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COMMODIFICATION OF RELIGION AND THE REPRESENTATION OF NEW MUSLIM MASCULINITY IN KAHF EVERYDAY BRAND ADVERTISEMENTS

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Abstract

This study examines the commodification of religion and representations of new masculinity in the marketing strategies of Kahf Everyday, a men's grooming brand targeting urban Muslim men in Indonesia. Employing a qualitative approach, the research applies Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to decode Islamic symbols in advertisements and social media content, Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis to explore socio-cultural contexts, and an evaluation of Islamic consumption ethics based on Monzer Kahf's principles. The study analyzes the brand name "Kahf" derived from Surat Al-Kahfi, the da'wah narrative (#PejuangBerKahf), and representations of masculinity through sports, adventure, and self-care. Findings reveal that Kahf integrates piety with a modern lifestyle, reflecting social shifts among millennial Muslim men, but also highlights potential commercial exploitation, such as the use of controversial figures (Ragnar Oratmangoen) and the risk of symbolic consumption (israf). Nevertheless, Kahf contributes positively through social initiatives like mosque construction and the Kahfpreneur program. This study contributes to the discourse on religious commodification, emphasizing the need for a balance between economic profit and spiritual integrity in halal marketing.

Keywords: *Religious Commodification, New Masculinity, Islamic Consumption Ethics, Social Media.*

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, the commodification of religion has become a significant phenomenon in which spiritual values are transformed into market commodities for economic gain. The global halal product market, which covers food, cosmetics, tourism, and Islamic finance, has grown rapidly, with an estimated market value of trillions of US dollars (Bergeaud-Blackler et al., 2015). Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim

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population, exemplifies the commodification of religion through the growing popularity of Islamic lifestyles, including the use of hijabs, halal tourism, and halal-labeled personal care products (Fealy & White, 2008). This phenomenon reflects spiritual needs as well as the dynamics of capitalism, which capitalizes on religious identity to meet consumer demands of the Muslim middle class(Adam, 2019).

In Indonesia, the commodification of religion is often linked to the transformation of consumer culture, in which Islamic symbols are used to reinforce brand image. Halal products, including cosmetics and personal care items, have become tools for constructing a modern Muslim identity that aligns with urban lifestyles (Maulida & Witro, 2022). Millennial Muslim men, in particular, are a significant target market as they adopt an Islamic lifestyle combining piety and modern aesthetics. This is evident in the growing demand for halal-certified men's grooming products, which provide religious guarantees and facilitate the expression of religious identity in public spaces (Adinugraha et al., 2019).

Concurrently, the construction of masculinity in Indonesia is undergoing a significant shift. Traditional masculinity, which emphasizes physical strength and patriarchal dominance, is shifting towards metrosexuality, a concept concerned with appearance and self-care (Nilan et al., 2014). Among millennial Muslim men, globalization, media, and professional needs influence this shift, making a neat appearance and modern lifestyle symbols of social status (Mahardika, 2024). Men's grooming products, such as facial soaps and pomades, have become a means of expressing this new masculinity. Often, these products use an Islamic narrative to attract Muslim consumers (Sabillah, 2021).

In this context, Kahf Everyday has emerged as a leading men's grooming brand in Indonesia. Targeted towards millennial Muslim men, Kahf offers halal-certified products such as face wash, beard serum, and perfume, as well as narratives referencing the Prophet's Sunnah, particularly regarding hair and beard care. Kahf positions itself as a brand that supports the modern Islamic lifestyle by combining metrosexual masculinity with religious values. Using technology like HydroBalance™ and digital marketing on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, Kahf has attracted urban consumers who care about their appearance and piety (Admin, 2023).

A body of previous research on the Kahf Everyday brand has explored various aspects of the brand, albeit with different focuses. For instance, Kurniastuti (2022) investigated the purchase intention of Kahf products based on consumer trust factors. In contrast, Alfian et al., (2024) examined brand awareness through the implementation of digital campaigns. Fadjarina's (2023) examination of Kahf's marketing communication strategy underscores the employment of Islamic narratives in advertisements. Raushanfikr et al., (2024) established a correlation between Kahf and religious expression;

DOI: https://doi.org/10.32332/ x296mm98

however, they did not delve into the intricacies of the commodification of religion. However, no study has specifically integrated the issues of religious commodification and representations of masculinity in the context of Kahf, creating a significant research gap.

The present study endeavors to address this lacuna by conducting an analysis of how Kahf Everyday commodifies Islam and represents new masculinities in its marketing. Contrary to the extant literature, which has predominantly centered on marketing aspects or consumer intentions, this study provides a critical perspective on the use of Islamic symbols and the construction of gender in consumer culture. The present study will adopt a discourse analysis approach to explore Kahf's advertisements. This approach will be used to understand how religion and masculinity are packaged as commercial values, as well as their implications for urban Muslim male identity.

The significance of comprehending the commodification of religion and gender within the context of consumer culture cannot be overstated. In a global context, halal markets frequently employ religious symbols to generate economic profit, which can obfuscate spiritual values (Turner, 2010). In Indonesia, this phenomenon impacts the self-perception of millennial Muslim men, where piety becomes intertwined with a commercialized lifestyle (Rozaki, 2013). This prompts inquiries into the ethical implications of faith-based marketing, particularly whether it aligns with Islamic consumption principles or merely exploits religion for commercial gain.

The commodification of religion and gender in Kahf Everyday marketing is indicative of broader social changes among Indonesian Muslim men. Kahf's advertisements have been shown to play a dual role in the promotion of products and the shaping of perceptions regarding the contemporary definition of what it means to be an urban Muslim man. Kahf's artistic approach entails the integration of Islamic narratives and metrosexual aesthetics, culminating in the creation of a novel representation of masculinity. This representation defies conventional norms while maintaining a strong connection to religious identity. However, this approach is not without its ethical implications, particularly with regard to the authenticity of Islamic values in marketing strategies.

In order to analyze this phenomenon, this study adopts Karl Marx's theory of commodification, which Vincent Mosco extends to the realm of culture and religion, showing how spiritual symbols are reduced to market commodities (Marx, 2024; Mosco, 2009). Vincent J. Miller, Jeremy Carrette, and Richard King have offered a critique of the exploitation of religion in consumer culture, a concept that is pertinent to an understanding of Kahf's marketing strategy (Carrette & King, 2004; Miller, 2004). In Indonesia, the "halal lifestyle" trend further reinforces this commodification, as evidenced

DOI: https://doi.org/10.32332/x296mm98

by the use of Islamic symbols by brands such as Kahf to appeal to millennial Muslim consumers (Maulida & Witro, 2022). The concept of new masculinities is analyzed through the lenses of David and Brannon, as well as John Beynon, who emphasize the transition from conventional masculinity to metrosexuality. This shift is situated within the context of Islamic values, particularly the notion of cleanliness as a form of worship (Beynon, 2001; David & Brannon, 1977). Monzer Kahf's Islamic consumption ethic, which emphasizes transparency and Sharia conformity, was used to evaluate Kahf's strategy. The literature points out the potential exploitation of religious symbols (Kahf, 1996). This analysis is supported by Roland Barthes' semiotics for visual signs, Norman Fairclough's critical discourse for social context, and Kahf's consumerism for Islamic ethics (Barthes, 1977; Fairclough, 1992).

In light of the aforementioned discussion, the present research is proposed to address the following inquiries: (1) How does Kahf Everyday use Islamic symbols to commodify religion in the marketing of men's grooming products? (2) How does the representation of new masculinity in Kahf's advertisements reflect social change among Indonesian Muslim men? (3) Is Kahf's marketing strategy in accordance with Islamic consumption ethics, or does it only utilize religion as a commercial value?

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach, emphasizing semiotics and discourse analysis to examine how Kahf Everyday commodifies religion and represents a new masculinity in its marketing. This approach was selected because it facilitates an exhaustive examination of the symbolic meanings and social context present in advertisements and brand content. This is pertinent to the comprehension of the phenomenon of consumer culture among millennial Muslim men. The research was conducted from February to April of 2025, and involved the collection and analysis of data from various sources related to Kahf's marketing strategy.

The research data sources consist of two types: primary and secondary. The primary data set encompasses Kahf's promotional content on the YouTube platform, in addition to the visual narratives and marketing texts displayed on Kahf's official Instagram account. Furthermore, an analysis of the packaging designs for Kahf's products, including face wash, beard serum, and perfume, was conducted to examine the utilization of Islamic symbols and the representation of masculinity aesthetics. Secondary data includes academic literature on the commodification of religion and masculinity, media articles on halal product trends, and market reports describing the development of Islamic lifestyles in Indonesia. This amalgamation of sources offers a comprehensive foundation for analyzing Kahf's strategy within the context of consumer culture.

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The data collection process involved two primary techniques. First, digital observation was used to identify and archive Kahf's advertisements on YouTube and Instagram content. The focus of this analysis was on the visual elements, narratives, and marketing messages of the advertisements. Secondly, a meticulous documentation process was implemented to systematically collect a comprehensive array of texts, images, and narratives from various facets of Kahf's product packaging. This included halal labels, sunnah references, and aesthetic designs. This process ensures that the data collected reflects a holistic representation of the brand, from digital media to physical products, thus supporting an in-depth analysis of the commodification of religion and masculinity.

The analysis was conducted using three complementary approaches. A semiotic analysis, grounded in Roland Barthes' theory, was employed to identify signs in Kahf's advertisements and packaging. This analysis encompassed denotative (literal), connotative (cultural), and mythical (ideological narrative) meanings that shape consumer perceptions (Barthes, 1977). Secondly, Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis model is applied to examine three dimensions: text (advertising content), discursive practices (message production and distribution), and socio-cultural practices (cultural context and power) that frame Kahf's marketing strategy (Fairclough, 1992). Thirdly, an evaluation of Islamic consumption ethics is conducted based on Monzer Kahf's principles, which emphasize transparency, fairness, and Shari'ah conformity. This evaluation is used to compare Kahf's strategy with Islamic consumption values, assessing whether the brand supports spiritual essence or merely exploits religion for commercial gain (Kahf, 1996). This approach enables a holistic analysis of the symbols, narratives, and ethical implications in Kahf's marketing.

The Utilization of Islamic Symbols in Kahf's Marketing Strategies for Daily Applications

a. The Naming of the Kahf Brand Comes from the Name of the Qur'an Chapter al Kahfi

The logo is an integral component of a brand's identity, serving as a "face" that facilitates consumer recognition and memory. Airey's assertion that a brand's logo should be designed with simplicity in mind is a crucial aspect of brand identity, as it facilitates easier recognition by consumers. "The simplest solution is often the most effective. The underlying rationale for this phenomenon warrants further examination. As Airey (2014) asserts, a basic logo can satisfy the majority of the criteria associated with iconic design. In this instance, the Kahf Everyday logo, featuring its minimalist "Kahf" text in white against a green background, exemplifies a sophisticated design that is readily identifiable while bearing a profound symbolic significance.

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Figure 1. Kahf Logo

Applying Roland Barthes's semiotics, Kahf's logo can be analyzed through three levels of meaning: denotative, connotative, and myth (Barthes, 1977). At the denotative level, the logo features simple text with a modern sans-serif font, white color on a dark green background, giving a clean and professional impression. On a connotative level, the dark green color is associated with Islam, peace, and purity, while the modern font reflects an urban aesthetic that is likely to resonate with younger demographics. On a mythical level, the naming "Kahf," which refers to Surat Al-Kahf, constructs an ideology of piety and spiritual protection. This ideology resonates with the tradition of Friday recitation of the letter in the hijra community in Indonesia, which is dominated by salafi, tarbiyah, and Jamaah Tabligh groups (Dewi, 2020; Han, 2019). Aldian R. Alfaridz of Kahf Public Relations further expounded on this philosophy during the Integrated Career Days April 2024 event, held on April 19-20, 2024 at Sasana Budaya Ganesa (Sabuga) ITB. In his presentation, Alfaridz elucidated that Kahf's establishment was a response to the growing demand for male-specific body care products. The company's name is derived from Surah Al-Kahf, a chapter of the Quran that contains a profound philosophical underpinning central to the narrative. Alfaridz also delineated a branding strategy targeting urban Muslim consumers (Hafizh, 2024).

The practice of reciting Surat Al-Kahf holds significant importance within the hijra community, which places a high value on the purity of Islamic teachings. The Amani Shalihatunnisa Community (AMSHAH) organizes "Al-Kahfi Time" on a weekly basis, constituting a recurring educational endeavor aimed at fostering spiritual devotion and fortifying communal bonds. This initiative encompasses a transition in members' behaviors, steering them away from detrimental actions and toward more beneficial practices, such as regular engagement with the Qur'an (Dini & Mariyam, 2022). A similar approach is adopted by Komunitas Yuk Ngaji Solo, which organizes "Jum'at Al-Kahf" every Friday as a daily program, thereby establishing this activity as a fixed component

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in the community's schedule. This contributes to the reinforcement of their commitment to the tenets of Islam (Raqib et al., 2022).

In order to comprehend the significance of the term "Kahf," critical discourse analysis was employed to examine a lecture delivered by Ustaz Khalid Basalamah, a Salafi preacher. In this lecture, Basalamah expounded on the virtue of reciting Surat Al-Kahf on Friday night. In his presentation, he asserted the following: "If Al-Kahf is clear that there is an order... if we end up choosing Yasin instead of Surat Al-Kahf, it means we are leaving something more appropriate... choosing it on Friday night needs an argument that explains." (Lentera Islam, 2016b) As demonstrated in the following video, the speaker places significant emphasis on the imperative of adhering to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, refraining from the incorporation of traditions lacking substantiation. This adherence is illustrated by the recommendation to recite Surat Yasin every Friday evening and to prioritize Surat Al-Kahf, a practice that is corroborated by the hadith. This narrative underscores the symbolic significance of naming Kahf, aligning with the tenets espoused by the hijra community.

The lectures delivered by Ustaz Khalid Basalamah reflect the Salafi perspective, which is one of the foundational tenets of the hijrah community in Indonesia. This community also encompasses tarbiyah and Jamaah Tabligh. The brand's naming of "Kahf" is not merely an aesthetic choice, but rather a deliberate marketing strategy aimed at fostering an emotional connection with consumers who engage in the tradition of reading Surah Al-Kahf on a weekly basis. Aldian R. Alfaridz's articulation of the profound philosophical underpinnings that inform the brand's nomenclature serves to fortify Kahf's standing as a entity that offers more than mere products; it is an entity that is deeply anchored in religious values. This distinguishes Kahf from other brands, making it particularly appealing to consumers who seek Islamic authenticity in a contemporary lifestyle.

The brand's naming, inspired by Surat Al-Kahf, reflects its target market, which is young urban Muslims dominated by the hijra community. This group, which is active in salafi, tarbiyah, or Jamaah Tabligh, prioritizes piety as an identity. However, its members live in a modern urban context. As Dewi (2020) and Akmaliah (2020) have demonstrated, Kahf's employment of symbols, including names that allude to sacred letters and philosophies articulated by Aldian, has effectively garnered the attention of this demographic. This group exhibits a high degree of receptivity to religious narratives that are deemed authentic and pertinent to their way of life.

The designation "Kahf Everyday," accompanied by the unembellished logo design and philosophy articulated by Aldian R. Alfaridz, functions not solely as a brand identity, but also as a spiritual and cultural symbol that resonates with the hijrah community. This

DOI: https://doi.org/10.32332/ x296mm98

strategy enables Kahf to establish a robust connection with the young demographic of urban Muslims, who incorporate religious practices such as the recitation of Surah Al-Kahf into the fabric of their identity. Simultaneously, it serves to fortify the brand's standing within the halal product market sector.

b. Brand Ambassadors from Hijrah Celebrities

Brand ambassadors play a crucial role in building a brand's identity, as outlined by Jean-Noël Kapferer, who emphasizes the importance of these figures in marketing strategies. According to Kapferer, brand ambassadors fulfill a crucial role in fostering consumer trust by leveraging their influence and credibility. They achieve this by leveraging their extensive social media reach to increase brand awareness, by creating emotional engagement through the conveyance of brand stories and values, by driving sales through trusted recommendations, and by enhancing brand image through positive testimonials (Kapferer, 2008). For halal brands such as Kahf Everyday, the strategic deployment of brand ambassadors who are in alignment with Islamic values is imperative to appeal to young, urban Muslims seeking authenticity in their lifestyles.

Kahf utilizes a number of personalities as brand ambassadors, including Dimas Seto, Ricky Harun, Teuku Wisnu, and Alfie Afandy of Bikers Dakwah. Dimas Seto, Ricky Harun, and Teuku Wisnu are hijrah celebrities who are widely recognized for their spiritual transformation and are active in the da'wah movement among urban Muslim youth, often involved in Kajian Musyawarah and other religious activities. Alfie Afandy, although not a celebrity, represents the da'wah community with significant influence through Bikers Dakwah, extending Kahf's reach to a more diverse audience. This choice reflects Kahf's strategy to associate the brand with respected figures within the hijrah community, reinforcing a narrative of authentic piety.

These hijrah celebrities play a strategic role in Kahf's marketing. Dimas Seto, Ricky Harun, and Teuku Wisnu build consumer trust by sharing their personal hijrah journeys, and Alfie Afandi lends credibility through his active dawah lifestyle. Through social media posts that reach thousands of followers, they raise brand awareness and create emotional engagement by sharing how Kahf products support their Islamic lifestyle. For example, they demonstrate self-care practices in line with the Sunnah. They also drive sales by recommending products such as face wash and beard serum while enhancing Kahf's brand image as a symbol of modern, trusted Islamic masculinity. A study by Prihastuti and KN, (2024) confirmed that Dimas Seto's presence as a brand ambassador significantly influences consumer loyalty to Kahf products, contributing 61.6% to purchasing decisions. This demonstrates the power of hijrah figures in influencing urban Muslim consumer behavior.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.32332/ x296mm98



Figure 2. Ricky Harun's Instagram Post Using Kahf Products

Evidence of this strategy can be seen in the photos they share on Instagram. The first photo shows Ricky Harun using Kahf products in front of the Grand Mosque, which has strong symbolic meaning. Using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, the image denotatively shows Ricky Harun using Kahf products in a sacred location, reflecting real use. Connotatively, the Grand Mosque symbolizes holiness and piety, and Kahf products are associated with Islamic treatments, establishing a spiritual connection. At the mythic level, the photo suggests that Kahf is part of a sharia-based lifestyle, which attracts consumers who admire Ricky's hijrah journey. The second photo shows Teuku Wisnu at a Kahf event with the words "Ready to Take the First Step?" on the wall. Denotatively, it presents Teuku in the context of a branding event. Connotatively, the writing refers to spiritual transformation. The myth emphasizes Kahf as a companion for the hijrah journey, strengthening the brand's image as a symbol of positive change.

However, not all of Kahf's brand ambassadors are hijrah celebrities. Some were chosen to diversify the audience. The focus on Dimas Seto, Ricky Harun, Teuku Wisnu, and Alfie Afandi demonstrates Kahf's strategy of targeting the hijrah community, particularly those associated with Kajian Musyawarah. Kajian Musyawarah is renowned for its moderate yet robust da'wah approach. While some of these celebrities do not have hijrah backgrounds, Kahf's choice of ambassadors still reflects its efforts to establish Islamic authenticity while opening up opportunities to reach a wider range of urban Muslim consumers, including those not fully involved in the hijrah movement.

These hijrah celebrities strengthen Kahf's position as an Islamic brand and reflect the dynamics of the commodification of Islam in consumer culture. Kahf builds a narrative of piety that resonates with the hijrah community by leveraging the influence of figures such as Dimas Seto, Ricky Harun, and Teuku Wisnu. This narrative is supported by photos on social media that reinforce the spiritual message. According to Prihastuti and

DOI: https://doi.org/10.32332/ x296mm98

KN's research, Dimas Seto's significant contribution confirms that the influence of hijrah brand ambassadors is not only symbolic but also has a real impact on consumer loyalty. A figure of 61.6% indicates the potential commercialization of religious values (Prihastuti & Kn, 2024).

c. Islamic Narratives in Kahf's Campaigns

Social media campaigns play a pivotal role in a brand's marketing strategy, as elucidated by Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, who emphasize that social media enables direct and timely engagement with consumers at low cost and high efficiency compared to traditional communication tools. Social media also fosters closer customer relationships through active interaction, enhancing loyalty and engagement while providing opportunities for brand community building and market research through netnography (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For Kahf Everyday, social media serves as an effective platform to reach urban Muslim youth with Islamic narratives that resonate with their religious values.

Kahf has launched several social media campaigns imbued with Islamic values, reflecting the brand's commitment to integrating piety into a modern lifestyle. The #JalanYangKupilih campaign in 2020 focused on men's personal journeys toward self-improvement, the #LangkahBerdampak Kahforward campaign in 2024 encouraged youth to create positive impact, and the #PejuangBerKahf campaign during Ramadan 2025 framed the holy month as a moment for spiritual reflection and struggle. These campaigns not only promote products but also construct narratives aligned with the religious identity of Kahf's target market.

The #JalanYangKupilih campaign of 2020 emphasized personal journeys toward self-betterment, focusing on self-care that transcends physical appearance to encompass confidence, balance, and life purpose. This narrative reflects the da'wah concept of promoting *taqwa* (piety) and positive societal contributions, an Islamic value emphasizing self-improvement and social good. Through this approach, Kahf not only markets its products but also invites consumers to lead more meaningful lives in accordance with Islamic teachings.

In 2024, the #LangkahBerdampak Kahforward campaign urged young people to take an active role in creating innovative and positive solutions for Indonesia and the world. This theme highlights the importance of tangible actions that benefit communities and the environment, aligning with the da'wah principle of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*—enjoining good and forbidding evil. This narrative resonates with urban Muslim youth who seek to blend Islamic zeal with modern contributions, positioning Kahf as a brand that supports their aspirations.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.32332/ x296mm98

The #PejuangBerKahf campaign, launched during Ramadan 2025 (approximately March 2025), encouraged individuals to view the holy month as a time for self-reflection, controlling desires, and becoming their best selves. This narrative reflects the da'wah concept of jihad al-nafs—the struggle against ego and temptation—central to Ramadan worship. By focusing on spiritual struggle, the campaign aligns with religious values cherished by the Muslim community, reinforcing Kahf's position as a brand that supports consumers' spiritual journeys.

The Islamic narratives in Kahf's campaigns reflect da'wah elements relevant to their target audience of urban Muslim youth. By integrating concepts of taqwa, amar ma'ruf, and jihad al-nafs, Kahf constructs narratives that encourage consumers to live more meaningfully in line with Islamic teachings while promoting its products. However, this approach also prompts reflection on the commodification of Islam, raising questions about whether these campaigns genuinely reflect authentic values or merely serve as a market strategy to attract consumers.

Evidence of these campaigns is evident in social media posts, such as an Instagram carousel for #PejuangBerKahf, detailing global activities with Indonesian students abroad. In Hungary, in collaboration with PCIM Hungary, Kahf organized Online Ramadan Study Sessions on February 23, March 8, 9, 15, and 22, 2025, alongside activities like Ramadan for Kids, communal iftar, and congregational Tarawih prayers at the Indonesian Embassy in Budapest on March 20, plus Qur'an classes for children on March 2, 9, 16, and 23. In Turkey, with PPI Turkey, Kahf held MHQ & MTQ competitions and a Grand Iftar Study Session from March 7–23; in Pakistan, with PPMI Pakistan, Islamic competitions from March 7–22, Ifthar on the Road on March 8, 16, and 24, and a Nuzulul Qur'an event on March 22. In the UK, PPI Warwick and PPI Manchester hosted Iftar Gatherings on March 24 and 11, respectively, while in Scotland, PPI Glasgow and PPI Edinburgh held Iftar Gatherings on March 13 and 14. In Jordan, HPMI Jordan organized grocery donations, iftar, and trauma healing for refugees and cancer patients on March 13, 15, and 16. In Austria, PPI Austria conducted Kultum competition socialization and selection from March 15–23, a communal iftar on March 25, and Itikaf and Sahur gatherings on March 26. In Morocco, PPI Morocco held MHQ and Arabic calligraphy competitions and a scholarly study session on March 22. The post's caption reads, "The spirit of Pejuang BerKahf knows no boundaries. Together with Indonesian students worldwide, we build faith, strength, and purpose in every step. No matter the distance, we stay strong and stand as one. #PejuangBerKahf," emphasizing a global spirit aligned with Kahf's da'wah narrative.

As Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) note, these campaigns leverage social media to enhance consumer engagement and build a robust brand community among urban

DOI: https://doi.org/10.32332/ x296mm98

Muslims. The global #PejuangBerKahf activities, from study sessions to iftar events, reflect Ramadan values that strengthen community bonds while promoting Kahf as a brand supporting an Islamic lifestyle. However, the use of Islamic narratives also intensifies questions about the commodification of religion, which warrants further analysis in the context of masculinity representation and Islamic consumption ethics in subsequent sections.

Representation of New Masculinity in Kahf's Advertisements and Reflections on Social Change Among Indonesian Muslim Men

The concept of masculinity in Indonesia has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades, particularly among urban Muslim men, shifting from traditional stereotypes emphasizing physical strength and dominance toward a more modern definition that encompasses self-care, social engagement, and Islamic identity. According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity, once synonymous with aggressive and authoritarian traits, is increasingly giving way to a more inclusive masculinity, where men are accepted for expressing themselves through healthy lifestyles, attention to appearance, and socially responsible roles (Connell, 2020). This shift reflects broader social changes in Indonesia, where globalization, digitalization, and the hijrah movement have shaped the identity of urban Muslim men, blending Islamic values with modern trends such as sports, adventure, and self-care.

In this context, Kahf Everyday's advertisements serve as a pertinent medium for exploring how representations of new masculinity reflect social changes among Indonesian Muslim men. Through symbols such as bearded men, endorsements of sports like soccer, basketball, and running, and the promotion of healthy lifestyles via content creators, Kahf's advertisements offer a multidimensional portrayal of masculinity. This section will analyze these elements to understand how Kahf represents a new masculinity aligned with the current social dynamics of Indonesian Muslim men.

a. Bearded Men with Islamic Values (Symbol of Sunnah)

The representation of bearded men in Kahf's advertisements serves as a central element reflecting Islamic masculinity while challenging traditional stereotypes that often focus solely on physical strength and dominance. In Muslim culture, the beard is regarded as a symbol of the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), embodying piety and a strong religious identity. Kahf leverages this symbol by integrating it into a narrative of modern grooming, such as the use of beard serum and beard oil, demonstrating that piety can align with an urban lifestyle that prioritizes appearance. This reflects broader social changes among Indonesian Muslim men, who are increasingly open to self-care without compromising Islamic values.

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The YouTube advertisement titled Kahf Beard Care - #TumBuhBersamaKahf provides a concrete example of this representation. Employing Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, the advertisement can be analyzed through three levels of meaning. At the denotative level, the video features a bearded man in a simple yet modern setting, reflecting an urban lifestyle. At the connotative level, the beard symbolizes Islamic piety, while the use of beard serum signifies attention to aesthetics, blending traditional values with modernity. At the mythical level, the advertisement constructs a narrative that modern Islamic masculinity is about growth—both physical (the beard) and spiritual—aligned with the Sunnah and self-care as a form of responsibility toward the body.

The narrative in the advertisement's background audio reinforces this message: "Growth is a home for process, a space for failure to embrace the opportunity to evolve through change. It's not just about the substance; it's about taking steps one by one. Before growing, cleanse yourself and fuel with nourishing energy as ammunition. Embrace and live the process with heart." Discourse analysis of this narrative reveals that "growth" refers not only to the physical growth of the beard but also to broader personal development, encompassing emotional maturity, spirituality, and social responsibility. Terms like "cleanse yourself" and "nourishing energy" point to self-care as a foundational step toward holistic growth, reflecting a new masculinity that is process-oriented rather than solely outcome-focused.

The advertisement also includes an authentic moment when a phone notification interrupts, followed by the dialogue, "Cut… silence your phone!" The bearded talent then opens his phone and says, "Someone's asking what the difference is between Kahf beard oil and Kahf beard serum." This dialogue, concluding with a product explanation and the quote, "Growth isn't always easy, but it's necessary. If you need to grow," underscores that growth requires effort, both in grooming the beard and in personal development. The concept of "growth" transcends the physical, encompassing spiritual growth (toward piety), emotional growth (accepting failure as part of the process), and social growth (becoming a more responsible individual), all of which resonate with the identity of modern Muslim men.

The beard as a symbol of Sunnah is deeply rooted in Muslim societal traditions, as articulated by Ustaz Khalid Basalamah, a prominent Salafi preacher, in one of his lectures. He stated, "The ruling on maintaining a beard, according to the majority of scholars, leans toward obligation. It is obligatory for Muslim men, to the extent that Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) said the fundamental difference between men and women lies in the beard… So, brothers, maintain your beards… trim your mustaches and keep your beards" (Lentera Islam, 2016a). This narrative emphasizes that the beard is not merely aesthetic but a symbol of Islamic masculine identity, distinguishing men from women

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and reflecting adherence to the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In the context of Kahf's advertisements, this representation is reinforced by showcasing bearded men grooming with Kahf products, positioning piety as an integral component of modern masculinity.

The broader social context also supports the emergence of the beard as a prominent Islamic identity marker. Noorhaidi Hasan notes that since the late 1990s, "Islamic symbols have become more prominent, giving rise to identity politics… the most striking signs include the emergence of young men wearing jalabiyyah, imamah, isbal, and lihyah (long beards)"(Hasan, 2008, pp. 31–32). This phenomenon highlights the beard as part of a Muslim identity movement, particularly among youth, which Kahf extends into a narrative of urban masculinity that retains Islamic values while embracing modern trends like self-care.

The representation of bearded men in Kahf's advertisements challenges traditional notions of masculinity that often dismiss self-care as "unmasculine." By featuring bearded men using beard serum and beard oil, Kahf demonstrates that piety and self-care can coexist, reflecting social changes among Indonesian Muslim men who are now more open to aesthetics without sacrificing their religious identity. The advertisement also illustrates that modern masculinity is not solely about physical strength but encompasses holistic growth across spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions.

Advertisements like Kahf Beard Care - #TumBuhBersamaKahf represent a new masculinity that integrates Sunnah values with a modern lifestyle, mirroring the social dynamics of urban Muslim men in Indonesia. The "growth" narrative not only refers to the beard but also to the journey toward piety and maturity, aligning with Islamic teachings emphasized by figures like Ustaz Khalid Basalamah and the identity phenomena described by Noorhaidi Hasan. This representation reflects how Indonesian Muslim men are embracing their identity in a more inclusive and contemporary manner.

b. Engagement in Sports Activities

Kahf demonstrates strong support for sports through various initiatives engaging young Indonesian Muslim men. In soccer, Kahf promotes Rizki Ridho through the content "Fly Higher, Garuda," showcasing nationalism and pride in the Indonesian national team, alongside Ragnar Oratmangoen, a naturalized player now bolstering the Garuda squad. In basketball, Kahf serves as an official sponsor of the Indonesian Basketball League (IBL), with a spotlight on the IBL All Stars 2025 event at Britama Arena on May 3, 2025, inviting fans to experience an exclusive event. For running, Kahf organized the Run & Brotherhood Connect Running Training Camp at Gelora Bung Karno (GBK) on January 10–11, 2025, bringing together a community of Muslim men to

DOI: https://doi.org/10.32332/ x296mm98

embrace a healthy lifestyle. Additionally, numerous other activities reflect Kahf's commitment to supporting sports-related endeavors, underscoring its dedication to integrating sports into a modern masculine identity.

Applying Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to these contents reveals profound layers of meaning. At the denotative level, images of Rizki Ridho in the national team jersey with the message "Fly Higher, Garuda" depict athleticism and national pride, while the Run & Brotherhood content shows groups of men in athletic attire. At the connotative level, sports symbolize physical strength and health, intertwined with Muslim identity through the concept of brotherhood. At the mythical level, these advertisements construct a narrative of new masculinity where Muslim men are not only physically strong but also prioritize health and solidarity, aligning with the growing trend among Indonesian Muslim youth who embrace sports and fitness as part of an Islamic lifestyle.

The trend of sports participation among Indonesian Muslim youth is burgeoning, driven by heightened awareness of health and a desire to embody religious identity. Kahf's content, such as Run & Brotherhood, appeals to young people by combining physical activities like running with Islamic values of brotherhood, reflecting a new masculinity that is active, healthy, and socially responsible. The rising popularity of marathons and community sports among urban Muslims indicates that sports are no longer solely about individual achievement but also about building community and maintaining life balance in accordance with Islamic teachings, such as preserving the body as a trust from Allah.

The selection of Ragnar Oratmangoen, a naturalized national team player who is not predominantly Muslim, initially appears to highlight local Muslim identity through his participation in a predominantly Indonesian team. Kahf's content featuring Ragnar alongside Rizki Ridho reinforces the narrative that Muslim masculinity can shine on an international stage, inspiring young Muslims to take pride in their identity. However, Ragnar's naturalized status raises questions about whether his inclusion is based on his Muslim identity or merely capitalizes on the popularity of naturalized players currently capturing public attention in Indonesia.

Criticism of the Indonesian Football Association's (PSSI) large-scale naturalization policy is a significant point of discussion in this context. Some football pundits, as frequently highlighted in media discussions, argue that this approach prioritizes short-term results—such as qualifying for the 2026 World Cup—over grassroots development, coaching, and quality competitions to nurture exceptional national team players (Alam & Gono, 2024). This approach contrasts with the image Kahf builds through campaigns like "TumBuhBersamaKahf," which emphasize the importance of process, patience, and gradual growth—values that should also be reflected in national football development.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.32332/ x296mm98

This contradiction prompts critical reflection: Did Kahf choose Ragnar Oratmangoen because he is a Muslim who can strengthen the narrative of Islamic masculinity, or due to his popularity amid the naturalization wave? If the former, Kahf risks entanglement in identity politics; if the latter, its strategy could be seen as exploiting a fleeting trend rather than fostering an authentic identity aligned with the process-oriented values it promotes, which is ironic given its focus on organic growth and piety.

Nevertheless, Kahf's engagement in sports successfully promotes a healthy lifestyle that resonates with Muslim youth. Support for Rizki Ridho, the IBL All Stars 2025, and Run & Brotherhood reflects a new masculinity that integrates physical strength, community solidarity, and Islamic identity, mirroring social changes among Indonesian Muslim men who are increasingly conscious of health and cultural pride.

c. Outdoor Activities and Adventure

Outdoor activities have emerged as an increasingly popular trend among Indonesian youth, largely influenced by the media's role in shaping interests and lifestyles. This phenomenon reflects a shift toward activities that blend adventure with social connectivity, driven by exposure through digital platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and films that inspire exploration. This trend illustrates how young people, including urban Muslim men, now seek challenging yet meaningful experiences, positioning outdoor activities as a reflection of their modern identity.

A key catalyst for the surge in interest in outdoor activities is the mountaineering phenomenon sparked by the 2012 film 5cm, set on Mount Semeru in Malang, East Java. The film, which portrays the physical and emotional journey of a group of young people, has inspired many, particularly youth, to take up hiking as a hobby (Andini, 2022). Since its release, hiking has become a symbol of adventure that transcends physical challenges, embodying camaraderie and self-reflection, appealing to young Muslims who seek to integrate spiritual values into their activities.

Kahf's Instagram advertisement featuring skydiving at Skydive Perris, California, exemplifies how the brand capitalizes on this trend. The advertisement showcases a bold and active talent parachuting from an airplane while using Kahf sunscreen, with a caption emphasizing skin protection under direct sunlight. The image of the talent, wearing a helmet emblazoned with "Kahf" against a vast blue sky, evokes the thrill of extreme adventure while highlighting self-care as an integral part of an active lifestyle, resonating with young men who admire challenges.

The trend of outdoor activities is closely tied to the evolving landscape of da'wah among Muslim youth, who now adopt innovative approaches through movements like Gerakan Pemuda Hijrah (Shift). According to Muhamad Ibtissam Han, Shift combines da'wah with outdoor activities through programs like Shit Ulin—where "ulin" means

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"play" in Sundanese—encompassing cycling, skateboarding, surfing, and camping (Han, 2019). This approach demonstrates that da'wah is no longer confined to formal sermons but is also expressed through adventurous activities that foster community bonds and piety, aligning with Islamic values that emphasize health and togetherness.

Within the context of new masculinity, outdoor activities like skydiving promoted by Kahf reflect Muslim men who are resilient yet attentive to self-care. The advertisement highlights a daring and adventurous side, with the talent conquering heights while protecting their skin with sunscreen, challenging traditional masculinity stereotypes that prioritize physical strength without regard for aesthetics. This reflects social changes among young Muslim men, who now integrate resilience with health and appearance consciousness as part of their Islamic identity.

Further analysis reveals that Kahf's advertisement not only leverages the adventure trend but also integrates da'wah values through the concepts of health and community. The use of sunscreen in the skydiving context can be seen as a form of self-care aligned with Islamic teachings on preserving the body, while the extreme activity reflects the adventurous spirit embraced by movements like Shift. This reinforces a narrative of new masculinity that is not only physically robust but also prudent in self-care and community engagement.

This trend is further supported by the growing interest among Muslim youth in following outdoor communities that combine enjoyment with spiritual values, as evidenced by the popularity of Shift's activities. By marketing sunscreen in a skydiving advertisement, Kahf effectively targets active Muslim men, offering products that support an adventurous lifestyle while upholding piety — a combination increasingly relevant in the digital era, where social media amplifies such trends.

d. Healthy Lifestyle and Self-Care

The trend of a healthy lifestyle among young Indonesian Muslims reflects a fusion of Islamic values and modernity, now an integral part of their identity. Young Muslims are no longer solely focused on consuming halal food and beverages but are expanding the syar'i lifestyle to encompass health and sports, with growing demand for halal products like cosmetics and supplements due to increased awareness of sharia-compliant ingredients (Adinugraha et al., 2019). Activities such as gym workouts and halal tourism offering sharia-compliant facilities have also gained popularity, demonstrating how piety is manifested in a modern, healthy lifestyle.

Symbolic piety is a hallmark of young Muslims, evident in syar'i attire, participation in virtual Islamic study sessions, and philanthropy through digital platforms like infaq and sadaqah. Social media plays a significant role in promoting "dakwahtainment,"

DOI: https://doi.org/10.32332/ x296mm98

where da'wah is blended with entertainment through content such as syar'i lifestyle vlogs, which often emphasize ritualistic aspects like prayer and outward appearance rather than substantive piety focused on deep ethical and moral values (Darojatun & Alawiyah, 2021).

The trend of a healthy lifestyle aligned with religious values is further evidenced by the rising interest among young Muslims in Islamic health practices. Social media, particularly Instagram, serves as a space for negotiating identity, where they showcase healthy practices encompassing both physical and religious dimensions, supported by influencers promoting balanced diets, exercise, and cleanliness habits in line with the Sunnah of the Prophet (Hayat, 2023). A healthy lifestyle is viewed as an expression of piety, such as preserving the body as a trust from Allah, reinforced through interactions in virtual communities that provide social validation and inspiration.

Kahf supports this trend by featuring content creator Farhan Bashel, known for discussing fashion, grooming, and men's health on his digital platforms. Farhan frequently shares tips on self-care, such as choosing appropriate clothing, men's grooming routines, and the importance of maintaining physical health through a balanced lifestyle. His presence in Kahf's content underscores that self-care is now part of modern masculinity, where urban Muslim men are no longer hesitant to prioritize appearance and health, reflecting a more inclusive social shift in the concept of masculinity.

A semiotic analysis using Roland Barthes' framework on Kahf's content featuring brand ambassador Ricky Harun provides further insight into this representation. In one piece of content, Ricky Harun is seen performing facial care using Kahf face wash. At the denotative level, the image depicts a bearded man washing his face with a refreshed expression, set against a simple yet modern backdrop. At the connotative level, the act of facial care symbolizes aesthetic and health consciousness, while Ricky's beard references Islamic identity aligned with the Sunnah. At the mythical level, the content constructs a narrative that new masculinity for Muslim men includes self-care as a form of responsibility toward the body, consistent with Islamic teachings emphasizing cleanliness and health. As a public figure known for his hijrah journey, Ricky Harun reinforces the message that grooming is not at odds with masculinity or piety but is an integral part of a modern Islamic lifestyle lived with mindfulness.

The inclusion of Kahf products like sunscreen and face wash in this content supports the growing awareness of health and aesthetics among Indonesian Muslim men, marking a significant social shift. Muslim men are no longer bound by traditional masculinity stereotypes that dismiss self-care but are beginning to view grooming as an act of worship that reflects a balance between body and soul. Kahf's products, offering halal solutions

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for men's grooming, are relevant in supporting this trend while reinforcing a modern and Islamic masculine identity.

Thus, the healthy lifestyle and self-care trend promoted by Kahf through content featuring Farhan Bashel and Ricky Harun reflects social changes among Indonesian Muslim men who now integrate piety with modernity. From health consciousness as an act of worship to self-care as an expression of new masculinity, Kahf captures this dynamic, offering a narrative that aligns with the aspirations of urban Muslim youth to live healthy, aesthetic, and meaningful lives.

Discussion

Evaluation of Islamic Consumption Ethics in Kahf's Marketing Strategy: Balancing Compliance and Commercial Exploitation

Islamic consumption ethics serve as a critical framework for evaluating the marketing strategies of brands targeting Muslim consumers, such as Kahf Everyday, which focuses on urban Muslim men. According to Monzer Kahf, consumption in Islamic economics must align with sharia principles, avoiding israf (excessiveness) and tabzir (wastefulness) while prioritizing maslahah (public welfare) (Kahf, 1978). This approach demands honesty, transparency, and the use of religious symbols not merely for commercial gain. In the context of Kahf, its marketing strategies, which rely on Islamic symbols and representations of new masculinity, require scrutiny to ensure a balance between sharia compliance and the potential for exploitation, based on findings from its campaigns.

Findings from the study indicate that Kahf employs Islamic narratives in campaigns such as #JalanYangKupilih, #LangkahBerdampak, and #PejuangBerKahf, incorporating da'wah elements like taqwa, amar ma'ruf, and jihad al-nafs. The global #PejuangBerKahf activities, reflecting the spirit of Ramadan with a focus on social good, exemplify the use of Islamic symbols that appear aligned with spiritual values. The beard, as a representation of the Prophet's Sunnah, is a central symbol, embodying the piety offered by Kahf to its Muslim male consumers. Additionally, Kahf constructs modern masculinity through engagement in sports (soccer with Rizki Ridho and Ragnar Oratmangoen, IBL All Stars 2025 basketball, and the Run & Brotherhood event), outdoor activities (skydiving), and self-care (featuring Farhan Bashel and Ricky Harun). This approach integrates piety with a healthy lifestyle and aesthetics, reflecting social changes among urban Muslim men who now embrace grooming and physical activities as part of their identity, consistent with Islamic teachings emphasizing health.

From the perspective of Islamic consumption ethics, Kahf's strategies demonstrate alignment with Monzer Kahf's principles, which emphasize consumption oriented toward falah (worldly and hereafter welfare) and maslahah. Halal products like sunscreen and face wash support cleanliness as an act of worship, while the

DOI: https://doi.org/10.32332/ x296mm98

#PejuangBerKahf campaign promotes spiritual reflection and acts of kindness (Kahf, 2003). Furthermore, activities such as mosque construction and renovation in collaboration with Yayasan Masjid Nusantara—including Masjid Al-Kahf in Poco Dedeng Village, West Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara—through the #PerjalananBerKahf campaign, demonstrate tangible contributions to societal welfare, reinforcing alignment with Islamic values.

However, there is potential for commercial exploitation in Kahf's strategies that warrants attention. The use of the beard and da'wah narratives may primarily aim to attract the Muslim market rather than promote substantive values, particularly if consumers are motivated to purchase products solely to display symbolic piety. The selection of Ragnar Oratmangoen, which sparked criticism due to his naturalized status, raises questions about whether the focus is on authentic Muslim identity or merely leveraging his popularity, potentially conflicting with Kahf's (2003) principles that reject consumption driven purely by desire.

The distinction between commodification and commercialization is pivotal in this evaluation. Commodification refers to the exploitation of religious symbols for profit without substantial benefit, while commercialization involves using symbols for business purposes that can yield positive impact. Kahf appears to lean toward commercialization, evidenced by activities like the Kahforward Goes to Campus talkshow at SBM ITB on March 23, 2024, which educates on business innovation and social impact, and the Kahfpreneur program, supporting Muslim communities and SMEs, such as Bikers Dakwah and Terang Jakarta, through entrepreneurship training and product sales.

Nevertheless, criticism of commodification remains relevant, particularly when Islamic symbols and masculinity—such as the beard, sports, and self-care—emphasize outward appearance over ethical substance, aligning with the symbolic piety identified by Rina (2018). Ethical challenges arise when Kahf's strategies potentially encourage excessive consumption (*israf*) for the sake of image rather than *maslahah* or *falah*, especially if social initiatives like mosque renovations or SME support are inconsistent with the primary marketing narrative.

The implications for Muslim consumers are also noteworthy. If Kahf's strategies merely promote symbolic consumption—such as purchasing products to display piety without understanding consumption ethics—this could undermine the falah advocated by Kahf (2003). However, if managed effectively, activities like mosque renovations and educational talkshows can enhance awareness of halal products and an Islamic healthy lifestyle, delivering tangible benefits to the Muslim community.

Kahf's social initiatives, such as collaborations with Yayasan Masjid Nusantara and the Kahfpreneur program, demonstrate a commitment to balancing commercial profit

DOI: https://doi.org/10.32332/ x296mm98

with da'wah impact and societal welfare. Support for SMEs and communities like Kajian Musawarah extends economic and spiritual benefits, aligning with the principle of maslahah and serving as a model for other brands in applying Islamic consumption ethics. This approach ensures that Kahf's marketing strategies not only achieve commercial success but also strive for authentic falah, transitioning to the conclusion or subsequent sections.

Conclusion

Kahf Everyday, a men's grooming brand targeting urban Muslims, effectively integrates Islamic symbols and new masculinity in its marketing while aligning with Islamic consumption ethics. By leveraging the brand name "Kahf" from Surat Al-Kahf, campaigns like #JalanYangKupilih and #PejuangBerKahf, and hijrah celebrities, Kahf combines Islamic narratives (taqwa, jihad al-nafs) with modern lifestyle elements like sports, adventure, and self-care. These reflect a shift in masculinity among millennial Muslim men, blending piety with aesthetics and health, as seen in endorsements by figures like Rizki Ridho and Farhan Bashel. Using semiotic and critical discourse approaches, the study reveals how Kahf navigates consumer culture by promoting halal products and social initiatives like Masjid Al-Kahf and Kahfpreneur, aligning with Monzer Kahf's principles of maslahah and falah.

However, Kahf's approach risks commercial exploitation through the commodification of symbols like the beard and figures like Ragnar Oratmangoen, which may lead to israf and challenge sharia authenticity. The study highlights the tension between impactful commercialization supporting da'wah and profit-driven commodification, contributing to the discourse on religious commodification through theories from Marx, Mosco, and Kahf. It underscores the need for ethical marketing guidelines in the halal market, particularly in balancing economic profit with spiritual integrity amid evolving gender and religious identities in Indonesia.

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