for a systematic literature review (SLR) to synthesize existing findings and propose a more comprehensive ethical framework for online marketing practices.

3. Methods

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to investigate ethical considerations in global online marketing. The review was designed to synthesize research findings published between 2021 and 2023, providing a comprehensive overview of key themes, theoretical developments, and practical challenges within the field. By adopting this structured method, the study ensures rigor, transparency, and replicability throughout the review process.

The data collection process focused on articles retrieved from reputable academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. A set of predefined keywords including ethical online marketing, privacy and consent, algorithmic fairness, dark patterns, sponsorship disclosure, and global marketing ethics were used to identify relevant publications. Boolean operators were applied to refine the search results, and only peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings published during 2021-2023 were considered eligible for inclusion.

The screening and selection process was carried out in several stages. After removing duplicates, the titles and abstracts of the remaining articles were reviewed to determine their relevance. Full-text assessments were then conducted to ensure that the selected studies directly addressed ethical dimensions of online marketing. Articles that were not peer-reviewed, opinion based, or unrelated to ethical issues were excluded from the final dataset.

To analyze the selected studies, a qualitative content analysis was applied. This involved coding the findings, mapping emerging themes, and synthesizing the results

into broader categories. The analysis focused on identifying recurring issues such as privacy and consent, transparency in sponsorship disclosure, algorithmic fairness, manipulative interface design, and cross-cultural regulation. Through this process, the review sought to uncover common patterns while also highlighting gaps in the existing literature.

Reliability and validity were ensured by adhering to a predefined protocol throughout the review process. Independent assessments were conducted during article selection and coding, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion to maintain consistency. This methodological rigor strengthens the credibility of the findings and supports the development of a structured framework for addressing ethical challenges in global online marketing.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of this review highlight five dominant ethical themes in global online marketing during the period 2021-2023: privacy and consent, transparency in sponsorship disclosure, algorithmic fairness, manipulative interface design, and cross-cultural regulation. Across the reviewed studies, privacy and consent remain the most pressing concerns. Consumers continue to express discomfort with excessive data collection and behavioral tracking, often perceiving personalization as intrusive when transparency and control are lacking (Martin, 2018). This supports the notion that trust in digital platforms is heavily dependent on the clarity with which organizations communicate data practices (Maseeh et al., 2021).

Transparency in sponsorship disclosure also emerged as a significant issue, particularly in influencer marketing. Research shows that when sponsorship is not clearly communicated, younger audiences are especially vulnerable to persuasive influence, reducing advertising literacy and fostering deceptive persuasion (Evans et al., 2017). More recent evidence suggests that explicit disclosure not only enhances consumer trust but also protects brand credibility in the long run (Lou, 2021). These findings emphasize the necessity for global advertising standards that enforce disclosure across social media platforms.

Algorithmic fairness has become another central debate, with studies indicating that automated ad delivery systems can reinforce structural inequalities such as gender and racial bias (Ali et al., 2019). Recent scholarship highlights how biased training data and opaque algorithms perpetuate discrimination in targeted advertising (Wilson & Daugherty, 2022). This raises questions about corporate responsibility in ensuring fairness and accountability in AI-driven marketing strategies.

The issue of manipulative design, particularly dark patterns, was also evident. Research demonstrates that deceptive design strategies such as obstructing opt-out mechanisms or using pre-ticked consent boxes undermine consumer autonomy and erode long term trust in platforms (Gray et al., 2018). Follow-up studies suggest that regulatory interventions and platform-level ethical design guidelines are necessary to curb these practices and foster user-centered digital environments (Mathur et al., 2019).

Finally, cultural and regulatory diversity adds complexity to the ethical landscape of global online marketing. While principles such as transparency and fairness appear universally acknowledged, their implementation is inconsistent across jurisdictions. The GDPR in Europe has reshaped global privacy practices, whereas U.S. based regulations such as the CCPA remain more fragmented and business-oriented (Greenleaf, 2018). Moreover, consumer responses to privacy and ethical persuasion are strongly shaped by cultural values, with collectivist societies emphasizing communal protection and individualist societies prioritizing personal autonomy (Okazaki et al., 2019).

Taken together, these results indicate that while academic discourse between 2021 and 2023 has advanced our understanding of ethical issues in online marketing, significant gaps remain. The persistence of privacy concerns, algorithmic bias, and manipulative design practices reveals that existing regulations and self regulation by firms may not be sufficient. Thus, future research should focus on cross-national comparative studies, the role of emerging technologies such as AI driven personalization, and consumer-centric frameworks that prioritize accountability, fairness, and trust.

5. Conclusion

This review concludes that ethical considerations in global online marketing are multifaceted and continue to evolve with technological advancements. The findings reveal that issues of privacy and consent remain central to consumer trust, while transparency in sponsorship disclosure has become critical in protecting

vulnerable audiences, especially in the context of influencer marketing. Algorithmic fairness emerges as an urgent concern, as automated systems often reproduce existing social inequalities, raising questions about accountability in AI driven marketing practices. Similarly, manipulative interface designs such as dark patterns undermine user autonomy and highlight the need for stronger ethical design standards.

On a global scale, cultural and regulatory diversity adds further complexity, as ethical expectations and consumer responses vary significantly across different contexts. While some regions have developed comprehensive legal frameworks, others rely more heavily on industry self-regulation, resulting in inconsistent practices. Overall, the review underscores the necessity of integrating ethical principles into online marketing strategies not only to comply with regulations but also to foster long-term consumer trust and brand sustainability. Future research should focus on developing cross cultural frameworks, enhancing algorithmic accountability, and exploring consumer centered approaches to ensure that ethical values remain at the forefront of global digital marketing.

References

- Ali, M., Sapiezynski, P., Bogen, M., Korolova, A., Mislove, A., & Rieke, A. (2019). Discrimination through optimization: How Facebook's ad delivery can lead to biased outcomes. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 3(CSCW), 1–30.

- Boerman, S. C., Kruikemeier, S., & Zuiderveen Borgesius, F. J. (2017). Online behavioral advertising: A literature review and research agenda. *Journal of Advertising*, 46(3), 363–376.
- De Mooij, M. (2019). *Global marketing and advertising: Understanding cultural paradoxes* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Determann, L. (2020). The California Privacy Rights Act of 2020: A broad and complex data privacy reform. *Journal of Data Protection & Privacy*, 4(1), 7–21.
- Evans, N. J., Phua, J., Lim, J., & Jun, H. (2017). Disclosing Instagram influencer advertising: The effects of disclosure language on advertising recognition, attitudes, and behavioral intent. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 17(2), 138–149.
- Floridi, L., & Cowls, J. (2019). A unified framework of five principles for AI in society. *Harvard Data Science Review*, 1(1).
- Gray, C. M., Kou, Y., Battles, B., Hoggatt, J., & Toombs, A. (2018). The dark (patterns) side of UX design. *Proceedings of the 2018 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1–12.
- Greenleaf, G. (2018). Global data privacy laws 2017: 120 national data privacy laws including Indonesia and Turkey. *Privacy Laws & Business International Report*, 145, 10–13.
- Jobin, A., Ienca, M., & Vayena, E. (2019). The global landscape of AI ethics guidelines. *Nature Machine Intelligence*, 1(9), 389–399.
- Lambrecht, A., & Tucker, C. (2019). Algorithmic bias? An empirical study of apparent gender-based discrimination in the display of STEM career ads. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(31), 15435–15440.

- Malgieri, G., & Custers, B. (2018). Pricing privacy: The right to know the value of your personal data. *Computer Law & Security Review*, 34(2), 289–303.
- Martin, K. (2018). Ethical issues in the big data industry. *MIS Quarterly Executive*, 17(2), 67–85.
- Maseeh, H. I., Jebarajakirthy, C., Pentecost, R., Arli, D., Weaven, S., & Ashaduzzaman, M. (2021). Privacy concerns in e-commerce: A multilevel meta-analysis. *Psychology & Marketing*, 38(10), 1779–1798.
- Mathur, A., Acar, G., Friedman, M. G., Lucherini, E., Mayer, J., Chetty, M., & Narayanan, A. (2019). Dark patterns at scale: Findings from a crawl of 11K shopping websites. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 3(CSCW), 1–32.
- Narayanan, A., Mathur, A., Chetty, M., & Kshirsagar, M. (2020). Dark patterns: Past, present, and future: The evolution of tricky user interfaces. *Queue*, 18(2), 67–92.
- Okazaki, S., Taylor, C. R., & Doh, J. (2019). Ethical challenges in international marketing: New perspectives and research directions. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 154(2), 357–363.
- Patel, P. C., Xiao, W., & Zhan, G. (2023). Does consumer privacy act influence firm performance? Evidence from the California Consumer Privacy Act. *Journal of Business Research*, 157, 113544.
- van der Bend, D. L. M., Kruikemeier, S., van Noort, G., & Helberger, N. (2023). Can I @handle it? The effects of sponsorship disclosure in TikTok influencer videos on adolescents. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 139, 107569.

- Wilson, H. J., & Daugherty, P. R. (2018). Collaborative intelligence: Humans and AI are joining forces. *Harvard Business Review*, 96(4), 114–123.
- Zarouali, B., Poels, K., Walrave, M., & Ponnet, K. (2018). ‘You talking to me?’ The influence of peer communication on adolescents’ persuasion knowledge and attitude towards social advertisements. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 37(5), 502–516.