

Commodification of Religion and Pop Culture on Social Media: Netnographic Studies

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Abstract:

Instagram accounts owned by cultural industry have been followed by millions of followers and are not limited to a group of people in a country because cyberspace creates unlimited communities. Cultural industries that use Instagram place halal (allowed in Islam) and syar'i (based on Islamic law) labels as important elements in promoting their commodities. The following article tries to look at the commodification of several posts on Instagram that are related to religious identity and the implications that are formed by the cultural industry in Muslim communities. The following qualitative research is analyzed by content analysis based on data collection - neographic studies - from several Instagram accounts, such as travel, fashion, and cosmetics agent accounts which utilize Islamic attributes. The results of this study indicate that the cultural industry always introduces new trends of pop culture through Instagram by using religious attributes, such as using the terms halal, syar'i, or Muslim. Religion as an agency is widely used by the cultural industry in advertising its commodities. In addition, the agency is a tool to persuade consumers to buy commodities and at the same time it is able to identify consumers as pious and modern Muslims.

Keywords: *Instagram, commodification of religion, agency, cultural industry, pop culture*

INTRODUCTION

There has been a shift in the perspective of religiosity among upper middle class Muslims in recent years. Religiosity is an important aspect of daily life that is shown through lifestyle. Religiosity is no longer interpreted by performing religious rituals specifically, but the way a person consumes a product is also a part of the form of religiosity itself (Yuswohady, 2014: 5). One example is when Muslim women prefer to use halal labeled cosmetic products like Wardah than other products. From an economic standpoint, Wardah gained high attention with the presence of its halal label. This also happens in other sectors such as fashion and tourism.

The commodification of religion practiced by some cultural industries is a means of obtaining a source of profit. According to Gokariksel, the Islamic culture industry is specifically aimed at Muslim women in terms of knowledge and commodities because they can act as producers as well as consumers (Gokariksel in Waninger, 2015: 2). In addition to attracting consumers, this has turned into a trend that seems to be followed by trend conscious people. The cosmetics, tourism and fashion industries are not satisfied just by promoting their commodities by showing their respective strengths, however, religious symbols can boost consumer interest and become a special consideration in consuming

these commodities. It's not strange when the syar'i or halal label covers a lot of industries in Indonesia.

The cultural industry takes advantage of this moment to get more attention from consumers. Through the imaging of advertisements that are made so fiercely by industry, consumers are persuaded to consume a commodity. Strangely, they sometimes purchase these products not because of use-value or based on the level of need, but to emphasize their social status. This shows a shift from the use-value to the symbol value.

Today the culture and media industries are very closely related. As one of the marketing strategies, the cultural industry does not want to be left behind. With the rise of smart-phone users in Indonesia as well as the frequent use of social media, the cultural industry such as online shops use Instagram application to introduce their products to consumers. With Instagram, users are facilitated to publish photos and videos via posts on their Instagram account. The results are fantastic because Instagram is able to increase people's purchasing and selling power. In fact, Waninger argues that the Islamic culture industry is in line with the spirit of consumerism where someone can show their religiosity through social media and their lifestyle (Waninger, 2015: 3).

Commodification of religion in Indonesia has been studied by several previous researchers. Zoya Hijab, for example, because of the use of halal label, Zoya managed to boost consumer interest to buy their products (Istiqomah, 2016: 2). In addition, the manufacture of banten offerings for the ngaben (cremation) ritual in Bali is also a commodification of religion confronted with modernity which keeps shifting the values of religion (Atmadja and Maryati, 2014: 3). We can also find commodification of religion carried out in the tourism sector during Nyepi (Balinese Day of Silence). Because of the effects of modernization that might cause Balinese Hindus to be reluctant to celebrate Nyepi as it is usually done, so they are looking for something new that is seclusion in hotels that offer attractive offers during Nyepi (Narottama, 2016: 16). However, commodification does not only occur in the religious aspects, but also health, such as offered by Natasha Skin Care which initially struggles with the aspect of beauty now shifting to highlighting its health aspects (Murlianti, 2014: 190).

Those researches interest me to go into religion commodification. Therefore, this study will focus on two things, first, how the cultural industry utilizes Instagram applications as a media for the commodification of religion in society. Second, what implications that are produced in the midst of consumers of the commodification process.

This study uses netnography as a data collection technique. Netnography as introduced by Kozinets is similar to ethnography in general, only this technique is sourced from the internet. In netnography, there are several steps that must be taken, namely, planning research, entry (formulation of problem and object of study of social media on the internet, data collection, interpretation of data which includes classification and coding of data, fulfillment of research ethical standards, and presentation of research results (Kozinets, 2002: 64) (Bowler, 2010: 1272) The data collected is based on Instagram accounts in the fields of fashion, cosmetics and tourism that use Islamic attributes. Number of followers and market interest in the products are also considered. The samples are random, considering that social media is not limited to one place, besides, data tracking is also done by looking at the official web of the account in question.

After the data is collected, the next step is to conduct content analysis. Content analysis is a way to interpret a text, symbol, image or other message that is communicated which is usually sourced from the mass media (Martono, 2011: 4). The netnographic results

are in the form of a collection of data from Instagram equipped from the official website of the related account and then viewed the contents, classified, and found patterns formed.

DISCUSSION

Instagram and the Culture Industry

The benefits of social media are so great that it increases the number of smart-phone users in Indonesia. Not only as a medium for self-existence, but also as a promotional vehicle. One of these social media is Instagram. Through the Instagram application, Instagrammers (Instagram users) can upload their collection of photos and videos that can be seen and commented on by netizens. Instagram social media which was introduced in 2010 serves as a mass communication media containing photos or videos accompanied by captions (a brief article accompanying the photo or video) (Boll, 2017: 37). This media has attracted a lot of users as the use of smart-phone increases plus the trend of today's people who tend to like to publish their activities in the form of photos or videos. Users can view posts from following accounts and accounts that are not private, even if they don't follow them. In addition, users can easily search for photos or videos simply by searching for keywords that are affixed with hash-tags, such as #halal #syari #muslim and so on which will automatically be selected from various Instagram accounts.

The rise of Instagram users has an impact on social matters, for example, users competing to have lots of followers so that there are more and more applications or tricks to increase followers' numbers significantly. The reason is, the more followers he is known and become the spotlight of other users. Unrealistically, they ask to be followed back. In addition, there are many celebrities or idol figures in the world of Instagram because their posts are different and attract attention even though they were not public figures before. That way, the next offer popped up like a product endorsement, whether it was advertised in other media or only local products sold in several stores.

Instagram helps the cultural industry market their products. The following Instagram accounts are owned by the cultural industry with different commodities and different sectors. They sell their products through their Instagram accounts. The present study will focus on Instagram accounts that have Islamic nuances in promoting their commodities. Because in the midst of global capitalism, religion also has a tremendous influence in establishing religious symbols as an important part of an everyday practice both in the domestic and public domain, as Ammerman calls it "everyday religion" (Ammerman, 2007: 5)

In the cosmetics industry, we take the @wardahbeauty account as a representation of the cultural industry. In its official website, Wardah is referred to as a prestigious brand for women which supports women to inspire, to make progress and to work. Besides being physically beautiful, they also excel in achievements in various fields so as to inspire the people around them. Some of the celebrities who became Wardah brand ambassador are: Ineke Koeshrawati, Dewi Sandra, Zaskia Sungkar, Dian Pelangi, Ria Miranda, Natasha Rizky all of whom are wearing hijab, while those who are not wearing hijab are Tatjana Saphira and Raline Shah. As of September 2017, the @wardahbeauty Instagram account has 1.1 million followers. Wardah sells beauty products and their jargon is "inspiring beauty with halal products" to obtain halal certificates from MUI.

Besides the cosmetics industry, this study also looked at the developing fashion industry. First is the Instagram account @hijup. 'Hijup' comes from the word 'hijab-up' which looks similar with 'make-up'. It was introduced in 2011 as the first Islamic fashion e-commerce in the world to function as an online mall with more than 50 well-known brands producing several limited edition products and priced at quite expensive prices. Hijup is a distributor of fashion designers in Indonesia to consumers around the world. In addition to selling various kinds of hijab, @hijup also provides bags, shoes, accessories, clothes, scarves, mukena (Indonesian Muslim women prayer cloak), beauty products, and men's clothing.

The Instagram account @hijup has 617 thousand followers who are mostly women. The jargon of hijup is "look good, feel good, do good." Hijup wrestles in the fashion world wrapped in Islamic nuances. This can be seen from the posting of photos and videos uploaded via the @hijup account such as routine recitation by presenting some famous ustadh (Islamic teacher) and speakers, celebratories during Muslim Holy Days, and also Muslim fashion festivals.

Other industries in the fashion sector that promote their commodities through Instagram accounts are @pands_jogja and @pandsmds. Pands is known as a Muslim department store in Indonesia. Pands physical stores only exist in the cities of Semarang and Yogyakarta. However, Pands also sells its products online through its Instagram account @pands_onlinestore. The @pands_jogja account has 2,818 followers. While the @pandsmds account has 4,875 followers. Both have jargon "the world is more beautiful with Muslim clothing". In the posts on their Instagram account, the industry always displays a trendy hijab model. They also attract consumers with various offers, such as giveaway, free umrah, private tutorials on wearing hijab, Pands member promos and shopping vouchers. They also put quotes of the Prophet's hadith in product promotion and held blood donor events. This industry does not use halal labels, although it sells clothes both for adults and children, hajj and umrah equipment and souvenirs, as well as perfume. In addition, seen in their Instagram account posts, Pands often commemorates Islamic Holy Days such as Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Hijri New Year and so on.

In the tourism sector, there are two Instagram accounts being studied. First, the @havehalalwilltravel account has 55.7 thousand followers. The account contains of various information about tourism that is lawful and friendly for Muslims in several countries in the world completed with culinary information. The account jargon is "Inspiring Muslims to see the world" with its industrial base in Singapore. In this account, they portray the consumers as "the modern Muslim traveler." In addition to providing information about culinary, the industry often offers traveling and quiz promos with holiday prizes through their Instagram account.

The @havehalalwilltravel industry was initiated by four young people who joined youth exchange programs in Seoul, South Korea, in 2015. In addition, @havehalalwilltravel has an application that can be accessed via smart-phone to make it easier for consumers to enjoy their trips and vacations. On its official website, @havehalalwilltravel quotes a verse from the Qur'an that encourages its people to travel, namely QS. Al Ankabut (29): 20. Coupled with the commitment of the owner to run the business quoted from their website:

"Actually by doing tourism it will expand our horizons in understanding the world. Therefore, we are working hard to publish the best tourism agents and hope the journey will be rich in experience for all of our Muslim brothers."

The second account is @halaltrip which is a world tourism agent also based in Singapore. their Instagram account has 11.7 thousand followers. The industry jargon is "discover halal food, get travel / holiday ideas, tips and inspiration." The @halaltrip Instagram feed contains a lot of Islamic nuances such as Islamic quotes and motivation. Founded in 2014, @halaltrip is known as a media that introduces the Muslim lifestyle in terms of tourism. In 2015, Halal Trip released an application that can be downloaded on smart-phones to provide more convenience for consumers. The parties working with the industry are quite numerous and prestigious, such as Muslim Travel Warehouse, Bintan Resorts, Tourism Australia, Wonderful Indonesia and so on.

Commodification of Halal Labels

Halal is a term in Islam to define a thing or action that is permitted by Islamic law. Not everyone agrees when the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) issues a halal fatwa even among Muslims themselves. Here MUI as an Islamic religious authority produces fatwas and controls Muslims in terms of consumption. This raises the pros and cons of food producers in particular. One of the reasons for those who disagree is because getting a halal certificate issued by the MUI through LPPOM (Institute for Food, Drug and Cosmetic Studies) costs quite expensive, which is IDR 2.5 million which will be processed in one to three months. It may not be a problem for middle-to-upper traders. However, for small traders who sell street food such as fried foods, ice, and snacks, this is heavy because of their small income. There are procedures for filing halal certificates; checking facilities and raw materials used in producing commodities in an industry.

However, some industries are quite enthusiastic about the regulation of halal certificates from the MUI. They can compete more with industries that do not have halal certificates. There is a shift in the function of halal certification issued by LPPOM. The halal label actually became the best-selling tool for industrial commodities that have it. Basically, the reason for the halal label is to protect consumers in consuming food and the products they use. This is not only beneficial for Muslims, but society in general so that everyone can consume it safely.

Halal is no longer a necessity for producers or consumers, but halal becomes a symbol of the identity of a particular person or group. This fact is strengthened by spirituality reason. The concept of spirituality itself is as important as religiosity. With the help of mass media that advertises very interestingly influences consumers in buying goods and services offered on the pretext that they look more spiritual. Spirituality here is interpreted as appreciation of religion based on one's experience. Whereas religiosity describes institutionalized religion, for example, how a religious follower carries out his religious ritual (McGuire in Turner, 2010: 465).

Commodification of religion is closely related to mass media as a connector between producers and consumers. According to Kitiarsa, the commodification of religion occurs because of the friction between global capitalism and religious beliefs and institutions (Kitiarsa, 2010: 984). He defines the commodification of religion as "A new

multi-faceted and multi-dimensional process that converts religious beliefs or traditions into consumable and marketable goods" (Kitiarsa, 2010: 986). Even so, by looking at Weber's phenomenal thesis, religion actually agrees with capitalism which is reinforced by Protestant ethics at that time. People are eager to find a livelihood that is supported by a strong religious doctrine.

There are several characteristics of the commodification of religion. First, the commodities offer religious attributes. Halal, syar'i and Muslim labels used by the Instagram accounts above are attributes of religions that previously have no relationship at all with economic activities. However, these accounts use it to increase the selling power of the commodity. Second, the motive is to seek the benefit of the cultural industry. According to Miller, the process of consumption is part of modern capitalism whose motives are clearly for profit (Miller, 2004: 33). Third, the interference of religious institutions (Kitiarsa in Atmadja, 2014: 173). Only religious institution (MUI) that issues the certificate of halal. However, not all of the accounts above own and use the halal label.

Commodification is carried out by most industries because they want to increase commodity sales through promotion on social media in the form of text or attributes that it uses. Murlianti analyzes that Natasha Skin Care has succeeded in gaining consumer interest because of labeling its products as healthy, internationally recognized, halal, safe, and so on. In addition, it is supported by a number of interesting models such as Miss Indonesia and Miss Universe among others (Murlianti, 2014: 331). Another industry that is commodifying religion is Zoya. The Zoya brand has succeeded in attracting consumers' interest in buying their products because they have a halal label from MUI since 2016. The sales of their products have increased sharply since the existence of halal labels that they carry (Istiqomah, 2016: 7).

In the tourism sector, Thailand seems to be more enthusiastic than Indonesia. This is proven by increasing the provision of halal facilities for Muslims both in food and hotels. Thailand hopes to become a favorite destination that can be visited by Muslims worldwide. The Thai government in an effort to promote tourism gave the slogan, "Thailand is Muslim friendly". In fact, Thailand provides a place of prayer at its international airport.

Religion as an Agency

Through some of the accounts above, there are things that greatly affect the market in the cultural industry. The symbols used by some of these accounts are halal, syar'i, and Muslim. Tilley defined this as an agency. Agency is defined as the strength or influence that someone receives to do something (Tilley, 2007: 19) (Allerton, 2009: 243). The agency in this case is the motive that moves consumers to buy the commodities offered. For religious reasons, oriented consumers showing their identity as spiritual Muslims will tend to follow them.

In the delivery of an advertisement, there is a process of forming a "signification code" that affects market interest (Baudrillard in Ritzer, 2010: 137). That is, in carrying out consumption activities, consumers equate themselves with the models in the advertisement, while identifying themselves differently from people or even other groups that do not consume these products. (Ritzer, 2010: 138). For example Wardah products with their halal labels plus the appearance of a hijabi model give a more Islamic impression. Consumers will see the model as an ideal Islamic and modern figure to be imitated through her hijab

comes with a plus value in the form of a halal label offered by Wardah. We can see here that the use value of an item or service decreases compared with a symbol value because by consuming certain products, consumers choose it because of consideration of style, prestige or a symbol of mere luxury (Kellner in Ritzer, 2010: 139). From several Instagram accounts above, each product offers Islamic nuances such as halal, syar'i, and Muslim labels. So religion is used as an agency in the cultural industry.

Wardah has a halal brand offered, in contrast to @hijup and @pands which do not have a halal label but give an Islamic impression through jargons and initiated activities. Pands hold a hijab creation routine to attract consumers who follow the trend of hijab styles. Trends are no less important than Islamic nuances because each of these accounts portrays its models as a Muslim woman who is both religious and fashionable. Not much different, @hijup with its Islamic jargon written on the official website:

"They deserve to look attractive with beautiful clothes and follow the trend but still syar'i".

The word syar'i above gives the impression that @hijup consumers will be more likely to have high spirituality than those who do not use it. This will encourage consumers to establish their identity as good Muslims according to religious orders. In the @hijup account you can also find a number of posts containing Islamic activities, such as charity events and Islamic studies that are carried out for free and are open to the public. This fact strongly supports the Islamic image carried by @hijup.

Turning to the tourism sector, @havehalalwilltravel and @halaltrip accounts have similarities in selling their commodities, which in this case are the services of tourism providers. The @halaltrip account on their Instagram shows a fairly strong Islamic attribute such as a photo containing Islamic quotes or motivations. Likewise, the @havehalalwilltravel account that has the jargon "the modern Muslim traveler " quotes a verse from the Qur'an which became the foundation of its industry, QS. Al Ankabut (29) verse 20. In addition, as seen in figure 3 and 4 below, the @halaltrip account uploaded a photo containing an Islamic quote originating from a hadith and the @havehalalwilltravel account posts a photo accompanied by a caption containing the Prophet's hadith coupled with a glimpse of how they are running their business. The impression confirms that the business they have can be used as the right choice for Muslims in choosing tourism agents that are safe, comfortable and modern.



Figure 1. Display of home page of @hijup Instagram account



Figure 2. Display the homepage of @hijup Instagram account



Figure 3. Display of @halaltrip Instagram account

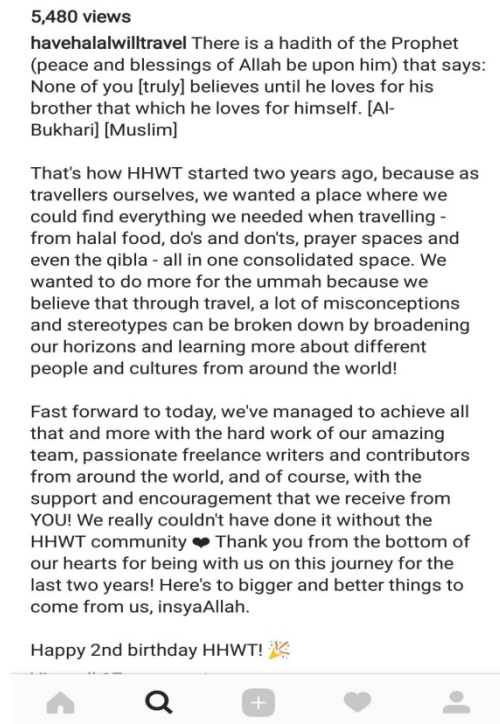


Figure 4. Display of @havehalalwilltravel Instagram account

Commodification Implications of Religion in Pop Culture

Consumers in buying products have various motives. One of them is religious motives. Religion as an agency is very effective in influencing the masses. This can be seen through the market response to the products introduced by some of these Instagram accounts. To strengthen one's spiritual impression, one feels the need to wear and at the same time show the attributes of Islam as a devout Muslim. In the use of hijab, for example, compared to the past, more working women in the public sector wear hijab than those who do not. Even though wearing hijab, their appearance is wrapped in modern fashion so that it adds to the fashionable impression, always up-to-date. The culture industry always creates trends that are in demand by consumers, even though the trend is always spinning. In this case, pop culture is a culture that is in demand by many people. The forms vary, from fashion, to music, to hairstyles.

Pop culture can be regarded as a culture of shock because it is easy to appear and more easily to disappear. Shopping is one form of pop culture that is in great demand in the United Kingdom and the United States (Storey, 1996: 169). It seems that Storey's opinion is correct, but the culture of shopping has flourished everywhere, especially when shopping online is more convenient than ever. Someone who is interested in reading trends will quickly follow suit. For example the hijab model often changes because the producer creates it in such a way as a result of global capitalism. Trends are deliberately formed by producers who compel consumers to follow them. This is increasingly lively with the ease of fast-paced technology through posts on various social media through their models, which are then followed by fans and the general public. Those who do not follow the trend are usually claimed to be a nerd, not fashionable, not cool and so on.

The process of commodification greatly influences markets which increases the consumption level of consumers. As a result, consumers do not just consume products based on their value, but rather the symbolic value in the process is far more important for them, where the prestige and identification of themselves as consumers of prestigious and Islamic products are present. For example, upper middle class Muslims tend to choose products that have brands such as @hijup products because the collection is limited edition and the price of the product is above average. This leads to the formation of a modern society that wants to create an excessive Islamic image, but in reality the impression is far from being shown to the public. If the spiritual measure is only judged by the clothing or attributes used, many paradoxes are found. Today many people are very Islamic in appearance, but it turns out that they are not balanced with good morals so that they harm others, being greedy, embezzle money, commit corruption, love to provoke and so forth. Susanto says that the religious practices of Indonesian people are still trapped in the symbolization of religion, rather than the fundamental substance of the decline of religion itself. (Susanto, 2017: 77)

In the process of consumption, use-values and symbol values are as if fighting. Consumers have a variety of motives in consuming a product; they may prioritize the use-value where the benefits of the product are expected, or tend to prefer symbol values for identifying consumers by consuming these products. This fact shows that a person's lifestyle is constructed by their own motives and environment, including the social media that markets it. The rise of advertising for a product in both the mass media and social media plays a very significant role in the culture of consumption. However, if this is not

accompanied by self-control, then consumers will always be slaves to the never ending capitalism.

CONCLUSION

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that the cultural industry has commodified religion through its Instagram account. The Islamic attributes used include halal labels as in the @wardahbeauty, @havehalalwilltravel, and @halaltrip accounts. While the syar'i label is used by @hijup in promoting its commodities. Muslim label is reflected in the marketing of @pands_jogja, @pandsmds, and @pands_onlinestore products. Religion through these labels has the power as an agency that is very influential on consumers' shopping interests. They no longer consume products or services based on their benefits or needs, but shift to prestige values, the impression of being a modern Muslim, pride in a well-known brand and Islamic label, or affirmation of their social status.

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