Islamic Legal Analysis of Income Earned from Destructive Honest Reviews by Food Influencers

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Abstract

The phenomenon of destructive honest reviews by food influencers on social media has raised legal and moral problems within the digital economic ecosystem. This study aims to examine the halal status of income derived from destructive reviews of culinary products from the perspective of Islamic law, emphasizing the principles of fiqh muamalah and digital da'wah ethics. The research employs a normative-analytic qualitative method based on a literature study of classical and contemporary fiqh works, DSN-MUI fatwas, and actual cases such as the controversy between Codeblu and Clairmont Bakery.The analysis reveals that although honesty is a fundamental value in Islam, honesty conveyed destructively—without regard for ethics, consent, and social impact—constitutes ghibah and fitnah, both of which are prohibited. Income generated from such content is deemed haram because it originates from acts that cause economic and social harm, contradicting the principles of halalan thayyiban and the legal maxim lā ḍarara wa lā ḍirār (no harm and no reciprocating harm). Conversely, criticism expressed politely and aimed at improving business quality can be considered a form of amar ma'rūf that brings benefit (maṣlaḥah). Therefore, this study emphasizes the necessity of applying Sharia-based ethics and moral responsibility in influencer marketing practices to ensure alignment with maqāṣid al-syarī'ah, particularly in preserving dignity, economic justice, and the blessing of sustenance (barakah al-rizq).

I. Introduction

In today's digital era, food influencers on social media have a significant influence in shaping public opinion about dining establishments. People often use food reviews by influencers as a reference before deciding to visit a particular restaurant or food stall (Dewi R, 2024). The phenomenon of "honest reviews" (reviews of food that are as they are) is often praised for its honest content, but it actually has serious consequences. Negative reviews that go viral can damage the reputation and income of culinary businesses. For example, a boycott movement against a food reviewer who frequently criticized culinary vendors in Indonesia went viral on social media (Azzahra, 2025). In addition to social impacts, content monetization has also fueled the rise of aggressive review content. Food influencers earn revenue from advertising and sponsorships. On YouTube, for example, they can earn around USD 0.3–0.5 per 1,000 views through the Google AdSense program (Ecomobi, 2023). Creators can also earn income from the YouTube Partner Program (55% of ad revenue), the Super Chat feature, paid subscriptions, or product affiliate links. On TikTok, the primary revenue sources are the Creator Fund, virtual gifts during live streams, sponsored content, and the TikTok Shop, which allows commissions through affiliate links. Thus, a high number of views or clicks can generate significant financial returns. This monetization system encourages some influencers to continue creating provocative content to attract attention and income (Heny Hendrayati, 2025). Such destructive reviews are considered to deprive others of their livelihood, even though the livelihood and blessings of businesses must be maintained in Islam (H. Firdaus, 2023).

Regulatoryly, there is already a legal umbrella for protecting business owners. Consumer Protection Law No. 8/1999 mandates honesty and transparency of information for consumers. Reviews that are misleading and detrimental to business owners can be considered a violation of consumer and business rights. In addition, Article 27 paragraph (3) of the ITE Law prohibits online defamation (Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 11 of 2008, 2008) If reviews are made to damage reputation without clear basis, business actors have the right to take legal action. The current reality shows that several food influencers have been reported to the police on charges of extortion (for example, the Clairmont and Codeblu cases) (Dara Dolorosa, 2025). Both economic and legal aspects show that income from destructive reviews triggers controversy that requires further study.

In Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh muamalah), every form of transaction and income must meet the principle of halalan thayyiban (permissible and permissible). The classical principle states: “Ma ḥarama akhdzuhu ḥarama i‘thauhu” (what is forbidden to take, it is also forbidden to give) (Ahmad Bissri, 2024). A valid hadith prohibits accepting wages from prostitution or shamanism, because these wages are “a substitute for forbidden things.” This means that if a job or business contains elements of sin or injustice, then the income may not be consumed by Muslims because it is considered al-khulūl fī al-māli bil-bātil (earning wealth from evil) (Ahmad Bissri, 2024). This principle is widely applied: wealth derived

from usury, gambling (maisir), fraud, pornography, child pornography, and activities that harm others are considered forbidden to own (Ilham, 2025). Accordingly, income derived from reviews or content containing slander/backbiting as the primary source is undoubtedly considered haram, as it violates the principle of not acquiring wealth through sinful or harmful means (Rosa and Bisyri, 2023).

In Islam, preaching must be based on noble ethics: upholding haq (truth) while avoiding munkar (evil), honoring the community, and maintaining the brotherhood of Muslims (Rosa and Bisri, 2023). Da'wah on social media should spread goodness, provide enlightenment, not spread evil or mock others. Tata Sukayat (2023) states that the ethics of digital media da'wah include: respecting religious norms, not offending ethnicity/religion/race (SARA), and avoiding provocative or insulting content. Another principle is the principle of "fala yalhadh-dzaka tala thănīnahu" (speak well or remain silent) as stated by the Prophet Muhammad (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim). Violation of this principle, for example, by publishing backbiting that, although true, is still forbidden because it causes slander and rifts in brotherhood (Ilham, 2025).

2. Research Method

This research uses a qualitative, normative-analytical method. Data were obtained from library research on relevant primary and secondary sources: (1) contemporary and classical muamalah fiqh texts (books, journals); (2) fatwas from scholars/institutions (DSN-MUI, MUI, regional fatwas); (3) journal articles on Islamic law and da'wah communication (2015–2025) and MUI press documents.

3. Results and Discussion

The study of honesty is not only the domain of Islamic ethics but has also long been an important discourse in Western moral philosophy. This perspective provides an additional framework for understanding the phenomenon of food influencers, who often claim to be "honest" in expressing their opinions about culinary products. In a global context, honesty does not simply mean telling the truth as it is; it also involves dimensions of social responsibility, moral awareness, and consideration of the consequences of statements made in the public sphere. Antony D. Molina (2017), in his article "The Truth About Honesty," emphasizes that honesty is situational and multidimensional. They point out that in professional practice and the media, telling the truth raw without considering context or social empathy can have destructive consequences. This form of honesty does not foster healthy transparency but instead creates social tension and diminishes public trust in certain professions or institutions. In the context of food influencers, this is evident when a content creator openly shares negative reviews, ignoring ethical video permissions or copyright, as in the viral review of Banyumasan peanut soto. In Wells and Molina's framework, this action can be categorized as truth misapplied—that is, the unwise use of truth that ultimately has detrimental social impacts.

Christian B. Miller (2020), in Honesty & Dishonesty: Unpacking Two Character Traits Neglected by Philosophers, develops a similar view by positioning honesty as a moral virtue. He believes that true honesty does not stop at conveying facts, but rather at the alignment of intention, content, and moral purpose. Miller asserts that a person can appear honest on the surface of their communication, yet remain ethically dishonest if their actions are motivated by ego, revenge, or a desire for personal gain. In the context of digital media, this is seen when an influencer displays extreme criticism not for the sake of consumer justice, but to increase engagement and revenue from content monetization. This phenomenon demonstrates a moral paradox: honesty born of economic self-interest can actually transform into a new form of social dishonesty. Yoella and Shaul (2015), through the concept of Deliberate Honesty, introduce the idea that honesty is not an automatic act, but rather the result of a process of moral and rational deliberation. In their view, a truly honest person not only tells the truth but also considers the social and emotional impact of their words. Good honesty is reflective, not impulsive. When a food influencer emotionally delivers criticism without verifying permission to use the video or considering the reputational impact on the business, that honesty is no longer deliberative, but rather destructive.

Haram Elements in Destructive Content

Destructive review content by celebrity Instagrammer CodeBlue, for example, is categorized as containing gossip and denigrating others, slander, and even blackmail. According to the Qur'an, Surah al-Hujuraat [49]:12, Allah forbids gossip ("Does anyone like to eat the flesh of his dead brother?") because it contains hatred and disgrace. The Prophet Muhammad explained gossip as "talking about your brother about something he dislikes" (Musyfikah Ilyas, 2018). In the case of destructive reviews, even though the information conveyed is true, the intention and content are detrimental to the reputation of others. This is exactly the definition of gossip (if true it is gossip, if not true it is slander) (Ilham, 2025). From an Islamic perspective, food reviews are essentially a form of conveying information. However, Islamic law strongly emphasizes honesty, justice, and the prohibition of harming others. Scholars emphasize that honest praise for something is permissible as long as there is no lie (Al-Gazali, 2011). As stated in Ihya' Ulumuddin, if someone characterizes things in a way that does not correspond to reality, then this is called a lie, including fraud and injustice (Al-Gazali, 2011). This means that if a review praises a dish and is true to reality, then the law is permissible. On the other hand, if the review contains insults or mentions of disgrace that insults other parties, then the law is haram because it is an act of backbiting. In the book Al Akhlaqu Lil Banin Juz 1, it is explained that calling out other people's faults (including ugliness or shortcomings) is backbiting (Umar bin Ahmad Baradja, 1953).

Another principle is the prohibition of harming other people. In the Sahih hadith it is stated: "It is not lawful to take a Muslim's property except what he gives willingly." (Ahmad bin Hanbal, 1995). This hadith emphasizes that a Muslim's wealth (rezeki) is personal property

protected by the Shari'a. This means that no one may take, obstruct or reduce the rights of others without their permission or willingness. Destructive content that causes the closure of other people's businesses is essentially approaching the act of "killing one's fortune". The hadith of the Prophet SAW also teaches muamalah without harm: "You are not allowed to do mubahah (something that contains harm)." The principle of lā ḍarara wa lā ḍirār (no harm and no mutual harm) requires that food reviewers should not arbitrarily bring down the reputation of others. If the intention is to help, reviews should still be conducted with good manners and polite language, including suggestions for improvement (Ahmad Baradja, 1953).

Fiqh literature highlights the prohibition of backbiting as an analogy for this act. (Riska Fitria, 2024) Reviews that denigrate a business without permission or proper context constitute public backbiting, as they accuse the person behind it of dishonesty. Meanwhile, the principle of "la darar wa la dirar" emphasizes that mutual harm should not be done. Scholars also remind us that trade must be accompanied by honesty; concealing defects in merchandise (tadlis) is also prohibited. In the context of reviews, if influencers promote honesty by concealing sponsorship, this could constitute a breach of contract. Furthermore, the National Sharia Council (DSN) fatwa and modern Sharia literature emphasize the accountability of digital content. In general, Islam teaches that both businesses and consumers should use media with noble ethics, not intentionally harming others. In terms of benefits and harms, the theory of maqasid al-syariah (Islamic law) also applies. Revenue from reviews that damage other people's businesses is inconsistent with the sharia's goal of preserving wealth and blessings. Conversely, constructive criticism can bring benefits (for example, encouraging improvements in food quality) and blessings. This aligns with the findings of Wiedmann & von Mettenheim (2020) that constructive criticism accompanied by solutions encourages innovation in Islamic business actors, encouraging wise preaching rather than spreading slander (Heny Hendrayati, 2025).

Income Status in Islamic Law

Referring to the principles of Islamic law, wealth obtained from unlawful acts is also unlawful. As an analogy, income from gambling or usury is clearly not permissible for consumption. Similarly, income derived from spreading gossip/slander is also not permissible. The Indonesian Ulema Council (DSN-MUI) specifically prohibits this in Fatwa No. 24/2017: "The activities of buzzers on social media who make the provision of information containing hoaxes, gossip, slander, and slander... a profession for profit... are haram." The phrase "for profit" indicates that if the primary intention of the activity is to earn money, then the content's unlawfulness makes such income unlawful. Furthermore, the fatwa (point h) prohibits producing content to "right the wrong or accuse the right... to deceive the public." Destructive reviews may fall into this category if their purpose is to exploit information for personal gain. Imam An-Nawawi explained that wages from sinful work (prostitution/shamanism) are forbidden because "such wages are a substitute for something forbidden" (Ahmad Bissri, 2024). This principle applies generally: if the core activity (content creation) is sinful, then the

wages/income from that activity constitute "consumption of wealth derived from evil." Therefore, even if a monetization contract (e.g., an advertising contract) is formally valid, its source (negative information) is destructive and thus brings harm to others. Therefore, according to Islamic jurisprudence, such wealth becomes forbidden for its owner. In conclusion, income from destructive reviews cannot be classified as halal-thayyib; instead, it is forbidden because it is caused by backbiting and slander carried out for profit.

From a transactional perspective, a group of scholars categorizes the influencer-restaurant relationship as a service contract (ijarah al-'amal). If an influencer receives payment, the review content must meet the principles of a contract: clear ijab-qabul (contract), definite object of work (food review), and halal benefits for the service provider (Yerna Wiza, et.al., 2025). DSN-MUI Fatwa No. 24/DSN-MUI/IV/2017 concerning transactions on social media emphasizes honesty (ṣidq) and transparency (bayan) in every digital promotion. This means that influencers are required to disclose if they are paid or have any commercial ties to the restaurant being reviewed. Otherwise, the publication can be categorized as digital fraud (najasy). As an illustration, Bukhari et al. (2025) stated that influencer campaigns must avoid elements of gharar (unclearness) and fulfill the maqāṣid of sharia by upholding justice and trustworthiness (Ayaz Akhter Naeemi, 2025)

Preaching Ethics and Social Responsibility

Instagram celebrities are often viewed as influential (essentially agents of preaching), thus bearing moral responsibility in accordance with Islamic ethics. In preaching, the fundamental principle is amar ma'ruf nahi munkar (enjoining good and forbidding evil) in a respectful manner. Preachers on social media should avoid content that incites slander or hostility. Sukayat (2023) emphasized that the ethics of digital media communication forbids offending ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA) and sensitive elements, as well as spreading insults. Destructive comments do the opposite: inciting hostility and spreading evil. Such actions are far from the character of the Prophet's preaching, which prioritizes gentleness and respect for the dignity of others. From a social media perspective, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) has compiled ethical guidelines that bind every Muslim internet user. The prohibition of backbiting and slander is clearly stated in MUI Fatwa No. 24/2017. Ramadhani's (2024) research confirms this: a case study of Instagram interactions emphasizes that Muslims are obligated to strengthen brotherhood and maintain harmony in cyberspace; all backbiting/slanderous content is prohibited. In general communication ethics, Muslims are advised to "speak good or remain silent" (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim). Therefore, producing negative content for profit not only violates muamalah but also denies the ethics of da'wah.

The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), through the National Council of Ulama (DSN-MUI) (2017), officially established the limits of halal content on social media. Destructive review material is clearly included in the MUI Fatwa's haram (forbidden) category: the first point

affirms that backbiting, slander, and namimah (name-calling), as well as the prohibition of creating enmity, are prohibited. Furthermore, points regarding buzzers (fatwas g and j) state that professions that promote hoax/backbiting content for profit are prohibited. This fatwa serves as a primary reference for Islamic media organizers. In addition to the MUI, some local ulama have also affirmed similar principles: for example, a regional ulama meeting in Indonesia declared that creators' income is haram if the content they produce defames (Devi Setya, 2024). The impact of this sharp criticism led netizens to question his intentions, whether he was providing constructive feedback or simply seeking sensationalism for engagement. In another case, Codeblu accused the fast-food chain Richeese of poor hygiene (finding cockroaches in drinks). He then demanded compensation of IDR 500 million (approximately US$30,000) and was ultimately awarded IDR 90 million (approximately US$6,000). Similarly, a similar claim occurred at Hollan Bakery Bali. The viral video ultimately swayed public opinion: many viewed his review as extortion disguised as criticism. The Clairmont Bakery case drew significant attention. Codeblu spread allegations that Clairmont donated moldy bread to an orphanage, when the claim was false. As a result, Clairmont suffered losses of approximately IDR 5 billion and faced legal action (Dara, 2025). Conversations were even uncovered that Codeblu demanded a fee of IDR 350 million for positive reviews. These actions clearly went beyond mere criticism. He manipulated the situation and collaborated with former staff to undermine a rival brand. These cases highlight that behind the label of "honest reviews" lies a scheme that harms others. Widespread destructive reviews can be a weapon for blackmail or reputational damage for personal gain. From a behavioral analysis perspective, Codeblu is associated with the theory of ethical egoism; he focuses on popularity and personal opinion without considering social impact. However, Islam holds every Muslim accountable for what they say. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak good or remain silent" (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim). Therefore, even if a comment is honest, if it is delivered in a destructive and derogatory manner, Islamic ethics considers it problematic.

4. Conclusion

Income earned from honest, destructive reviews by food influencers essentially violates the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh muamalah) because it harms others and violates the ethics of Islamic da'wah. While honesty in expressing opinions is permissible, forms of communication that involve backbiting, slander, or damaging the reputation of business actors render such income unlawful. Based on DSN-MUI Fatwa No. 24/2017 and the principle of lā ḍarara wa lā ḍirār, monetization of destructive content is considered haram because it originates from actions that cause social and economic harm. Therefore, criticism in digital media must be conducted ethically, transparently, and constructively to remain in line with the maqāṣid al-shari'ah in protecting wealth, honor, and the blessings of sustenance.

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