

UNCONVENTIONAL MARKETING MIX STRATEGIES: BRAINROT AND ANTI-TREND IN KITABISA.COM ADVERTISEMENT A SEMIOTIC AND MARKETING MIX ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Amid growing audience fatigue toward overly polished and conventional digital advertising, alternative communication strategies such as brainrot content and anti-trend approaches have emerged. These strategies employ absurd visuals, hyperbolic humor, and low-budget aesthetics to capture attention and foster engagement, particularly among younger audiences. This study examines Kitabisa.com's viral zakat campaign as an example of how unconventional marketing communication can be applied in values-based digital marketing.

This research adopts a qualitative case study approach, employing Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic analysis to examine signs, objects, and interpretants within the advertisement, alongside an 8P marketing mix framework to assess how the campaign transforms conventional marketing principles. The findings reveal that Kitabisa.com successfully repackages religious messages into a humorous parody format aligned with youth digital culture. This strategy generates high social media engagement, reduces psychological distance toward the obligation of zakat, and organically expands promotional reach.

The study demonstrates that absurd humor and unconventional visual communication can function as an effective and meaningful strategy in philanthropic digital marketing, offering insights for brands seeking innovative approaches to communicating social and religious values in the digital era.

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1. Introduction

In an increasingly competitive digital era, brands are scrambling to find ways to stand out from the sea of content constantly flooding social media. Audience fatigue with overly polished and commercial-looking conventional advertising has triggered a shift in marketing strategies toward a more authentic, unexpected, and engaging approach. This phenomenon gave birth to the concept brainrot content and anti-trend, which consciously

defies traditional marketing aesthetics by presenting absurd visuals, rough editing, and humor that seems spontaneous and unstructured.

This approach is gaining popularity among younger generations, particularly Gen Z and millennials, who prefer content that feels more "real" and less like a structured, corporate production. According to Berger (2013), viral content has strong emotional elements, surprises, and unexpected elements, thus triggering spontaneous audience engagement. This concept also aligns with digital marketing theory proposed by Kotler et al. (2021), which emphasizes that marketing in the digital era must be more interactive, participatory, and community-based to attract the attention of younger generations who tend to avoid traditional advertising.

Various global and local brands are starting to adopt this strategy by leveraging meme culture, parody, and participatory humor to create more engaging and shareable content on social media (Abidin, 2021). According to Jenkins (2006) in the concept spreadable in media, content with cultural appeal and participation is more likely to spread because audiences feel a role in its distribution. This is evident in modern advertising trends that utilize absurd humor and elements of irony to create emotional connections with audiences.

In this context, Kitabisa.com's zakat campaign offers a unique and innovative approach. Rather than using the serious religious narrative or emotional approach common in charity advertising, Kitabisa presents absurd visuals, extreme metaphors, and satirical humor reminiscent of popular religious infotainment formats on television. The use of excessive CGI, hyperbolic props, and parody elements are key attractions that distinguish this campaign from conventional zakat marketing approaches.

This approach not only attracts a younger audience but also opens up new discussions about how to communicate da'wah and philanthropy in the digital age. According to Baudrillard (1994), in the era of hyperreality, media not only represents reality but creates a new, more exaggerated, and dramatic reality. By combining the semiotics of signs, objects, and interpretation in its visual communication strategy, this campaign demonstrates how a religious message can be repackaged into something relevant, entertaining, and meaningful for a modern target market.

Furthermore, Kitabisa.com's approach demonstrates the close relationship between unconventional marketing strategies and the "anti-trend" phenomenon. By ignoring traditional boundaries and creating bold and different content, Kitabisa.com demonstrates that digital marketing in the modern era doesn't always have to follow established formulas. Instead, creativity and the courage to explore new concepts can be key to capturing audience attention and creating a significant impact.

With this analysis, this article aims to delve deeper into the impact of Kitabisa.com's advertising campaign within the context of unconventional marketing mix strategies. Furthermore, this research also aims to understand how creative approaches such as brainrot content and anti-trend can change the paradigm of digital marketing and provide insights for other brands looking to adopt similar strategies.

Despite the growing body of literature on viral content, meme culture, and unconventional digital marketing strategies, most existing studies primarily examine their application in commercial branding, political communication, or popular entertainment contexts. Limited attention has been given to how brainrot content and anti-trend strategies function within values-based digital marketing, particularly in the domains of religious communication and philanthropy. Moreover, empirical studies that integrate semiotic analysis with the services marketing mix framework to examine such unconventional campaigns remain scarce, especially in the Indonesian digital media landscape.

Therefore, this study aims to examine how Kitabisa.com employs brainrot and anti-trend strategies in its zakat advertising campaign. Specifically, this research seeks to analyze

the semiotic meanings embedded in the advertisement and to assess how these unconventional creative elements transform traditional marketing mix principles in digital philanthropic communication.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to explore the use of brainrot content and anti-trend strategies in Kitabisa.com's zakat advertising campaign. A case study design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth and contextual analysis of a contemporary digital marketing phenomenon within its real-life setting, particularly when the boundaries between content, audience interpretation, and platform dynamics are blurred.

a. Data Sources and Sampling

The primary data source consists of Kitabisa.com's viral zakat advertisement distributed through social media platforms, particularly TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. This advertisement was purposively selected based on several criteria: (1) its high level of audience engagement and virality, (2) its explicit use of absurd visuals, parody, and low-budget aesthetics associated with brainrot content, and (3) its deviation from conventional philanthropic advertising norms. This purposive sampling strategy ensures that the selected case is information-rich and relevant to the research objectives.

Additional data were obtained from audience interactions on social media, including comments, shares, and engagement metrics, to capture public responses and interpretive patterns. Supporting insights were also drawn from in-depth interviews with individuals familiar with digital marketing and content production to contextualize the creative and strategic choices observed in the advertisement.

b. Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis was conducted through multiple analytical stages. First, content analysis was applied to identify recurring visual, narrative, and stylistic elements that characterize brainrot and anti-trend strategies in the advertisement. Second, a semiotic analysis based on Charles Sanders Peirce's framework was employed to examine the relationship between signs, objects, and interpretants, enabling an interpretation of how religious and philanthropic meanings are constructed through absurd and humorous representations.

Third, the findings were further examined using the services marketing mix (8P) framework, which includes product, price, place, promotion, people, process, physical evidence, and customer service. This step aimed to assess how unconventional creative elements transform or reinterpret traditional marketing principles within a digital philanthropic context.

c. Credibility and Trustworthiness

To enhance the credibility of the findings, this study employed methodological triangulation by integrating multiple data sources and analytical approaches, including content analysis, semiotic interpretation, interview insights, and social media data analysis. Cross-referencing these data sources allowed for a more robust interpretation of the campaign's meaning and effectiveness. In addition, theoretical triangulation was applied by drawing upon established frameworks in semiotics, digital marketing, and media studies to ensure analytical consistency and reduce interpretive bias.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the empirical findings derived from the analysis of Kitabisa.com's zakat advertisement, focusing on visual composition, semiotic elements, audience representation, and the application of the services marketing mix (8P).

The development of digital technology has drastically changed the marketing landscape, with strategies becoming increasingly diverse and dynamic (Kotler et al., 2021). One phenomenon that has emerged in the digital marketing era is brainrot content, namely content that appears absurd, nonsensical, and low-quality but is able to capture attention and create high engagement (Phillips & Milner, 2021). This phenomenon illustrates the changing patterns of content consumption by audiences, who are now more attracted to surprises, exaggerated humor, and non-traditional approaches to marketing (Berger, 2013). In line with this phenomenon, a trend has also emerged anti-trend, where brands dare to deviate from established marketing norms to create unique and differentiated experiences (Heath & Heath, 2007).

One interesting example of this unconventional marketing strategy is the Kitabisa.com advertising campaign. The ad uses humor, pop culture references, and unusual absurd elements in its fundraising campaign, even zakat payments. In some video clips from this advertisement, elements are seen that combine anti-traditional marketing techniques and brainrot content.

a. Visual and Narrative Characteristics

The advertisement adopts an unconventional visual style characterized by exaggerated props, intentionally visible green screen effects, retro typography, and striking color contrasts. The narrative format parodies religious television talk shows, particularly those involving authoritative maternal figures responding to everyday religious questions. The opening scene features a child and a mother figure against an artificial seaside background, accompanied by cheerful background music and informal dialogue.

This parody-driven narrative structure establishes familiarity while simultaneously disrupting conventional expectations of religious and philanthropic advertising. Hyperbolic metaphors such as oversized objects and humorous slogans like "Zakat Cleans Wealth" are repeatedly employed to simplify abstract religious concepts into concrete, everyday symbols. The use of exaggerated visuals and digital absurdity reflects contemporary visual cultures of engagement on social media platforms (Highfield & Leaver, 2022).

b. Semiotic Findings

Using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework, the advertisement demonstrates a consistent interaction between signs, objects, and interpretants. Visual signs such as exaggerated CGI effects, retro fonts, and parody staging signify popular digital culture and humor. These signs are juxtaposed with objects representing religious authority, particularly through the presence of Mamah Dedeh as a well-known preacher figure. The presence of recognized religious figures in digital campaigns reinforces religious authority while adapting it to contemporary media logic (Campbell, 2021).

The interpretants produced from this interaction frame zakat not as a distant or moralizing obligation, but as an accessible and relatable religious practice. Nostalgic

references to religious infotainment programs function as cultural anchors, enabling audiences to decode the message through familiar symbolic systems.

c. Marketing Mix (8P) Findings

Kitabisa.com is a service provider whose actions or performance are intangible and do not result in any ownership. Although Kitabisa.com's zakat campaign is rooted in an unconventional creative approach relying on absurd content, hyperbolic humor, and parody of popular culture it can still be analyzed through the lens of the marketing mix (marketing mix).

The marketing mix theory for the service sector, consisting of product, price, promotion, place, people, process, physical evidence, and customer service, will serve as a framework for assessing the extent to which this campaign deviates from or transforms traditional marketing strategies. This approach serves to emphasize that the success of marketing communications does not always depend on adherence to established formats, but rather on accurately reaching the target audience's social and psychological context.

First, from the aspect of product the service offered is not a commercial product, but rather zakat as a form of religious obligation and philanthropy. Kitabisa presents zakat as something relevant, accessible, and even enjoyable through light and familiar visual packaging. The metaphor of a spray bottle reading "Zakat Cleans Wealth" demonstrates how religious concepts can be simplified and contextualized in everyday symbols, strengthening the audience's understanding of zakat's spiritual value in a fresh and non-patronizing way.

Second, the aspect of price in this context, the emphasis isn't on the nominal price, but rather on the perceived psychological barriers to paying zakat. Kitabisa's advertisements mitigate these barriers by presenting a non-intimidating atmosphere. Rather than touching on the emotional side with a narrative of sadness, as is typical of zakat advertisements, Kitabisa presents a positive, cheerful, and humorous narrative that emphasizes the comfort of doing good.

Third, on the elements of place, content distribution no longer relies on conventional media, but utilizes digital media—such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube—which have viral algorithms and participatory nature. This aligns with the concept of spreadable media from Jenkins (2006), who explains that content will spread widely if it has emotional connection and potential for reinterpretation by the audience.

Fourth, in terms of aspects promotion, Kitabisa deviates from the conventional approach which usually emphasizes a professional impression and serious narrative. They choose the strategy anti-trend, a promotional style that appears unprofessional but is authentic and engaging because it resembles user generated content. In this case, Kitabisa has practiced what Kotler et al. (2021) call marketing for humanity, namely marketing that prioritizes emotional connections, good values, and participatory experiences.



Picture 1. Opening Scene of KitaBisa Advertisement

Table 1. Scene 1 Analysis

Scene	Sign	Object	Interpretant
Title and opener	Visual Cue: Children’s figure and mom appear, background behind sea and title big child ask mom answering part 2.	Campaign Title and 2 Characters: Child (son wearing a cap) and mom (woman wearing hijab) in format of preaching in TV	Nostalgia with TV show religious, that have same concept, namely The Mom and Aa’ Show.
	Audio Cue: Music opener cheerful, child’s voice: <i>“Assalamualaikum Mom...”</i>		
	Notes Visual: Green screen, font style retro, striking colors.		

In this scene 1, it begins with a visual featuring two main characters, namely a child and a woman called "Mamah". The chosen background is a sea view, giving a fresh and cheerful impression. At the top of the screen, there is a large title that reads "Kid Asks Mamah Answers Part 2". This title not only serves as an introduction, but also attracts the audience's attention with its striking size. The use of the words "Kid Asks" indicates that this show focuses on the interaction between the younger generation and adults, creating curiosity and engagement.

The audio accompanying this visual also strongly supports the atmosphere it seeks to create. Upbeat opening music fills the background, creating a pleasant atmosphere and inviting the audience to engage. A child's voice greeting with "Assalamualaikum, Mah..." adds intimacy and warmth to the interaction. This greeting not only conveys

respect but also creates a close and affectionate atmosphere between the child and mother.

Furthermore, the use of green screen in this production provides flexibility in creating dynamic backgrounds. This allows the production team to showcase a variety of interesting settings without physical limitations. The retro font style used for the titles and other text adds an interesting visual element, giving a nostalgic yet modern feel. The bold colors chosen for the text and other graphic elements serve to attract the audience's attention, making the information conveyed easier to remember and absorb.

Fifth, in terms of aspects people, Kitabisa represents its employees by selecting influencers who understand the needs and desires of the community. The selection of influencers who understand spiritual preaching is packaged in easy-to-understand language. The chosen influencer is Mamah Dedeh, a famous preacher who has long been known by the community. Mamah Dedeh, whose real name is Dede Rosidah, graduated from the Religious Teacher Education Program at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah. She began having a preaching program on national television in 2007 on the Indosiar TV station. Then in 2023, Mamah Dedeh still maintains her presence through television programs. "Peace be upon you, Mama Dedeh" on Trans7.



Picture 2. Mamah Dedeh and Reza Chandika On Screen

The next influencer featured in Kitabisa's ad is Reza Chandika, an Indonesian radio host, presenter, comedian, singer, and actor. He also has several podcasts on various platforms. In 2021, Reza played Ari's cousin in the film "Ali & Ratu Ratu Queens." He has also starred in various web series, including "Keluarga Badak".

Sixth, on the aspect of process, Kitabisa understands the spiritual need to continue to be able to perform worship during activities, conveyed through the features provided by the Kitabisa zakat application.



Picture 3. Mamah Dedeh Shows Kitabisa Application

At 00.23, Mama Dedeh's dialogue is "Zakat is our obligation to Allah. What is the function of zakat? First, it cleanses the hearts of the rich, so they are not arrogant. Second, it cleanses our wealth, so they are clean. Third, it helps the poor." Continued at 00.36, the dialogue "So, so we don't have to bother calculating and how to pay, Mom?". Then at 00.46, Mama Dedeh's answer dialogue "You can pay zakat on the Kitabisa application (showing the application and its features). There is also a zakat calculator feature, God willing, it is practical and in accordance with sharia."

Seventh, on the aspect of physical evidence, Kitabisa must be able to increase customer trust, build a positive brand image, and influence purchasing decisions. This is demonstrated by assuring customers that the app's calculation features are in accordance with sharia law. It also provides information that all zakat collection institutions on Kitabisa are officially licensed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.



Picture 4. Mamah Dedeh's Explanation About Zakat Is An Obligation

Eighth, on the aspect of customer service, Kitabisa offers quality and convenience to customers by allowing them to download its app through the Play Store and App Store. At the 0:53 minute mark, Mama Dedeh's dialogue encourages viewers to download the Kitabisa app.



Picture 5. Kitabisa App Can Be Downloaded Via GooglePlay and AppStore

From a marketing mix (8P) perspective, this campaign doesn't completely abandon basic marketing principles, but instead adapts them to the dynamics of the digital era. Kitabisa successfully frames zakat as a "product" that's easy, accessible, and non-intimidating. Through participatory digital channels, Kitabisa expanded its promotional reach and strengthened emotional connections with audiences through a relatable format. Thus, this campaign not only succeeded in increasing awareness and engagement but also demonstrated how a creative approach can renew the face of Islamic preaching communication in the social media era.

Kitabisa.com's zakat advertising campaign demonstrates how digital marketing strategies that deviate from conventional norms can be effective in reaching a young audience brainrot content and anti-trend Kitabisa utilizes absurd visuals, hyperbolic humor, and parody elements to package a religious message in a lighthearted, entertaining, and viral format. A semiotic analysis based on Charles Sanders Peirce's theory reveals that the signs used in this advertisement—from the spray bottle casing to the authoritative character in the parody of religious infotainment—have strong symbolic meanings and can be creatively interpreted by the audience.

This section interprets the empirical findings by situating them within broader theoretical perspectives on digital marketing, semiotics, and unconventional communication strategies. Such strategies reflect the logic of internet memes, where repetition, exaggeration, and cultural remixing shape audience interpretation and participation (Zulli & Zulli, 2020).

1. Brainrot and Anti-Trend as Digital Marketing Strategies

The findings indicate that brainrot content and anti-trend strategies function as deliberate departures from conventional philanthropic advertising that typically relies on emotional solemnity and polished aesthetics. In line with Berger's (2013) theory of contagious content, the use of absurd humor and visual exaggeration generates surprise and emotional resonance, key drivers of virality.

Rather than diminishing the seriousness of zakat, this unconventional format reduces psychological distance and reframes religious obligation as socially approachable. This supports Kotler et al.'s (2021) concept of Marketing 5.0, which emphasizes emotional connection, participation, and cultural relevance in engaging digitally native audiences.

The effectiveness of humor in this campaign supports prior findings that humor appeal in digital advertising enhances engagement and positive audience attitudes when aligned with contextual relevance (Muthiah & Kaur, 2023).

2. Semiotic Interpretation and Meaning Construction

From a semiotic perspective, the campaign's exaggerated visuals and parody format serve as meaningful sign systems rather than mere comedic devices. The juxtaposition of authoritative religious figures with intentionally low-budget aesthetics produces layered meanings that bridge sacred values and contemporary digital humor.

Following Peirce's triadic model, these signs generate interpretants that position zakat as both sacred and accessible. In Baudrillard's (1994) framework of hyperreality, the advertisement operates within an exaggerated media space where religious messaging is reconstituted through symbolic excess, enhancing memorability without detaching from its normative foundation.

3. Marketing Mix Adaptation and Ethical Reflection

The application of the services marketing mix (8P) demonstrates that unconventional creativity does not negate fundamental marketing principles. Instead, Kitabisa.com adapts these principles to the logic of digital culture. Promotion adopts an anti-trend style that resonates with participatory media practices, while process and physical evidence reinforce trust through sharia compliance and institutional legitimacy.

However, the use of absurd humor in religious communication also raises ethical considerations. There is a potential risk that exaggerated or parodic representations could be misinterpreted as trivializing religious obligations. In this campaign, such risks are mitigated through explicit verbal explanations, the presence of recognized religious authorities, and clear references to sharia-compliant practices. These elements function as ethical safeguards, ensuring that humor serves as a gateway to engagement rather than a distortion of religious meaning.

4. Effectiveness Brainrot Content and Anti-Trend

Kitabisa.com's advertisement adopts an absurd visual approach and presents an unusual context to capture the audience's attention. One scene shows a person holding a cellphone with a casing resembling a spray bottle labeled "Zakat Cleans Wealth." This metaphor provides a unique interpretation of zakat as a cleaning tool, making it easier to understand in a concrete concept. Furthermore, the use of a green background (green screen) deliberately made visible, along with simple CGI effects, creates a low-budget aesthetic that enhances the comedic elements of the ad. This strategy not only stands out visually but also enhances viral appeal due to its unconventional appearance compared to typical philanthropic ads.

Beyond the absurd visuals, the over-the-top humor and pop culture references are also key draws in this ad. One scene shows the main character sitting on a stately red chair against a backdrop of a house, while a man carries a giant microphone with the words "As Big as Mamah's Love." This hyperbole effectively grabs attention and reinforces the comedic element, contributing to its viral appeal. Furthermore, the parody of old television shows like "Mamah dan Aa" adds a nostalgic element for audiences familiar with the references. Thus, the ad is not only entertaining but also builds an emotional connection with the audience through recognizable cultural elements.

The interactive approach and strategy to create virality are also evident in various aspects of this advertisement. The use of large slogans like "Zakat Itu Wajib" (Zakat is

Obligatory) in a striking font, combined with the dramatic expressions of the main character, ensures that the core message is conveyed despite the unconventional format. Audience response on social media indicates that this approach sparks widespread discussion, proving the effectiveness of an engagement-based marketing strategy. Kitabisa.com's boldness in departing from the serious and emotional format of philanthropic advertising demonstrates the increasingly experimental evolution of digital marketing. By utilizing elements of surprise, humor, and interaction, this advertisement not only raises awareness of zakat but also strengthens Kitabisa.com's position as an innovative platform for communicating social messages.

Previous studies on digital philanthropy suggest that social media engagement plays a significant role in shaping donation behavior and expanding the reach of charitable campaigns (Saxton & Wang, 2020).

4. Conclusion

This study analyzes the non-conventional marketing strategies implemented by Kitabisa.com in its viral zakat campaign, using a non-conventional marketing approach. brainrot content And anti-trend This strategy utilizes absurd visuals, hyperbolic humor, and aesthetics low budget to attract the attention of the audience, especially the younger generation, amidst the saturation of conventional digital advertising that is too formal and neat.

The analysis shows that Kitabisa.com successfully packaged the religious message of zakat into a fun, light-hearted parody format that's relevant to the digital culture of young people, particularly generation-z and millennials. This approach generated high engagement on social media, reduced the audience's psychological distance from the issue of zakat, and organically expanded the promotional reach through virality.

By applying the services marketing mix (8P) framework—which includes product, price, place, promotion, people, process, physical evidence, and customer service—this study found that the Kitabisa campaign, while deviating from traditional marketing norms in form, still touches on fundamental marketing aspects in substance. Zakat is presented as relevant, accessible, and enjoyable through familiar visuals and everyday metaphors. Psychological barriers The perception of zakat practices is reduced with positive and humorous narratives. Content is strategically distributed through social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, leveraging their algorithms and participatory nature.

Promotion style anti-trend Kitabisa's selected content resembles user-generated content, providing an authentic feel and closer to the audience's daily lives. Selecting figures like Mamah Dedeh and Reza Chandika as influencers strengthens the message's effectiveness by bridging da'wah values with a popular communication style. Furthermore, Kitabisa's app features, such as the zakat calculator and easy access through the Play Store and App Store, are crucial for a practical and sharia-compliant service process. Validity and trust are built through the assurance that all zakat collection institutions on Kitabisa have official permits from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.

Overall, this campaign demonstrates that absurd humor and unconventional visual approaches can be effective digital marketing strategies for conveying value-based social messages, including in the context of Islamic outreach and philanthropy. Through this creative innovation, Kitabisa.com has strengthened its position as a digital platform that is not only relevant but also progressive in reaching the younger generation.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis focuses on a single case study, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other philanthropic or religious digital marketing campaigns. Second, this research relies primarily on qualitative interpretation and observable engagement indicators, without incorporating in-depth audience reception analysis or large-scale quantitative measurement. Future studies could expand this research by comparing multiple campaigns across different platforms or cultural contexts, integrating audience surveys or experimental methods to assess message interpretation more systematically. Further research may also explore long-term effects of brainrot and anti-trend strategies on trust, religious perception, and donation behavior in digital philanthropy.

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