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Developing an Ethics-Oriented Electronic Marketing Model

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A B S T R A C T

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed marketing interactions while simultaneously giving rise to emerging ethical challenges, such as dark design patterns, algorithmic manipulation, and the erosion of consumer privacy. The present study aimed to develop a comprehensive model of ethics-oriented electronic marketing. A grounded theory approach based on the systematic design of Strauss and Corbin was employed, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 academic experts and senior digital marketing managers until theoretical saturation was achieved. Data analysis was conducted through three stages of open, axial, and selective coding, resulting in the development of a paradigmatic model comprising six dimensions: causal conditions (customers' ethical awareness), contextual conditions (ethics-oriented organizational culture), intervening conditions (environmental pressures and legal gaps), the central phenomenon (ethics-oriented electronic marketing), strategies (ethical codes, training, and algorithmic transparency), and consequences (consumer trust and sustainable competitive advantage). Therefore, advanced technologies, in the absence of commitment to ethical standards, are incapable of generating sustainable trust.

Keywords: *ethics-oriented electronic marketing, grounded theory, customer trust, sustainable competitive advantage, digital maturity.*

1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the nature, scope, and mechanisms of marketing activities. Electronic marketing has evolved from a supplementary communication channel into a central component of organizational strategy, customer relationship management, market intelligence, and value creation. Organizations increasingly rely on digital platforms, social media, data analytics, artificial intelligence, automated communication systems, and personalized recommendation mechanisms to identify customer needs, influence purchasing decisions, and sustain interactions with target markets. This transformation has expanded the capacity of firms to reach customers rapidly and at relatively low cost, while simultaneously generating new forms of interactivity, personalization, and market responsiveness. The strategic significance of electronic marketing is particularly evident in its capacity to support market expansion, facilitate access to international customers, and improve organizational responsiveness to competitive conditions (Arabshahi et al., 2023). However, the growing dependence of marketing on data-driven and technology-mediated interactions has also created a range of ethical challenges that cannot be adequately addressed through traditional marketing principles alone.

The evolution of marketing thought itself provides an important foundation for understanding why ethical considerations have become increasingly central to contemporary electronic marketing. Traditional marketing approaches were largely concerned with products, transactions, and market exchange, whereas more recent perspectives have emphasized customer relationships, human values, social responsibility, and the broader consequences of marketing activities. Marketing 3.0, for example, conceptualizes customers not merely as buyers but as whole human beings whose values, emotions, and social concerns should be incorporated into organizational decision making (Kotler et al., 2010). This perspective implies that the effectiveness of marketing cannot be assessed solely through short-term indicators such as sales growth, conversion rates, or market share. Rather, organizations are increasingly expected to consider how marketing practices affect customer dignity, autonomy, privacy, social welfare, and long-term trust. Accordingly, ethical marketing has become not only a normative concern but also an important managerial requirement in an environment characterized by increasing transparency and stakeholder scrutiny.

Ethics in marketing has historically been concerned with the fairness and acceptability of organizational behavior toward customers and other stakeholders. The general theory of marketing ethics emphasizes that ethical decision making in marketing is shaped by individual evaluations, perceived consequences, deontological considerations, organizational environments, and broader cultural norms (Hunt & Vitell, 2006). In digital environments, these dimensions become considerably more complex because marketing decisions are increasingly embedded in automated systems, data-processing architectures, platform algorithms, and personalized communication technologies. Decisions concerning targeting, data collection, profiling, pricing, recommendation, and advertising may therefore involve ethical implications that are not always visible to either customers or organizational decision makers. The growing complexity of these mechanisms strengthens the need for frameworks that can guide organizations in balancing commercial effectiveness with ethical responsibility.

Recent scholarship has reinforced the importance of ethical marketing as a distinct and expanding field of inquiry. A comprehensive review of ethical marketing research has shown that the field increasingly encompasses issues such as transparency, consumer vulnerability, privacy, responsible persuasion, sustainability, stakeholder interests, and the ethical implications of technological innovation (Dastane et al., 2025). This expansion reflects the recognition that ethical marketing cannot be reduced to compliance with legal rules or avoidance of deceptive advertising. Rather, it involves a broader organizational commitment to fairness, honesty, accountability, respect for customers, responsible data use, and alignment between commercial activities and societal expectations. In this sense, ethics-oriented marketing represents an institutional orientation in which ethical principles are integrated into marketing policies, employee behavior, technological systems, performance measures, and strategic decision making.

The digitalization of customer interactions has intensified the relevance of these concerns. Electronic commerce and online marketing are characterized by spatial separation, limited face-to-face interaction, information asymmetry, and dependence on technological interfaces. Under these conditions, trust becomes a critical mechanism through which customers evaluate whether an organization is reliable, credible, and worthy of continued interaction. Research on electronic commerce has long demonstrated that trust plays a central role in relationship development in

online environments because customers must make decisions despite uncertainty concerning sellers, transactions, data security, and fulfillment processes (Papadopoulou et al., 2001). Trust is therefore not an incidental psychological outcome but a structural requirement for successful electronic exchange.

The importance of trust is also consistent with the commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing, according to which successful relational exchanges depend substantially on trust and commitment between interacting parties (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In electronic marketing contexts, this principle becomes especially important because customers often interact with organizations through interfaces, platforms, and automated systems rather than through direct interpersonal relationships. Trust must consequently be generated through consistent organizational signals, including accurate information, transparent policies, reliable service, data protection, fair treatment, and accountable responses to problems. When these signals are weakened, organizations may experience not only immediate customer dissatisfaction but also declining loyalty, reputational damage, negative electronic word of mouth, and reduced willingness to share information.

Trust assurances are particularly important in Internet-based shopping environments. Customers frequently evaluate online sellers on the basis of cues that reduce perceived uncertainty and communicate institutional reliability (Kim & Benbasat, 2009). Privacy statements, security assurances, transparent return policies, clear product descriptions, visible accountability mechanisms, and credible service guarantees can therefore function as important trust-building mechanisms. However, the effectiveness of such mechanisms depends on whether customers perceive them as authentic rather than merely symbolic. If organizations publicly promote transparency while simultaneously engaging in manipulative design, excessive tracking, misleading personalization, hidden fees, or unclear consent procedures, trust may deteriorate rapidly. Ethical electronic marketing must therefore address not only the formal presentation of assurances but also the substantive consistency between organizational claims and actual practices.

Artificial intelligence has further complicated the ethical landscape of electronic marketing. AI-enabled marketing systems can process extensive volumes of customer data, predict behavior, automate content generation, personalize offers, optimize customer journeys, and support real-time engagement. From an organizational perspective, these capabilities can significantly increase the efficiency and precision of marketing activities. Research in electronic retailing has demonstrated that artificial intelligence can transform customer engagement by enabling more sophisticated forms of personalization, service automation, and data-driven interaction (Behera et al., 2024). Yet the same capabilities raise substantial ethical concerns regarding surveillance, behavioral manipulation, discriminatory targeting, opaque decision processes, excessive personalization, and erosion of customer autonomy.

The ethical implications of artificial intelligence in marketing are particularly significant because technological capability does not automatically imply ethical legitimacy. AI can be used to promote social good, enhance access, improve customer experiences, and support responsible decision making, but these benefits depend on the ethical principles embedded in its design and implementation (Hermann, 2022). Without appropriate safeguards, organizations may use predictive analytics and automated persuasion to exploit psychological vulnerabilities, infer sensitive characteristics, manipulate choice architectures, or personalize messages in ways that customers cannot meaningfully understand or contest. Consequently, the ethical governance of AI-assisted electronic marketing requires transparency, explainability, proportionality, accountability, and meaningful protection of customer rights.

Customer knowledge management is another important component of contemporary digital transformation. Electronic marketing increasingly depends on organizations' ability to collect, integrate, interpret, and operationalize customer information. The integration of customer knowledge management with electronic transformation and artificial intelligence can improve marketing intelligence and organizational responsiveness (Hasankhani Kouhestani & Vahedi, 2024). However, expanded access to customer knowledge creates a corresponding ethical obligation regarding how information is obtained, stored, analyzed, shared, and applied. The mere technical availability of customer data does not justify unrestricted use. Ethical electronic marketing therefore requires organizations to distinguish between what they are technologically capable of doing and what they should legitimately do in view of customer consent, expectations, privacy, and autonomy.

These issues are also closely connected to organizational sustainability. Contemporary firms are increasingly evaluated not only according to financial performance but also according to their social, environmental, and ethical

conduct. Digital marketing practices that are based on short-term exploitation of customer attention or personal information may generate temporary commercial gains while undermining long-term stakeholder relationships. Conversely, sustainability-driven digital marketing can support entrepreneurship and strategic decision making when digital technologies and business intelligence systems are used in a manner consistent with long-term value creation (Foziljonov et al., 2025). From this perspective, ethical electronic marketing may serve as a mechanism through which digital capabilities are aligned with sustainable organizational performance.

The relationship between ethics and organizational performance is particularly important because ethical behavior is sometimes incorrectly perceived as a constraint on profitability. In practice, ethics-oriented marketing may contribute to organizational legitimacy, customer retention, reputational strength, and reduced relational risk. Previous research has examined the relationship between ethics-oriented marketing and profitability indicators, suggesting that ethical orientation can be relevant to organizational financial outcomes rather than merely constituting a normative obligation (Sherafatpour et al., 2015). Ethical practices may reduce complaints, lower reputational costs, strengthen stakeholder confidence, and support long-term relationships. Therefore, the managerial question is not simply whether ethics imposes costs, but how ethical principles can be integrated into marketing systems in ways that generate both stakeholder value and sustainable organizational benefits.

This argument can also be interpreted through the resource-based view of the firm. Sustainable competitive advantage arises when organizations possess valuable, rare, difficult-to-imitate, and organizationally embedded resources or capabilities (Barney, 1991). Trust, ethical reputation, transparent data practices, responsible customer relationships, and an organizational culture supportive of ethical conduct may constitute intangible capabilities that competitors cannot easily replicate. Unlike short-term promotional tactics, these resources are accumulated through repeated interactions, consistent organizational behavior, managerial commitment, and credible institutional practices. Ethics-oriented electronic marketing may therefore be conceptualized as more than a compliance mechanism; it may represent a strategic capability capable of supporting differentiation and sustainable competitive advantage.

The ethical dimension of marketing has also become increasingly intertwined with social responsibility and sustainability education. Contemporary marketing professionals are expected to understand that ethical decision making, social responsibility, and sustainability are interdependent components of professional practice rather than separate areas of concern (Ferrell & Ferrell, 2025). This expectation has implications for organizations because ethical marketing cannot be institutionalized solely through written policies. Employees require continuous education, ethical competence, managerial guidance, and organizational systems that enable them to identify and address ethical tensions. In rapidly changing digital environments, ethical training must also evolve alongside technological developments because new platforms and tools continuously create unfamiliar situations for which traditional codes may be insufficient.

At the market level, emerging digital business models also demonstrate that the relationship between value creation and ethics is becoming more complex. Contemporary market strategies increasingly seek to enrich customer experiences through personalization, symbolic value, community participation, digital services, and data-driven interaction. Yet these enrichment strategies may simultaneously create ethical tensions concerning exclusivity, manipulation, behavioral influence, and the distribution of value between firms and consumers (Dion et al., 2025). The challenge for organizations is therefore to design digital marketing strategies that enhance customer value without exploiting informational asymmetries or behavioral vulnerabilities. This challenge is especially relevant in highly competitive markets where commercial pressure may encourage organizations to prioritize immediate performance over long-term ethical considerations.

The development of digital marketing capabilities further intensifies this tension. Electronic marketing capabilities can support strategic goals by improving market reach, responsiveness, communication, and international growth (Arabshahi et al., 2023). However, greater capability also means greater power to influence customers, and increased influence creates a corresponding need for responsible governance. Organizations with advanced technologies may be capable of tracking behavior across channels, generating highly targeted content, conducting real-time experimentation, and dynamically modifying offers. Without ethical boundaries, these capabilities may shift from customer orientation to customer manipulation. Thus, digital marketing maturity should not be assessed only in terms of

technological sophistication but also in terms of the organization's ability to govern technology responsibly.

The centrality of ethics is further reinforced by the fact that digital markets are increasingly characterized by heightened customer awareness. Consumers can compare alternatives rapidly, access independent information, share experiences publicly, criticize organizations through social media, and mobilize collective reactions against perceived misconduct. As a result, unethical marketing behavior that may previously have remained localized can now produce widespread reputational consequences. This environment creates stronger incentives for transparency and accountability, but it can also produce organizational tensions when market pressures encourage aggressive growth strategies. A systematic ethics-oriented approach is therefore necessary to ensure that ethical principles are not applied selectively or reactively but are embedded throughout the electronic marketing process.

Despite the growing literature on marketing ethics, trust, artificial intelligence, digital engagement, customer knowledge management, sustainability, and competitive advantage, these areas are often examined separately. Ethical marketing research highlights normative principles and stakeholder considerations (Dastane et al., 2025), digital and AI research emphasizes technological capabilities and customer engagement (Behera et al., 2024; Hermann, 2022), trust research focuses on relationship formation and uncertainty reduction (Kim & Benbasat, 2009; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Papadopoulou et al., 2001), and strategic management research explains how distinctive capabilities can generate sustainable advantage (Barney, 1991). What remains insufficiently integrated is an empirically grounded explanation of how causal pressures, organizational contexts, intervening conditions, managerial strategies, and organizational consequences interact to form an ethics-oriented electronic marketing system.

This gap is especially important because ethical electronic marketing is inherently multidimensional. It involves not only honesty in advertising but also data governance, privacy protection, customer autonomy, employee competence, organizational culture, technological maturity, management commitment, internal monitoring, complaint handling, performance evaluation, competitive pressures, regulatory conditions, and sustainability considerations. A model that focuses on only one of these dimensions cannot adequately explain how ethical marketing operates in contemporary digital organizations. Grounded theory is particularly suitable for this purpose because it enables the development of an integrated explanatory model derived from the perspectives and experiences of knowledgeable participants rather than imposing a predetermined framework on an evolving phenomenon.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to develop a comprehensive grounded-theory model of ethics-oriented electronic marketing by identifying its causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, central phenomenon, organizational strategies, and consequences.

2. Methods and Materials

The present study was applied-exploratory in terms of purpose and employed a combination of descriptive and exploratory approaches in terms of data collection. With respect to the nature of the data, this study was qualitative and was conducted using grounded theory based on the Strauss and Corbin approach. The study population consisted of experts and specialists with professional knowledge and experience in electronic marketing, digital marketing, business ethics, organizational management, consumer behavior, and information technology. In addition to university professors and academic researchers, senior managers and specialists from organizations and businesses active in digital marketing and e-commerce were also included in the qualitative population. Given the nature of grounded theory, the qualitative population was not statistically defined on the basis of a predetermined sample size; rather, sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Theoretical saturation was considered to have been reached when new interviews no longer added any substantive new concept or category to the conceptual framework of the study and the newly obtained data merely contributed to the refinement and enrichment of previously identified categories.

Purposive sampling was initially used, followed by theoretical sampling. In the first stage, experts were selected on the basis of their educational background, managerial experience, research experience, and specialized familiarity with the research topic, such that they were capable of providing in-depth and credible information concerning ethics-oriented electronic marketing. Subsequently, as data analysis progressed and initial categories emerged, additional participants were selected according to the theoretical requirements of the study. In other words, participants in the later stages of interviewing were selected on the basis of categories that required additional data for

completion, comparison, or explanation. Overall, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 academic experts, managers, and senior specialists in the field of digital marketing. The principal expert-selection criteria included holding at least a master's degree in management, marketing, information technology, communication, business ethics, or related disciplines; having at least five years of relevant academic or professional experience in digital marketing and e-commerce; familiarity with ethical issues in electronic advertising, sales, and communications; experience in the design, implementation, or evaluation of digital marketing programs; and willingness and readiness to participate in interviews and provide expert perspectives.

In the present study, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with experts. This type of interview allows the researcher, in addition to asking predetermined questions, to formulate follow-up questions based on participants' responses and thereby explore latent dimensions of the phenomenon. Grounded theory was used for data analysis. Following transcription, the textual data obtained from the interviews were categorized through several stages of coding, including open, axial, and selective coding. During the analytical process, after open, axial, and selective coding had been completed, it became evident that the collected data possessed sufficient explanatory capacity for the extraction and elaboration of a paradigmatic model. MAXQDA software was used for data analysis in this section, enabling the researcher to organize, classify, and extract concepts and categories. The output of this stage consisted of identifying the ethical dimensions and indicators of electronic marketing and developing the preliminary research model.

3. Findings and Results

Open coding constitutes the first stage of data analysis in grounded theory, during which raw data are broken down into smaller units and initial concepts are extracted from them. In the present study, after repeated examination of the interview transcripts, key concepts related to ethics-oriented electronic marketing were identified and recorded as open codes. These codes were subsequently grouped into conceptually related categories through the constant comparative method. The results of this stage, based on the components of the systematic Strauss and Corbin model, are presented in Table 1.

Examination of the interview data indicated that ethics-oriented electronic marketing is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by a set of causal, contextual, and intervening factors. Among these, increased customer awareness, intensification of digital competition, growing concerns regarding privacy, and the crisis of trust in online environments were identified as the most important causal conditions underlying the emergence of this phenomenon. In addition, factors such as organizational culture, top-management support, digital maturity, employee training, and information infrastructures provide the context required for implementation of this approach. Conversely, variables such as weak supervision, competitive pressure, the rapid pace of technological change, and economic conditions may act as intervening factors that can either facilitate or hinder the implementation of ethics-oriented electronic marketing. In response to these conditions, strategies such as developing an ethical code, continuous training, information transparency, internal monitoring, complaint responsiveness, and responsible use of technology were identified. Ultimately, outcomes such as increased customer trust, enhanced brand image, greater loyalty, fewer complaints, and the creation of sustainable competitive advantage were identified as the principal consequences of implementing this approach.

Table 1

Open Coding

No.	Selected Statement from the Interview	Extracted Open Code(s)
Open coding related to causal conditions		
1	One interviewee stated that in the digital business environment, customers have become more sensitive than ever to brand honesty. In the interviewee's view, when advertising content does not correspond to the reality of the product or service, customers respond very rapidly on social media, which can generate widespread public distrust. The participant emphasized that increasing customer awareness and access to information have compelled companies to pay more serious attention to ethics in electronic marketing.	Increased customer awareness; sensitivity to honesty; information transparency; need for ethical conduct; pressure of public opinion

2	Another interviewee noted that increasing competition in online markets has led some businesses to use seductive techniques, exaggeration, and even concealment of certain facts in order to attract customers. According to the participant, this situation has intensified the need to develop an ethics-oriented model so that competition can be directed through healthier practices.	Intensified online competition; deceptive advertising; exaggeration; unhealthy competition; need for an ethical model
3	One expert believed that the development of digital technologies and the diversity of communication tools have created substantial capacity to influence consumer behavior; however, if such capacity is used without an ethical framework, it may lead to manipulation of customer choice and exploitation of informational vulnerabilities.	Development of digital technology; high influence capacity; possibility of customer manipulation; informational exploitation; need for ethical control
4	According to one participant, the increase in customer complaints concerning privacy, unsolicited messages, user tracking, and the use of data without consent constitutes one of the most important reasons for paying attention to ethics-oriented electronic marketing. The participant emphasized that respect for privacy has now shifted from being a competitive advantage to becoming a requirement.	Customer complaints; privacy; unsolicited messages; user tracking; use of data without consent; ethical requirement
5	An interviewee with managerial experience in digital marketing stated that declining customer loyalty in online markets is largely attributable to negative experiences arising from deceptive advertising, poor delivery, or dishonest brand responsiveness. In the participant's view, the emergence of an ethics-oriented model is a response to this crisis of trust.	Declining customer loyalty; negative experience; deceptive advertising; poor responsiveness; trust crisis
6	One university professor stated that changes in social values and increasing public attention to organizational responsibility have resulted in a situation in which greater sales are no longer regarded as the sole objective; rather, the manner in which profit is generated has also become important. This shift in perspective has strengthened the emergence of an ethics-oriented approach to electronic marketing.	Changes in social values; organizational responsibility; importance of the manner of profit generation; strengthening of the ethical approach
Open coding related to the central phenomenon		
1	One participant defined ethics-oriented electronic marketing as an approach in which all activities related to customer acquisition, information provision, persuasion, sales, and customer retention in digital environments should be conducted on the basis of honesty, fairness, respect for customer rights, and social responsibility. In the participant's view, ethics must be embedded in the fabric of marketing decisions rather than being confined to advertising slogans.	Definition of ethics-oriented marketing; honesty; fairness; respect for customer rights; social responsibility; institutionalization of ethics
2	Another interviewee emphasized that ethics-oriented electronic marketing does not merely mean legal compliance; rather, it represents an internal organizational commitment to avoiding deception, misuse of data, and psychological pressure on customers.	Beyond legal compliance; internal commitment; avoidance of deception; data protection; avoidance of psychological pressure
3	One expert stated that within an ethics-oriented model, the customer is regarded not merely as a source of revenue but as an informed stakeholder with the right to choose. Accordingly, content, pricing, advertising, and post-purchase follow-up should be designed with respect for customer dignity.	Customer as stakeholder; right to choose; customer dignity; fair pricing; respectful advertising
4	According to one interviewee, the central phenomenon of this study involves synergy between digital marketing effectiveness and ethical commitment, enabling the organization to improve economic performance without deviating from professional values.	Synergy between ethics and effectiveness; economic performance; professional values; responsible marketing
5	One professor emphasized that ethics-oriented electronic marketing comprises multiple dimensions, including transparency, trust building, privacy protection, content honesty, fairness in interactions, and accountability, and therefore cannot be reduced to a single dimension.	Multidimensional nature of the phenomenon; transparency; trust building; privacy; content honesty; fairness; accountability
Open coding related to contextual conditions		
1	One interviewee noted that organizational culture plays a highly important role in making digital marketing more ethical. If managers focus exclusively on short-term sales, employees may also be driven toward unethical tactics; however, in organizations where honesty and respect for customers are accepted as organizational values, ethics-oriented marketing develops more effectively.	Organizational culture; emphasis on short-term sales; employee orientation; value orientation; institutionalization of honesty
2	One expert stated that information technology infrastructures and organizational data-monitoring systems provide an important foundation for implementing ethics-oriented electronic marketing. If an organization lacks transparent mechanisms for managing customer data, implementing ethical principles will also be difficult.	Technology infrastructure; data-monitoring systems; implementation platform; transparent data management; difficulty of ethical implementation
3	Another interviewee stated that the type of industry and characteristics of the target market also affect the realization of ethics-oriented marketing. For example, in service-oriented and health-related businesses, audiences are substantially more sensitive to ethics, confidentiality, and transparency than in some other sectors.	Type of industry; target-market characteristics; audience ethical sensitivity; confidentiality; transparency
4	One participant stated that the level of organizational digital maturity is also important. Organizations that do not yet possess coherent digital processes generally rely on fragmented and reactive measures rather than developing a coherent ethical policy.	Digital maturity; process integration; ethical policy; fragmented measures; reactive approach

5	According to one professor, employees' awareness of professional ethics and their knowledge regarding the consequences of nontransparent behavior constitute an important foundation for the emergence of ethics-oriented marketing. Greater education and awareness reduce the possibility of misconduct.	Employee awareness; professional ethics; training; prevention of misconduct; organizational capacity
6	One interviewee emphasized that top-management support for an ethics-oriented approach is one of the most important contextual conditions. According to the participant, unless senior managers recognize ethics as a strategic priority, it will not be taken seriously at the implementation level.	Top-management support; strategic priority; managerial commitment; seriousness in implementation
Open coding related to intervening conditions		
1	One expert stated that weak legal supervision and the absence of sufficient enforcement mechanisms sometimes lead organizations toward unethical practices because some businesses perceive the cost of violation to be lower than its short-term benefits.	Weak legal supervision; lack of enforcement mechanisms; incentive for violation; short-term benefit
2	Another interviewee believed that intense pressure to achieve sales indicators, conversion rates, and rapid growth constitutes one of the major barriers to ethical conduct. Under such conditions, some teams may sacrifice ethical principles for short-term results.	Pressure on performance indicators; excessive sales orientation; rapid growth; sacrificing ethics
3	One participant referred to competitors' behavior and stated that when the market environment is saturated with misleading advertising and exaggerated promises, adherence to ethical standards becomes more difficult because organizations may feel that they are falling behind competitively.	Unethical competitor behavior; misleading advertising; exaggeration; competitive pressure; perception of falling behind
4	One professor emphasized that rapid technological developments, such as artificial intelligence, excessive personalization, and predictive analytics, create both opportunities and threats. If ethical rules do not develop alongside technology, the possibility of misuse of these tools increases.	Rapid technological developments; artificial intelligence; excessive personalization; ethical threat; regulatory lag
5	One interviewee stated that customers' level of media and digital literacy is also an important intervening factor. The more informed customers are, the more cautiously organizations behave; however, in markets characterized by low awareness, the likelihood of unethical exploitation increases.	Customer media literacy; digital awareness; organizational caution; likelihood of exploitation
6	One marketing manager stated that economic problems and environmental instability may also drive some companies toward unethical decisions because under crisis conditions, organizational focus may shift from long-term sustainability to survival and immediate revenue.	Environmental instability; economic problems; unethical decision making; shift in priorities toward survival
Open coding related to strategies, actions, and interactions		
1	One interviewee suggested that organizations should develop a clear ethical code for digital marketing so that all employees understand which types of messages, content, data-collection practices, and advertising behaviors are acceptable. The participant emphasized that without written standards, personal interpretations may replace organizational principles.	Development of an ethical code; behavioral standardization; clarification of permissible boundaries; employee guidance
2	One expert stated that continuous employee training in digital ethics, privacy, responsible content creation, and customer responsiveness constitutes one of the key strategies for implementing ethics-oriented electronic marketing.	Continuous training; digital ethics; privacy; responsible content; responsiveness
3	One participant believed that information concerning actual product characteristics, final prices, return conditions, and the manner in which customer data are used should be clearly disclosed on digital platforms in order to strengthen user trust.	Information transparency; honesty in product presentation; transparent pricing; disclosure of data policies; trust building
4	One interviewee noted that establishing an internal monitoring system for evaluating advertising content, campaigns, and the manner in which customer information is used could prevent ethical misconduct.	Internal monitoring; campaign evaluation; advertising-content control; prevention of misconduct
5	One professor emphasized the importance of developing an accountability and effective complaint-handling system, stating that an organization that acknowledges its mistakes and takes corrective action demonstrates a closer practical commitment to ethics.	Accountability system; complaint handling; acknowledgment of mistakes; compensation; responsibility
6	Another interviewee stated that balanced and responsible use of data analytics, personalization, and marketing automation technologies should be prioritized so that organizations can benefit from technology without violating customer privacy or freedom of choice.	Responsible use of technology; balanced personalization; ethical automation; preservation of freedom of choice
7	One manager emphasized that incorporating ethical indicators into the performance evaluation of the marketing unit, such as customer satisfaction, registered complaints, content transparency, and informed consent, can help modify organizational behavior.	Ethical performance indicators; customer satisfaction; complaint reduction; informed consent; behavior modification
Open coding related to consequences		

1	One expert stated that the most important consequence of ethics-oriented electronic marketing is increased customer trust. In the expert's view, when customers perceive that an organization provides information honestly and does not misuse their data, a more sustainable relationship with the brand emerges.	Increased customer trust; sustainable relationship; informational honesty; data protection
2	Another interviewee stated that adherence to ethics in digital marketing leads to an improved brand image and greater organizational social credibility. This credibility affects not only customers but also partners, investors, and employees.	Improved brand image; social credibility; stakeholder attraction; enhanced reputation
3	One participant stated that ethics-oriented marketing leads to customer loyalty and repeat purchasing in the long term because customers in online environments place considerable importance on safe, transparent, and respectful experiences.	Customer loyalty; repeat purchase; safe experience; respectful experience
4	One professor stated that this approach can reduce conflicts, complaints, and dissatisfaction resulting from misleading advertising and, consequently, decrease hidden organizational costs.	Reduced complaints; reduced conflict; reduced dissatisfaction; reduced hidden costs
5	One marketing manager believed that implementing ethics-oriented electronic marketing creates a more sustainable competitive advantage because, in saturated markets, trust and credibility can become major sources of differentiation.	Sustainable competitive advantage; source of differentiation; saturated market; credibility orientation
6	One interviewee noted that the ultimate consequence of this approach is movement toward sustainable development and greater responsibility because ethical conduct prevents profitability from conflicting with the interests of customers and society.	Sustainable development; responsibility; alignment of profitability with societal interests

Axial coding is a stage of data analysis in which the concepts and codes generated during open coding are organized into subcategories and major categories on the basis of similarities, differences, and conceptual relationships. At this stage, the researcher attempts to establish connections among dispersed data and clarify the conceptual structure of the phenomenon under investigation. In other words, axial coding is a process through which the relationships among categories are specified according to the Strauss and Corbin paradigmatic model, including causal conditions, the central phenomenon, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences.

In the present study, after the extraction of open codes related to ethics-oriented electronic marketing, the codes were classified into subcategories and subsequently grouped under major categories on the basis of conceptual similarity. The result of this stage was the initial structure of the research conceptual model, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Axial Coding Based on the Paradigmatic Model

Main Category	Subcategory	Related Dimensions/Concepts
Causal conditions	Customers' ethical awareness	Sensitivity to honesty, attention to privacy, influence of ethics on purchase decisions
Causal conditions	Market and societal pressure	Digital competition, social demands, ethical expectations
Contextual conditions	Ethics-oriented organizational culture	Ethical values, behavioral norms, organizational honesty
Contextual conditions	Organizational capabilities	Management support, employee capabilities, infrastructure, and digital maturity
Intervening conditions	Environmental and legal pressures	Legal requirements, weak supervision, external pressures
Intervening conditions	Competitive constraints	Competitor behavior, performance pressure, focus on short-term results
Central phenomenon	Ethics-oriented electronic marketing	Honesty, transparency, privacy, respect for customer rights, accountability
Strategies	Institutionalization of ethics in digital marketing	Ethical code, training, monitoring, data management, transparent communication
Consequences	Customer-oriented outcomes	Trust, satisfaction, loyalty
Consequences	Organization-oriented outcomes	Brand credibility, competitive differentiation, sustainable competitive advantage

Based on the axial coding table, the central phenomenon of the study is ethics-oriented electronic marketing, which, as a managerial and communication approach, is grounded in honesty, transparency, respect for customer rights, protection of privacy, fairness in exchanges, and social responsibility. This phenomenon emerges under the influence of a set of causal conditions, including increased customer awareness, the spread of distrust in the digital environment, intense competition in online markets, growing concerns about privacy, and changing social values.

The establishment and realization of this phenomenon also occur within specific contextual conditions.

Organizational culture, top-management commitment, digital maturity, human-resource competencies, technological infrastructures, and industry characteristics constitute some of the most important contextual factors that can facilitate the successful implementation of ethics-oriented electronic marketing. At the same time, the process is influenced by intervening conditions. Factors such as weak regulation, economic pressures, unhealthy competition, rapid technological developments, and the level of customer awareness can either facilitate or undermine implementation of ethics-oriented strategies.

In response to these conditions, organizations employ strategies such as developing ethical codes, training employees, enhancing communication transparency, continuous monitoring, responsible data management, responding to complaints, and revising performance-evaluation indicators. Ultimately, implementation of these strategies leads to outcomes such as increased customer trust, improved brand image, stronger loyalty, reduced conflict, sustainable competitive advantage, and progress toward sustainable development.

The results of axial coding indicated that ethics-oriented electronic marketing is a multidimensional and systematic phenomenon that cannot be reduced merely to advertising behavior; rather, it encompasses a set of values, infrastructures, mechanisms, and organizational consequences. Therefore, explaining this phenomenon requires examining it within a network of causal, contextual, intervening, strategic, and consequential relationships. This stage provided the foundation for developing the paradigmatic model and proceeding to selective coding.

Selective coding represents the final stage of analysis in the Strauss and Corbin grounded theory process. At this stage, the researcher integrates the major and subsidiary categories in an attempt to identify the core category and, on that basis, provide a coherent theoretical narrative of the phenomenon under study. In other words, during selective coding, all categories extracted in previous stages are organized in relation to a central category, thereby forming the final framework of the emerging theory. The purpose of this stage is to move beyond classification and explanation of partial relationships toward achieving an overarching conceptual coherence for interpreting the phenomenon.

In the present study, following open and axial coding and continuous examination of relationships among the categories, ethics-oriented electronic marketing was identified as the core category. This category possessed the greatest explanatory capacity among all categories and was capable of organizing the other components of the model around itself. In the present study, the core category represents an approach through which an organization seeks to organize all of its marketing activities in electronic and digital environments on the basis of ethical principles, including honesty, transparency, fairness, respect for customer rights, privacy protection, responsibility, and accountability.

The final data analysis indicated that ethics-oriented electronic marketing emerges in response to a set of environmental and organizational changes and pressures. Increased customer awareness, greater sensitivity to brand honesty, growing concerns regarding misuse of personal data, negative experiences arising from misleading advertising, and intense competition in online markets are among the factors that have highlighted the necessity of greater attention to ethics in electronic marketing activities. These conditions confront organizations with the reality that achieving marketing effectiveness in the digital era without taking ethical requirements into account is not only unsustainable but may also result in weakened trust, declining loyalty, and damage to brand reputation.

At the same time, the emergence and institutionalization of this core category do not occur in a vacuum but rather within specific contextual conditions. An ethics-oriented organizational culture, top-management support, digital maturity, employee capabilities, appropriate information and monitoring infrastructures, and the characteristics of the industry and target market constitute factors that provide the conditions necessary for realizing ethics-oriented electronic marketing. These conditions strengthen the organization's internal and external capacity to accept, implement, and institutionalize ethics in digital marketing.

Simultaneously, certain intervening conditions influence the manner in which this phenomenon is realized. Weak regulation and enforcement, pressure to achieve short-term results, unethical competitor behavior, rapid technological developments, and the level of customer media literacy are among the factors that may facilitate or inhibit the institutionalization of ethics in electronic marketing. These intervening conditions cause organizations to encounter practical complexities and conflicts in the process of realizing the core category.

In response to this situation, organizations adopt multiple strategies to manage and operationalize ethics-oriented electronic marketing. These strategies include developing ethical codes, establishing behavioral standards, training and empowering employees, ensuring transparency in marketing

communications, responsible data management, designing monitoring mechanisms, strengthening accountability systems, and revising performance-evaluation indicators. These measures demonstrate that realization of the core category requires a set of purposeful, coherent, and continuous actions across different organizational levels.

Ultimately, successful implementation of ethics-oriented electronic marketing produces consequences that can be observed at the customer, organizational, and societal levels. Increased customer trust, improved brand image and credibility, stronger loyalty and repeat purchasing, fewer complaints and conflicts, reduced hidden costs resulting from distrust, creation of sustainable competitive advantage, and movement toward sustainable development and social responsibility constitute the most important consequences of this phenomenon.

Accordingly, the final narrative derived from selective coding can be explained as follows: within the competitive and complex environment of digital marketing, increasing customer awareness and assertiveness, growing ethical concerns, and declining trust in some conventional marketing practices compel organizations to reconsider their marketing approaches. In this context, organizations possessing appropriate cultural, managerial, human, and technological foundations can implement ethics-oriented electronic marketing by adopting specific strategies and, through this approach, protect customer rights while simultaneously achieving strategic outcomes and sustainable competitive advantages.

Overall, selective coding in this study demonstrated that the core category of "ethics-oriented electronic marketing" is not merely a value-based concept but also a strategic and multidimensional mechanism for the effective management of digital customer relationships. This category constitutes the connecting link among ethical requirements, market contingencies, organizational capabilities, and performance outcomes and may therefore serve as the theoretical core of the final research model (Table 3).

Table 3

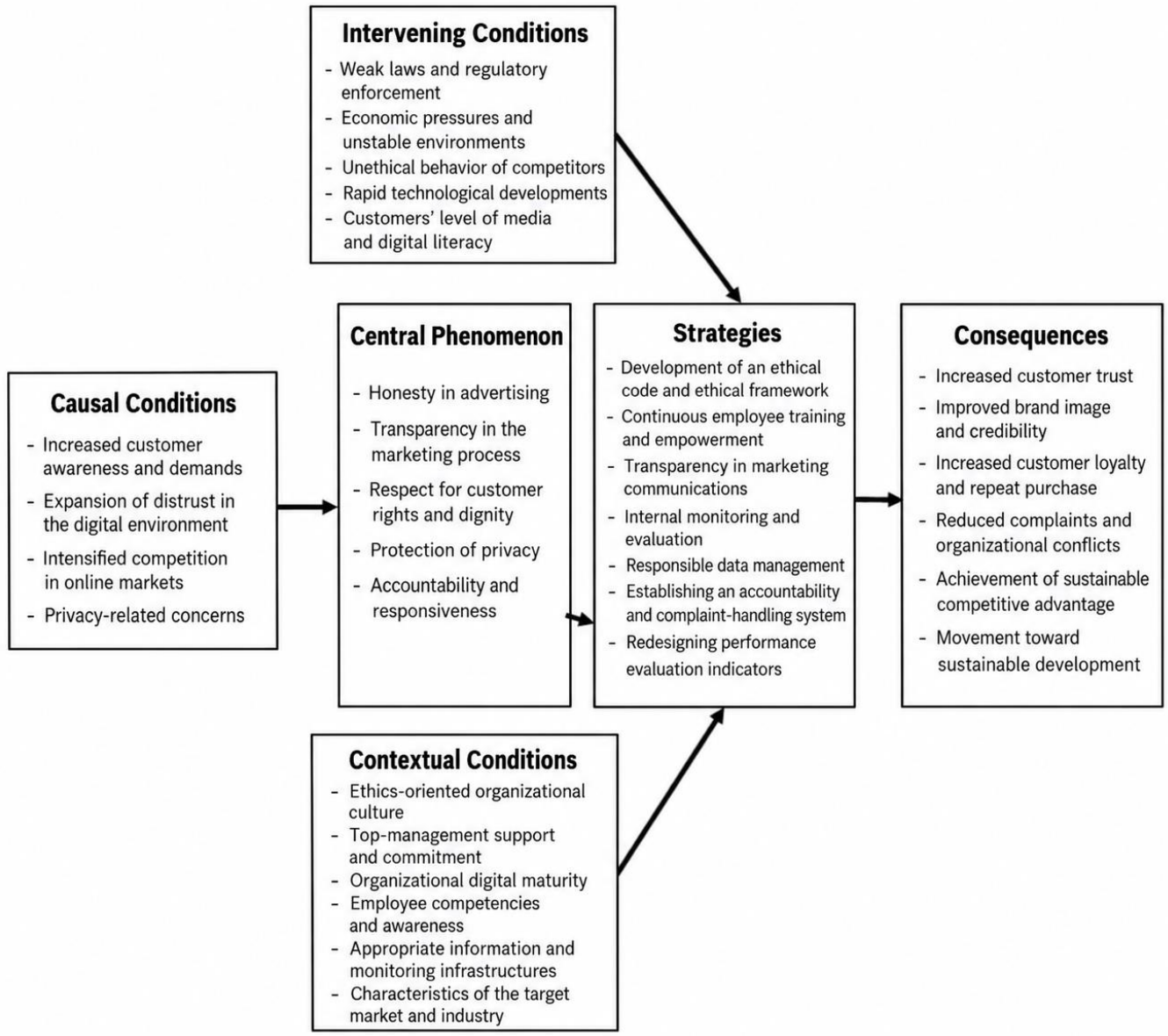
Selective Coding

Core Category	Relationship with Other Categories	Theoretical Narrative
Ethics-oriented electronic marketing	Influenced by causal conditions	Increasing customers' ethical awareness and external pressures create the need to move toward ethics-oriented marketing.
Ethics-oriented electronic marketing	Strengthened within contextual conditions	The presence of an ethical culture, management support, and digital maturity facilitates implementation of this approach.
Ethics-oriented electronic marketing	Influenced by intervening conditions	Legal pressures, weak supervision, and unethical competition can alter the intensity and quality of model implementation.
Ethics-oriented electronic marketing	Operationalized through strategies	Ethical codes, training, transparency, and responsible data management constitute implementation mechanisms for realizing this phenomenon.
Ethics-oriented electronic marketing	Leads to consequences	This approach increases customer trust and ultimately creates sustainable competitive advantage.

The results of selective coding indicated that all categories extracted from the data were directly or indirectly associated with the core category of ethics-oriented electronic marketing. This category emerges as a result of causal conditions, is strengthened within contextual conditions, is influenced by intervening conditions, is operationalized through organizational strategies, and ultimately produces positive and sustainable consequences for customers, organizations, and society. Finally, the ultimate research model was obtained as illustrated below (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Main Factors and Concepts Extracted in the Paradigmatic Model



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to develop a comprehensive model of ethics-oriented electronic marketing by identifying its causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, central phenomenon, organizational strategies, and consequences. The findings showed that ethics-oriented electronic marketing is not a single behavioral practice or a limited compliance mechanism; rather, it is a multidimensional managerial approach shaped by customer awareness, competitive and social pressures, organizational culture, technological maturity, managerial commitment, regulatory conditions, employee capabilities, and the responsible use of data and digital technologies. The core phenomenon identified in this study was ethics-oriented electronic marketing, characterized by honesty, transparency, protection of privacy, respect for customer rights, fairness, accountability, and social responsibility. The findings further indicated that organizations operationalize this approach through ethical codes, continuous training, transparent communication, internal monitoring, responsible data governance, complaint-handling systems, and the integration of ethical indicators into performance evaluation. These strategies were ultimately associated with increased customer trust, enhanced brand reputation, greater loyalty,

fewer complaints, sustainable competitive advantage, and movement toward more responsible and sustainable organizational development.

One of the principal findings was that increased customer awareness and heightened sensitivity to ethical issues function as important causal conditions for the development of ethics-oriented electronic marketing. Customers in digital markets increasingly possess access to information, comparative platforms, social media, online reviews, and mechanisms for publicly expressing dissatisfaction. As a result, misleading advertising, lack of transparency, inappropriate use of customer data, and violations of privacy can be detected and disseminated rapidly. This finding is consistent with the broader evolution of marketing toward more customer-centered and value-sensitive approaches. Kotler et al. argued that contemporary marketing should move beyond a narrow focus on products and transactions and should consider customers as human beings with values, expectations, and social concerns (Kotler et al., 2010). The present findings extend this perspective by showing that, in digital settings, customer awareness acts not only as an outcome of market development but also as a direct pressure encouraging organizations to institutionalize ethical behavior.

The importance of customer awareness is also aligned with research on trust in electronic commerce. Online exchange is associated with uncertainty because customers often interact with organizations without direct personal contact and must rely on digital interfaces, organizational claims, and technological assurances. Papadopoulou et al. emphasized that trust is essential for relationship building in electronic commerce because it reduces uncertainty and supports continued interaction (Papadopoulou et al., 2001). Similarly, Kim and Benbasat showed that trust-related assurances play an important role in Internet-based consumer shopping and can shape customers' perceptions of seller credibility and reliability (Kim & Benbasat, 2009). The present study supports these findings by showing that increased customer awareness of privacy, data use, advertising accuracy, and digital manipulation raises expectations for ethical conduct and makes trust increasingly dependent on transparent and responsible marketing practices.

Another important result concerned the role of organizational culture as a contextual condition. The findings indicated that ethics-oriented electronic marketing is more likely to emerge in organizations where honesty, customer respect, accountability, and responsible conduct are embedded in organizational norms and managerial expectations. In contrast, an excessive focus on short-term sales may create incentives for employees to adopt manipulative or misleading practices. This interpretation is consistent with the general theory of marketing ethics, which emphasizes the importance of organizational environments, moral evaluations, perceived consequences, and contextual factors in shaping ethical marketing decisions (Hunt & Vitell, 2006). The present study adds to this view by illustrating how organizational culture functions as a structural context that either supports or constrains ethical digital marketing behavior.

Top-management commitment was also identified as a critical contextual factor. The findings suggest that ethical principles cannot be institutionalized through isolated employee actions if senior managers do not treat ethics as a strategic priority. This result is particularly important because digital marketing practices often involve decisions about data use, personalization, campaign design, automation, and performance targets that are directly influenced by organizational strategy. The strategic relevance of ethics is consistent with Dastane et al., who emphasized that ethical marketing should be understood as a broad organizational orientation encompassing fairness, stakeholder interests, transparency, and responsible decision making rather than as a narrow set of promotional rules (Dastane et al., 2025). In this sense, the present study suggests that management commitment is essential for translating ethical principles into resource allocation, organizational policies, employee expectations, and evaluation systems.

The role of digital maturity and technological infrastructure constituted another key contextual finding. Organizations with coherent digital processes, transparent data systems, and adequate monitoring mechanisms were perceived as better able to implement ethics-oriented electronic marketing. This finding is particularly significant in light of the growing integration of artificial intelligence and data analytics into marketing. Behera et al. showed that AI-enabled e-marketing can transform customer engagement through advanced personalization, automation, and data-driven interaction (Behera et al., 2024). However, the present study indicates that technological sophistication alone is insufficient. Without corresponding ethical controls and governance mechanisms, the same technologies may facilitate manipulation, intrusive personalization, excessive surveillance, or opaque decision making.

This result also aligns with Hermann's ethical analysis of artificial intelligence in marketing. Hermann argued that AI can be leveraged for socially beneficial marketing applications, but its ethical implications must be carefully managed through responsible design and use (Hermann, 2022). The current findings reinforce this position by identifying responsible data management, privacy protection, and transparent technological use as core components of ethics-oriented electronic marketing. Thus, digital maturity should be interpreted not only in terms of technological capability but also in terms of governance maturity, meaning the organization's capacity to use advanced technologies while preserving customer autonomy, privacy, and trust.

The findings also identified employee knowledge and competence as important contextual factors. Ethical marketing in digital environments requires employees to understand not only marketing objectives but also ethical risks related to privacy, content creation, consent, data analysis, personalization, and customer communication. This result is consistent with Ferrell and Ferrell, who emphasized the importance of integrating marketing ethics, social responsibility, and sustainability into professional education and decision making (Ferrell & Ferrell, 2025). The present findings suggest that continuous training is not merely supportive but central to the implementation of ethics-oriented electronic marketing because employees must continuously interpret new ethical challenges created by evolving technologies.

At the same time, the study identified several intervening conditions that may strengthen or weaken implementation. Weak legal enforcement, economic instability, strong performance pressure, unethical competitor behavior, rapid technological change, and customer digital literacy were all found to affect how organizations apply ethical marketing principles. These results illustrate that ethical behavior is not determined exclusively by internal values. Organizations operate within competitive and institutional environments that may create conflicting incentives. When competitors employ misleading advertising or aggressive personalization and when regulatory enforcement is weak, organizations may perceive ethical behavior as commercially disadvantageous in the short term.

The influence of competitive and market pressures is consistent with research showing that ethical issues are increasingly embedded in broader market dynamics. Dion et al. highlighted the relationship among market dynamics, brand strategy, and ethics, demonstrating that value creation strategies can involve complex ethical tensions (Dion et al., 2025). The present study similarly suggests that organizations must reconcile competitive pressure with ethical responsibility. This reconciliation is particularly important in digital environments because technological tools enable rapid experimentation, aggressive targeting, and sophisticated behavioral influence. Therefore, organizations may need explicit governance mechanisms to prevent short-term competitive pressures from overriding long-term ethical commitments.

Another important finding concerned customer knowledge management and the ethical use of customer information. The study identified data governance and responsible use of customer information as central strategic components of ethics-oriented electronic marketing. This result is aligned with Hasankhani Kouhestani and Vahedi, who emphasized the importance of customer knowledge management in electronic transformation and artificial intelligence in marketing (Hasankhani Kouhestani & Vahedi, 2024). However, the present study extends this perspective by demonstrating that the strategic value of customer knowledge is inseparable from ethical responsibilities concerning consent, transparency, privacy, and legitimate use. Organizations may gain substantial competitive value from customer data, but this value is sustainable only when customers perceive data practices as fair and responsible.

The identified strategies provide a practical explanation of how organizations can institutionalize ethics in electronic marketing. The development of ethical codes, continuous employee training, communication transparency, internal monitoring, responsible data management, effective complaint handling, and ethical performance indicators represent a coherent governance architecture rather than isolated actions. These findings are compatible with contemporary conceptualizations of ethical marketing as a systematic organizational practice (Dastane et al., 2025). They also suggest that ethical marketing requires integration across policy, human resources, technology, performance management, and customer service. An ethical code alone is unlikely to be effective unless supported by training, monitoring, accountability, and measurable standards.

The study also found that ethics-oriented electronic marketing has important consequences for trust and customer relationships. Increased trust was identified as one of the most immediate outcomes, followed by improved loyalty, repeat purchasing, and reduced conflict. This finding strongly supports the commitment-trust theory of

relationship marketing, which positions trust as a central mechanism in the development and maintenance of successful relational exchanges (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In digital environments, where customers may be particularly sensitive to uncertainty and perceived vulnerability, ethical practices appear to function as trust-building mechanisms that reduce relational risk and strengthen long-term commitment.

The relationship between ethics and customer trust is also consistent with the findings of Kim and Benbasat regarding trust assurances in Internet-based shopping (Kim & Benbasat, 2009). The present study extends that logic by indicating that trust is generated not only by formal assurances but also by broader ethical practices such as honest communication, transparent pricing, privacy protection, accountable complaint handling, and responsible personalization. In this sense, ethical electronic marketing can be understood as a comprehensive trust infrastructure that supports digital customer relationships across multiple stages of interaction.

Another major consequence identified in the study was improvement in brand image and organizational credibility. Ethical conduct in digital marketing was viewed as capable of strengthening the reputation of the organization among customers, employees, investors, and other stakeholders. This finding corresponds to the broader shift toward socially responsible and sustainability-oriented marketing. Ferrell and Ferrell emphasized that ethical marketing, social responsibility, and sustainability are increasingly intertwined dimensions of contemporary marketing practice (Ferrell & Ferrell, 2025). Similarly, Foziljonov et al. showed that sustainability-driven digital marketing can support entrepreneurship and strategic decision making when digital capabilities are aligned with responsible business intelligence systems (Foziljonov et al., 2025). The present findings support the view that ethics-oriented digital marketing can contribute to organizational legitimacy as well as commercial effectiveness.

The findings further demonstrated that ethics-oriented electronic marketing may contribute to sustainable competitive advantage. This result can be explained through the resource-based view of the firm. Barney argued that sustainable competitive advantage depends on resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and organizationally embedded (Barney, 1991). Ethical reputation, customer trust, transparent data practices, managerial commitment, and an organizational culture of responsibility may constitute such intangible capabilities. Competitors may imitate specific advertising techniques, technological tools, or promotional campaigns, but deeply institutionalized trust and ethical credibility are accumulated gradually and are more difficult to replicate.

The strategic consequences identified in this study are also consistent with previous research on the economic relevance of ethics-oriented marketing. Sherafatpour et al. examined the relationship between ethics-oriented marketing and profitability ratios, indicating that ethical orientation may have meaningful implications for organizational financial performance (Sherafatpour et al., 2015). Similarly, the present findings suggest that ethics should not be interpreted as an obstacle to profitability. Instead, ethical marketing may reduce hidden costs associated with complaints, distrust, customer loss, reputational damage, and relational conflict while simultaneously strengthening loyalty and differentiation.

The study also identified sustainable development and social responsibility as broader consequences of ethics-oriented electronic marketing. This finding suggests that the model extends beyond customer-level outcomes to encompass organizational and societal value creation. Foziljonov et al. emphasized the connection between digital marketing, sustainability, and business intelligence systems in entrepreneurship (Foziljonov et al., 2025), while Kotler et al. proposed a value-oriented view of marketing in which firms respond to broader human and societal concerns (Kotler et al., 2010). The current findings integrate these perspectives by suggesting that ethics-oriented electronic marketing can function as a bridge between digital effectiveness, customer welfare, and sustainable organizational development.

Finally, the study provides an integrated explanation of how electronic marketing capability may contribute to strategic goals when governed ethically. Previous research has shown that electronic marketing capabilities can support organizational growth and strategic market development (Arabshahi et al., 2023). The present study does not challenge the importance of such capabilities; rather, it demonstrates that their long-term effectiveness depends on the ethical frameworks within which they are employed. Digital capabilities without ethical governance may create short-term advantages but also generate distrust, reputational risk, customer resistance, or regulatory exposure. By contrast, ethics-oriented electronic marketing combines technological capability with organizational responsibility, creating a more balanced foundation for sustainable performance.

The present study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the study employed a qualitative grounded-theory design and relied on interviews with 20 academic experts, managers, and senior specialists, which means that the findings reflect informed professional perceptions rather than statistically generalizable relationships. Second, although theoretical sampling was used until saturation was reached, the composition of the sample may not fully represent all industries, organizational sizes, market structures, or levels of digital maturity. Third, the study was based on self-reported interview data and may therefore have been influenced by participants' subjective interpretations, retrospective judgments, and social desirability. Fourth, the model was developed at a conceptual level and was not quantitatively tested for causal strength, predictive validity, or relative importance of the identified dimensions. Fifth, rapid technological developments in areas such as generative artificial intelligence, algorithmic targeting, automated content creation, and privacy regulation may alter some ethical challenges over time, meaning that the proposed model should be regarded as theoretically robust but open to future refinement.

Future research should quantitatively validate the proposed model using larger and more diverse samples and should develop reliable measurement scales for the identified dimensions of ethics-oriented electronic marketing. Structural equation modeling could be used to test the relationships among causal conditions, contextual factors, intervening variables, organizational strategies, and outcomes such as trust, loyalty, brand reputation, and sustainable competitive advantage. Comparative studies across industries would also be useful because privacy sensitivity, regulatory requirements, and customer vulnerability may differ substantially between sectors such as healthcare, financial services, retail, education, and entertainment. Cross-cultural studies could examine whether the meaning and importance of ethical electronic marketing vary across different institutional and cultural environments. Longitudinal research could assess whether ethical marketing practices generate sustained changes in customer trust and organizational performance over time. Future studies should also investigate emerging issues related to generative artificial intelligence, algorithmic transparency, explainable personalization, dark patterns, automated persuasion, synthetic content, and the governance of customer data. Experimental research may further help determine how specific ethical practices influence customer perceptions, behavioral intentions, and willingness to disclose personal information.

Organizations seeking to implement ethics-oriented electronic marketing should treat ethics as a strategic management issue rather than as a narrow legal or promotional concern. Senior managers should establish clear ethical principles for digital marketing, translate those principles into operational policies, and ensure that ethical requirements are incorporated into campaign design, data collection, personalization, pricing, customer communication, and post-purchase service. Written ethical codes should be supported by continuous employee training, internal monitoring mechanisms, clear accountability structures, and effective complaint-handling procedures. Organizations should also review the ethical implications of artificial intelligence, automation, and customer analytics before deploying them at scale and should ensure that customers receive clear information about data collection, consent, personalization, and privacy. Performance evaluation systems should incorporate ethical indicators alongside sales and conversion metrics so that employees are not implicitly encouraged to sacrifice ethical standards for short-term outcomes. Finally, organizations should recognize that customer trust, ethical reputation, responsible data practices, and transparency are strategic assets that can strengthen long-term loyalty, reduce hidden costs, and support sustainable competitive advantage.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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